

UNIVERSITY of WORCESTER

Founders' ethical decision-making in early-stage socially innovative, technology-based ventures: developing the Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation

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Abstract

The founders in this study address problems left unresolved by current markets, services and institutions. Some build new technologies; others use digital tools differently to widen access, improve care, support inclusion, protect environments or create public-interest value. They do this while running young businesses that must generate revenue, build credibility and retain capacity to reinvest in the mission. The surrounding ecosystem is uneven: some actors are supportive, while others are cautious, misaligned or influential without fully understanding the problem, the technology or the ethical consequences of action or delay.

This thesis examines how founders of socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures define, justify and adapt ethical decisions while building organisations under resource, market, institutional and technical constraints. It draws on business ethics, social responsibility, ethical decision-making, social innovation, responsible innovation, technology ethics and selected social entrepreneurship scholarship. The social entrepreneurship literature is used as an analytical lens for examining mission, legitimacy, public-benefit claims, resource constraint and mission drift; it is not used to classify the participating firms as social enterprises.

The study is based on 25 founders of micro-to-small, UK-registered private companies limited by shares (CLS), recorded in Companies House records with the company-type designation "Private Limited Company". No organisation classed as a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) was included. Entities designated "by guarantee", charities, community interest companies (CICs) and comparable purpose-constrained forms were excluded. The sample is therefore positioned as shareholder-owned and for-profit, with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims.

Using an interpretivist qualitative design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews, case-matched documentary reading and a two-stage member-checking process. The findings are organised around three themes: ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance; social impact strategy, through which ethical aims are

translated into stakeholder engagement, learning, impact evidence, reinvestment and operational judgement; and tech for good, where ethical commitments were embedded, tested or strained through data practices, design choices, technological integration, safeguarding, inclusion and environmental externalities.

The study proposes the Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) as a mid-range explanatory account of how founders seek to hold ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and safeguards under constraint. DEN interprets ethical decision-making as ongoing navigation rather than a single decision point. It is developed through six mechanisms: Bounded Ethics, Omission-based Dissonance, Osmotic Alignment, Ethical Capabilities Capital, Micro-Transformative Innovation and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion.

The study introduces the VISION model—Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation—alongside three applied tools: the SMAG cadence, the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) and the EthOS Lifecycle. Together, these support review of ethical commitments, ethics–technology integration and staged decision-making without treating the tools as universal prescriptions, moral rankings or maturity scores. The thesis contributes to debates on ethical decision-making, responsible innovation and technology-based social innovation by showing how ethical commitments are formed, constrained, evidenced and recalibrated in founder-led ventures. Its limitations relate to the UK context, legal form, early-stage focus and reliance on single-participant founder accounts read alongside public and case-matched materials. Further research could examine later-stage ventures, different legal forms, comparative jurisdictions, stakeholder perspectives and empirical applications of DEN, VISION, SMAG, ETIS and the EthOS Lifecycle.

Keywords: ethical decision-making; social innovation; technology-based early-stage ventures; Private Limited Company; responsible innovation; stakeholder engagement; Dynamic Ethical Navigation; VISION model; SMAG cadence; Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum; EthOS Lifecycle.

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Responsible Use of Language and Learning Tools

No software or assistive tool was used to generate codes, themes, findings or interpretations. Glean supported interview recording and transcript preparation; Dragon, Microsoft Word and Excel supported transcription checking, organisation and document handling; Scholarcy was used only in a limited way to locate terms or passages within already assembled material; and Grammarly Pro supported expression and proofreading. These tools supported accessibility, organisation and language review only. Analytic decisions remained researcher-led throughout.

Further detail on the analytic workflow, including the use of Excel and the absence of dedicated CAQDAS software, is provided in **Chapter 3: Research methodology**.

Record of Publication Amendments

The thesis wording remains as approved. The scheduled deletion of participant data was completed on 27 September 2026 in accordance with the retention arrangements described in this thesis. References to deletion as planned or scheduled, listed below, reflect the data-management position at the time of examination. These passages and the research, analysis, findings and conclusions remain unchanged.

1. **3.4.6**, **162**: "This final phase is scheduled for 60 days after formal confirmation of the examination outcome (D + 60)".
2. **3.5**, **163**: "…with secure deletion planned 60 days post-examination…".
3. **A1.261 Researcher reflexive memo - End of Phase 6**, **449**: "…with the deletion action remaining scheduled for D + 60 from the agreed trigger…"

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increasingly been discussed in terms of how organisations understand and address their effects on society and the environment beyond legal compliance and profit-making (Carroll, 1991; Wood, 1991; Garriga and Melé, 2004; Crane, Matten and Spence, 2019). This thesis draws on that literature but distinguishes social responsibility from ethical responsibility. Social responsibility refers here to responsibilities arising from an organisation's effects on stakeholders, communities and the environment. Ethical responsibility is broader: it concerns what ought to be done, by whom, on what grounds and under what constraints (Fischer, 2004; Crane and Matten, 2016). Ethical decision-making is therefore the principal analytical frame, with social responsibility treated as one domain in which ethical commitments may become visible.

Several strands of scholarship inform this framing. Stakeholder approaches are commonly used to foreground obligations to those affected by organisational decisions and practices (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Triple bottom line thinking broadens evaluation beyond financial performance alone (Elkington, 1997), while shared-value arguments propose that firms may align commercial activity with wider societal concerns (Porter & Kramer, 2006, 2011). In this thesis, value creation is not treated as self-evidently ethical. It is understood as a contested matter involving different forms of value, including economic value, social or public value and, in some cases, environmental value (Beschorner, 2014; Kornberger, 2017). These forms of value may overlap, but they do not necessarily align. Ethical judgement remains necessary because value claims do not, by themselves, resolve questions of responsibility, harm, fairness or justification.

Social innovation is treated as central to the study because it directs attention to attempts to address unmet or inadequately met needs through new products, services, practices or organisational arrangements (Mulgan, 2006; Moulaert, MacCallum, Mehmood, & Hamdouch, 2013; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). The term is not used here simply to denote responsible business practice. It refers to efforts to intervene in recognised social, environmental, health or public-interest problems in ways that may alter access, coordination, capability or outcomes. Such claims may relate to community-level, group-specific or wider public-interest benefit, and their reach is not assumed to be universal. This matters because the firms examined are not merely commercial ventures with incidental ethical concerns; they are ventures whose missions involve claims about social, environmental, health or public-interest benefit.

This speaks directly to an organisational shift identified in the CSR literature. Early CSR activity was often framed externally through corporate philanthropy, community investment and reputation management (Carroll, 1999; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Later developments moved responsibility closer to strategy, operations and internal organisational practice (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Crane et al., 2019). This broader history remains relevant as background, but the empirical setting examined in this thesis is more specific: small, founder-led, early-stage ventures in which responsibility is often expressed less through mature corporate programmes, and instead, through founder judgement, emerging routines, product design choices and decisions taken under resource constraint (Jenkins, 2004; Belz & Binder, 2017).

For the purposes of this study, *early-stage ventures (ESVs)* are operationally defined as founder-led, UK-registered, for-profit ventures incorporated less than five years. The companies included are UK-registered entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company". For this thesis, these are treated as share-capital, shareholder-owned private limited companies. No entity designated "Company Limited by Guarantee" was included, and entities otherwise designated "by guarantee" were excluded from scope.

The sample therefore comprises companies registered in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This boundary matters analytically because it directs the study

towards firms with share capital, shareholder ownership and distributable profit, and therefore towards incentive, accountability and profit-distribution dynamics associated with for-profit, shareholder-owned organisations rather than purpose-constrained or quasi-non-profit forms.

Founder accounts indicated team sizes ranging from one person to around 15 people. On a headcount basis, the sample is therefore described as comprising micro-to-small early-stage ventures. Organisation size was not used as an inclusion criterion, sampling variable, basis for later cross-case grouping or analytic category. Case-level team sizes are not reported because, when combined with sector, technology focus, location, company age and verbatim extracts, they could increase the risk of participant or venture identification.

The eligibility window closed on 31 March 2024, so that all cases remained within a common early-stage frame and the study retains a coherent and manageable scope (Yin, 2018; Patton, 2015; Marmer et al., 2011; OECD, 2017; Harper-Anderson and Lewis, 2022). The design does not impose a fixed numerical cap in advance. Rather, it is delimited by legal form, jurisdiction, organisational stage and eligibility window, with the rationale for the final interview number addressed in **Chapter 3: Research methodology** (Patton, 2015; Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016; Saunders and Townsend, 2016).

The term *ESV* is used in preference to "*start-up*" because the latter term is applied inconsistently across policy, practice and academic writing, and may imply a particular sector, funding model or hyper-growth trajectory. In this thesis, "ESV" functions as an operational, stage-based descriptor for ventures that meet the study's inclusion criteria. Early choices about business models, product architectures, data practices and organisational routines are made under resource constraints and rapid iteration, foregrounding tensions between values, viability and scale. Where such ventures pursue social, environmental, health or public-interest aims while building, or critically relying on, digital systems, decisions about software design, data flows, algorithmic methods and platform dependencies may carry ethical implications from the outset, including privacy, security, safeguarding, fairness and access (Martin, 2018; Fleischmann and Wallace, 2015; Floridi, 2013; Mittelstadt et al., 2016).

The thesis draws selectively on social entrepreneurship and social enterprise scholarship as an analytical lens, not as a legal or organisational classification. The participating firms are not treated as social enterprises in legal form. Rather, this literature helps examine how shareholder-owned, for-profit ventures frame mission, legitimacy, public-benefit claims, resource constraint and mission drift while pursuing social, environmental, health or public-interest aims through market activity (Mair and Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012; Battilana and Lee, 2014; Nicholls and Murdock, 2012). This distinction is retained throughout the thesis wherever social entrepreneurship, social enterprise or hybrid-organisation literature is used.

In this thesis, "***technology***" refers to *digital systems*, including software applications and services, data architectures and flows, algorithmic and machine-learning systems, platform ecosystems, and underlying cloud and network infrastructure. This usage aligns with established accounts of digital artefacts, infrastructures and platforms (Yoo, Henfridsson & Lyytinen, 2010; Kallinikos, Aaltonen & Marton, 2013; Tilson, Lyytinen & Sørensen, 2010; Gawer, 2014; Tiwana, 2014) and with the ethical salience attributed in the literature to data-intensive and AI-enabled systems (Kitchin, 2014; Floridi, 2013; boyd & Crawford, 2012; Barocas & Selbst, 2016).

"*Technology-based*" denotes ventures whose core value proposition or delivery relies on such digital systems, whether offered as purely digital products or services or through digitally mediated physical artefacts and processes, including connected devices, sensors, assistive tools or clinical technologies. Unless stated otherwise, "**technology**" refers to digital or digitally mediated technology as defined above. Where useful, ***technology-driven*** ("tech-driven") denotes ventures whose core offering is a novel digital artefact; ***technology-enabled*** ("tech-enabled") denotes ventures that rely on digital capabilities to deliver their social, environmental, health or public-interest aims.

The study also requires a working distinction between ethics and *ethicality*. Ethics is used here to refer to questions about what may be judged right, responsible or defensible in action, particularly where decisions affect others and where competing duties, consequences, rights, relationships or forms of harm have to be considered (Frankena, 1973; Rachels and Rachels, 2019; Crane and Matten, 2016). This matters in a technology-

based context because digital tools, data practices, platforms and automated processes do not only support organisational activity; they may also shape access, visibility, dependency, risk and accountability.

In ordinary usage, ***ethicality*** refers to the state, quality or condition of being ethical (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The term is not introduced in this thesis as a new concept or as a measurable moral score. It is used as a working interpretive term for examining how founders understand, justify and pursue being ethical in relation to their venture's mission, decisions and constraints. A venture is therefore not treated as ethical simply because it pursues a social, environmental, health or public-interest aim, nor because it uses technology for an apparently beneficial purpose. This distinction is important for the study. The ventures examined use technology in pursuit of ethical or public-interest endeavours, but that does not remove questions about privacy, access, exclusion, safety, dependency, environmental cost, accountability or unintended harm. Ethicality is therefore examined through the ways founders recognise ethical issues, make judgements, allocate resources, respond to constraints and translate commitments into product, data, governance and diffusion choices. **Chapter 2: Literature review** develops this working use of *ethicality* through business ethics, ethical decision-making, CSR, small-business responsibility, social innovation, responsible innovation and technology ethics literature. Appendix **A1.2.3.1** shows how the term was operationalised in the interview design.

Digitally mediated contexts have been argued to broaden the scope of business ethics by introducing obligations associated with data collection and processing, persistent online interaction and automated decision-making (Floridi, 2013; Nissenbaum, 2010). These contexts can intensify asymmetries of information and power, particularly where behavioural data are used for profiling, targeting and optimisation (Zuboff, 2019). Where AI-enabled systems are deployed, concerns about discriminatory impacts, opacity and accountability sharpen scrutiny of design choices and data or technical governance arrangements (Barocas & Selbst, 2016; Pasquale, 2015; Mittelstadt et al., 2016). Ethical analysis therefore needs to address not only intended benefits, but also how system

architectures and data practices may shape users' autonomy, exposure to harm and opportunities to contest decisions.

In sum, the study examines founder-led, UK-registered, technology-based ESVs that use digital technologies in pursuit of explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims. The focus falls on entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company" and incorporated less than five years before 31 March 2024, at a stage when core product and data architectures, organisational routines and value commitments are still being formed, and when early choices may leave lasting traces (Marmer et al., 2011; OECD, 2017; Harper-Anderson and Lewis, 2022). The UK focus, sector spread, legal-form boundary and eligibility window support bounded case design, purposive sampling and a coherent institutional frame for the study (Yin, 2018; Patton, 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The remainder of this chapter is organised as follows.

Figure 1: Chapter 1 structure and section focus

1.2 Background	sets out the context and relevance of the study.
1.3 Research gaps	identifies the knowledge gaps addressed by the research.
1.4 Research aim, objectives, significance and estimated contributions	sets out the study's aim, objectives, significance and anticipated contribution.
1.5 Research scope and boundary conditions	defines the study boundaries, including inclusion criteria, delimitations and interpretive constraints.
1.6 Structure of the document	explains how the remaining chapters are organised.

1.2 Background

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has often been described as moving from a voluntary, reputation-oriented activity associated with corporate responses to social pressure in the 1960s and 1970s, towards more strategic and operationally embedded approaches from the 1990s onwards (Davis, 1973; Carroll, 1979, 1999; Elkington, 1997). That history is relevant to this thesis, but it does not provide a direct organisational

template. The empirical focus is not mature corporations with established CSR systems, but micro-to-small, founder-led early-stage ventures. In this setting, responsibility is more likely to be expressed through founder judgement, product choices, emerging routines, stakeholder relationships and decisions taken under resource constraint (Jenkins, 2004; Belz and Binder, 2017).

Digitally mediated ventures make these questions more visible and more contested. Public claims about social purpose, inclusion, sustainability or "tech for good" may help ventures communicate their aims, but they also invite scrutiny where commitments are overstated, unsupported or difficult to evidence. Additionally, technology-enabled responses to social, environmental, health and public-interest problems can introduce risks relating to privacy, security, fairness, inclusion and environmental cost (Martin, 2018; Fleischmann and Wallace, 2015; Buhmann and Fieseler, 2020). Early-stage ventures are therefore a useful site for this study because decisions about business models, product design, data practices and organisational routines are made while resources are limited, yet may leave durable traces.

The study is also bounded by organisational form. Although the conceptual framing draws selectively on social entrepreneurship, social enterprise and hybrid-organisation scholarship, the empirical sample is limited to UK-registered entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company". To reiterate, entities designated "Company Limited by Guarantee" or otherwise "by guarantee", charities, community interest companies and comparable purpose-constrained forms are excluded. The findings should therefore be read as concerning shareholder-owned, for-profit ventures with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims, rather than organisations operating under non-distribution constraints or different legal-purpose regimes.

Against this backdrop, the next section sets out the research gaps the thesis aims to address.

1.3 Research gaps

The preceding sections positioned this thesis within debates on business ethics, CSR, social innovation, responsible innovation and selected social entrepreneurship scholarship (Carroll, 1991; Freeman, 1984; Mair and Martí, 2006; Owen, Macnaghten and Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013). Across these literatures, ethical responsibility is often discussed at organisational, strategic or technological levels, while less attention is given to how founders of micro-to-small, technology-based early-stage ventures interpret and operationalise ethical commitments during early organisational formation (Jenkins, 2006; Spence, 2016; Nambisan, 2017; Lubberink et al., 2017). Digital technologies may support socially innovative aims, but they can also introduce privacy, security, fairness, access, accountability and environmental concerns (Nissenbaum, 2010; Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Barocas and Selbst, 2016; van Dijk, 2020; Strubell, Ganesh and McCallum, 2019). The research gaps set out below therefore concern the early, founder-level translation of ethical commitments into product, data, organisational and diffusion choices. Here, "technology" is used as defined in Section 1.1, drawing on sociotechnical accounts of technology as materially, organisationally and socially configured rather than as a neutral tool (Winner, 1980; Pinch and Bijker, 1984; Orlikowski, 1992; Feenberg, 1999).

This section identifies three specific gaps. Each subsection first states the gap and then explains its basis. The gaps should be read within the scope already set out: UK-registered entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company", incorporated less than five years before 31 March 2024, and pursuing explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims through digitally mediated activity.

1.3.1 Founder-level ethics-by-design in early digital build

Research gap 1: Founder-level ethics-by-design in early digital build remains insufficiently specified.

Existing work on responsible technology, CSR and digital ethics has drawn attention to risks associated with data-intensive and digitally mediated systems, including privacy,

security, fairness, access and environmental impact (Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Barocas & Selbst, 2016; Strubell et al., 2019). However, less is known about how founders in early-stage, socially innovative ventures translate such concerns into practical decisions about data collection and use, model design and evaluation, release decisions, user safeguards and dependencies on third-party platforms under resource and time constraints (Porter & Kramer, 2006, 2011; Jones & Wicks, 1999; Lobschat et al., 2021).

Ethical decision-making models offer useful accounts of judgement and action (Rest, 1986; Jones, 1991), but they are less well suited to explaining recurring decisions that unfold across fast-moving digital development. Sociotechnical perspectives show that technologies are shaped through social and organisational conditions (Williams & Edge, 1996; Pinch & Bijker, 1984; Orlikowski, 1992; Winner, 1980), yet these accounts do not always specify the concrete, early-stage design trade-offs made by founders. The first gap therefore concerns how ethics is worked into early digital build before organisational routines, governance arrangements and technical controls are fully settled.

1.3.2 Founder decision-making and early leadership under tension

Research gap 2: Founder decision-making in early-stage contexts, and the leadership behaviours that support ethics–growth trade-offs, remain under-explained.

Research on social innovation and hybrid organising has examined mission, legitimacy, public-benefit claims and intended outcomes (Mulgan, 2006; Mair & Martí, 2006; Smith & Reisch, 2017; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Phills et al., 2008). However, where this literature is applied in the present thesis, it is used analytically rather than classificatorily. It is intended to help frame how shareholder-owned, for-profit ventures pursue social, environmental, health or public-interest aims through market activity; it does not reclassify the sampled firms as social enterprises or non-profit organisations.

Within that bounded setting, further explanation is needed of how founders handle tensions between ethical commitments, growth pressure, resource limits and platform or market constraints. Existing leadership literature points to relevant behaviours, including

problem framing, stakeholder engagement, adaptive judgement and iterative adjustment (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Yet these behaviours are less often connected to concrete early-stage decisions about product design, data use, algorithms, deployment, partnerships or revenue choices. This gap matters because ethics in early ventures may be shaped not only by stated values, but also by how founders respond when those values come under pressure.

1.3.3 Early ethical operationalisation and mission-aligned diffusion

Research gap 3: A joined-up, process-level account of early ethical operationalisation and mission-aligned diffusion remains limited.

Social innovation scholarship has examined attempts to create social or public value through changed practices, relationships and forms of coordination (Westley & Antadze, 2010; Mulgan, 2006; Mair & Martí, 2006; Davies & Chambers, 2019; Nicholls & Murdock, 2012; Murray et al., 2010; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017). For this thesis, such value is not treated as automatically ethical or universal. It may be community-level, group-specific or wider public-interest value, and it may remain partial, uneven or contested. This is important because socially innovative aims can diverge from outcomes, and intended benefits may be accompanied by omission, exclusion, dependence or unintended harm.

What remains less developed is an integrated view of how early, values-led adjustments are made during venture formation, and how impact is diffused when founders seek to avoid mission drift. Linear adoption models and capital-driven scaling assumptions provide only partial guidance for this context (Rogers, 1962/2003; Moore, 1991; Bugg-Levine & Emerson, 2011). Institutional, stakeholder and adjacent capability-oriented perspectives offer useful resources for examining adaptation, legitimacy and constraint (Freeman, 1984; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), but the present study does not assume that those frameworks fully explain founder-level ethical practice in early, digitally mediated ventures. The third gap therefore concerns how ethical commitments are translated into product, data, governance and diffusion

choices over time, and how founders attempt to preserve mission alignment under practical constraint.

1.4 Research aim, objectives, significance and estimated contributions

To address the identified research gaps, the study is structured around one overarching aim and six research objectives.

Figure 2 sets out this structure. The aim identifies the central purpose of the study, while the objectives break that purpose into the main areas of investigation: how founders define ethicality, how ethical decisions are made under constraint, how social purpose and technology interact, and how ethical commitments are adapted as early-stage ventures develop.

Figure 2: Research aim and objectives

Research aim

To understand how the founders of socially innovative, technology-based ventures in their early stage define and apply ethicality to their decision-making.

Research objectives

Objective 1: Determine how founders of socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures define ethicality, and how those definitions shape the identification, assessment and handling of moral issues.

Objective 2: Examine the challenges and opportunities founders encounter when integrating ethical considerations into early-stage decision-making.

Objective 3: Describe how founders use organisational, institutional and technological resources when making decisions and pursuing socially innovative aims.

Objective 4: Establish how founders select, justify and adapt socially innovative approaches under early-stage conditions.

Objective 5: Identify the principles, anticipated returns and outcome claims that inform operational decisions in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures.

Objective 6: Develop an empirically grounded conceptual account of how ethical considerations are integrated into founders' decision-making in early-stage, socially innovative, technology-based ventures.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The objectives provided the main scaffold for data collection, analysis and reporting. During interviews and subsequent interpretation, the research was guided by a small set of consistent, decision-centred prompts that encouraged participants to describe how ethical considerations were defined, applied and negotiated in particular situations. These prompts were used as practical orienting questions and are not presented as a separate set of formally stated research questions. This helped keep the objectives, interview dialogue and analytic claims aligned within a reflexive thematic analysis approach.

The significance of the study lies in its focus on an under-explored setting: founder-led, technology-based early-stage ventures that make social, environmental, health or public-interest claims while working under commercial, technical and organisational constraint. **Figure 3** summarises the study's estimated empirical, theoretical, conceptual and practical contributions, developed further in **Chapter 5: Discussion**. It shows how the thesis contributes by examining how ethical commitments are defined, tested and carried into practice, rather than treating social purpose or technological innovation as evidence of *ethicality* in itself.

Figure 3: Research significance and estimated contributions

Research significance

In digitally mediated contexts, claims about social value and ethical conduct can become more visible, contested and rapidly amplified. This makes it important to examine how responsibility is operationalised, evidenced and constrained, rather than only how it is expressed.

1. The study focuses on early-stage, UK-registered entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company", with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims and digital reliance. It examines how ethical commitments are translated into product design, data practice and governance decisions under time and resource constraints.
2. By examining founder decision-making, the study analyses how trade-offs and external pressures are described and handled when digital technology is used to address social, environmental, health or public-interest problems.

Estimated research contribution

i.Scientific knowledge: The study founder-level judgement in early-stage, technology-based companies with specified public-interest aims. It contributes to scholarship on moral issue recognition, ethical judgement, social innovation and responsible innovation, while locating the inquiry in a small-firm, founder-led setting (Rest, 1986; Jones, 1991; Mair and Martí, 2006; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

ii.Business practice: The study provides a practice-facing account of how founders describe, test and adjust ethical commitments while developing socially innovative ventures. It focuses on early digital build, including design, data and release decisions; leadership, judgement and boundary-setting under growth, funding and delivery pressures; and how early operational choices may shape later diffusion where scaling remains mission-aligned (Friedman, Kahn and Borning, 2006; van den Hoven, 2013; Martin, 2018; Brown and Treviño, 2006; Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009; Battilana and Lee, 2014; Rogers, 1962/2003; Moore, 1991; Bugg-Levine and Emerson, 2011).

iii.Policy implications: The study indicates why evidence, governance and inclusion may need to be considered earlier in venture formation, not only once firms have matured. It also points to support mechanisms that recognise early-stage constraint where ventures combine public-interest aims with commercial viability (Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013; Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011; Yunus, Moingeon and Lehmann-Ortega, 2010).

iv.Societal impact: The study contributes to the debate on how digital solutions are used to address social issues, and also societal perspectives, the social contract and more representative approaches to ethical innovation (Moon, 2010; Healy and Phillips, 2004; Friedman and Hendry, 2019; Waldron, 2016).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

1.5 Research scope and boundary conditions

This section defines the parameters within which the study was designed and interpreted, including the UK setting, early-stage focus, and the study's inclusion criteria. It is organised into subsections covering scope and boundary conditions, interpretive constraints and boundary implications, eligibility and sampling criteria, and study limitations. Scope and boundary conditions The study focuses on founder-led, technology-based, micro-to-small early-stage ventures with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims. The empirical scope is limited to UK-registered entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company" and incorporated less than five years before 31 March 2024. These entities are treated in this study as share-capital, shareholder-owned private limited companies. Companies limited by guarantee, charities, community interest companies and comparable purpose-constrained forms are outside the scope of the study. This legal-form boundary does not make social enterprise, social innovation or sustainable-entrepreneurship scholarship irrelevant. Rather, those literatures are used as analytical resources for examining mission, public-benefit claims, founder agency, legitimacy, mission drift and responsibility in private, for-profit ventures with ethical or public-interest commitments.

1.5.1 Constraints and boundary implications

A number of study design features influence how the findings should be interpreted and where they may be transferable. The UK focus supports contextual coherence, but it also limits direct transfer to jurisdictions with different corporate, regulatory or institutional arrangements. The setting was selected because it allowed consistent verification through Companies House, including incorporation dates, company-type designation and officer appointments. It also provided a common policy and institutional context for examining early-stage digital responsibility, including expectations around data protection, online harms, commissioning practices and organisational accountability.

The early-stage window foregrounds formative decision-making, but it does not capture longer-run changes that may occur as ventures scale, formalise governance or respond

to later market and investor pressures. The legal-form boundary also shapes interpretation. The study concerns entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company"; findings should not be read as direct claims about entities designated "by guarantee", charities, community interest companies or comparable purpose-constrained forms. Practical constraints relating to recruitment, public visibility and source availability may also have influenced which ventures and perspectives were most accessible. These implications are returned to in **Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations**, while **Chapter 3: Research methodology** provides further detail on design choices and mitigation steps.

1.5.2 Operational scope and eligibility criteria

Operationally, eligible cases were UK-registered, for-profit, technology-based early-stage ventures with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims. Eligibility was verified through Companies House records, including company-type designation, incorporation date and officer appointment. The sample covers companies registered in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The scope was designed to keep the study close to early ethical decision-making, when product and data practices, governance routines and value commitments may still be forming. Research on early-stage ventures and regional development commonly treats the first three to five years as a period marked by rapid iteration, resource constraint and path-dependent choices with longer-run effects (Marmer et al., 2011; OECD, 2017; Harper-Anderson and Lewis, 2022). The UK-only boundary also supported consistent verification through a single corporate register.

Eligibility was assessed through Companies House records and publicly available organisational materials. Public statements of purpose were used to establish positioning and eligibility, not to verify impact or prove that stated commitments had been achieved. **Figure 4** summarises the criteria used to identify participants and cases.

Figure 4: Criteria for research participant selection

Criterion and application to the study
Legal form and age: Eligible entities were for-profit, UK-registered companies recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company" and incorporated less than five years before 31 March 2024. Entities designated "by guarantee" were excluded from scope (Marmer et al., 2011; OECD, 2017; Harper-Anderson and Lewis, 2022).
Companies House verification: Incorporation date, company-type designation and officer appointments were checked through Companies House. Company websites were used to corroborate the company name, number and public-facing identity.
Founder definition: "Founder" refers to an officer, director or company secretary appointed on or within 60 days of incorporation, with an active status during selection.
Technology-based activity: Eligible ventures were either technology-enabled, using digital tools or systems to deliver their aims, or technology-driven, building digital products, services or solutions. Digital reliance was assessed in relation to the stated social, environmental, health or public-interest purpose (Porter and Kramer, 2006; Manyika et al., 2013).
Public-interest purpose: Public materials had to indicate a social, environmental, health or public-interest aim as central to the venture's stated purpose. These materials were used to establish eligibility and contextual positioning, not to verify impact.
Indicative ethics or impact commitment: Public materials were reviewed for indicators of values, ethics, impact, safeguards, responsible technology use or CSR-related commitments. These indicators supported sampling and contextual interpretation, without being treated as proof that stated commitments were fully realised (Crane, Matten and Spence, 2019; Kaplan and Minton, 2019).
Sectoral range: Sampling sought coverage across public-interest business-to-business services, environment, education, health and financial inclusion. Sectoral range supported cross-case variation, but sector was not used to define eligibility on its own.
Diversity and representation: Attention was paid to diversity and representation among founders and teams, including gender, disability and ethnic background where publicly visible or voluntarily disclosed. These aims were pursued within the limits of purposive sampling and participant availability (Patton, 2015).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

1.5.3 Constraints

The **identified constraints** of this research span across the dimensions set out below.

Figure 5: Identified research constraints and resulting effects (prior to research implementation)

Geographic scope
The study is limited to UK-registered entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company". Entities designated "by guarantee", charities, community interest companies and comparable purpose-constrained forms are outside the scope of the study. Transferability should therefore be considered cautiously in jurisdictions with different corporate forms, legal-purpose regimes, regulatory expectations or cultural settings (Galindo-Martín et al., 2021).
Timeframe
The study focuses on entities incorporated less than five years before 31 March 2024, when the planned research data gathering window closed, and as such, the findings may not reflect the practices of companies outside this timeframe, more established businesses, those transitioning to more mature stages, or with longer incubation periods (Marmer et al., 2011; Harper-Anderson & Lewis, 2022). The design also restricts what can be said about longer-term ethical implications and how decision-making evolves during early venture formation (Marmer et al., 2011; Harper-Anderson & Lewis, 2022).
Data collection
The study draws on interview transcripts, company websites and other publicly available materials. The findings therefore reflect accounts and materials available within a particular temporal and organisational context. Public-facing materials were used to support sampling and contextual interpretation; they were not treated as proof that stated ethical practices or social-impact claims had been achieved. This source base may give greater visibility to ventures with stronger public documentation and may under-represent ventures with fewer resources to maintain a substantial online presence (Fieseler, Fleck, & Meckel, 2010; Gioia et al., 2013; Zeyen et al., 2023).
Participant selection and recruitment
Selection, recruitment and implementation were time-limited and depended on the willingness of eligible founders to participate. While purposive sampling was used increase cross-sector variety, venture types and founders perspectives, the dataset may still lean towards founders of firms that were publicly visible, sufficiently resourced to participate, and willing to discuss their experiences and perspectives on ethical decision-making. Future research could extend the range of services, technologies, ethical frameworks, organisational forms and professional perspectives examined within early venture ecosystems (Patton, 2015; Calderon et al., 2023).
Clearance of conflict of interest
At the time of conducting this research, the author was employed by Ofcom (Office of Communications, the UK's communications regulator); and received formal clearance regarding potential conflicts of interest. To preserve impartiality, companies regulated by Ofcom under the Online Safety Act 2023 were excluded from the study. This exclusion may under-represent ventures operating under higher online-safety regulatory exposure, so transferability should be judged cautiously where compliance interactions and enforcement expectations are central to founders' day-to-day ethical decision-making.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

1.6 Structure of the document

The remaining chapters develop the thesis from literature review and methodology through to findings, discussion and conclusion. Together, they examine how founders of technology-based early-stage ventures describe, justify and adapt ethical decision-making within the scope defined in this chapter.

Figure 6: Structure of this thesis – Chapters 2 to 6

Chapter 2: Literature review
- Reviews the academic literature used to frame the study, including business ethics, CSR, ethical decision-making, social innovation, responsible innovation, selected social entrepreneurship scholarship, and technology ethics.

Chapter 3: Research methodology
- Explains how the research was designed and undertaken, including the interpretivist qualitative approach, sampling and verification, interviews, documentary reading, member-checking, analysis and audit-trail practices.

Chapter 4: Findings
- Presents the finalised findings from reflexive thematic analysis, supported by anonymised extracts, member-checking, cohort comparison and documentary reading.

Chapter 5: Discussion
- Interprets the findings in relation to the literature and research objectives.
- Presents the contribution to knowledge, including the Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation, the VISION model, the SMAG cadence, the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum and the EthOS Lifecycle.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations
- Draws together the study's findings, limitations and implications, and sets out recommendations for future research, practice and policy.

Abbreviations and Glossary of key concepts and models
- Provides definitional support, methodological materials, anonymised extracts and source details.

Appendices
- Provides supplementary methodological and analytic materials, including audit-trail records, reflexive memos, member-checking materials and anonymised coded extracts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the bodies of literature used to frame the study: *business ethics*, *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*, *ethical decision-making*, *social innovation*, *responsible innovation*, selected *social entrepreneurship scholarship* and *technology ethics*. These literatures are not treated as interchangeable. Each is used to illuminate a different part of the problem examined in the thesis: how founders of small, technology-based early-stage ventures describe, justify and adapt ethical decisions under constraint.

CSR scholarship provides part of the background because it examines how organisations understand, justify and respond to their social and environmental effects, and how such responsibilities become linked to strategy, accountability and legitimacy. However, the empirical setting examined here is not one of mature corporations with established CSR systems. It is a setting of small, founder-led ventures, where responsibility is more likely to be expressed through founder judgement, product choices, emerging routines and decisions made under resource constraint (Jenkins, 2004; Belz and Binder, 2017).

The chapter also draws selectively on social entrepreneurship and social enterprise scholarship. Its use is analytical rather than classificatory. The sampled firms are not treated as social enterprises in legal or organisational form; they are understood, within the scope set out in **Chapter 1: Introduction**, as shareholder-owned, for-profit ventures with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims. This literature is used because it helps frame questions of mission, legitimacy, public-benefit claims, resource constraint and mission drift in ventures that pursue public-interest aims through market activity (Mair and Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012; Battilana and Lee, 2014; Nicholls and Murdock, 2012).

The review therefore extends beyond CSR alone. It examines ethical decision-making, leadership, identity, institutional context, social innovation, responsible innovation, technology ethics and selected resource and capability perspectives where these

literatures help explain how ethical judgement is formed, tested and translated into practice. Where the discussion refers to the organisational context examined in this study, the term early-stage venture, or ESV, is used in the operational sense defined in **Chapter 1: Introduction**.

The relationship between value and ethics also requires caution. Early CSR writing often treated responsibility as peripheral to commercial purpose (Freeman, 1984; Carroll, 1991), while later analyses gave greater attention to the links between social and environmental responsibility, strategy and organisational legitimacy (Wood, 1991; Matten and Moon, 2008; Garriga and Melé, 2004). Porter and Kramer's (2011) account of "creating shared value" is one influential formulation of that shift, but it has also been criticised for drawing ethical and political questions too quickly into value-creation logics (Beschorner, 2014). For this thesis, value is therefore treated as plural and contested. Economic value, social or public value and environmental value may overlap, but they do not necessarily align. Their relationship is one of the reasons ethical judgement remains necessary (Kornberger, 2017).

Social innovation is central to this thesis because it directs attention to attempts to address unmet or inadequately met needs through new products, services, practices or organisational arrangements (Mulgan, 2006; Nicholls and Murdock, 2011; Moulaert et al., 2013; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). In this study, the term does not simply denote doing business responsibly. It refers to interventions in recognised social, environmental, health or public-interest problems in ways that may alter access, coordination, capability or outcomes. Such claims may operate at community, group or wider public levels, and are not assumed to have universal public reach in every case.

The literature also shows that moving from promising ideas to durable outcomes is rarely straightforward. Barriers include ambiguity in how problems are framed, entrenched routines that limit experimentation, organisational cultures that resist adaptation, and legitimacy pressures that may narrow the scope for novel practices to diffuse beyond a niche (Lettice and Parekh, 2010; Grimm et al., 2013; van Wijk et al., 2019; Osburg and Schmidpeter, 2019; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995; Pel and Kemp, 2020).

These issues are particularly relevant to early-stage ventures, where founders seek to realise social or technological change under uncertainty (Baumol, 1968; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; OECD, 2020). Alongside commercial considerations, founders' ethical perspectives and personal ambitions may influence how opportunities are assessed and how stakeholder interests are prioritised (Shepherd et al., 2003; Dacin et al., 2007; Shepherd, Patzelt and Haynie, 2012). Studies of moral identity indicate that entrepreneurs who see themselves as socially responsible are more likely to foreground ethical considerations when developing products, forming partnerships or shaping governance arrangements (Aquino and Reed, 2002; Weaver, Treviño and Agle, 2005). At organisational level, new ventures also construct identities that signal credibility and purpose, shaping access to resources and expectations about acceptable conduct (Scott, 2001; Navis and Glynn, 2011).

To structure the discussion, the review is organised into six thematic clusters that provide the analytical scaffolding for the empirical chapters. **Figure 7** maps these clusters and indicates how they relate to one another and to the study's focus on ethical practice in technology-based ventures. The figure is intended as an orienting device rather than an exhaustive taxonomy. A more detailed synthesis, linking these domains to empirical findings and to the concepts developed in this research, is introduced in **Table 6.**

These strands position the study at the intersection of CSR, social innovation, entrepreneurship and technology, and provide the basis for analysing how ethical choices are made in technology-based ventures at the early stage. Alongside these domains, the chapter brings together small-business responsibility and sustainable entrepreneurship literature to locate responsibility within micro-to-small, founder-led ventures, where ethical commitments are shaped through founder judgement, resource constraint, stakeholder proximity, product choices and emerging organisational routines.

Figure 7: Structure of the Chapter 2: Literature Review Chapter and corresponding key theoretical domains and frameworks reviewed (Sections 2.2–2.6).

2.2 Foundations of ethical thought: a framework for analysis – exploring the bases of moral judgement, sources of ethical authority, and evaluative principles guiding responsible conduct.	• Metaethics: the nature and grounding of moral claims • Normative ethics: duties, consequences, virtues, care/relational ethics • Applied ethics: dilemmas, professional responsibility, stakeholder ethics
2.3 Ethical leadership and Ethical entrepreneurship – considering how leadership and entrepreneurial activity shape ethical cultures and venture strategy.	• Ethical and responsible leadership (learning, influence, accountability) • Ethical entrepreneurship and mission integrity in venture contexts • Ethical climate, moral identity, and leader–culture dynamics
2.4 Identity, culture, and social context in ethical practice – analysing how personal and organisational identities interact with wider institutional environments to influence legitimacy and moral action.	• Moral identity and narrative accounts of ethical agency • Organisational culture, norms, and ethical sensemaking • Institutional logics, legitimacy, and socio-cultural constraint
2.5 Ethical Decision-Making Theories and Models – reviewing cognitive, emotional, and contextual accounts of ethical behaviour, including classical and emergent frameworks.	• Issue-contingent and process models of ethical decision-making • Behavioural ethics and bounded rationality in judgement under constraint • Dissonance, moral attentiveness, and ethically salient trade-offs • Rational Choice Theory and Bounded Rationality
2.6 Technology and Innovation Frameworks – examining how ethical and social considerations shape technological design, diffusion, and governance, and how responsible innovation may enhance societal well-being.	• Responsible innovation and socio-technical governance • Ethics-by-design / value-sensitive design and information ethics • Technology adoption, scaling, and accountability mechanisms

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

2.1.1 Ethicality as an interpretive concept

The term *ethicality* is used in this thesis to refer to the quality, state or condition of being ethical (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). It is not introduced as a new concept, nor is it treated as a measurable moral score. In ordinary usage, *ethicality* points to whether something can be regarded as ethical. In business ethics research, related questions are usually examined through moral judgement, perceived ethicality, ethical decision-making, ethical climate, stakeholder responsibility and the translation of ethical intention into action (Rest, 1986; Treviño, 1986; Reidenbach and Robin, 1990; Jones, 1991; Victor and Cullen, 1988). The term is therefore useful for this study because it allows attention to remain on how ethical claims are understood and worked through, rather than assuming in advance that a particular venture, decision or technology is ethical.

This distinction matters because the participating ventures were selected for their explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims, not because they were assumed to be ethically superior to other firms. A venture may seek to address a societal need while still raising ethical questions about access, exclusion, privacy, data use, accountability, dependency, labour, environmental cost or unintended harm. The pursuit of social or public value is therefore not treated as equivalent to *ethicality*. Social innovation and social entrepreneurship scholarship help explain mission, public-benefit claims, legitimacy and mission drift, but those literatures do not remove the need to ask how ethical commitments are interpreted and operationalised in practice (Mair and Martí, 2006; Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller, 2008; Santos, 2012; Battilana and Lee, 2014).

Within *ethical decision-making* literature, ethicality is commonly approached through the recognition of moral issues, the formation of judgement, intention and behaviour. Rest's (1986) four-component model, Treviño's (1986) interactionist account and Jones's (1991) moral-intensity framework all show that ethical conduct cannot be explained only by abstract principle. It also depends on issue recognition, situational pressures, organisational context and the perceived seriousness of consequences. This is relevant for founder-led ventures because early decisions are often made before routines,

governance arrangements or stable accountability mechanisms are fully developed. The question is not only whether a founder holds ethical values, but how those values are translated into choices about design, data, users, partnerships, revenue, safeguards and scaling.

Work on perceived ethicality also helps clarify the interpretive character of the term. Reidenbach and Robin (1990) treat ethical evaluation as involving several moral philosophies, including justice, relativism, egoism, utilitarianism and deontology. Their work is useful here because it shows that ethicality is rarely judged through a single moral lens. A decision may appear defensible in terms of consequences, but questionable in terms of rights, fairness or duties. Conversely, a decision may preserve a duty or boundary while limiting speed, growth or reach. For this thesis, *ethicality* is therefore understood as plural and contested. It refers to the quality of being ethical as interpreted by actors who may be balancing different moral standards under practical constraint.

The term also has to be distinguished from compliance. Compliance may form part of ethical practice, particularly where legal or regulatory requirements protect users, workers or affected communities. However, business ethics scholarship has long noted that acting lawfully is not the same as acting ethically, especially where legal standards lag behind new organisational or technological practices (Carroll, 1991; Paine, 1994; Crane and Matten, 2016). This is particularly important in technology-based ventures, where products, data practices and platform dependencies may develop before their social effects or governance needs are fully settled. Technology ethics and responsible innovation literature therefore extend the discussion by showing how ethical questions may arise through design choices, data flows, opacity, automation, accessibility, user vulnerability and the distribution of risk (Winner, 1980; Nissenbaum, 2010; Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Owen, Macnaghten and Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013).

In this thesis, then, *ethicality* is used as a working interpretive term. It does not mean that ethical status can be assumed from mission, innovation, stakeholder engagement or legal compliance. It refers to how founders make sense of what behaving ethically requires in relation to their venture's purpose, constraints and effects. The interview materials reproduced in **Appendix A2.3.1** show how this concern was operationalised in the

research design. The term helps connect the literatures reviewed in this chapter to the empirical focus of the study: how founders define, justify and adapt ethical commitments while building micro-to-small, technology-based early-stage ventures with public-interest aims. Ethical conduct is therefore treated as something to be recognised, judged and enacted through practice, including deliberate action, resource allocation, responses to constraint and decisions about trade-offs, rather than as a quality that can be inferred from an actor's stated purpose.

2.2 Foundations of ethical thought: a framework for analysis

This section reviews selected foundations of ethical thought that inform the study's understanding of ethical decision-making. The aim is not to adjudicate between philosophical traditions, but to show how different accounts of duty, consequence, virtue, care, rights, fairness and applied responsibility may inform the interpretation of founders' accounts. In this thesis, these traditions are treated as sensitising resources rather than as fixed coding categories. They help frame the kinds of reasoning founders may draw on when describing what ought to be done, what should be protected, and how competing responsibilities are weighed under constraint.

The aim is, therefore, to lay the groundwork for examining the ethical aspects of entrepreneurial activity by outlining the principal pillars underpinning ethical inquiry; and provide a starting point for considering how founders in technology-based ventures make sense of their obligations.

Ethical theory is often described as operating on three levels, although the boundaries between them are not always clear. ***Metaethics*** deals with the nature of moral judgement. ***Normative ethics*** asks how such judgement might guide action**.** ***Applied ethics*** takes insights from both and develops them in relation to particular fields of practice. In business ethics this layered scheme has been used to link philosophical debate to questions of responsibility and governance (Crane & Matten, 2016). Together, these perspectives provide a foundation for analysing how ethical reasoning shapes decision-making in digital-technology-based ESVs.

2.2.1 Metaethics: enquiring into the nature of Morality

Metaethics looks at the meaning and justification of moral claims rather than offering prescriptions by raising questions such as: when people call something "good" or "bad," are they identifying objective properties, voicing preferences, or rehearsing shared conventions? Are obligations universal, or are they tied to particular cultures? Where, if anywhere, does moral authority originate? Reason, social processes, human nature, or perhaps divine command?

Positions in the literature diverge. *Realist* accounts indicate that moral truths exist independent of human perception and can be accessed through reason (Brink, 1989; Shafer-Landau, 2003). Conversely, *subjectivist* views regard moral judgements as expressions of individual attitudes (Ayer, 1936). Mackie (1977) famously advanced an *Error Theory*, claiming that all moral discourse rests on a mistaken assumption of objective values. Other writers strike intermediate positions: Rawls (1971) and Korsgaard (1996) emphasise rational agreement, while Foot (2001) and Hursthouse (1999) relate morality to human capacities and forms of social life.

These debates filter into business ethics in more practical guises. Donaldson and Dunfee's (1994) *Integrative Social Contracts Theory* proposed that firms operate within "micro-contracts" that are locally defined but constrained by overarching "hypernorms." Wicks and Freeman (1998) observed that stakeholder theory carries implicit metaethical assumptions about the reach of obligations. For entrepreneurs, such commitments take priority: a founder who sees duties as universal may lean towards formal procedures, while one who regards morality as context-bound may rely more on dialogue and adaptation (Weick, 1995; Suchman, 2002).

Metaethical positions also have practical implications for business ethics, including how obligations are framed (for example, as universal duties or context-specific responsibilities) (Treviño et al., 2006). How these orientations were handled analytically is set out in **Chapter 3: Research methodology**.

2.2.2 Normative ethics: establishing ethical standards for action

a) *Normative ethics* moves the discussion from the nature of moral claims to the standards by which conduct may be judged. It offers several evaluative logics that are relevant to organisational and entrepreneurial decision-making: consequences, duties, rights, character and care (Frankena, 1973; Rachels and Rachels, 2019). These traditions do not provide fixed coding categories for this study. Rather, they offer sensitising lenses for interpreting how founders describe what should be protected, what may be traded off, and what limits should not be crossed under constraint. ***Consequentialism: outcomes as the basis of ethical judgement*** **:** consequentialist ideas, connected with Bentham (1789) and Mill (1861), judge actions by reference to their consequences This way of thinking is the basis for cost–benefit analysis and some methods of measuring impact, where ethical assessment depends on the size, distribution and desirability of consequences (Smart and Williams, 1973; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2019). In corporate debates, Friedman's (1970) shareholder primacy position has been a consequentialist stance on economic value, while Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line has extended the evaluation framework to include social and environmental performance (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Norman and MacDonald, 2004).

b) ***Deontology: duties and constraints in business practice*****:** deontological theories, often connected with Kant's categorical imperative, judge actions on the basis of duties, principles and restrictions that cannot be reduced to results alone (Kant, 1785/1993; Bowie, 1999). This logic is contained in the professional obligations, compliance standards, fiduciary duties, procedural fairness and promises to regard humans as ends rather than as just means that are part of organisational settings. Deontological reasoning is especially pertinent for technology-based ventures because founders have to evaluate if certain uses of data, design decisions or business methods are still acceptable even if they

appear to be commercially efficient or socially good (Floridi and Cowls, 2019; Mittelstadt, 2019).

c) ***Rights-based approaches: entitlements and obligations:*** while closely related to deontological reasoning, these are treated separately here because rights vocabulary is especially prominent in business and digital ethics. These approaches foreground entitlements held by individuals or groups, and the corresponding obligations owed by organisations. In technology-based ventures, this is particularly relevant to privacy, informed consent, non-discrimination, digital dignity, transparency and equitable access to technological benefits (Feinberg, 1973; Beauchamp and Bowie, 2004; Floridi, 2013; Binns, 2018; Mittelstadt et al., 2016).

d) ***Virtue ethics and responsible leadership in entrepreneurial settings:*** rooted in Aristotle, places character at the centre, asking what kind of person, founder or leader one should be (Aristotle, trans. 2009; MacIntyre, 1981; Hursthouse, 1999). Solomon (1992) and Moore (2017) argue that virtues such as honesty, courage and practical wisdom can anchor organisational culture. This is relevant to early-stage ventures because limited formal structures may make founders' dispositions and judgement especially influential (Nielsen and Massa, 2013).

e) **Care ethics: relationships and attentiveness:** emerging from feminist philosophy, focuses on empathy, relationships, vulnerability and responsiveness to context (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993). Its application to business shifts attention beyond contractual obligation towards interdependence, attentiveness and relational responsibility (Liedtka, 1996; Derry, 2012). For socially innovative, technology-based ventures, this perspective is relevant where affected users or communities may be vulnerable, distant from decision-makers or unevenly represented in design and delivery choices.

In practice, these traditions do not exist in isolation. For example, consequentialist reasoning is often used in discourse about scalability and impact measurement (Nicholls and Murdock, 2011; Mulgan, 2006), privacy or rights issues are generally defended by deontological principles (Floridi, 2013; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011), and virtue ethics is often compatible with founding identity and cultural development discourse (Fauchart

and Gruber, 2011; Weaver et al., 2005). Accountability and community related discourse are indicative of care-based thinking (Tronto, 2013; Rai and Sambasivan, 2021). In essence, the dominant strand may generally reflect the context in which it is discussed; and alongside investor expectations, regulatory frameworks, peer standards or social pressures (Suchman, 1995; Van Wijk et al., 2019).

The procedures through which these traditions were operationalised in data collection and analysis are detailed in **Chapter 3: Research methodology**.

a) Consequentialism: outcomes as the basis of ethical judgement

Consequentialist approaches judge the morality of action by its outcomes, with utilitarianism forming the most influential strand (Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1861; Smart & Williams, 1973; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2019). In this tradition, ethical value rests on maximising overall benefit or minimising harm, an idea that has shaped corporate and policy thinking alike (Harsanyi, 1977; Shaw, 2016). In business settings, consequentialist logic has often been the basis for performance-based frameworks. Wartick and Cochran (1985) conceptualised *Corporate Social Performance* through observable outcomes, and Wood (1991) enhanced this framework by correlating concepts of social responsibility with quantifiable results.

The *Shareholder Primacy perspective*, most notably articulated by Friedman (1970), was grounded in a consequentialist framework: profit maximisation was shown as the optimal means to achieve social welfare, as it facilitated the effective allocation of resources within markets (Jensen, 2002; Heath, 2006). Counter-positions like *Stakeholder Theory* (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007) broadened the scope of moral concern, while the "Triple Bottom Line" (Elkington, 1997; Norman & MacDonald, 2004; Slaper & Hall, 2011) demonstrated how consequentialist reasoning could integrate environmental and social criteria with financial returns. These modifications underscore the flexibility of consequentialism in discussions of business ethics (Crane & Matten, 2016; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007).

The consequentialist frame is also visible in *technology ethics*. binns (2018) demonstrates how algorithmic fairness debates often revolve around the effects and distribution of benefits and harms, reflecting similar concerns in *information ethics* (Moor, 1985; Floridi, 1999; Floridi & Taddeo, 2016). Discussions of Responsible Innovation likewise draw on outcome-focused reasoning, stressing anticipation of social and environmental consequences (Stilgoe, Owen, & Macnaghten, 2013; van den Hoven, Doorn, & Swierstra, 2015); revealing how consequentialism continues to inform normative expectations in contexts where uncertainty and externalities are pronounced.

Consequentialist ethics evaluates the rightness of action by reference to expected outcomes, typically framed as the overall balance of benefit and harm (Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1861). In technology-based ESVs, consequentialist reasoning often appears in the language of scale, reach, and measurable impact, where rapid diffusion is positioned as a route to social benefit. However, the practical capacity to forecast consequences is frequently constrained by high uncertainty and limited information in early-stage conditions (Knight, 1921; Simon, 1955). In digitally mediated settings, potential harms may be diffused, delayed, and unevenly distributed across user groups and contexts, and may also emerge through feedback effects that are difficult to anticipate at design time (Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Selbst et al., 2019). Consequentialism can therefore help explain founders' reliance on impact narratives, while also underscoring the need for complementary constraints where downstream effects cannot be reliably predicted.

In the context of this study, consequentialist thinking is echoed through the approaches founders use to deal with ethical challenges under conditions of uncertainty. Outcomes in socially innovative, technology-based ventures are often articulated in terms of expected benefits or possible harms. Simultaneously, anticipating the long-term trajectory of new technologies or the indirect effects they may generate has proven difficult (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019; Stilgoe et al., 2013). This limitation indicates that, while consequentialist reasoning is influential, it is insufficient alone and interacts with duty-, virtue-, and care-based claims (Crane & Matten, 2016).

b) Deontology: duties and constraints in business practice

Deontological approaches take a different starting point. They rest on the claim that certain actions are right or wrong irrespective of their consequences. Kant's *Categorical Imperative* is the most frequently cited expression of this idea: individuals should act only on principles that could be consistently universalised and should never treat people merely as means to an end (Kant, 1785/1993). Business ethicists have applied this reasoning to support duties of honesty, promise-keeping, respect for privacy, and the protection of dignity in employment relations (Bowie, 1999; Schwartz & Carroll, 2003; Cosans, 2008; Cavico & Mujtaba, 2013; Levin et al., 2019).

Organisations often seek to translate these *commitments* into professional codes, ethical charters and compliance programmes. Such mechanisms can set expectations and reduce ambiguity, but their effect depends on more than formal adoption; it also depends on ethical culture, leadership, perceived fairness and the way responsibilities are interpreted in everyday work (Paine, 1994; Weaver, Treviño and Cochran, 1999; Treviño, Weaver, Gibson and Toffler, 1999; Kaptein and Schwartz, 2008; Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes, 2007).

Also, while *codes of conduct* and *compliance systems*, for instance, are known to increase predictability and fairness, they may create rigidity when quick responses are needed, as is often the case in new ventures (Herrera, 2015; Jenkins, 2004; García-Piqueres & García-Ramos, 2021). Studies note that small firms often struggle with this tension: they have limited capacity to develop complex compliance structures, yet external stakeholders still expect them to act in ways that reflect clear ethical standards (Jenkins, 2004; Lettice & Parekh, 2010).

The *"Mere Means" Principle* - based on the notion that *people should never be treated as tools* - has been widely adopted in employment relations and human resource management that emphasise respect for autonomy and recognition of intrinsic worth (Levin et al., 2019; Kanter, 1999). In the technology field, deontological reasoning is increasingly prominent. Studies on *Artificial Intelligence* and *Algorithmic Systems* indicate that when attention is directed to duties and responsibilities, issues such as opacity,

manipulation and discrimination are brought into sharper focus, even where overall benefits appear persuasive (Mittelstadt et al., 2016).

For technology-based ESVs, this body of work has been interpreted as showing that duty-oriented reasoning can operate as a stabilising force. It may establish limits on what is considered permissible, independent of commercial pressure, and communicate clear boundaries to stakeholders. *Deontological perspectives*, in this sense, have been taken to provide a language for marking boundaries in domains such as product design, data use and employment practices. The literature suggests that such boundaries are conceived as limits that should not be crossed in the pursuit of growth or innovation (Bowie, 1999; Schwartz & Carroll, 2003; Herrera, 2015; Mittelstadt et al., 2016).

c) Rights-based approaches: entitlements and obligations

Although rights are often within deontological traditions, a distinct rights vocabulary is frequently used in business and digital ethics; thus, it is treated separately here for clarity. *Rights-based approaches* emphasise the entitlements that individuals or groups may legitimately claim, together with the corresponding duties owed by others in organisational and social settings (Feinberg, 1973; Beauchamp & Bowie, 2004). They are grounded in traditions of *Political Philosophy*, from the early *contractarian* arguments of Hobbes and Locke concerning the preservation of life, liberty, and property (Hobbes, 1651/1996; Locke, 1689/1988), through to Rawls's (1971) *Theory of Justice*, which frames rights as expressions of fairness within cooperative schemes. Subsequent scholarship, including Sen's (1999) and Nussbaum's (2000) *Capabilities approach*, advances these discussions by enquiring not only into the theoretical rights of persons but also into their practical talents and potentialities. More recent work has also discussed how rights reasoning has adapted to new domains, including the protection of information, digital privacy, and online participation (Floridi, 2013; Mantelero, 2016; Susskind, 2018).

Within *Corporate* and *Organisational research*, *rights perspectives* are often linked to the evolution of *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*. Matten and Moon (2008), for example, differentiate between *explicit CSR*, referring to formal and codified undertakings to

safeguard human, labour and environmental rights, and *implicit CSR*, which is expressed through prevailing social norms and institutional expectations. Empirical studies have suggested that neglecting either form may carry consequences, including challenges to organisational legitimacy, reputational difficulties, or reduced stakeholder confidence (Doane, 2005; Carroll, 2016; Russell, Ferris & McIntosh, 2016; Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016).

Minimalist interpretations, linked to Friedman's (1970) *Shareholder Primacy*, assert that firms need only fulfil legal obligations and concentrate on profit maximisation; however, an increasing body of research indicates the importance of broader rights agendas—encompassing diversity, sustainability, employee participation, and corporate citizenship—as integral to responsible business practice (Agle, Mitchell & Sonnenfeld, 1999; Bocquet, Le Bas & Mothe, 2011; Aguilar-Fernández & Otegi-Olaso, 2018; Ruggiero & Cupertino, 2018; Nosratabadi et al., 2019).

In ESVs and early-stage firms—especially in data-intensive or AI-enabled sectors—rights-based questions are often raised. Concerns about privacy, informed consent, algorithmic fairness and non-discrimination recur in accounts of emerging technologies (Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Floridi, 2013; Jobin, Ienca & Vayena, 2019). Rights frameworks are also used to discuss digital dignity, transparency and equitable access to innovation's benefits (Taylor, Floridi & van der Sloot, 2017; Binns, 2018).

Overall, it has been argued that *Rights-Based reasoning* can operate as a counterweight to outcome-led logics by signalling claims that ought to be protected even when efficiency or growth pressures suggest alternative courses (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Sen, 2004; Nussbaum, 2011). In socially innovative, technology-driven ventures, a rights vocabulary may give founders and managers a practicable way to negotiate dilemmas—for example, how far rapid iteration can proceed without eroding stakeholders' entitlements. Stating commitments in rights terms—in privacy notices, ethical codes or governance charters—has also been associated with greater credibility with regulators, investors and affected communities (Stahl et al., 2017; Morley et al., 2020; George et al., 2021).

d) Virtue ethics and responsible leadership in entrepreneurial settings

Responsible leadership in entrepreneurial settings is closely linked to virtue ethics: it foregrounds character (e.g., honesty, courage) and practical wisdom (phronesis) for judicious action under uncertainty (Aristotle, trans. 2009; MacIntyre, 1981; Solomon, 1992). Numerous studies have established *ethical leadership* as a significant factor influencing organisational navigation at the junction of innovation and societal responsibility (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005; Treviño, Hartman & Brown, 2000; Lawton, Rayner & Lasthuizen, 2013).

Leadership in social innovation has been described in the literature as a mechanism that connects entrepreneurial activity to collective benefits and stakeholder welfare (Maak & Pless, 2006; Voegtlin, Patzer & Scherer, 2012; Battilana & Lee, 2014; George et al., 2021). Kant's (1785/1993) *principle of universal moral responsibility* continues to influence these debates. At the same time, interpretive accounts such as Weick's (1995) *Sensemaking Framework* indicate that leaders often rely on framing processes to rationalise or justify decisions in contexts characterised by ambiguity. Evidence from studies of entrepreneurial and technology-oriented leadership suggests that this tension between aspirational ethical goals and the pressures of situational practice frequently recurs (Sarasvathy, 2001; Shepherd, Patzelt & Haynie, 2013; Powell & Baker, 2017).

Responsible leadership approaches emphasise that addressing issues such as inequality, climate change, or the societal effects of emerging technologies may require more than compliance with formal codes; they point towards anticipatory and participatory practices designed to embed reflection and accountability in decision-making (Maak & Pless, 2009; Voegtlin et al., 2012; Floridi, 2013; Stahl et al., 2017; Von Schomberg, 2013). Frameworks on Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) further develop these principles, highlighting anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion, and responsiveness as procedural norms (Owen, Macnaghten & Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013; Stahl et al., 2017). However, for ventures working with emergent technologies, such practices have been presented as both promising and difficult to institutionalise, given

pressures for speed, investor returns, and technical novelty (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; George et al., 2021).

At the same time, existing analyses indicate that ethical leadership in early-stage or socially innovative ESVs may entail an iterative process of sensemaking, in which founders frame, reframe, and communicate emerging dilemmas, thereby shaping how teams perceive and prioritise moral salience (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Sarasvathy, 2001; Powell & Baker, 2017). This interpretive work appears to support the balancing of social and technological objectives with stakeholder expectations, encouraging leaders to remain attentive to trust, legitimacy, and reputational concerns (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Voegtlin et al., 2020; George et al., 2021). Relatedly, evidence from case-based studies suggests that, in resource-constrained environments, founders often rely on informal mechanisms—such as symbolic commitments, transparent dialogue, or personal modelling of ethical conduct—to articulate an organisation's ethical orientation where formal systems may be underdeveloped (Treviño, Brown & Hartman, 2003; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Corner & Ho, 2010; Choi & Majumdar, 2014). On the other hand, the absence of anticipatory or inclusive practices has been associated with reputational damage, erosion of stakeholder confidence, and ethical lapses in technology-intensive ventures (Floridi, 2013; Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Stahl et al., 2017; Johnson & Wetmore, 2021; Von Schomberg, 2013).

Combined, this body of literature indicates that *ethical leadership in social innovation* is not best conceived as a fixed trait, but rather as a collection of evolving interpretive and relational capacities, enacted through ongoing conversation, negotiation, and self-reflection; allowing leaders to mediate between normative commitments (for example, justice, transparency and inclusion) and practical constraints (for example, funding, regulation, or growth timelines) (Sonenshein, 2007; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2002). Understanding how founders explain and defend such positioning may yield insights into the maintenance, adaptation, or occasional compromise of ethical standards in socially innovative, technology-driven enterprises (Hahn et al., 2014; Santos, 2012; Shepherd, Patzelt & Haynie, 2013).

e) Care ethics: relationships and attentiveness

Care ethics is often described as emerging from *Feminist critiques* of traditional *Moral Theory*, with early contributions emphasising the interdependence of human life and the moral significance of relationships, context, and vulnerability (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993; Held, 2006). Grounded on attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness to concrete needs - rather than universal rules or cumulative consequences (Hamington, 2011; Noddings, 2013) - the underpinning ethical reasoning may therefore not always be reducible to abstract principles. Instead, it might be embedded in relational practices and situated forms of judgement (Ruddick, 1989; Hamington & Sander-Staudt, 2011).

Organisational studies on *Care ethics* generally focus on management and corporate responsibility frameworks that emphasise empathy, trust, and attentiveness to stakeholder well-being (Hamington & Sander-Staudt, 2011; Koehn, 1998; Melé, 2016; Simola, 2015). Empirical research further suggests that practices associated with care—such as fostering trust, supporting dialogue, or encouraging relational accountability—may help sustain collaboration, knowledge sharing, and legitimacy in contexts where interpersonal ties are central (Montgomery, Dacin, & Dacin, 2012; Haraway, 1988; Shore et al., 2018). In entrepreneurial environments where formal structures are underdeveloped, obligations to others often develop in more informal ways. Research suggests that the attentiveness of founders to employees, users and surrounding communities can, under such conditions, exert a disproportionate influence on the ethical climate and the overall direction of the organisation (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Corner & Ho, 2010; Roblek et al., 2019).

The integration of technology into organisational processes appears to complicate the application of *care ethics*. the adoption of care-oriented practices may become restricted where attentiveness to users and stakeholders, which might otherwise play a stronger role (Tronto, 2013; Hamington, 2019; Walker, 2010), is reduced through the use of information and communication systems which create a distance between decision-makers and those directly affected by their actions, fostering neglect or create ethical

blind spots (Brey, 2000; Suchman, 2002; Floridi, 2013; Mittelstadt et al., 2016). In entrepreneurial contexts, particularly in ESVs working with data-driven and algorithmic technologies, existing studies indicate that rapid growth, investor expectations, and scaling pressures may encourage abstraction and automation in ways that could weaken relational attentiveness (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; Binns, 2018; Martin, 2019).

For the purposes of this research, *care ethics* may provide an interpretive frame for exploring how socially innovative, technology-based entrepreneurs describe and justify their decisions. Given the assumption that it is not always possible to capture ethical action solely in terms of outcomes or duties, it diverts attention to how founders recognise needs, express empathy, and enact relational responsibilities in their ventures (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Hamington, 2019; Shore et al., 2018)

2.2.3 Applied ethics: navigating ethical dilemmas in practice

While *Metaethics* and *Normative ethics* provide the conceptual underpinnings of ethical reasoning, *Applied Ethics* concerns itself with how such principles are interpreted and enacted in concrete circumstances (Singer, 2011; Harris, Sapienza, & Bowie, 2009). It may be understood as the practical domain of *ethics*, translating abstract arguments into frameworks that can guide decisions in situations characterised by competing interests, uncertainty, and pressure. This strand of inquiry is particularly relevant for business and entrepreneurship, where decisions have immediate and often irreversible implications for employees, consumers, and communities (Asongu, 2007; Harris et al., 2009; Oliver, 2011).

In the entrepreneurial domain, *applied ethics* often addresses dilemmas linked to product safety, consumer protection, labour practices, and environmental sustainability (Palazzo, Krings, & Hoffrage, 2012; Weaver, Treviño, & Cochran, 1999). These are issues that cannot always be resolved through reliance on law or regulation alone, as firms may operate at the frontier of innovation where formal rules lag behind practice (Brey, 2000; Stahl et al., 2017). Technology-based ESVs, in particular, are frequently confronted with ethical blind spots arising from the rapid development of digital tools and AI systems. Scholars have drawn attention to concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, discrimination, and

opaque decision-making processes (Floridi, 2013; Floridi & Cowls, 2019; Moor, 1985). Such concerns have been incorporated into frameworks of responsible innovation, which stress principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, autonomy, and explicability (Stahl et al., 2017; Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

Applied ethics also underscores the tension between entrepreneurial imperatives for rapid growth and the potential erosion of ethical commitments (Nilssen, 2019; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). For instance, scaling pressures may incentivise compromises in employment standards, environmental safeguards, or consumer protection, raising questions about how ESVs balance short-term viability with long-term social responsibility (Seligman, 1972; Caplan, 2008). The literature suggests that firms may benefit from embedding ethical reflection into business planning processes, supported by accountability mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and a culture of open dialogue (Weaver et al., 1999; Mayer et al., 2009; Ferdman & Deane, 2014).

Several scholars have argued that *Stakeholder Theory* provides a useful complement to *Applied Ethics*, since it highlights that ethical responsibilities rarely operate in isolation but are instead relational and systemic (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997). When applied to ESVs, this means that ethical decisions cannot simply be evaluated in terms of internal efficiency or profitability but must consider effects on investors, employees, customers, regulators, and communities (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Asikiwe, 2021). This broadens the scope of *applied ethics* by linking micro-level decision-making to macro-level questions of legitimacy and societal trust (Brey, 2000; Sethi, 2015).

Combined, the literature suggests that *applied ethics* may be most usefully understood as a bridging field that connects philosophical reasoning with business practice, particularly in domains where technological change raises new and contested questions. Although there remains debate over the extent to which firms are capable of self-regulation, there is growing consensus that Applied Ethics provides the vocabulary and tools for anticipating risks, negotiating trade-offs, and embedding responsibility into entrepreneurial action (Singer, 2011; Floridi, 2013; Stahl et al., 2017).

The attention to concrete dilemmas in *Applied Ethics* connects directly with broader CSR debates. Whereas *applied ethics* addresses the immediate challenges of decision-making, CSR frameworks situate those choices within wider societal and institutional contexts (Carroll, 1999; Matten & Moon, 2008; Frynas & Yamahaki, 2016).

This Chapter now turns to *ethical leadership* and *entrepreneurship*, focusing on how leaders may shape the cultures, routines and practical conditions through which ethical commitments are enacted. **Table 1** summarises selected debates in philosophical ethics, and their relevance to organisational and entrepreneurial contexts and scholarship; and indicates how these perspectives may sensitise empirical inquiry into the ethical practices of technology-based ESVs, while noting methodological tendencies and limits in the existing literature.

Table 1: Synthesis of selected ethical traditions and their relevance to organisational and entrepreneurial inquiry

Theme / Subsection	Literature	Findings from previous research	Methodological approaches	Limitations / Gaps identified
Metaethics	Ayer (1936); Mackie (1977); Brink (1989); Shafer-Landau (2003); Donaldson & Dunfee (1994); Wicks & Freeman (1998).	Debates are often framed around moral realism and relativism; Integrative Social Contracts Theory links universalism/relativism to business contexts; stakeholder approaches appear to embed metaethical assumptions.	Philosophical argumentation; conceptual frameworks; limited empirical testing.	Few empirical applications; reliance on conceptual reasoning; limited evidence from entrepreneurial or early-stage venture settings.
Normative ethics (general frameworks)	Mill (1861); Kant (1785/1993); Aristotle (1999); Frankena (1973); Gilligan (1982); Nielsen & Massa (2013).	Consequentialist, deontological, virtue, and care-based theories offer different logics for ethical assessment; applications to entrepreneurship and CSR.	Theoretical exposition; case-based illustrations; surveys.	Often prescriptive; integration in dynamic entrepreneurial contexts remains limited.
Normative ethics - Consequentialism	Friedman (1970); Elkington (1997); Donaldson & Preston (1995); Binns (2018).	Debates may be reflected in shareholder vs. stakeholder logics; triple bottom line frames social/environmental outcomes; algorithmic fairness debates.	Corporate case analysis; policy frameworks; normative debate.	Often assumes outcomes can be specific and measured; less attention to plural values, fairness, or
Normative ethics - Deontology	Kant (1785/1993); Bowie (1999); Schwartz & Carroll (2003); Mittelstadt et al. (2016).	Duty-based reasoning appears in CSR, compliance, and professional codes; applications in AI ethics highlight risks of manipulation, opacity, and discrimination.	Normative philosophy; CSR duty frameworks; applied ethics in technology.	May be criticised for rigidity; little empirical study in fast-changing ESV environments.

Theme / Subsection	Literature	Findings from previous research	Methodological approaches	Limitations / Gaps identified
Normative ethics - Rights-based approaches	Hobbes (1651/1996); Locke (1689/1988); Rawls (1971); Sen (1999); Nussbaum (2000); Floridi (2013).	Theories of Justice and Rights inform CSR debates, digital ethics, and entrepreneurship; capabilities approach links rights to entrepreneurial opportunity and innovation.	Political philosophy; applied ethics frameworks; CSR research.	Operationalisation may be abstract; empirical testing sparse; digital rights frameworks still emerging.
Normative ethics - Virtue ethics	Aristotle (1999); MacIntyre (1984); Solomon (1992); Moore (2002).	Virtue ethics linked to founder character, entrepreneurial excellence, and organisational practices grounded in dispositions.	Philosophical reasoning; case-based discussion; organisational ethics.	Limited integration into rapidly changing ESV contexts; empirical testing underdeveloped.
Normative ethics - Care ethics	Gilligan (1982); Held (2006); Tronto (1993); Hamington & Sander-Staudt (2011).	Care ethics highlights relational responsibilities, empathy, and attentiveness; applied to business contexts, suggests ethics may be embedded in stakeholder care and inclusivity.	Feminist ethics; relational theory; qualitative organisational research.	Underrepresented in entrepreneurial studies; often overlooked in technology-focused debates.
Applied ethics	Singer (2011); Harris et al. (2009); Moor (1985); Stahl et al. (2017); Floridi & Cowls (2019).	Applied ethics provides practice-oriented tools for navigating dilemmas in entrepreneurship, technology, and AI; Responsible Innovation frameworks propose beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and explicability.	Case studies; Responsible Innovation frameworks; AI ethics principles.	Often reactive to high-profile crises; limited longitudinal or ESV-specific evidence.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

2.3 Ethical leadership and ethical entrepreneurship

Ethical leadership scholarship has often examined how leaders influence conduct, norms and decision-making within organisations. In entrepreneurial firms, this influence may be especially visible because formal structures are often still developing and founder discretion can be high (Weaver, Treviño & Agle, 2005; Ciulla, 1995; Northouse, 2022; Kempster et al., 2011). *Ethical leadership* is generally described as the demonstration of honesty, fairness, integrity and accountability, together with efforts to encourage such standards among others (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Eisenbeiss, 2012; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Pless, 2007).

For this thesis, the relevance of *ethical leadership* lies less in leadership style as a fixed trait and more in how founders shape the conditions under which ethical commitments are interpreted, tested and enacted. Prior work suggests that 'ethical leadership' may affect not only immediate conduct, but also the climates and cultures through which collective sensemaking and organisational decisions take shape (Treviño, Brown & Hartman, 2003; Den Hartog, 2015; Kaptein, 2008). In early-stage ventures, those processes may be complicated by uncertain markets, scarce resources, investor expectations and the need to align innovation with responsibility (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Freeman & Reed, 1983; Maak & Pless, 2006; Voegtlin et al., 2012).

Responsible leadership scholarship adds a further emphasis on moral imagination, relational competence and stakeholder inclusion (Maak & Pless, 2009; Floridi, 2013; Von Schomberg, 2013; George et al., 2021). In this study, these ideas are used to frame ethical leadership as an ongoing practice of trade-off negotiation, boundary-setting and value-laden guidance, rather than as a stable list of personal attributes.

2.3.1 Foundations of ethical leadership: conceptualisation and social learning

Ethical leadership is commonly defined as a form of leadership in which individuals demonstrate personal virtues such as honesty, fairness, integrity, and reliability, alongside

efforts to foster similar standards among others in the organisation (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005; Mayer et al., 2009, 2012; Piccolo et al., 2010; Huang & Paterson, 2017; Lin et al., 2020). Conceptual models often distinguish between dispositional attributes, including moral courage and trustworthiness, and relational behaviours, including transparent communication, consistent rule application and reinforcement of shared values (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Den Hartog, 2015).

Empirical studies have associated *ethical leadership* with employee satisfaction, organisational commitment and reduced misconduct (Mayer et al., 2009; Piccolo et al., 2010; Bedi et al., 2016). That association should, however, be read alongside work showing how incentive structures, peer norms and ambiguous institutional guidance may normalise deviance or weaken ethical aspiration (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Palmer, 2012; Kaptein, 2008). This point is especially relevant to small or recently founded ventures, where formal systems may be limited and founders' decisions can carry disproportionate signalling effects (Jenkins, 2004; Schein, 2010; Nicholls & Murdock, 2011).

Social Learning offers one way to understand that influence. Drawing on Bandura's (1986) *Social Cognitive Theory*, *ethical leadership* research suggests that people often adopt norms by observing those they regard as credible role models, rather than through formal instruction alone (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Jordan et al., 2013). Everyday practices—how decisions are explained, how rewards are allocated, how setbacks are handled—may therefore become behavioural reference points (Weaver, Treviño & Cochran, 1999; Bapuji et al., 2020). In entrepreneurial settings, where policies may remain incomplete or informal, founders' values and routine choices may become especially visible to staff, collaborators and investors (Sonenshein, 2007; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014). This has solidified discourse interlocking *Ethical leadership* and *ethical entrepreneurship*, with the former providing interpretive frames and lived examples that guide ventures as they navigate tensions between innovation, growth and responsibility (Maak & Pless, 2006; Floridi, 2013; von Schomberg, 2013).

2.3.2 Ethical Leadership in social innovation contexts

In studies of *social innovation*, leadership has frequently been examined as a process that links entrepreneurial activity with broader societal benefit and stakeholder welfare (Maak & Pless, 2006; Voegtlin, Patzer & Scherer, 2012; Battilana & Lee, 2014; George et al., 2021). Philosophical concepts persist in shaping these debates. Kant's (1785/1993) account of universal moral obligation is often mentioned; yet, practical studies reveal that leaders seldom base their judgements only on abstract principles. Instead, it seems that decisions go through more practical or interpretive processes that let leaders respond when they need to. Interpretive approaches, including Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework, indicate that leaders often reframe or rationalise choices in order to act under conditions of ambiguity. Research on entrepreneurial and technology-oriented leadership similarly shows that normative ideals are regularly mediated by situational pressures (Sarasvathy, 2001; Shepherd, Patzelt & Haynie, 2013; Powell & Baker, 2017).

Responsible leadership literature extends this discussion by arguing that responses to complex challenges—such as inequality, climate change and the societal consequences of technological development—require more than adherence to formal codes. Scholars have proposed anticipatory and participatory practices that incorporate reflection and accountability into organisational decision-making (Maak & Pless, 2009; Voegtlin et al., 2012; Floridi, 2013; Stahl et al., 2017; Von Schomberg, 2013). Principles articulated within the *Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) framework*—anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion and responsiveness—further develop these ideas (Owen, Macnaghten & Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013). While relevant to ventures engaging with emerging technologies, existing research indicates that applying these practices is often difficult in contexts characterised by rapid expansion, investor demands and technological novelty (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; George et al., 2021).

Studies of entrepreneurial and early-stage ventures indicate that ethical leadership in these environments frequently manifests as continuous sensemaking, wherein founders express and recontextualise emerging challenges for their teams and stakeholders (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Sarasvathy, 2001; Powell & Baker, 2017). This

interpretive activity is understood, in the literature, as leaders' attempts to balance technological and social objectives, while at the same time maintaining trust, legitimacy and organisational reputation (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Voegtlin et al., 2020; George et al., 2021). Evidence also points to reliance on informal mechanisms—such as symbolic commitments, open dialogue, and personal modelling of ethical conduct—particularly where formal governance structures are underdeveloped (Treviño, Brown & Hartman, 2003; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Corner & Ho, 2010; Choi & Majumdar, 2014). Research has also drawn attention to the risks that arise when anticipatory or inclusive practices are absent. Case studies point to reputational damage, declining stakeholder confidence, and, in some instances, ethical lapses within technology-oriented enterprises (Floridi, 2013; Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Stahl et al., 2017; Johnson & Wetmore, 2021; Von Schomberg, 2013).

Rather than treating *ethical leadership* in *social innovation* as a stable attribute, much of the literature approaches it as a set of interpretive and relational capacities that develop over time. These capacities appear to be exercised through dialogue, negotiation and reflection, allowing leaders to move between broad normative commitments—such as justice, transparency and inclusivity—and the practical demands associated with funding, regulation or organisational growth (Sonenshein, 2007; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2002). Examining how founders explain and justify this positioning provides insight into how ethical standards are maintained, adapted or at times compromised in socially innovative, technology-driven enterprises (Hahn et al., 2014; Santos, 2012; Shepherd, Patzelt & Haynie, 2013). In the remainder of the thesis, this work is discussed primarily in terms of ethical navigation while retaining the term “Ethical Leadership” where it is used in the source literature.

2.3.3 Institutional and Organisational influences

Research on *ethics in entrepreneurship* generally indicates that moral reasoning does not take place in isolation from its organisational and institutional context. While personal values may provide an initial orientation, a considerable body of scholarship shows that the environments in which founders and managers operate can shape how ethical issues

are recognised, discussed and addressed (Treviño, 1986; Arnaud & Schminke, 2012; Kaptein, 2008; Weaver, Treviño & Agle, 2005).

Described as the shared assumptions, beliefs and norms that shape how individuals collaborate and interpret their work, organisational culture is a prominent focus in the study of *ethics* in management (Schein, 2010; Martin & Cullen, 2006) and a key factor influencing how moral expectations are solidified within organisations (Kaptein, 2008; Mayer et al., 2010; Valentine et al., 2011). In ventures at an early stage, where oversight structures may be limited and routines not yet formalised, cultural signals appear to carry particular weight in guiding employees towards, or in some cases away from, responsible practice (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Suchman, 2002; Corner & Ho, 2010).

The related notion of an *ethical climate* is usually framed in terms of collective perceptions of what constitutes appropriate behaviour (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Research in this area indicates that climates emphasising care, legal standards or principled reasoning may increase attentiveness to moral issues and support deliberation about the interests of different stakeholders (Neubert et al., 2009; Arnaud & Schminke, 2012; Topcu et al., 2015).

Leadership is also frequently highlighted as an organisational lever for embedding ethical standards. Studies propose that leaders who communicate clear expectations, demonstrate transparency, and reinforce fairness may help establish reference points for integrity within everyday routines (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005; Jordan et al., 2013; Cortes-Mejia et al., 2021). Evidence drawn from large corporations, ESVs, and hybrid organisations—ventures that combine commercial and social logics—suggests that visible support for accountability can encourage employees to raise concerns or engage in pro-social practices, even in the absence of mature compliance systems (Ofurum & Odinioha Gabriel, 2019; Van der Wal & Demircioglu, 2020; Senathip et al., 2017). At the same time, research on "*normalised deviance*" shows that ambiguous incentives or intense performance demands may undermine these intentions despite formal declarations of values (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Palmer, 2012).

A further stream of research draws on *Moral Development Theory*. Following Kohlberg's (1958, 1981) work on stages of moral reasoning, later studies have examined how organisational settings may encourage or obstruct the move towards more principled forms of thought (Jorgensen, 2006; Storsletten & Jakobsen, 2015; Ramboarisata & Gendron, 2019). Some evidence points to the value of interventions such as mentoring, structured ethics dialogues and participatory decision-making, which appear to support the incorporation of moral reasoning into professional identity (Valentine & Bateman, 2011; Jordan et al., 2013; Demont-Biaggi, 2019).

In this thesis, *governance* is used in two principal senses. First, *organisational* or *corporate governance* refers to the structures, accountabilities, decision processes and oversight arrangements through which organisations are directed and controlled. Second, *data* or *technical governance* refers to the rules, controls and decision procedures governing data, digital systems and technical practice. In technology-based ventures, these dimensions may intersect in practice, but they are not interchangeable. They are therefore treated as analytically distinct throughout the thesis.

Organisational governance offers one way to examine how incentives, oversight and accountability may shape ethical decision-making. Agency Theory suggests that weak monitoring or misaligned incentives can encourage short-term or self-interested behaviour (Milgram, 1974; Koehn, 2016). Governance scholarship has therefore considered mechanisms such as transparent reporting, stakeholder oversight and incentive alignment as ways of limiting opportunism (Blair & Stout, 1999; Rajan & Zingales, 2000). At the same time, an exclusive focus on shareholder value has been criticised for narrowing attention to financial return at the expense of environmental, community or stakeholder concerns (Christensen, Johnson & Horn, 2008; Donaldson & Walsh, 2015).

In parallel, *hybrid governance* models are most directly associated with social enterprise and hybrid-organisation scholarship, where social purpose and financial metrics are often examined together (Zahra, Bruton & Cai, 2018; Ebrahim, Battilana & Mair, 2014; Battilana & Lee, 2014). In this thesis, they are used more selectively. They are not treated as direct

descriptors of the sampled firms' legal form. Rather, they provide a useful lens for considering how shareholder-owned, for-profit ventures may attempt to hold mission and commercial viability together under strain.

Organisational learning and Innovation scholarship adds a further perspective by showing how technical problem-solving may either embed or marginalise ethical goals. Mechanisms such as stakeholder panels, product ethics reviews and reflective workshops have been identified as ways of surfacing potential harms and aligning new offerings with shared values (Von Krogh, Nonaka & Rechsteiner, 2012; Floridi, 2013; Stahl et al., 2017; Von Schomberg, 2013). Such mechanisms are relevant to early-stage firms because rapid experimentation and market pressure may otherwise outpace systematic ethical reflection (George et al., 2021; Austin et al., 2006; Mittelstadt et al., 2016).

Across these strands, the literature tends to converge on the view that ethical decision-making in entrepreneurial and socially innovative organisations is shaped not only by personal virtues or leadership styles but also by the interaction of cultures, climates, governance systems, and learning routines with broader institutional norms and market expectations (Kaptein, 2008; Mayer et al., 2010; Floridi, 2013; Schein, 2010). Several authors suggest that embedding reflective structures—such as value statements, participatory governance, and iterative dialogue—can strengthen organisational legitimacy and resilience, supporting principled responses to the evolving demands of technology-intensive and socially oriented environments (Kaptein, 2008; Mayer et al., 2010; George et al., 2021).

2.3.4 Ethical Leadership styles and the cultivation of Moral Identity

Ethical leadership has been discussed less as a single paradigm than as a range of practices through which leaders represent, protect and translate ethical commitments in organisational life (Treviño, Brown and Hartman, 2003; Eisenbeiss, 2012). Different leadership traditions therefore offer distinct ways of understanding how ethics may be integrated into routines, relationships and decision-making.

One influence comes from *clarity* and *reinforcement*, where rules, rewards or sanctions are used to stabilise expectations in contexts where formal systems are underdeveloped (Avey et al., 2010; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). While this can provide consistency, it may also limit deeper ethical reflection if applied in isolation (Brown et al., 2005).

A second emphasis concerns *authenticity* and *integrity*, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, consistency between words and actions, and transparency in relationships. These qualities are argued to build credibility and encourage the internalisation of ethical standards among employees (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 2012).

Some strands of the literature foreground a *service-oriented posture*: sustained attention to dignity, local communities and stakeholder welfare. where such practices are in evidence, studies report gains in trust and a more inclusive climate—effects that appear salient for organisations seeking to couple innovation with social aims (Eva et al., 2019; Painter-Morland, 2013). A related line of work considers more *future-facing leadership*—setting shared purpose, inviting reflection, and sustaining ambition beyond immediate targets—which has been associated with prosocial commitment and inventive responses to ethical problems (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1998; Kuratko et al., 2017). In practice, it is said, leaders seldom rely on a single approach; combinations are common and seem to vary with context. Instead, they combine them, shifting between clarity, authenticity, service and inspiration depending on organisational stage, resource constraints or stakeholder pressures (Maak & Pless, 2006; Powell & Baker, 2017). Such combinations may be particularly salient in socially innovative and technology-based enterprises, where governance structures are emergent and ethical expectations are contested.

The concept of *moral identity* provides a complementary perspective, referring to the extent to which moral values form part of a leader's self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Studies indicate that leaders with a salient moral identity are more likely to encourage prosocial behaviour, and may cultivate this through mentoring, dialogue and symbolic choices (Weaver, Treviño & Agle, 2005; Jordan et al., 2013).

Across these components, ethical leadership appears as an adaptive skill rather than allegiance to a specific style. *Personal integrity* shapes it, as do institutional supports and cultural routines, which can either facilitate or constrain moral intent (Kaptein, 2008; Mayer et al., 2010). For early-stage ventures, ethical leadership may be viewed less as a fixed style than as an ongoing effort to combine different emphases—clarity, authenticity, care and inspiration—while also responding to the practical demands of growth, innovation and stakeholder expectations.

2.3.5 Integrated frameworks for Ethical Decision-Making: Responsibility, Cognition, and Executive Influences

A considerable body of scholarship has sought to explain how individuals and organisations arrive at ethical or unethical choices, often through frameworks that integrate cognitive, contextual, and normative considerations (Treviño, 1986; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Rest, 1986; Haidt, 2001; Kahneman, 2011). Rest's (1986) *Four-Component Model* remains influential, identifying moral awareness, moral judgement, moral intention, and moral action as sequential yet interrelated processes, each of which may be shaped by empathy, experience, or organisational framing (Treviño, 1986; Reynolds, 2006). Treviño's (1986) *Interactionist perspective* similarly emphasises the dynamic relationship between individual traits and situational cues, while Ferrell and Gresham's (1985) *Contingency Framework* places ethical reasoning within organisational and environmental contexts.

Building on these approaches, Jones's (1991) *Issue-Contingent Model* proposed that three elements frequently shape ethical judgements: the salience of a moral issue, the presence of an actor capable of moral choice, and an evaluation of whether the behaviour accords with socially recognised standards. Jones also introduced the notion of *Moral Intensity*, suggesting that the perceived scale and immediacy of harm can influence both ethical appraisal and subsequent behaviour. This view recalls earlier philosophical arguments about sympathy and dialogue as prerequisites for moral deliberation (Smith, 1759/1991)

and resonates with Sensemaking approaches that emphasise the interpretive work managers undertake when faced with ambiguity (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Subsequent research has extended these models to incorporate insights from *psychology* and *behavioural economics*. Theories of *Bounded Rationality* (Simon, 1955) and *Prospect Theory (*Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) suggest that decision-makers often rely on heuristics and experience cognitive biases, particularly under pressure. Research on *managerial cognition* indicates that the way executives filter signals, allocate attention, and prioritise competing claims may influence both strategic direction and approaches to social responsibility (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016; Hu, He & Chen, 2022). This is consistent with *Upper Echelons Theory* (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), which proposes that organisational outcomes can reflect the values and experiences of senior leaders.

From a normative perspective, Donaldson and Dunfee's (1994) *Integrative Social Contracts Theory* has been widely discussed for its attempt to reconcile universal "hyper-norms" with localised agreements, providing a framework for balancing broad moral standards with context-specific practice. *Stakeholder Salience* models add further nuance, arguing that legitimacy, urgency, and power shape how competing claims are prioritised (Mitchell et al., 1997). These approaches highlight the balancing act of ethical standards between general principles and specific expectations, a challenge that is especially relevant for ESVs as they navigate changing regulatory and cultural landscapes (Suchman, 2002; Battilana & Lee, 2014).

More recent research on CSR and executive decision-making suggests that studies of CSR adoption often emphasise institutional pressures or reputational incentives, while giving less attention to leaders' cognitive habits and personal values. Hu et al. (2022) introduced the *Three Pillars of CSR Decision Frame*, which combines individual, organisational, and societal aspects, using *Bounded Rationality* and *Ethical Framing* as a foundation.

- *The Corporate Purpose (C-Pillar)* highlights how leaders communicate and share the core mission that links economic, strategic, and social goals. This aligns with the effort to develop "Shared Value" (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and adopt wider concepts of purpose as a basis for legitimacy and innovation (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; George et al., 2021).

- *The Corporate Stakeholders (S-Pillar)* highlights the importance of stakeholder salience—legitimacy, urgency, and power—and continuous communication with groups affected by entrepreneurial or technological efforts (Mitchell et al., 1997; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016).

- *The Responsibility of Leaders (R-Pillar)* emphasises the crucial role of executives in weaving these priorities into governance structures, daily operations, and accountability systems (Kaptein, 2008; Maak & Pless, 2006; Ebrahim, Battilana & Mair, 2014).

This line of work suggests that ethical decision-making involves more than applying abstract rules or relying on cognitive processes. Instead, it may be conceptualised as an iterative and negotiated process, involving psychological capacities, institutional arrangements, and reflective leadership (Floridi, 2013; Von Schomberg, 2013; Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013). For socially innovative and technology-intensive ventures, these perspectives are particularly relevant: founders and executives are often required to align organisational purpose, stakeholder expectations, and governance mechanisms while addressing rapidly evolving ethical boundaries. Literature on responsible innovation proposes that anticipatory reflection, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive governance can help maintain transparency and resilience when ethical norms are contested or in flux (Stahl et al., 2017; Owen, Macnaghten & Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe et al., 2013).

Taken together, this literature suggests that ethical decision-making in entrepreneurial and technology-based contexts is best approached as a situated process rather than a single cognitive event. Responsibility-based principles, cognitive processes, emotional

tensions, leadership influence and organisational context all shape how ethical issues are recognised, justified and acted upon. For this thesis, that synthesis provides the basis for analysing how founders describe ethical judgement under uncertainty, competing pressures and institutional change (Treviño, 1986; Jones, 1991; Rest, 1986; Hu et al., 2022).

2.3.6 Sensemaking and Executive Perception: interpreting ethical actions

Research indicates that *Ethical Decision-Making* often develops through processes of interpretation and framing rather than through the direct application of abstract principles (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005; Sonenshein, 2007; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). *Sensemaking* has been described as identity-based, retrospective, and socially embedded, meaning that moral concerns are filtered through experience, context, and collective narratives. Over time, these processes can also permit practices that later appear problematic to become routine (Treviño, 1986; Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Palmer, 2012).

Leaders play a central role in influencing which issues gain attention and how they are understood within organisations through their language, decisions, and symbolic actions (Treviño, 1986; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Ashkanasy et al., 2006; Mayer et al., 2010). In this regard, research indicates that modelling ethical conduct, establishing feedback channels, and narrating dilemmas transparently may foster climates in which employees interpret ambiguity through ethical categories rather than through efficiency logics (Seni, Parboteeah & Cullen, 2016; Seni et al., 2022; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Den Hartog, 2015). Conversely, studies on organisational misconduct show that when leaders downplay or obscure ethical dimensions, employees may frame decisions as purely instrumental, legitimising practices such as corruption, neglect, or opportunism (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Treviño et al., 2003; Kaptein, 2008; Palmer, 2012).

These dynamics may be especially acute in entrepreneurial contexts. ESVs often lack routinised codes of conduct or mature governance structures, which may increase the interpretive weight of founders' narratives and framings (Patzelt & Haynie, 2012;

Shepherd, Williams & Patzelt, 2015; Powell & Baker, 2017; Corner & Ho, 2010). Garud, Gehman, and Giuliani (2014) highlight how *Entrepreneurial Sensemaking* frequently occurs through storytelling that retrospectively rationalises uncertain actions. Similarly, Sarasvathy (2001) links *Effectuation* to interpretive framing under uncertainty, while Sonenshein (2007) shows how *Ethical Sensemaking* is accomplished through narrative construction rather than explicit rule application. Such findings suggest that the ethical orientation of young firms may be strongly conditioned by how dilemmas are described, remembered, and socially reconstructed (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi & Tihanyi, 2016).

Studies of *Executive Cognition* add further explanatory depth. Described as structured but partial representations of reality, mental models seek to explain how leaders perceive and prioritise ethical considerations (Heyler, Armenakis & Walker, 2016; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2008; Patzelt & Haynie, 2012). Evidence suggests that inclusive or prosocial orientations are associated with more complex and integrative cognitive processing (Gloschl, Loschelder & Fischbacher, 2017; Waldman, 2008; Bapuji, Husted, Lu & Mir, 2020). Leaders motivated by power, however, may simplify interpretive frames to emphasise short-term or instrumental outcomes (Waldman, Ramirez, House & Puranam, 2001; Waldman & Galvin, 2008; Eisenbeiss, 2012). This implies that ethical interpretations are filtered not only by organisational norms but also by the leader's motivational and cognitive structures (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Finkelstein, Hambrick & Cannella, 2009).

CSR-focused scholarship supports this line of reasoning by showing how executive perceptions shape how responsibility is defined and enacted (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Agle, Mitchell & Sonnenfeld, 1999; Hu et al., 2022). Hu et al. (2022) contend that no single *CSR* decision model adequately integrates individual cognition, organisational dynamics, and institutional pressures. Building on Hahn et al. (2014), they suggest that managers' interpretive schemes are conditioned simultaneously by *bounded rationality* (Simon, 1955; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), *institutional narratives* (Suchman, 2002; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and *organisational culture* (Schein, 2010; Kaptein, 2008). Their

work extends earlier accounts by showing how responsibility may be interpreted differently across leaders and contexts.

In technology-based ESVs, this perspective is especially relevant. Decisions about design, data use, algorithmic fairness, or stakeholder relations are often explained through narratives of opportunity, innovation, or external constraint rather than predefined ethical rules (Floridi, 2013; Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Stahl et al., 2017; Von Schomberg, 2013; George et al., 2021). This indicates that ethical reasoning may be embedded in ongoing processes of *sensemaking*, where executives interpret events and justify actions, rather than treated as isolated judgements. From this perspective, *Executive Perception and Framing* can be understood as core mechanisms through which ethical orientations are shaped and normalised in entrepreneurial practice (Weick, 1995; Sonenshein, 2007; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Garud et al., 2014).

Table 2 synthesises the main strands of research on *ethical leadership* and *Entrepreneurship*. It highlights conceptual definitions, behavioural mechanisms, contextual influences, and leadership styles, as well as the ways in which leaders may shape *organisational culture* and follower behaviour. The table also identifies how these models have been operationalised in studies of *ethical leadership*, and where evidence remains limited, particularly regarding early-stage and socially innovative ventures.

Table 2: Synthesis of ethical leadership, ethical entrepreneurship and founder-level ethical practice

Theme / Subsection	Literature	Findings from previous research	Methodological approaches	Limitations / Gaps identified
Foundations & Conceptualisation	Ciulla (1995); Treviño et al. (2003); Brown et al. (2005); Eisenbeiss (2012); Den Hartog (2015).	Ethical leadership linked to honesty, fairness, trustworthiness; influence through modelling and reinforcement.	Surveys, scales, conceptual models.	Western bias in measures; limited application in ESVs.
Social Learning	Bandura (1986); Brown & Treviño (2006); Ashkanasy et al. (2006); Bapuji et al. (2020).	Leaders model behaviour; followers learn ethical standards through observation and imitation.	Social cognitive theory; experiments; surveys.	Causality difficult to prove; contextual moderators under-explored.
Social Innovation Contexts	Maak & Pless (2009); Voegtlin et al. (2012); Floridi (2013); Von Schomberg (2013); Stahl et al. (2017).	Responsible leadership links to stakeholder inclusion, Responsible Innovation, tech ethics.	Case studies; conceptual RI frameworks.	Limited empirical evidence from ESVs implementing RSI.
Leadership Styles & Moral Identity	Walumbwa et al. (2008); Bass & Riggio (2006); Eva et al. (2019); Aquino & Reed (2002); Maak & Pless (2006)	Authentic, transformational, and servant leadership styles associated with stronger moral identity and ethical climate	Cross-sectional surveys; meta-analyses	Distinctions between leadership styles often blurred; entrepreneurial dynamics under-researched
Institutional Influences	Mayer et al. (2010); Schein (2010); Kaptein (2008); Von Krogh et al. (2012)	Organisational culture and ethical climate strongly mediate leadership effects	Longitudinal surveys; culture assessments	Measures of "ethical culture" contested; weak ESV evidence

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

2.4 Identity, Culture, and the Social Context in ethical practice

Research across *Organisation* studies and *Business Ethics* indicates that patterns of ethical conduct are rarely reducible to individual reasoning alone. They emerge through the interplay between personal identity, shared culture, and the surrounding social order (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; March, 1994; Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012). Within many sectors, acceptable behaviour is shaped by *institutional logics*—configurations of norms and taken-for-granted assumptions that define what counts as legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001; Greenwood et al., 2011). These logics intersect with cultural expectations (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004), professional codes (Kaptein, 2008; Schwartz, 2016) and collective self-descriptions, which together help to frame how members understand their obligations (Pratt, 2012; Brickson, 2007). At the same time, psychological mechanisms such as *Moral Disengagement* explain how actors sometimes re-label questionable practices so that they appear consistent with personal or organisational standards (Bandura, 1999; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004; Moore, 2008).

Identity-oriented accounts stress that ethical commitments are linked to how individuals and groups construct a sense of who they are in relation to others (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006). In *Entrepreneurship research*, founders' self-understandings have been shown to affect how they manage the tension between growth objectives, stakeholder expectations, and broader social aims (Cardon et al., 2009; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Shepherd et al., 2013; Powell & Baker, 2017). For ventures working with emerging technologies, these findings imply that decision-making is conditioned not only by market logic but also by cultural cues and institutional pressures (Battilana & Lee, 2014; George et al., 2021).

2.4.1 Social-Justice legacies and organisational practice

Many of the ideas captured by the term *Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)* can be traced to social movements that challenged long-standing exclusions in civic and economic life. *Civil-rights campaigns* (McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984), *Feminist* and

Gender-equity activism (Calás & Smircich, 1996; hooks, 2000), *LGBTQ+* struggles (Bernstein, 2002; Giordano & Cassese, 2016) and *Indigenous rights initiatives* (Peredo & Anderson, 2006; Smith, 2012) have each left a mark on how organisations define fairness and participation. *Intersectionality*, first articulated by Crenshaw (1991), offers a conceptual language for analysing how race, gender, class and similar dimensions combine to create uneven access to resources or influence (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Collins, 2015). Empirical research shows that such intersections can entrench disadvantage unless addressed by active inclusion policies (Holvino, 2010; Ferdman, 2014; Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

Justice-oriented concerns are also embedded in global policy frameworks, most notably the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, which integrate equity and inclusion across objectives on education, labour, gender, and governance (UN, 2015; Sachs, 2012; Scheyvens, Banks & Hughes, 2016). These instruments convert civil-society advocacy into institutional commitments and can influence organisational behaviour indirectly, through disclosure norms, financing conditions or reputational expectations (Aguilera et al., 2007; Fukuda-Parr, 2018; Joseph & Wilkins, 2020). In entrepreneurial contexts, alignment with *SDG* targets has been associated with enhanced legitimacy and with appeal to investors seeking demonstrable social impact (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; George et al., 2021).

Within established organisations, equity agendas are commonly advanced through diversity management programmes and inclusive-leadership practices (Cox, 1993; Thomas, 2001; Shore et al., 2011). Evidence links these practices to gains in employee engagement and innovative capacity, although outcomes depend on how thoroughly such goals are embedded into day-to-day routines (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Ferdman & Deane, 2014). While caution has been raised about how *JEDI* discourse can be diluted into symbolic gestures if not backed by structural change (Edelman, 1992; Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006), for new ventures, early attention to these themes can function as a principled stance while also signalling credibility to staff, partners and funders (Maak & Pless, 2009; Voegtlin et al., 2012; Battilana & Lee, 2014).

2.4.2 Existential and relational perspectives on ethical agency

Innovation is often known to move ahead of settled ethical guidance. In emerging technology contexts, founders and development teams may have to make decisions before the social effects, user implications or governance requirements of a product are clear (Collingridge, 1980; Swierstra and Rip, 2007; Owen, Macnaghten and Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013).

Work in *Existential Philosophy* is useful here because it treats responsibility as something that has to be assumed when rules are incomplete, contested or unsuitable to resolve the situation. Accordingly, in technology-based organisations, founders may apply classical accounts that emphasise freedom, authenticity and accountability in circumstances that prevent them from deferring to an external code (Sartre, 1943/1992; Sartre, 1946/1992; MacIntyre, 1981; Solomon, 1992; Storsletten and Jakobsen, 2015).

Studies of *Founders* and *Early-Stage leaders* suggest that choices about products, governance and stakeholder engagement may be understood as exercises of personal responsibility that shape a venture's emerging culture (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Wicks & Freeman, 1998; Miller & Miller, 2008). From this standpoint, *Ethics*, is not only a matter of applying pre-given principles, it also involves judgement about what a person or organisation is prepared to stand behind when the available guidance is partial, ambiguous or still forming (Guignon, 2004; Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus, 1997).

Relational scholarship about *agency* illustrates how values are negotiated in everyday interaction. Organisations are portrayed as arenas of practice, where ethical meaning is created through dialogue, shared narratives and mutual accountability (Giddens, 1984; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1977; Thornton et al., 2012). Research on *Organisational Identity* and *Innovation* shows that *collective sensemaking* often anchors *ethical commitments* more effectively than prescriptive codes alone (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brickson, 2007; Pratt, 2012). Group processes may also create *ethical blind spots* or reinforce *problematic routines*, as illustrated in research on *Moral Disengagement* and *Conformity* (Bandura, 1999; Moore, 2008). Work on *Moral Development* further suggests

that social support and deliberation can assist individuals in sustaining principled reasoning under conditions of pressure (Kohlberg, 1981).

Overall, *existential* and *relational perspectives* suggest that *ethical behaviour* in socially innovative, technology-based ventures is not predetermined but develops in response to context and interaction. This process is observed to be shaped by *personal reflection* and the *prevailing norms* within organisational and institutional settings. Maintaining *integrity*, therefore, would likely hinge on the ability of founders to balance individual accountability with the relational obligations stemming from collaboration, regulation, and stakeholder dialogue (Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014; Battilana & Lee, 2014; George et al., 2021).

2.4.3 Ethical Culture and macro-level CSR theories

Organisation studies have often treated *shared assumptions* and *values* as part of the background against which members interpret events and decide how to act. Schein (1985) describes *Culture* as the taken-for-granted ideas and routines that give organisational life a degree of order and predictability. Later studies suggest that these elements are learned through interaction and become embedded through practices such as training, rituals and leadership stories (O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Treviño & Weaver, 2003). Such arrangements have been linked to employees' willingness to engage in ethical behaviour or experiment with new practices, although their effects depend on context and organisational form (Weaver, Treviño & Cochran, 1999; Baker et al., 2006).

The concept of *ethical climate* focuses more specifically on collective judgements about what behaviour is appropriate and how ethical matters should be handled (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Research suggests that *ethical climate* may be influenced by formal mechanisms, such as codes, reporting channels and appraisal systems, alongside informal cues such as leadership example, peer reaction and everyday decision routines (Treviño et al., 1998; Mayer, Kuenzi & Greenbaum, 2010). Within this context, this literature review indicates that principled or benevolent climates may often be associated with lower misconduct and higher organisational commitment, while also noting that

effects vary by context, hierarchy and organisational conditions (Martin & Cullen, 2006; Neubert et al., 2009).

The related concept of *ethical context* helps explain how organisational structures and social connections interact. Leadership consistency, credible formal and informal rules and open debate may facilitate an environment in which ethical issues are more likely to be recognised and addressed (Mayer et al., 2010; Riivari et al., 2012). Informal cues, including mission statements and shared narratives, may also reinforce expectations even where they are not yet codified in policy (Ardichvili et al., 2009). This point is especially relevant to founder-led early-stage ventures, where formal systems may still be emerging and where founders' explanations, priorities and boundary-setting can carry strong signalling effects.

Models such as Ardichvili et al.'s *Ethical Business Culture* and Kaptein's *Corporate Ethical Virtues Framework* attempt to formalise these insights by identifying conditions under which people may notice and act on ethical concerns. Empirical studies associate such conditions with behaviours including problem reporting, voice and prosocial initiative (Kaptein, 2011; Riivari et al., 2012). *Case-based* work further suggests that, in entrepreneurial firms, openness and rapid feedback may create space for reflection. This supports the view that culture, governance and leadership interact in shaping how dilemmas surface, although the form of that interaction is likely to differ between mature organisations and small ventures under constraint (Sarasvathy, 2001; Harris, Sapienza & Bowie, 2009).

More broadly, research on *CSR* positions organisational ethics within wider social and regulatory expectations (Matten & Moon, 2008; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). This connects with *Responsible Research and Innovation scholarship*, particularly its emphasis on anticipation, inclusion and responsiveness in technology design (Von Schomberg, 2013; Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013). For early-stage technology ventures, these literatures suggest that *ethical culture* may contribute to legitimacy and resilience, but this should not be read as a simple transfer of mature *CSR models* into small-firm settings. In this thesis, the relevance lies in how founders attempt to translate ethical commitments

into routines, safeguards and public claims while organisational structures are still forming (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Battilana & Lee, 2014).

2.4.4 Shareholder, Stakeholder, and Institutional perspectives on CSR

Debates about *CSR* are often shaped by the tension between *shareholder-centred* and *stakeholder-centred* accounts of the firm. *Shareholder-centred* perspectives tend to treat managerial responsibility as primarily directed towards owners and financial performance, subject to legal and contractual limits (Friedman, 1970; Jensen, 2002). *Stakeholder* perspectives broaden that account by asking how firms should take account of those affected by their decisions, including workers, users, customers, suppliers, communities, regulators and wider publics (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Phillips, 2003).

Stakeholder Theory is useful for this thesis because it shifts attention from the firm as a private economic actor to the relationships through which organisational decisions create effects for others (Freeman, 1984; Parmar et al., 2010). However, it also broad acceptance that *stakeholder engagement* should not be treated as inherently ethical. Engagement may be selective, instrumental or reputational, particularly where it is used to manage legitimacy rather than redistribute influence or alter decisions (Greenwood, 2007; Devinney, 2009). As such, the relevant question is not only whether stakeholders are mentioned, but how far their concerns influence decisions, priorities, safeguards and boundaries.

Institutional perspectives add a further layer by showing that responsibility is shaped by the legal, regulatory, professional and cultural environments in which firms operate. Organisations may adopt responsible practices because they are normatively valued, legally expected, reputationally useful or necessary for legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995; Scott, 1995; Matten and Moon, 2008). In early-stage ventures, these pressures may be present before formal governance is mature, meaning that founders often interpret institutional expectations through informal judgement, professional experience and emerging routines (Jenkins, 2004; Spence, 2016).

For founder-led early-stage technology ventures, shareholder, stakeholder and institutional perspectives need to be applied carefully. The firms examined in this thesis are not large corporations with mature CSR departments, formalised board committees or extensive compliance infrastructure. They are micro-to-small, founder-led and still forming their routines. *Responsibility* is therefore more likely to appear through founder judgement, stakeholder dialogue, product choices, data practices, partnership decisions and early governance signals than through fully institutionalised CSR systems. This also creates a form of '*responsibilisation*', where public-interest, regulatory or social expectations are placed on founders before they have the resources, infrastructure or authority usually associated with larger organisations (Jenkins, 2004; Perrini, Russo and Tencati, 2007; Spence, 2016). These perspectives suggest that *Legitimacy* demands are negotiated not only at firm level, but also through the situated judgement of founders, who must respond to resource constraints, sectoral expectations and institutional pressures while shaping early routines, priorities and commitments (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi and Tihanyi, 2016; Shepherd, Williams and Patzelt, 2015).

This matters for the present study because ethical decision-making is examined before responsibility has necessarily become formalised in organisational systems. *Shareholder*, *stakeholder* and *institutional perspectives* therefore provide part of the framing, but they do not fully explain the setting on their own. The following subsection develops this qualification by drawing on *Small-Business Responsibility* and *Sustainable Entrepreneurship* literature, which more directly addresses how responsibility is enacted in founder-led ventures operating with limited resources, emerging governance arrangements and public-interest aims.

2.4.5 Small-Business Responsibility and Sustainable Entrepreneurship in founder-led ventures

Small-Business Responsibility literature offers an appropriate bridge between *CSR* and the empirical context of this thesis. Jenkins (2004) argues that *CSR models* that were developed around large firms can misrepresent smaller businesses because *responsibility* in smaller firms is often informal, relational and owner-manager dependent. Rather than

being codified through extensive policies, it may be enacted through day-to-day decisions, direct stakeholder contact, reputational proximity and personal accountability (Murillo and Lozano, 2006; Russo and Tencati, 2009; Spence, 2016). This does not mean that responsibility is weaker in small firms; rather, it is organised differently. Small firms may have fewer formal systems, but they may also have shorter decision chains, closer stakeholder relationships and greater scope for founders' values to shape practice directly (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Wickert, Scherer and Spence, 2016). At the same time, limited finance, staffing and administrative capacity can restrict the extent to which ethical commitments are formalised, measured or maintained consistently (Perrini, Russo and Tencati, 2007; Ciliberti, Pontrandolfo and Scozzi, 2008).

This literature is particularly relevant to socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures because *responsibility* is not only attached to employment practices, community relations or environmental claims. It is also embedded in choices about technology design, data use, accessibility, inclusion, user safety, environmental externalities and the pace at which products are developed or scaled. The founder's role is therefore unusually significant. In young ventures, founders may act simultaneously as strategist, designer, ethical decision-maker, boundary-setter and public representative. Their ethical commitments can become organisational commitments before formal governance arrangements exist. This helps explain why responsibility in early-stage ventures often appears as a process of ethical navigation rather than as a settled CSR system.

Sustainable Entrepreneurship literature extends this discussion by focusing on ventures that seek to create economic activity while protecting or improving social and environmental conditions. Cohen and Winn (2007) and Dean and McMullen (2007) position market imperfections and environmental degradation as sources of entrepreneurial opportunity, while Shepherd and Patzelt (2011) define sustainable entrepreneurship through the relationship between what is to be sustained and what is to be developed. Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) further distinguish *Sustainable Entrepreneurship* from *Sustainability Innovation*, showing how entrepreneurial activity may contribute to sustainability-oriented change through products, processes, business models and market formation.

The sustainability literature helps clarify why value creation cannot be treated as automatically ethical. A venture may generate social, public or environmental value while still facing questions about harm, exclusion, data use, labour, accountability or long-term consequences. Conversely, resource constraints may mean that founders support an ethical course of action in principle but delay, adapt or sequence its implementation in practice.

For this reason, this thesis treats *Small-Business Responsibility* and *Sustainable Entrepreneurship* as complementary to, but distinct from, conventional *CSR*, the latter of which provides useful concepts for understanding legitimacy, stakeholder accountability and the relationship between business and society. However, *Small-Business Responsibility* literature draws attention to informality, proximity, founder influence and resource limitation, while *Sustainable Entrepreneurship* literature explains how social and environmental commitments are pursued through opportunity recognition, business-model design and long-term viability (Hall, Daneke and Lenox, 2010; Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010; Muñoz and Cohen, 2018). Together, these literatures support the study's focus on how founders define, justify and adapt ethical decisions in micro-to-small, technology-based early-stage ventures.

This framing also avoids treating the ventures as social enterprises in legal or organisational form. As the sample consists of private companies limited by shares—not companies limited by guarantee, charities or community interest companies—the relevance of social enterprise, social innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship literature therefore lies in the nature of the founders' public-interest claims and ethical commitments, rather than in a formal classification of the firms. The question is, therefore not whether the organisations are social enterprises, but how founders of private, early-stage ventures attempt to hold together mission, viability and responsibility while operating under constraint.

Table 3 brings together the literature reviewed in this section, showing how identity, organisational culture, institutional logics, social justice movements, policy frameworks, shareholder and stakeholder perspectives, small-business responsibility and sustainable entrepreneurship may shape ethical interpretation and decision-making.

Table 3: Synthesis of 2.4 Identity, Culture, and Social Context in Ethical Practice

Theme / Subsection	Literature	Findings from prior research	Methodological approaches	Limitations / Gaps identified
Identity & Moral Agency	Ashforth & Mael (1989); Brickson (2007); Pratt (2012); Fauchart & Gruber (2011); Cardon et al. (2009).	Identity logics shape entrepreneurial ethics; moral identity predicts prosocial behaviour.	Surveys; identity scales; case studies.	Narrow sampling (students, Western founders); identity conflict underexplored.
Culture & Social Norms	Hofstede (1980); Bandura (1999); Thornton et al. (2012); March (1994).	Cultural norms and institutional logics shape ethical reasoning.	Comparative studies; institutional logics frameworks.	Macro-level focus; micro-level practice link weak.
Social Justice Movements	Crenshaw (1991); Cho et al. (2013); Fraser (2009); Sen (2009); Holvino (2010); Peredo & Anderson (2006).	JEDI principles rooted in civil rights, feminism, Indigenous movements; influence on organisational EDI practice.	Critical theory; organisational case studies.	Translation from activism to ESV practice thinly evidenced.
Policy & SDGs	UN (2015); Scheyvens et al. (2016); Fukuda-Parr (2018).	SDGs embed global justice in organisational frameworks.	Policy analysis; sustainability reporting.	Symbolic adoption vs substantive practice gap.
Small-business Responsibility and Sustainable Entrepreneurship	Jenkins (2004, 2006); Murillo and Lozano (2006); Perrini, Russo and Tencati (2007); Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013); Spence (2016); Wickert, Scherer and Spence (2016); Shepherd and Patzelt (2011); Schaltegger and Wagner (2011); Muñoz and Cohen (2018).	Responsibility in small firms is often informal, relational and founder- or owner-manager-dependent rather than organised through mature CSR systems. Sustainable entrepreneurship links opportunity recognition, viability and social or environmental commitments.	SME-focused CSR studies; conceptual and empirical studies of small-business responsibility; sustainable entrepreneurship theory; case-based and review studies.	Less is known about how founders in technology-based early-stage ventures define, justify and adapt ethical responsibility while operating with limited resources, emerging governance arrangements and socio-technical risk.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

2.5 Ethical Decision-Making: theories and models

The review now turns—from *ethical foundations*, *leadership* and *culture*—to models that help explain how ethical judgements are formed, justified and enacted in organisational settings. *ethical decision-making* scholarship has developed across *psychology*, *philosophy*, *organisational studies* and *entrepreneurship*. Across these strands, *ethical behaviour* is usually not attributed to a single cause, but to the interaction of cognitive, emotional and contextual mechanisms (Rest, 1986; Treviño, 1986; Jones, 1991; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Kaptein, 2008; Reynolds, 2006).

Dual-Process Theories suggest that moral judgement may involve both intuitive-affective and deliberate-analytical processes (Haidt, 2001; Kahneman, 2011; Greene et al., 2004; Cushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006). Other work gives greater attention to *organisational culture, ethical climate* and *leadership behaviour* as conditions that shape how individuals recognise and interpret moral situations (Brown et al., 2005; Mayer et al., 2009; Kaptein, 2011; Arnaud & Schminke, 2012). *Contingency models* add that situational pressures, including performance expectations and resource scarcity, may interact with individual values and intentions in shaping decisions (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Treviño, 1986; Craft, 2013).

These models are useful because they provide language for analysing founder judgement under constraint, and help frame how moral issues may be recognised, delayed, justified, normalised or acted upon; when ventures are still forming and when product, data, market and stakeholder decisions are being made in close succession.

2.5.1 Understanding ethical decisions in organisations

Research on *ethical decision-making* suggests that morally significant choices rarely follow a single, linear calculation. They are more often described as unfolding through linked processes: recognising that an issue has ethical salience, interpreting its seriousness, considering possible responses, forming an intention and acting, or failing

to act, within a particular context (Rest, 1986; Treviño, 1986; Jones, 1991). This matters for the present study because founders' decisions are examined not as isolated choices, but as situated judgements made while ventures are still developing their routines, resources and technical arrangements.

Jones (1991) contributed with the idea of *moral intensity*, which argues that the way a situation is judged depends on how serious it appears to those involved. Later work suggested that elements such as the extent of harm, how quickly it is likely to occur, the degree of social consensus about its wrongness, and the closeness of those affected can shape whether an issue is treated as ethically important (Butterfield, Treviño & Weaver, 2000; Singhapakdi et al., 1996). This lens is likely relevant to technology-based ventures, where consequences may be spread across large user groups or only become visible over time (Floridi, 2013). Such studies suggest that ethical failings cannot always be explained as intentional misconduct; they may also arise from organisational conditions that blunt recognition of moral concerns.

Research also considers how ethical aspects sometimes fade from view. *Ethical fading* and *ethical blindness* describe situations when dominant goals, routinised procedures, technical framing, or pressure for speed can eclipse value-based reflection (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004; Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011; Palazzo, Krings & Hoffrage, 2012). Storsletten and Jakobsen (2015) add that such *blindness* may also be understood through an existential lens, in which tensions between authenticity and conformity affect how actors engage with ethical problems. Related studies link these dynamics to *Cognitive Dissonance*, where gaps between personal standards and institutional demands prompt individuals to downplay or ignore ethical considerations (Festinger, 1957; Arnaud & Schminke, 2012).

Developmental approaches add a further layer. Kohlberg's model suggests that people appeal to different standards—ranging from punishment avoidance to universal rights (Kohlberg, 1981). *Higher-stage reasoning* is associated with greater willingness to apply principled norms in business dilemmas (Treviño, 1986; Reynolds, 2006), yet behaviour may still drift under incentives, group norms or structural barriers (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Mayer, Kuenzi & Greenbaum, 2010).

Social-psychological theories also illuminate decision-making. The *Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)* and the *Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)* describe how attitudes, perceived expectations and control beliefs shape intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). Studies in organisational settings show that informal cues from peers or leaders influence whether intentions become behaviour (Dubinsky & Loken, 1989; Otieno, Mutuku & Okello, 2016). Research on *moral attentiveness* highlights that people who habitually register moral aspects of events detect problems earlier (Reynolds,2006).

Sensemaking work also attempts to explain how ambiguous decisions are construed through stories, analogies and social signals, especially under novelty or uncertainty (Weick, 1995; Sonenshein, 2007; Sarasvathy, 2001). The literature also distinguishes between *amoral behaviour*, where actors overlook any ethical content, and *immoral behaviour*, where it is acknowledged but overridden by other aims (De George, 1990; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). Incentive schemes, narratives of success or hierarchical pressure may foster either tendency (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Palmer, 2012).

Integrative frameworks link these elements to context. Treviño's *Interactionist Model* shows how judgement depends on both individual traits (e.g., locus of control, reasoning level) and situational variables such as job design, group climate and organisational culture (Treviño, 1986; Loe, Ferrell & Mansfield, 2000; Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006). Ferrell and Gresham's *Contingency Model* makes a similar point from marketing ethics: personal values combine with policy and environment, a view later applied to supply chains, digital platforms and investor activism (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Ferrell, Fraedrich & Ferrell, 2019; Kaptein, 2008; Schwartz, 2016). Supporting structures—codes, mentoring, reporting channels and the informal stories that define "how we do things"—help keep moral salience visible (Weaver, Treviño & Cochran, 1999).

Classic studies of *cognitive dissonance* provide another lens: people often adjust beliefs or narratives to reduce the tension between self-image and organisational demands (Festinger, 1957; Arnaud & Schminke, 2012). Together, these perspectives portray ethical decision-making as adaptive rather than mechanical. Noticing, judging, intending and acting are negotiated against incentives, peer influence and routine (Jones, 1991; Reynolds, 2006; Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011). For founders and managers in socially

innovative, technology-based firms, practical implications follow: make *moral salience* harder to overlook (through explicit framing of potential impacts), build routines that slow decisions when stakes are high, and invest in cultural signals that reward principled reasoning (Kaptein, 2008; Battilana & Lee, 2014; Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

2.5.2 Dual-Process frameworks in early-stage venture contexts

Ethical decision-making has traditionally been examined through rationalist perspectives that prioritise deliberation, structured reasoning, and the systematic evaluation of competing options (Rest, 1986; Treviño, 1986; Jones, 1991). Although such accounts remain foundational, a range of studies indicate that they may only partially capture the mechanisms through which moral evaluations occur in practice, particularly in contexts characterised by speed, ambiguity, and emotional salience (Haidt, 2001; Kahneman, 2011; Cushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006). *Dual-Process theories* seek to explain this complexity by suggesting that people often rely on two interacting modes of thought: a fast, affect-laden, largely *automatic system*—commonly labelled *System 1*—and a slower, reflective system that supports *analytical reasoning—System 2* (Greene et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2004; Evans, 2008). While this subsection emphasises dual-process accounts due to their salience in early-stage venture contexts, *Complementary approaches* (e.g., *Moral Development and Sensemaking*) are discussed in 2.5.1 and 2.5.3.

From this perspective, *moral judgements* may originate in immediate intuitive reactions—such as empathy, aversion, or loyalty—which are subsequently elaborated or contested by reflective reasoning (Haidt & Bjorklund, 2008). This interplay appears particularly relevant to early-stage venture settings, where founders and early employees are frequently asked to decide on product features, data-handling practices, or hiring priorities with limited information and under considerable time pressure. Studies of *entrepreneurial cognition* suggest that "*gut feelings*" may direct attention to opportunities or risks, after which deliberation tests feasibility and alignment with organisational or stakeholder values (Mitchell et al., 2002; Grégoire, Corbett, & McMullen, 2011; Cardon, Foo, Shepherd, & Wiklund, 2012). In socially innovative ventures, *ethical intuitions* may

involve attention to user vulnerability, environmental consequences, or distributive fairness, while rational analysis provides a way of incorporating these concerns into workable strategies (Sarasvathy, 2001; Shepherd, 2015; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014).

Several models shed light on how these modes of judgement interact. Haidt's (2001) *Social Intuitionist Model (SIM)* suggests that moral evaluation often begins with an intuitive response, with reasoning following to justify or refine the position (Maio & Olson, 1995; Graham et al., 2013). Dedeke's (2015) framework extends this idea by showing how emotion and self-reflection may be integrated into a sequence of recognition, appraisal, self-assessment, choice, and action. Similarly, Heyler et al.'s (2016) *Cognitive-Intuitionist Model* portrays *ethical judgement* as recursive, with actors shifting between affective recognition and rational scrutiny depending on urgency and context (Reynolds, 2006; Sonenshein, 2007).

Other adaptations refine Rest's (1986) *Four-Component Model*. Schwartz (2016) integrates empathy, moral affect, and contextual moderators, suggesting that awareness, judgement, and intention can all be shaped by organisational culture, stakeholder proximity, and time constraints (Kaptein, 2008; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). Gupta and Shaw (2014) propose that the relative dominance of intuition or reflection may depend on cognitive load, deadlines, and the perceived seriousness—or moral intensity—of an issue (Jones, 1991; Singhapakdi et al., 1996). These mechanisms resonate with research indicating that entrepreneurs frequently draw on heuristics or emotionally salient cues when operating under uncertainty, with more deliberate reasoning tending to surface when time or pressure allows (Mitchell et al., 2002; Sarasvathy, 2001).

Parallel literatures draw attention to systematic distortions that can accompany these processes. Studies of *bounded ethicality* (Chugh, Bazerman, & Banaji, 2005), *moral heuristics* (Sunstein, 2005), and *ethical fading* (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004; Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011) suggest that organisational framing, incentive schemes, or routinised practices may obscure the moral salience of day-to-day choices. For early-stage ventures, where "move fast" cultures or growth imperatives can dominate, such dynamics may increase the likelihood that ethical issues are sidelined unless explicit counter-

measures—such as participatory design or transparent accountability mechanisms—are built into organisational routines (Stahl et al., 2017; Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

On balance, *dual-process* accounts suggest that *ethical decision-making* is better understood as a shifting interaction between intuitive judgements and deliberate reasoning, shaped by dialogue, organisational context, and situational pressures. For socially innovative, technology-based enterprises, this body of work may help explain why founders' ethical reasoning can fluctuate between fast, emotionally tinged reactions (e.g., concern for data privacy or environmental harm) and slower, more systematic evaluations of feasibility, stakeholder impact, and long-term legitimacy (Cardon et al., 2012; Shepherd, 2015; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014; Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011).

2.5.3 Cognitive dissonance in ethical decision-making

Cognitive dissonance remains a central construct for explaining how people resolve ethical tension when their beliefs, values, or goals conflict with observed behaviour or outcomes. Festinger's (1957) original studies conceptualised *dissonance* as a state of psychological discomfort created by inconsistency between cognitions. Early work showed that people are motivated to reduce this discomfort by altering attitudes, reinterpreting evidence, or downplaying the importance of the discrepancy (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Aronson, 1968). Subsequent analyses broadened the meaning of "*cognition*" to include emotions, norms, and habitual routines, underscoring that it is the relation among these elements—not their content alone—that generates pressure to restore balance (Cooper, 2007; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999).

Further work has examined *Dissonance* arising when individuals pursue valued aims yet fail to meet them. In such instances, internal conflict emerges between a person's self-perception (for example, as competent or principled) and the reality of non-achievement (van Dijk & Kluger, 2011), leading to the adoption of strategies such as reassessing the goal's importance, attributing barriers to circumstance, or revising future aspirations to reduce this imbalance (Goldenberg, Husman & Pyszczynski, 2000; Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002). These dynamics are particularly salient for entrepreneurs, whose ventures

frequently set ambitious technological or social objectives that may not be realised within the intended horizon (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Shepherd, Patzelt & Baron, 2013).

Discomfort can also stem from failure to act. *Psychological* studies show that people judge harms linked to inaction differently from those caused by direct acts (Spranca, Minsk, & Baron, 1991), and the *regret* literature notes that "*the road not taken*" often leaves a longer residue than errors of commission (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995). In organisations, delaying or shelving public commitments on social or environmental issues has been associated with reputational strain and internal friction, especially when the delay is justified as temporary expediency (Wang & Bansal, 2012). Related accounts of *motivated reasoning*, *self-deception*, and the *early moves of moral disengagement* describe how such unease may be neutralised or reframed when valued aims are neglected (Bandura, 1999; Merritt, Effron & Monin, 2010).

Whether *dissonance* prompts *repair* or *rationalisation* depends partly on *identity* and *social learning*. Individuals for whom *morality* is central to the *self* tend to report stronger *discomfort* when behaviour *drifts*, and are more likely to pursue *corrective action* (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Access to credible exemplars—mentors, senior colleagues, peers known for integrity—can supply interpretive resources that turn unease into analysis and dialogue rather than defensive justification (Treviño, Hartman & Brown, 2000; Weaver, Treviño & Agle, 2005).

Within socially innovative, technology-oriented ventures, these processes may be intensified by volatility and resource constraints (Stinchcombe, 1965; Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). Finding the right balance between social purpose and commercial viability presents ongoing value conflicts for both founders and staff (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Powell & Baker, 2017). Investor timelines, regulatory demands, and scaling pressures can challenge standard commitments; teams may then decide—either openly or implicitly—whether to reaffirm their principles, rearrange their priorities, or set aside ethical discussions to maintain progress (Cardon, Foo, Shepherd & Wiklund, 2012; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014). In firms where strategy, identity, and legitimacy are closely linked, decisions are seldom made in isolation. Founding individuals frequently reflect on the soundness of their choices, while founding groups often engage in collective

negotiations, which can significantly impact both culture and external credibility (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011).

2.5.4 Emotional Dissonance and ethical strain in entrepreneurial contexts

Work on *ethical decision-making* increasingly treats *affect* as integral rather than background noise (Haidt, 2001; Greene et al., 2004; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011). A well-used lens is *emotional dissonance*: the strain that arises when one's felt emotions must be hidden, reshaped, or reinterpreted to satisfy organisational or wider social expectations (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Studies of *emotional labour* distinguish between "*surface acting*" (modifying display) and "*deep acting*" (modifying feeling), and link sustained mismatches between felt and shown emotion to fatigue, stress, and lower job satisfaction (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003). Meta-analytic work broadly supports the association between *chronic dissonance* and *burnout-type* outcomes, while noting variation by role demands and autonomy (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011).

Entrepreneurial settings can intensify these dynamics. New ventures often demand confident storytelling to investors, employees, and users at precisely the moment when uncertainty is highest. Founders in socially oriented or technology-based firms may be expected to display resilience and optimism while privately worrying about the compatibility of commercial milestones with social or environmental commitments (Baron, 2008; Shepherd et al., 2003; Zahra et al., 2009; Crane et al., 2019). Research on "*entrepreneurial emotion work*" shows how this *performed optimism* can stabilise teams and attract resources, yet it may also leave ethical concerns—about growth paths, stakeholder impacts, or creeping mission drift—unspoken and unresolved (Morris et al., 2012; Pollack et al., 2012; Powell & Baker, 2017). In such circumstances, the tension is more than psychological impression-management; it bears on the credibility of public promises and on founders' efforts to maintain a coherent professional identity (Fisher, 2012; Navis & Glynn, 2011).

Normative theories help to locate the ethical weight of that tension. A Kantian reading would suggest discomfort where expedient choices cannot be justified as generalisable duties—for example, when speed-to-market appears to crowd out fair dealing or respect for rights (Kant, 1785/1996; O'Neill, 1989). *Virtue-ethical accounts* add that a persistent gap between avowed qualities (honesty, fairness, practical wisdom) and everyday practice risks eroding character and blurring moral discernment (MacIntyre, 1984; Hursthouse, 1999; Kristjánsson, 2011). Work on "*mission drift*" in hybrid ventures makes a similar point at organisational level: public commitments to social purpose can be diluted by incremental concessions to growth imperatives (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Ebrahim, Battilana & Mair, 2014).

Affective strain does not inevitably corrode judgement. *Sensemaking* research suggests that confronting clashing imperatives can, at times, stimulate more nuanced moral reasoning and creative problem-solving (Weick, 1995; Haidt, 2001; Sonenshein, 2007). The Aristotelian notion of *Phronesis*—practical wisdom—frames good judgement as a calibrated integration of reason and emotion under uncertainty (Aristotle, trans. 2000; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010; Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014). Organisational supports appear to matter here: spaces for peer dialogue, mentoring relationships, and routines that normalise discussion of value conflicts (e.g., ethics debriefs, design reviews) are associated with stronger voice and with re-framing discomfort into learning rather than rationalisation (Treviño, 1986; Weaver, Treviño & Agle, 2005; Kaptein, 2008). From a micro-regulatory view, strategies such as reappraisal rather than suppression are generally linked to better well-being and decision quality (Gross, 1998; Grandey, 2000).

Risk and time pressure are part of entrepreneurial life and plausibly heighten these affective demands. Early-stage leaders often juggle investor expectations and public interest narratives, which can sharpen the felt conflict between near-term survival and longer-term mission (Shepherd et al., 2003; Cardon et al., 2012). Some studies report that working through these pressures can foster clearer ethical frameworks and more deliberate incorporation of virtues—temperance in claims, honesty in reporting limits, care for stakeholder effects—into daily routines (Sonenshein, 2007; Powell & Baker, 2017). *Complementary work* highlights individual and organisational capabilities that may

help: emotional intelligence and perspective-taking (Goleman, 1995, 1998), authentic communication by leaders (Walumbwa et al., 2008), and governance mechanisms that keep stakeholder dialogue and value considerations visible in product and market decisions (Maak & Pless, 2006; Kaptein, 2008).

In sum, the literature depicts *emotional dissonance* as a recurrent feature of entrepreneurial ethics rather than a peripheral inconvenience. Where aspirations for innovation, commercial viability, and public benefit intersect, founders and teams navigate an affect-laden terrain that is inseparable from questions of responsibility and identity. The balance appears to turn on whether ventures build habits and forums that surface tensions early and treat them as input to judgement—rather than as signals to be suppressed until circumstances force a reckoning.

2.5.5 Normative perspectives on Dissonance in entrepreneurial judgement

Normative theories help frame the unease that can arise when commercial aims sit uneasily beside social, environmental, health or public-interest commitments. A consequentialist reading asks which course of action is likely to produce the greatest overall welfare (Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1863). In entrepreneurial settings, however, that judgement is rarely settled. Revenue growth, user acquisition or investor milestones may point in one direction, while longer-term or less visible effects on users, communities or ecosystems may point in another. Some affected groups may also have less power to make their interests visible (Hahn et al., 2014; Crane et al., 2019).

While impact tools such as *Social Return on Investment* (SROI) may support this kind of evaluation, it is also reasonable to question their suitability to resolve ethical issues given that their use still depends on assumptions about attribution, discounting, evidence quality and the relative weight given to different stakeholder interests (Nicholls, 2009; Millar and Hall, 2013; Hall et al., 2015; Ebrahim and Rangan, 2014). Founders may therefore need to justify whether speed, scale or market capture should take priority where there may be costs for particular users, communities or ecological systems. That justificatory work can itself generate cognitive strain and ethical tension, especially where

social purpose is being pursued through market-facing activity (Elkington, 1998; Jenkins, 2009; Austin et al., 2006; Battilana and Lee, 2014).

Deontological approaches pull the analysis in another direction. Here, duties may constrain what is acceptable regardless of projected benefit: do not deceive, respect persons, secure informed consent (Kant, 1785/1996; Bowie, 1999; O'Neill, 1989). For technology ventures, this matters where decisions involve sensitive data, material risk, user vulnerability, labour standards or claims made to investors and partners. A minimally tested feature, an unclear risk disclosure or an overstretched operational promise may raise questions that cannot be settled by appeal to aggregate benefit alone (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Floridi, 2013). The discomfort described in such contexts may therefore be less about forecasting outcomes and more about recognising a line that ought not to be crossed.

Social-contract arguments add a relational register. Classical accounts emphasise the agreements that make cooperation possible (Hobbes, 1651; Locke, 1689; Rousseau, 1762), while contemporary versions locate legitimacy in keeping faith with those affected (Scanlon, 1998; Phillips, 2003). For ESVs, this may include explicit and tacit promises to employees, users, suppliers, early investors, partners and host communities. These promises matter because public-interest ventures often depend on trust before their claims about benefit can be fully evidenced. Breaches of those understandings (e.g., misleading impact claims, under-resourced safety practices, neglect of environmental commitments) tend to erode trust and invite moral criticism even when they remain technically lawful (Suchman, 1995; Bowie & Werhane, 2005; Palazzo & Scherer,2006). The effect is amplified where a venture's identity trades on sustainability or inclusion, since credibility and access to resources then depend on perceived consistency (Battilana et al., 2012; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Read together, these traditions help to explain why *Dissonance* surfaces at predictable pressure points. Consequentialism foregrounds distributional trade-offs; deontology highlights duties that do not yield to expedience; contractarian thinking centres reciprocity and trust. None offers a complete guide in isolation, but each clarifies a different source of ethical strain in innovation-intensive settings.

2.5.6 Organisational context, reflective capacity, and managing dissonance

Whether *dissonance* becomes a prompt for *learning* or a path to *rationalisation* is thought to depend heavily on context. Work on *ethical culture* shows that shared assumptions, communication routines, and incentives shape whether people notice and name moral concerns (Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006; Kaptein, 2008). Organisations that invite challenge, make room for deliberation, and hold leaders to account tend to surface value conflicts earlier and handle them more constructively (Brown & Treviño, 2006; May et al., 2015). Where speed and short-term targets dominate, difficult questions are more easily sidelined (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004; Kish-Gephart, Harrison & Treviño, 2010).

Ethical infrastructure research widens the lens to include both formal and informal supports—codes and training, reporting channels, ethics officers, but also stories, peer norms, and visible modelling by senior figures (Weaver, Treviño & Cochran, 1999; Valentine et al., 2018). In young or hybrid ventures, early investment in these scaffolds is associated with lower exposure to mission drift and reputational shocks as the organisation scales (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Battilana & Lee, 2014).

A second strand comes from practical-wisdom traditions. *Phronesis* is the cultivated capacity to judge well in situations where rules run out (Aristotle, 2000; MacIntyre, 1984; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Empirical work links structured reflection—ethics dialogues, case reviews, after-action learning—to clearer articulation of values and better balance across competing demands (Treviño, 1986; Palazzo et al., 2020). In entrepreneurial teams, simple devices—checking major decisions against a mission charter, documenting value trade-offs, inviting stakeholder challenge—can keep operational choices tethered to declared purposes (Santos, 2012; Corner & Pavlovich, 2016).

Affective capability also matters. Leaders who can recognise and regulate their own emotions, and read those of others, are more likely to sustain empathy and ethical sensitivity under pressure (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Ashkanasy & Dasborough, 2003; Langhorn, 2004). Psychological safety and participatory routines reduce the risk that discomfort hardens into defensiveness or disengagement (Edmondson & Lei, 2014;

Duggan et al., 2016). Programmes that blend coaching, peer mentoring, and stakeholder dialogue have been shown to surface value tensions early and to illuminate blind spots before they calcify into practice (Pless & Maak, 2011; Wu et al., 2020).

From this perspective, *Dissonance* functions as a barometer. Where *values* are explicit, deliberation is normalised, and principled reasoning is recognised, tension can sharpen priorities and even spur innovation (Hibbert et al., 2019; Weaver et al., 1999). Where *governance* is opaque or narrowly metric-driven, tension is more likely to be suppressed or rationalised, with predictable ethical and reputational costs (Kaptein, 2011; Bowie & Werhane, 2005). For socially oriented technology ventures, establishing culture, reflective routines, and socio-emotional skill early in the life course appears to provide the conditions under which gaps between aspiration and practice can be identified and closed, supporting legitimacy and the sustained pursuit of both social and technical goals (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Wang & Bansal, 2012; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999).

2.5.7 Rational Choice Theory, bounded rationality and ethical judgement

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) has been used in *economics*, *sociology* and *political science* to explain how people compare alternatives by weighing expected gains against possible losses, aiming to select the option that best serves their goals (Becker, 1976; Sen, 1993; Hands, 2012). *Utility* in this sense is defined broadly: it may refer to satisfaction, efficiency, reputation, or even the survival of a firm (Kliemt, 1993; Lahno, 2007; Archer, 2019). *RCT* does not offer a moral rule about what is right or wrong; it is a descriptive model of choice under assumptions of rational appraisal (James & Rassekh, 2000; Storsletten & Jakobsen, 2015).

Classical assertions posited that decision-makers have stable preferences, possess complete information, and are capable of unlimited processing, hence enabling them to evaluate alternatives and select the option with the highest net benefit (March & Simon, 1958; Archer, 2019). Empirical work, however, shows that these conditions rarely apply. Studies in psychology and behavioural economics document the effects of limited attention, incomplete data, and framing pressures, which restrict the scope of rational

calculation (Simon, 1955; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Gigerenzer & Selten, 2001; Camerer et al., 2004).

The approach is often linked to Adam Smith's discussion of *Self-Interest* and the "*Invisible Hand*," later broadened by authors such as Becker (1976, 1993), who argued that even apparently altruistic behaviour can be modelled as preference-driven if the definition of utility is extended (Osmani, 2019). Yet several lines of criticism have been influential. Simon (1957) posits that *Bounded Rationality* leads individuals to choose options that are only "good enough" in the face of uncertainty, rather than seeking optimal solutions (Simon, 1955).

At the same time, *behavioural research* indicates that biases, including anchoring, framing, and loss aversion, can systematically influence judgement (Thaler, 1985; Kahneman, 2011). Other scholars argue that reliance on *heuristics* is not always a flaw; in ambiguous or time-pressured environments, simple rules may be an effective way to reach workable solutions (Gigerenzer & Selten, 2001).

RCT has also been questioned for its capacity to explain cooperation and collective governance. Ostrom (1990, 1998) showed how communities often sustain commons through reciprocity and shared norms rather than through individual maximisation. Sen (1993) similarly noted that commitments and social values may guide behaviour in ways not reducible to preference satisfaction. *Organisation research* reports comparable findings: institutional expectations, cultural scripts and legitimacy concerns shape decisions alongside instrumental reasoning (Scott, 2001; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; March & Simon, 1958).

Even so, many authors keep *RCT* as a reference point. It provides a baseline for examining where actual behaviour diverges from the assumptions of *Perfect Rationality* and can help describe the incentive structure of a decision (Smith, 1991; Hands, 2012). Later refinements—including *Bounded Rationality*, *behavioural economics*, and the incorporation of *norms*—are often treated as extensions rather than rejections (Simon, 1955; Sen, 1993; Ostrom, 1998).

In studies of *entrepreneurship*—particularly those involving *technology* or *social aims*—RTC can clarify how founders consider opportunity costs, risk, and resource allocation. Yet the pressures of rapid scaling, incomplete information, and moral complexity suggest that a strict utility-maximising model gives only a partial picture. To understand decision-making in these contexts, it is essential to consider not just incentives but also values, stakeholder expectations, and the institutional framework (Sen, 1993; Kahneman, 2011; Osmani, 2019).

Table 4 summarises the theoretical perspectives reviewed in **2.5**.

Table 4: Synthesis of 2.5 Ethical Decision-Making Theories and Models

Theme / Subsection	Literature	Findings from prior research	Methodological approaches	Limitations / Gaps identified
Cognitive Models	Rest (1986); Hunt & Vitell (1986); Jones (1991); Reynolds (2006); Tenbrunsel & Messick (2004).	Multi-stage processes of moral awareness, judgement, intent, behaviour; moral intensity affects salience.	Surveys, lab experiments; scenario-based studies.	Overly linear; underestimates situational pressures and bounded rationality.
Moral Development	Kohlberg (1981); Treviño (1992); Colby & Kohlberg (1987).	Suggests progression from self-interest to principled reasoning.	Longitudinal studies, moral dilemmas.	Cultural bias; assumes linear development.
Ethical Blindness & Bias	Palazzo et al. (2012); Bazerman & Tenbrunsel (2011); Chugh et al. (2005).	Biases and inattentiveness explain ethical lapses.	Behavioural experiments; psychology studies.	Difficult to measure in real-world organisational settings.
TRA / TPB	Fishbein & Ajzen (1975, 2010); Ajzen (1991); Dubinsky & Loken (1989).	Attitudes, norms, perceived control shape ethical intentions.	Surveys; behavioural models.	Intention–behaviour gap; cultural/contextual moderators underexplored.
Contingency & Interactionist	Treviño (1986); Ferrell & Gresham (1985); Craft (2013).	Interaction of individual and situational factors.	Theoretical models; survey evidence.	Broad frameworks, weak predictive validity.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

2.6 Technology and innovation frameworks: ethical and social dimensions

Technological innovation is often described as a catalyst for growth and improvement, yet it can also destabilise established systems, create new dependencies, and expose communities to risks that were not previously recognised (Winner, 1980; Feenberg, 1999; Johnson & Wetmore, 2008). This ambivalence has drawn attention to how innovation might be steered so that social benefit, rather than only technical performance or financial return, becomes central to its trajectory. The framework of *Responsible Innovation (RI)* developed in recent years reflects this concern. It proposes that developers and organisations should integrate forward-looking assessment, continuous reflection, participation of diverse groups, and an ability to respond to emerging concerns into their practices (Owen, Macnaghten & Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013; Von Schomberg, 2013).

Practical mechanisms have been suggested to embed these principles, such as *value-sensitive design*, *participatory workshops*, and *structured ethics review processes*, each of which aims to ensure that new technologies reflect collective priorities and anticipated social outcomes (Friedman, Kahn, & Borning, 2008; Flipse et al., 2013; Stahl, Eden & Jirotka, 2017). Studies of *smaller technology ventures* suggest that adopting such measures early—for instance, through co-design with users or anticipatory governance tools—can help sustain attention to societal value even when commercial growth pressures intensify (Dreyer et al., 2017; Shelley-Egan, 2017).

2.6.1 Change Management theories and the integration of ethical norms

Research on *organisational change* has traditionally emphasised improvements in performance, efficiency, or competitiveness. Nonetheless, the same theoretical models can be read as offering pathways to embed ethical priorities within organisational development (Burnes, 2009; Caldwell et al., 2008; Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Kotter's (1996) *Eight-Step Model*, although designed with corporate transformation in mind, sets

out a sequence that can be adapted to ethical integration, tailoring the stages to align with ethical priorities, such as, for instance, creating a sense of urgency by emphasising social or environmental risks in the initial stages and forming coalitions in subsequent stages to connect technical and ethical expertise; ensuring the consolidation of progress includes the integration of responsible practices throughout the organisation (Lorenzi & Riley, 2003; Caldwell et al., 2012). Framing Kotter's *Stages* in this way suggests that structured change programmes may provide a credible route for legitimising ethical commitments and for weaving social concerns into the fabric of innovation-oriented cultures.

Lewin's (1951) *Unfreeze–Move–Refreeze Model* interprets change as a cycle of destabilising old patterns, experimenting with alternatives, and stabilising new norms. In innovation contexts, this can be understood as questioning assumptions about technological neutrality, trialling participatory methods, and formalising new standards or procedures (Burnes & Cooke, 2013; Schein, 2010; Sørensen, 2006). The evidence reasonably points to Lewin's framework as a useful heuristic for understanding how responsible practices can be tested and gradually consolidated, especially when companies attempt to stabilise ethical routines within rapidly changing technological environments.

Bridges' (2009) *Transition Model* shifts the focus to the subjective experience of change, delineating three key phases: endings, neutral zones, and new beginnings. Research on *mission-driven organisations* shows that transitions of this nature can instigate tension and uncertainty, particularly if upholding ethical convictions depends upon changes in identity or practice. Processes that involve supportive mechanisms—dialogue, joint planning, and shared sensemaking—are noted as essential methods for grounding change (Bauer et al., 2008; Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011; Sonenshein, 2010; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Such insights indicate that managing the psychological dimension of transition may be integral to sustaining value commitments, allowing ethical aspirations to take root as part of the organisational identity rather than remaining peripheral statements of intent.

Across these perspectives, *change management* appears less a technical exercise than a process of embedding values through organised procedures, cultural reinforcement, and attention to the emotional dimensions of transition. For early-stage or hybrid ventures, where founder influence and informal routines are highly salient, deliberate investment in value-oriented structures has been associated with resilience against mission drift and reputational risk (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014; Austin et al., 2006; George et al., 2021).

Recent work suggests further value in linking these theories with the broader field of responsible and anticipatory innovation. Frameworks such as *Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)* emphasise foresight, reflexivity, stakeholder engagement, and responsiveness (Owen, Macnaghten & Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013). Integrating these principles with established change models provides tools for embedding ethics more firmly into innovation practices. Practical illustrations include *value-sensitive design*, *ethics sprints*, and *stakeholder panels*, which can help ensure that social concerns remain visible as ventures grow and scale (Friedman, Kahn, & Borning, 2008; Flipse et al., 2013; Dreyer et al., 2017; Shelley-Egan, 2017).

The literature consistently suggests that *ethical* and *social* implications of innovation arise across several layers. At the *design level*, choices about system architecture or data use directly affect how technologies mediate values. At the *organisational level*, governance arrangements and workplace culture determine how ethical issues are prioritised or sidelined. At the *policy level*, regulation and standards influence incentives and create accountability frameworks (Floridi, 2013; Binns, 2018; Stahl, 2021).

Methods that integrate these dimensions—by bridging anticipatory governance, engaging stakeholder dialogue, and implementing structured change processes—seem to be the most effective in aligning innovation with public values (Owen et al., 2012; Stilgoe et al., 2013; Von Schomberg, 2013). However, the available evidence continues to be somewhat restricted. Smaller ventures often encounter limitations in resources and face significant market pressures that hinder their ability to adopt these practices, despite having a clear intent to do so (Dreyer et al., 2017; Shelley-Egan, 2017; Timmermans & Blok, 2018).

2.6.2 Meso- and Micro-Level CSR theories: Strategic CSR and Responsible Social Innovation (RSI)

Much of the CSR work has focused on *macro level* causes and the influence of regulation, institutional logics and legitimacy constraints on organisational behaviour (Carroll, 1979, 1991, 2016; Matten and Moon, 2008; Aguilera et al., 2007; Aguinis and Glavas, 2012). This perspective helps to understand why corporations embrace formal *CSR* pledges but pays less attention to how responsibility is viewed and applied within organisations. Recent scholarship has attempted to address this gap by exploring *meso-level* routines and micro-level decision-making, demonstrating that ethical orientations are often constructed through everyday practices, resource allocation and interactions with stakeholders (Mair and Martí, 2006; Nicholls and Murdock, 2011; Valentine and Fleischman, 2008; Pel et al., 2020). These dynamics are particularly pertinent for technology-oriented and socially innovative businesses where problems of societal value and organisational purpose come up alongside choices of design, growth and business modelling (Strand, 2014; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015; George et al., 2021). A multi-level approach therefore allows the review to link individual commitments, organisational procedures and broader social consequences (Mair et al., 2012; Dacin et al., 2011).

Within this framing, *strategic CSR* has been framed as a mode of combining public concerns with market logic. Baron (2001) distinguishes between *altruistic CSR*, where the main goal is social benefit, and *strategic CSR*, where social and environmental goals are pursued along with goals such as differentiation, reputational advantage or risk management (Husted and Allen, 2007; McWilliams, Siegel and Wright, 2006). Findings from social innovation and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship suggest that such integration can support innovations dedicated to public challenges including energy, health and education where ethical commitments are intertwined with entrepreneurial opportunities (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Santos, 2012; Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011; Bansal et al., 2018). The literature on governance suggests that clarity of responsibility, methods for stakeholder input and accurate resource allocation are necessary for the continued sustainability of these practices over time (Jamali, 2008; Lee, 2008; Doh et al., 2010; Wickert et al., 2016). On balance, this literature finds *Strategic CSR* to be neither

solely *altruistic* nor *completely* instrumental, but a path in which *moral desire* can be converted into viable organisational practice.

Responsible Social Innovation (RSI) builds on these arguments by placing responsibility in the innovation process itself. *RSI*, drawing from *Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)* (Owen, Macnaghten and Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013; Von Schomberg, 2013) promotes anticipation, reflexivity, stakeholder involvement and responsiveness (Lubberink et al., 2017; Timmermans and Blok, 2018). Entrepreneurs are defined as 'boundary spanners' who engage in technical, commercial and normative domains to safeguard public value (Lubberink et al., 2019; Pel et al., 2020). Practically, they have included value-sensitive design (Friedman, Kahn and Borning, 2008), ethics-by-design (van de Poel, 2016), participatory workshops (Flipse et al., 2013) and anticipatory governance systems (Fisher and Rip, 2013; Stahl, Eden and Jirotka, 2017). These strategies can be time- and resource-consuming but they offer systematic ways of incorporating ethical thought in product lifecycles and organisational routines.

RSI sees responsibility as an element of entrepreneurial strategy rather than an add-on that is tangential to the business (Owen et al., 2012; Stilgoe et al., 2013). Case studies of ventures in artificial intelligence, health and environmental monitoring indicate how foresight exercises, deliberative panels or impact indicators can maintain social aims in sight while enterprises develop and scale (Dreyer et al., 2017; Shelley-Egan, 2017; Stahl et al., 2017). However, rapid growth, investor expectations and increasing legislation are also pointed out in the literature as complicating aspects to these aims. Therefore, to maintain accountability, there is a need for adaptable infrastructures and iterative learning rather than one-off ethical commitments (Voegtlin and Scherer, 2017; Lubberink et al., 2019; Fox et al., 2021). *RSI* should therefore be viewed as an adaptable approach, not a prescriptive methodology.

2.6.3 Social Innovativeness: integrating Ethics and Agency

Social innovativeness refers to the use of new ideas, practices, products or organisational arrangements to respond to social challenges (Santos, 2012; Jin et al., 2022). In

technology-based early-stage ventures, it is often linked to mission-oriented activity and to efforts to connect commercial development with wider forms of benefit (Mair and Martí, 2006; Battilana and Lee, 2014). For this thesis, the concept is useful because it does not treat innovation as ethically valuable simply because it is new, socially framed or technologically enabled. Its ethical significance depends on how needs are identified, whose interests are recognised, what harms are anticipated and how trade-offs are handled when resources, evidence and market conditions are uncertain (Stinchcombe, 1965; Aldrich and Ruef, 2006).

Hybrid-organisation scholarship is relevant because it examines organisations that work across market and social logics. Such organisations may pursue public-interest aims while also depending on revenue, investment, customer growth or partnership opportunities (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Pache and Santos, 2013). Although the ventures in this thesis are not treated as social enterprises in legal or organisational form, this literature helps explain the tensions that can arise when founders seek to preserve a mission while building a viable company. These tensions include the risk of mission drift, the selective use of stakeholder language, and the difficulty of keeping social or environmental claims connected to operational decisions rather than treating them as identity statements.

Social innovativeness also has a practical dimension. This can include awareness of the ethical implications of design decisions, contemplation on stakeholders' demands and a readiness to challenge the idea that markets or technology are neutral (Reynolds et al. 2014; Shepherd and Patzelt 2011). This can also be demonstrated through routines that enable experimentation, user involvement, cross-sector collaboration and adjustment of products or services when new knowledge emerges (Blank and Dorf, 2020; Chesbrough, 2003; Westley et al., 2014). Research studies on *Small Firms* suggest that flexible structures, direct stakeholder contact and partnership working may help founders to identify social needs and turn them into products, services or operating practices, although these processes are still vulnerable to time, funding and capacity constraints (George et al., 2021; Dreyer et al., 2017).

Social innovativeness therefore extends beyond the development of a technological artefact. It may also involve changes to business models, supply chains, user

relationships, access arrangements, governance routines or release decisions (Mair et al., 2012). This distinction matters for technology-based ventures because public value may be shaped as much by design choices, inclusion practices, risk controls and accountability mechanisms as by the product itself. A venture may seek to address an unmet need, but the ethical quality of that effort depends on whether the people affected by the innovation are considered in its design, use and development.

Responsible and anticipatory innovation scholarship adds further detail to this discussion without replacing it. *Responsible Innovation* literature emphasises anticipation, reflexivity, stakeholder involvement and responsiveness as ways of aligning technological development with societal priorities (Owen, Macnaghten and Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013; Von Schomberg, 2013). In entrepreneurial settings, these principles are relevant because they encourage founders to treat ethics as part of product development, governance and organisational learning, rather than as a later reputational or compliance concern (Grunwald, 2014; Stahl, Eden and Jirotka, 2017; Timmermans and Blok, 2018). They also show why ethical practice may need to be revisited repeatedly as products are tested, users change, evidence develops and regulatory expectations become clearer.

For this thesis, *social innovativeness* is thus understood as a relationship between ethical awareness, entrepreneurial agency and organisational practice. It helps explain how founders may attempt to hold commercial viability together with social, environmental, health or public-interest aims, while also showing why that alignment cannot be assumed to be stable or complete. The value of combining *social entrepreneurship*, *hybrid organisation* and *responsible innovation* scholarship lies in the way it makes these tensions visible: not as abstract contradictions between mission and market, but as practical questions about design, prioritisation, governance, accountability and the conditions under which ethical commitments can be sustained (Santos, 2012; Owen et al., 2012; Battilana and Lee, 2014; Lubberink et al., 2017).

2.6.4 Social and Technological Innovation: theories and frameworks

Social innovation is not usually treated as a single model. The literature presents it as a varied field that moves across policy, markets and civil society, with its form and meaning shaped by context (Painter-Morland, 2013, in Osburg et al., 2013; Pel et al., 2020). Therefore, broad assertions about social innovation as a universal solution need to be approached with caution, since they may obfuscate differences in actors, settings, aims and impacted groups (André and Abreu, 2012, in Galego et al., 2022).

The field has widened across *sociology*, *management*, *public administration* and *science and technology studies* (Phillips et al., 2015; van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hsu et al., 2019; Galego et al., 2022), and it is commonly described as heterogeneous, with continuing debate about its scope and analytical boundaries (Nicholls and Murdock, 2011; Montgomery, 2016; Grimm et al., 2013; Archer, 2019). For this study, that matters because *Social Innovation* is used as a framing concept. It is not treated as evidence that a venture's stated mission is necessarily ethical, effective or widely beneficial.

One starting point is Schumpeter's (1934) account of innovation as new combinations of products, processes, markets or organisational forms. *Social entrepreneurship scholarship* adapts that logic to unmet needs and cross-sector recombination (Mair and Martí, 2006; Nicholls and Murdock, 2011). Mulgan and colleagues place further emphasis on networks, intermediaries and brokers, particularly in how ideas travel, gain support and diffuse (Mulgan et al., 2007, 2017). From this perspective, effectiveness depends not only on novelty, but also on relationships, legitimacy and the conditions under which an innovation is taken up.

A recurrent distinction is made between *technological* and *social innovation*. *Technological innovation* is often associated with formal R&D, product development and artefacts. *social innovation* is more often discussed in relation to social relations, participation, access, capability and governance (Painter-Morland, 2013; Polanyi, 1944; van Wijk et al., 2019). In social entrepreneurship scholarship, it is commonly linked to

unmet needs, public benefit, empowerment and institutional change. In more conventional for-profit innovation literature, innovation is more often assessed through competitiveness, adoption, scaling and organisational performance. This thesis draws on the former tradition to examine mission, legitimacy and public-benefit orientation, while retaining the legal and organisational boundary of a for-profit, shareholder-owned sample.

Evaluating the impact has been quite difficult. *Social value* tends to be complex, engaging various stakeholders and spanning long periods, which complicates the processes of attribution and comparison (Phills et al., 2008; Westley et al., 2017; Montgomery, 2016). Evaluation methods encompass a range of approaches, including qualitative narratives, theory-of-change mapping, hybrid scorecards, and metrics tailored to specific sectors (Bouchard, 2012). For ESVs, such measurement can support legitimacy and organisational learning, but it also places demands on limited resources (Aguinis & Glavas,2012; George et al., 2021). Theoretical perspectives have sought to explain how agency interacts with wider structures. Institutional theory and related work on "*institutional work*" examine how actors contest, disrupt, or reinforce rules and norms to legitimise new practices (Battilana et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2011).

Structuration Theory offers a related but distinct view, emphasising the recursive relationship between agency and institutional arrangements and showing how established routines are both reproduced and reshaped over time (Giddens, 1984; Pache & Santos, 2013). A further body of research emphasises empowerment and capability, drawing attention to the conditions that may enable individuals or communities to initiate and sustain innovation (Zimmerman, 2000; Kwon et al., 2013).

In technology-orientated settings, social and technical forms of innovation often intersect, although the degree of overlap is not always straightforward. Work in information ethics and the philosophy of technology has suggested that design decisions are never entirely neutral, since they carry implicit choices about matters such as privacy, fairness and accessibility (Floridi, 2013; Stahl et al., 2017). On this basis, frameworks of *Responsible and Anticipatory Innovation* propose that processes of research, design and governance should incorporate elements of anticipation, critical reflection, stakeholder

involvement and responsiveness to emerging concerns (Owen et al., 2012; Stilgoe et al., 2013; von Schomberg, 2013). Practical techniques—including value-sensitive design, ethics-by-design protocols, stakeholder workshops, and time-bounded "ethics sprints"—illustrate ways in which ethical reflection can be embedded into product development and organisational routines (Friedman, Kahn, & Borning, 2008; van de Poel, 2016; Flipse et al., 2013; Dreyer et al., 2017).

Read together, these perspectives position *Social Innovativeness* at the intersection of *ethics* and *agency*. Leaders of hybrid organisations often operate at the fault line between commercial imperatives and social commitments, and their responses are conditioned not only by governance arrangements, investor expectations, or regulatory demands but also by interpretive frames and personal values (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Pel et al., 2020). In this sense, *social innovativeness* can be described both as a mindset—sustained attentiveness to the ethical implications of innovation—and as a capability, namely the ability to combine that awareness with adaptive problem-solving as technologies, markets, and institutions evolve (Santos, 2012; George et al., 2021; Voegtlin & Scherer, 2017; Lubberink et al., 2019).

2.6.5 Institutional Change and Social Movements

Institutional Theory has long examined how norms, rules, and conventions emerge from collective action and, once established, come to regulate behaviour in ways that extend beyond their origins. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) emphasised that while institutions are created by people, they can become taken-for-granted features of social life, exerting authority even when not consciously designed (cited in Pappas & Thapa, 2021). Subsequent contributions emphasise their dual role as both "*enablers*" and "*constraints*," shaping how individuals interpret their environment and the scope for change within it (Scott, 2014; Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2011). From this standpoint, attempts to reorient organisations or communities—whether around ethical, social, or environmental priorities—must be understood in relation to established practices and embedded expectations (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2017).

Structuration Theory complements this by focusing on the recursive link between *Agency* and *Structure*. Giddens (1984) argued that social life is reproduced through routine action, while significant change emerges when these interactions are reconfigured and stabilised in new forms. Studies of *social innovation* use this lens to show how arrangements consolidate through the interplay of resources, skills, and interpretive frames, often outside formal hierarchies (Pel et al., 2020; Jessop et al., 2013). *Change*, in this sense, is rarely abrupt or linear but evolves through incremental adaptations, alliances, and reframing processes that gather weight over time (MacGregor & Fontrodona, 2011; Ssutowski & Ratajczak, 2016).

The perspective can be extended by examining the motivations of individuals. Self-determination theory explains persistence in collective efforts by linking it to the fulfilment of psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research on *Social Entrepreneurship* and grassroots innovation confirms that actors often describe their work as meaningful because it connects with personal values and offers opportunities for learning and belonging (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Avelino et al., 2020; Kwan et al., 2021). More recent studies add resilience, perceived impact, and a sense of purpose as factors that strengthen capacity to mobilise resources and persist despite resistance from dominant institutions (Haxeltine et al., 2017; Westley et al., 2013).

Community psychology places *agency* within the context of networks that foster solidarity and support. Research indicates that local-level interventions can foster collective efficacy, empowering communities to tackle issues of exclusion, inequality, and environmental challenges (Murray et al., 2010; Pantea, 2020). This viewpoint aligns with discussions on empowerment and participatory governance, highlighting that the legitimacy and sustainability of social change rely on inclusive processes and the acknowledgement of various perspectives (Zimmerman, 2000; Andersen, 2014; Fung, 2015).Research on *Social Movements* brings a new perspective, focusing on how challenges to established institutional arrangements gain momentum. While Schumpeter (1934) portrayed entrepreneurs as reformers who combine resources in new ways (Nicholls & Murdock, 2011), Henderson (1993) later described movements as typically originating at the margins of dominant systems. When insiders in mainstream

organisations adopt issues first raised at the periphery, they can create openings for experimentation that gradually reshape norms and expectations (Westley et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2018). Such processes demonstrate that institutional change is often co-produced by reformist insiders and civic networks working in parallel (Battilana et al., 2009; Rao et al., 2000).

Recent studies illustrate how environments influence opportunities for innovation through the concept of "*Affordances*", introduced as part of Gibson's (1979) *Ecological Psychology*, and understood as opportunities for action shaped by technologies, policies, and cultural contexts (Pappas & Thapa, 2021). Research indicates that *Change* is more likely when individuals are able to recognise supportive combinations of tools, incentives, and relationships. Additionally, success in forming coalitions that can transform intentions into practical models or governance routines plays a crucial role (Howaldt et al., 2019; do Adro & Fernandes, 2020).

Collaborative infrastructures play an important role in these dynamics. Deliberative forums, open data platforms, and multi-stakeholder partnerships not only enable experimentation but can also generate new conventions of participation, accountability, and resource sharing (Surman, 2013; Reypens et al., 2016; Moulaert et al., 2017). By creating spaces for mutual learning, such arrangements can help organisations reconcile tensions between market pressures and commitments to equity or sustainability (Vaas, 2008; Painter-Morland, 2013; Pel et al., 2020).

Together, these perspectives portray *social innovation* as a layered process that connects individual purpose, organisational routines, and institutional fields. Under favourable conditions, collective and intentional action aimed at addressing societal challenges can generate new norms, collaborative practices, and technological artefacts aligned with public benefit (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Floridi, 2013; Battilana & Lee, 2014). By embedding principles of reciprocity and solidarity, such efforts contribute to the gradual reworking of socio-technical systems and open pathways towards more participatory and equitable development (Jessop et al., 2013).

2.6.6 Social capital and the scaffolding of social innovation

A strand of the *social capital* literature intersects with debates on how societies organise the capacity to generate new solutions, with attention to trust, networks and norms; however, social capital has a broader remit in *sociology* and *public policy* (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Adler & Kwon, 2002). McElroy (2002) described *Social Innovation Capital* as the collective ability to experiment and learn across boundaries, stressing the importance of trust and shared norms (cited in Pantea, 2020). Others point to the role of *networks*, both *formal* and *informal*, in sustaining innovation over time (Painter-Morland, 2013; Kaasa et al., 2007). This line of argument has been echoed in policy reports: the OECD (2010) and BEPA (2010) both stress that resilience and competitiveness depend not only on physical resources but also on human and social ties.

Two distinct traditions shape how the term is understood. The first strand, influenced by *rational-choice thinking*, views networks as efficient conduits for information and coordination. It includes Coleman's (1988) rational-choice account, Granovetter's (1973) "weak ties," and Burt's (1992) "structural holes," alongside later summaries in management scholarship (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Vaas, 2008). A second, more civic in orientation, treats social capital as grounded in *horizontal association*, reciprocity, and self-governance (Putnam, 2000; Ostrom, 1996). The contrast matters: in the first case, social capital supports optimisation within existing market institutions; in the second, it is a resource for contesting or reshaping them (Montgomery, 2016; Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019).

From this perspective, social innovation is often cast as a response to needs unmet by either markets or public services. OECD (2010) and Galego et al. (2022) outline a catalogue of initiatives applied to tackle exclusion, inequality, and environmental challenges, while Moulaert et al. (2013, p. 17) frame innovation as a way of resisting conservative forces that sustain disadvantage. The connection to empowerment and grassroots movements is strong, with insights drawn from community psychology and transition studies (Zimmerman, 2000; Avelino & Rotmans, 2009; Avelino et al., 2017,

2020). In this view, *social capital* functions less as a static stock of relationships than as a medium through which groups mobilise agency.

A further body of literature distinguishes between *economic* and *social innovation*. Nicholls and Murdock (2011) define the latter as meeting neglected needs, particularly in weak institutional settings. *Entrepreneurial* perspectives highlight agency and mission: Dees (1998) characterises social entrepreneurs as change agents, while Battilana and Lee (2014) and Pache and Santos (2013) explore how hybrid organisations navigate competing logics. Others, such as Santos (2012) and Shepherd and Patzelt (2011), link opportunity recognition directly to the creation of pro-social value. In these accounts, founders mobilise networks and legitimacy to address gaps left by conventional incentives, though they remain constrained by the need to reconcile viability with social purpose (Strand, 2014; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Montgomery (2016) maps the field's internal diversity using Kuhn's (1962) notion of *Paradigms*. A *technocratic paradigm* frames social innovation as expert-led optimisation within neoliberal policy regimes (Mulgan, 2014; Vaas, 2008). A *democratic paradigm*, by contrast, highlights distributed power and collective action, seeking institutional change directed toward equity and inclusion (Gibson-Graham, 2003; Moulaert & Nussbaumer, 2005; Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019). These orientations have practical consequences: they shape what is counted as success, how impact is measured, and whose voices are included (Phills, Deiglmeier & Miller, 2008; van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016; Westley et al., 2017). The account in this section is strongly informed by social-innovation and social-entrepreneurship scholarship, and is used here to illuminate participation, legitimacy and inclusion in mission-led ventures that nonetheless operate through for-profit organisational forms (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019; Phillips et al., 2015).

In technology-driven settings, participation is also shaped by *infrastructures*—data, platforms, and standards that set conditions for engagement (Floridi, 2013; George et al., 2021). Thus, social capital is better viewed as an enabling condition than a guarantee, as its effects depend on how connections are made, the values they embody, and their interactions with institutions (Jessop et al., 2013; Montgomery, 2016). Relatedly, there is growing awareness that a universal approach may not be effective. The network features

that facilitate coordination in one context might lead to exclusion in another. Additionally, the methods of measurement are still debated, and the causal relationships are frequently intertwined with political and geographical factors (Pel et al., 2020; Hsu et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2015). For these reasons, context-sensitive analyses—attentive to local histories, power relations and the mix of technocratic and democratic impulses—are likely to give the most traction on when and how social capital underwrites genuine social innovation (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001; Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019).

2.6.7 Ethical and technological up-scaling

Stage-Gate models have long framed industrial development as a sequence of exploration, feasibility, design, and launch, with progress reviewed at defined *"gates"* against technical and market criteria (Cooper, 1990; 2008; Tidd & Bessant, 2021).

Although such models are still widely used, scholars in ethics and technology studies have argued that criteria to evaluate the review points should be expanded beyond technical feasibility and commercial viability to include considerations of public benefit, distributive effects, and long-term societal risks (Owen, Macnaghten & Stilgoe, 2012; Grunwald, 2014; Stahl, Eden & Jirotka, 2017). For instance, case studies in renewable energy and medical equipment show that incorporating deliberative workshops or stakeholder panels into review cycles can reveal societal implications early, while redesign is possible (Dreyer et al., 2017; Timmermans & Blok, 2018).

The challenge of moving innovations from initial trials to broader adoption has been widely examined through diffusion theories. Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations Framework* describes adoption as a sequential process, beginning with innovators, followed by early adopters, the early and late majority, and finally laggards. Moore (1991/1999) refined this account by emphasising the "*chasm*" between early adopters and the early majority, where expectations of reliability, legitimacy, and support differ markedly. Researchers have suggested that incorporating ethical and social factors into both design and communication can facilitate this transition by diminishing perceived risks, enhancing trust, and aligning new technologies with the values of the public (Osburg & Schmidpeter, 2019).

Organisational learning capacity is also central to discussions of scaling. Cohen and Levinthal's (1990) concept of absorptive capacity highlights the importance of recognising, assimilating, and applying external knowledge. For socially innovative ventures, this entails balancing growth with the maintenance of ethical commitments. Research on *hybrid organisations* notes that routines supporting stakeholder dialogue, impact measurement, and community engagement can become marginalised during expansion, generating what has been described as a "*social innovation paradox*" (Seelos & Mair, 2012; Vaas, 2008). Unless reinforced, the very practices that establish credibility and legitimacy may be eroded as ventures pursue scale.

Path dependency constitutes a further barrier. Early design or governance decisions can create forms of lock-in that restrict adaptation and leave organisations misaligned with changing societal expectations (David, 1985; Arthur, 1989; van Wijk et al., 2019). Mechanisms such as ethical review points or periodic reassessment have been proposed to mitigate this effect by keeping trajectories open to revision.

The relationship between social and environmental practices and financial outcomes remains contested. Meta-analyses indicate that outcomes differ depending on the industry, the time frame considered, and how deeply these practices are integrated into the fundamental strategy (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, 2011; Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Nonetheless, evidence points to a growing organisational engagement with social responsibility, pursued either as a principled stance or as a strategic response to regulatory, reputational, and market pressures (Brown & Forster, 2013; Russell et al., 2016; Phillips et al., 2015).

In this thesis, however, social responsibility and ethical responsibility are not treated as interchangeable. *Social Responsibility* refers to the organisation's effects on stakeholders, communities and the environment. *Ethical responsibility* is broader: it concerns the moral framing through which founders judge what ought to be done, what limits should be observed, and which forms of action remain acceptable under pressure (Fischer, 2004). This distinction matters in for-profit ventures because the issue is not only whether businesses produce social value, but how founders justify, prioritise and constrain commercial action in relation to their ethical commitments.

The existing literature suggests that effectively scaling innovation in a way that maintains ethical integrity requires a focus beyond mere market growth or technical efficiency. It is essential to broaden the evaluation criteria, ensure that diffusion is valid, enhance learning capabilities, and safeguard against route dependency. By this logic, companies that are able to bring these elements together are more capable of integrating social responsibility into their expansion, and conversely, the absence of these during expansion would mean a greater likelihood that ethical commitments weaken or are forsaken.

2.6.8 Moral Imagination, Framing, and the ethical horizons of Social Innovation

Jessop and colleagues (2013) argue that research on *social innovation* has often prioritised organisational forms or policy implications, while paying less attention to the ethical reasoning that accompanies efforts to reshape social relations. Initiatives designed to address exclusion or unmet needs rest on assumptions about progress, legitimacy, and voice. These assumptions are linked to "*social imaginaries*", generally referred to as shared but contested visions of future possibilities, sustained through adaptation, imitation, and reinvention (Taylor, 2004; Jessop et al., 2013). From this perspective, social innovation is not limited to the design of services or organisational forms; it represents a process in which actors seek to reconfigure rules, norms, and practices across multiple levels of society (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Pel et al., 2020). When combined with collective learning and institutional embedding, such reconfigurations can contribute to human development (Jessop et al., 2013).

Moral imagination is central to this line of inquiry. Defined as the ability to envision alternatives beyond prevailing routines while remaining attentive to others' interests (Johnson, 1993; Werhane, 1999), it enables actors to recognise hidden injustices, reframe problems, and explore courses of action that acknowledge diverse values (Hartman, 2001; Derry, 2012). Within the field of *Social Innovation*, *Moral Imagination* can be observed when actors consider the unintended outcomes of seemingly beneficial

reforms or when they reconfigure initiatives to reach groups that are otherwise excluded (Montgomery, 2016; Lindhult, 2008).

A further strand of research examines how Framing influences organisational engagement with contested issues. Gioia (1992) demonstrated that ethical interpretations often depend on the categories and metaphors used to make sense of dilemmas, while Kaplan (2008) showed that strategic discussions can elevate certain logics and silence others. Within social innovation, how a challenge is described, for instance as a technical fault, a breach of rights, or an opportunity for collective action directly shapes which responses are considered legitimate (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). In this way, framing may expand moral imagination by opening up new interpretive pathways, or constrain it by restricting what is regarded as possible.

The institutional context is also said to shape how imagination and framing develop. Pel and Kemp (2020) note that many social-innovation practices first surface in *marginal* or *informal* settings before gaining wider recognition. Such initiatives may temper market dynamics by embedding ideas of reciprocity and justice (Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005; Kemp et al., 2016), but they may also encounter institutional resistance or reproduce established hierarchies. Critical CSR and critical management scholarship therefore provide a useful caution: market-facing organisations should not be assumed to reconcile profit and social value without residue. Ethical language may also legitimise or privatise responsibilities that were previously civic, collective or public (Banerjee, 2008; Fleming & Jones, 2013; Frynas & Yamahaki, 2016).

Evaluation adds a further dimension. Howaldt and Schwarz (2010) note that because social innovation is open-ended, clear criteria for judging outcomes are elusive. Lindhult (2008) similarly argues that innovation is not inherently virtuous; its ethical quality depends on the values mobilised and the inclusiveness of deliberation. Empirical studies show how this ambiguity, as seen through community energy projects, digital inclusion initiatives, and participatory budgeting can broaden participation and redistribute power, yet they may also entrench inequalities or create new elites when accountability mechanisms are weak (Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Smith & Raven, 2012; Avelino et al., 2019).

Pel et al. (2020) propose a *socio-material framework* to analyse such contradictions, identifying four clusters: initiatives that build supportive relations; the creation of networks; partnerships that contest or replace established norms; and interactions between these efforts and broader technological change. This perspective resonates with work on *empowerment* and *self-determination*, which emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as conditions for sustained engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Avelino et al., 2017). It also aligns with proposals for "*value-based collaborative analysis*," which incorporate ethical criteria, stakeholder dialogue, and reflexive monitoring into each phase of innovation—from problem framing to institutionalisation (Kemp et al., 2016; Westley et al., 2017).

Combined, these strands of literature depict *Social Innovation* as a process shaped by the interplay of moral imagination, framing practices, and institutional conditions. Progress in this field appears to depend on cultivating contexts—such as workshops, partnerships, and participatory evaluations—where creative reasoning is combined with systematic attention to accountability, power, and long-term consequences (George et al., 2021; Moulaert et al., 2017; Grunwald, 2014). Social innovation can therefore be read less as a neutral toolkit and more as an evolving dialogue about justice, solidarity, and the futures organisations seek to advance.

2.6.9 Technological dimension: the social dynamics of Ethical Technology

A substantial body of work challenges the idea that technologies possess fixed meanings or values, instead emphasising how legitimacy is shaped through social processes. The *Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) framework*, introduced by Bijker, Hughes and Pinch (1987), proposes that artefacts undergo phases of "*interpretative flexibility*" before particular understandings stabilise or "close" (Pinch & Bijker, 1984; Bijker, 1995). Closure is rarely a neutral outcome. It tends to be shaped by institutional arrangements, dominant professional discourses, and political struggles, which can elevate some interpretations while marginalising others (Bijker, 2009; Klein & Kleinman, 2002). This line of work therefore treats technologies as *ethically laden*, since their trajectories emerge

through negotiations among designers, investors, regulators, and users over which values, compromises, and performance criteria should prevail (Winner, 1993; Fischer, 1992).

Evidence from ventures developing privacy-oriented tools and low-carbon technologies shows that ethical orientations are often worked out in practice rather than being predetermined. They tend to evolve through repeated cycles of prototyping, collective discussion, and trial implementation, which help founders assess whether their innovations are consistent with stakeholder expectations and wider societal priorities (Lindley et al., 2011; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Husted & Allen, 2020). *Actor–Network Theory (ANT)* makes a similar point by conceptualising technology and society as co-produced networks in which both human and non-human entities influence outcomes (Latour, 1999; Law, 1992). In ethically oriented ventures, responsibility is therefore distributed: founders, code, funding criteria, technical standards, and even materials can shape how commitments to equity, privacy, or sustainability are enacted (Callon, 1986; Pollock & Williams, 2010). Translation processes, including recruiting allies, revising scripts, and stabilising interpretations, may reinforce, dilute, or redirect ethical intentions (Callon, 1991).

Research on *artificial intelligence*, *welfare technologies*, and *Civic Platforms* reinforces the view that ethical qualities are embedded in design architectures. Choices about how systems are configured can support or erode principles such as fairness, accountability, and data protection (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; Mittelstadt, 2019; Lepri et al., 2018). This has resulted in the recognition of the link between design and broader theories of adoption. Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations* suggests that uptake is shaped by attributes such as perceived advantage, compatibility, and visibility, and it typically spreads from innovators to early adopters, through majority groups, and eventually to laggards. Moore (1991) added that the transition between early adopters and early majorities—described as "*crossing the chasm*"—is especially difficult, as expectations regarding reliability and legitimacy diverge sharply between these groups. *Case studies* of re*newable energy systems*, *open-data platforms*, and *responsible AI* confirm that adoption is uneven: cultural translation by early adopters, regulatory support, and persuasive narratives can enable

diffusion, while infrastructural lock-in or conflicting business models often act as barriers (Geels, 2002; Berkhout, 2006; Sloane & Moss, 2019).

Adoption at the organisational or individual level has also been studied through the *Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)* (Davis, 1989) and subsequent extensions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Research consistently shows that perceptions of usefulness, ease of use, and trust are critical to whether new technologies are adopted. Research on *Value-Sensitive* and participatory design indicates that while adoption is easier when technologies have a clear purpose, simple interfaces, and trustworthy safeguards, conversely, complexity or vague claims often discourage engagement (Friedman, Kahn, & Borning, 2008; van de Poel, 2016; Gefen & Straub, 2005). Perceptions of legitimacy are also shaped by framing—how technologies are described, which issues they claim to resolve, and whose interests they are seen to advance (Gioia, 1992; Kaplan, 2008).

Critical perspectives in technology studies add that design choices themselves carry ethical weight. Feenberg (1999) argues that design often embeds assumptions about control, authority, and efficiency, which may reproduce inequalities unless countered by moral imagination: the ability to question taken-for-granted scripts and to consider perspectives of marginalised groups (Johnson, 1993; Werhane, 1999). In rapidly evolving fields such as AI or data-driven services, this involves scrutinising how datasets are assembled, whose risks are ignored, and how longer-term consequences are anticipated (Floridi, 2019; Stahl et al., 2017). Ethical integration is therefore best understood not as a final feature but as an ongoing practice of reflection, dialogue, and adaptation (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; Owen et al., 2012).

Considered together, *SCOT*, *ANT*, *Diffusion studies*, *TAM* and *Critical Ethics* provide complementary ways of examining how technologies with ethical salience emerge, stabilise and spread. *SCOT* emphasises negotiated meanings, *ANT* foregrounds distributed agency, diffusion theory and *TAM* explain adoption dynamics, and critical perspectives draw attention to asymmetries, exclusions and the need for reflexivity. For socially innovative ESVs, these traditions suggest that responsible scaling is not only about adoption or expansion. It also depends on how ethical reflection is embedded into design, governance and communication, and to whether public trust and longer-term

benefit remain plausible as technologies diffuse (Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013; George et al., 2021; Floridi, 2019).

2.6.10 Resource, capability and dynamic recalibration perspectives

Resource-based perspectives help connect CSR, stakeholder responsibility and early venture practice by directing attention to the resources, routines and relationships through which organisational commitments are sustained over time. *The Resource-Based View (RBV)* argues that firms differ in the resources they develop, combine and protect, particularly where those resources are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and supported by organisational arrangements (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). Later VRIO formulations place further emphasis on whether an organisation is able to capture and sustain value from those resources through routines, structures and managerial action (Barney, 1995). Although RBV is often used to explain competitive advantage, its relevance in this thesis is narrower. It provides a way of examining how intangible resources such as knowledge, reputation, trust, stakeholder relationships, organisational routines and technical capability may become consequential in practice.

This matters for research on responsible and socially innovative ventures because ethical commitments do not necessarily remain at the level of values, aspirations or public statements. They may become embedded in routines, capabilities, design standards, stakeholder relationships, assurance practices and forms of organisational learning. Work on socially complex resources and path dependence is relevant here because trust, legitimacy, reputation and relational credibility are not easily purchased or copied. They are usually built over time through repeated interaction, visible commitments and accumulated practice (Dierickx and Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991; Amit and Schoemaker, 1993). In this sense, ethical credibility may be understood as partly relational and partly organisational: it depends not only on what a firm claims, but on how those claims are supported, tested and maintained.

CSR and *stakeholder scholarship* have used resource-based reasoning to explain why social responsibility may become organisationally significant. Russo and Fouts (1997), for

example, connect environmental performance to resource-based advantage, while Branco and Rodrigues (2006) argue that CSR may contribute to intangible resources such as reputation, trust and employee commitment. Surroca, Tribó and Waddock (2010) similarly link corporate responsibility and financial performance through intangible resources.

Stakeholder-oriented work also suggests that durable value may arise where firms build relationships with stakeholders in ways that support trust, reciprocity and cooperation, rather than treating stakeholder engagement as communication alone (Hillman and Keim, 2001; Harrison, Bosse and Phillips, 2010). These arguments do not make responsibility automatically ethical, nor do they prove that responsible firms necessarily perform better. They do, however, show why ethical, relational and reputational resources may matter to how organisations endure, adapt and maintain legitimacy.

Dynamic Capabilities scholarship adds a temporal and adaptive dimension. Rather than focusing only on the possession of resources, it examines how organisations sense change, seize opportunities and reconfigure assets, routines and capabilities as conditions shift (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007).

Capability lifecycles and entrepreneurship-focused accounts are especially relevant to early-stage settings, where capabilities are still forming and may need to be revised as markets, technologies and institutional expectations change (Helfat and Peteraf, 2003; Zahra, Sapienza and Davidsson, 2006). In founder-led ventures, adaptation may involve changes to product design, data practices, partner criteria, pricing, release decisions, assurance routines or stakeholder engagement as new risks and expectations become visible.

For this thesis, the importance of these perspectives lies in their attention to recalibration. Socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures do not only need resources; they need the capacity to review and adjust how resources are used as technical, ethical and stakeholder conditions change. Technological development may require changes to data flows, user safeguards, accessibility features, explainability, release sequencing or

assurance checks. Ethical commitments may also need to be revisited where evidence changes, harms become clearer, stakeholder expectations shift or the venture's capacity expands. The relevant issue is therefore not simply whether a venture possesses valuable resources, but whether its routines and relationships allow ethical and technological decisions to be recalibrated together.

These perspectives are useful for this thesis, but they are applied cautiously. The study does not reduce ethical responsibility to competitive advantage, nor does it treat ethics as valuable only where it improves organisational performance. *RBV* and *Dynamic Capabilities* provide a supporting vocabulary for examining how technological capability, ethical credibility and stakeholder trust may be cultivated, tested and adjusted together in early venture practice. This vocabulary prepares the later discussion of *Ethical Capabilities Capital* and *Ethics–Technology Integration*, where the central question is how ethical commitments become durable enough to shape decisions, systems and relationships over time.

For socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures, this framing is important because technology alone may not explain value, legitimacy or resilience. A venture may also depend on whether users trust its data practices, whether stakeholders accept its impact claims, whether accessibility or safeguarding commitments are built into delivery, and whether governance routines can support decisions as the organisation develops. Ethical orientation may therefore become practically significant when it is embedded in product architecture, evidence practices, stakeholder relationships and organisational routines.

At the same time, this should not be read as a claim that ethics always produces advantage. Ethical commitments may slow growth, limit revenue options, increase costs or expose tensions that remain unresolved. The relevance of RBV and dynamic capabilities is therefore interpretive rather than determinative: they help explain how resources, routines and adaptation matter, while the ethical significance of those resources depends on how they are used, justified and recalibrated in practice.

Table 5 summarises the frameworks that connect *ethics* to *technology* and *innovation*. It brings together responsible innovation, information ethics, social construction of technology, innovation systems and related capability-oriented perspectives. Each offers a different way of examining how technology is shaped, legitimised and governed, while also showing limits in their application to entrepreneurial and early-stage contexts. The table therefore identifies methodological tendencies and points where ethics and innovation research may be more closely integrated.

Table 5: Synthesis of 2.6 Technology and Innovation Frameworks: Ethical and Social Dimensions

Theme / subsection	Literature	Findings from prior research	Methodological approaches	Limitations / gaps identified
Responsible Innovation (RI)	Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten (2013); von Schomberg (2013); Stahl et al. (2017).	RI principles emphasise anticipation, inclusion, reflexivity and responsiveness in the governance of research and innovation.	Conceptual frameworks; policy analysis; Responsible Research And Innovation studies.	Limited empirical application to micro-to-small, technology-based early-stage ventures operating under resource and governance constraints.
Tech ethics and information ethics	Moor (1985); Floridi (2013); Floridi and Cowls (2019).	Digital and AI ethics literature identifies principles including beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, justice and explicability.	Philosophical analysis; applied ethics; digital governance and AI ethics case studies.	Principles can remain abstract unless translated into organisational routines, design choices and decision practices.
Social Construction of Technology (SCOT)	Pinch and Bijker (1984); Bijker, Hughes and Pinch (1987); Fischer (1992).	Technology is shaped through social groups, interpretive flexibility and socio-technical negotiation rather than through inherent technical properties alone.	Historical case studies; sociological analysis; socio-technical interpretation.	Less frequently applied to ethical decision-making in technology-based early-stage ventures, particularly where founders are still shaping both product and organisation.
Innovation and institutions	Rogers (2003); Schot and Steinmueller (2018); George et al. (2021).	Diffusion, policy mixes and grand challenges shape how innovation develops, spreads and becomes institutionally embedded.	Innovation-system analysis; policy studies; diffusion studies; grand-challenge scholarship.	Often operates at macro or system level, with less attention to micro-level ethical judgement and founder practice in early-stage ventures.
Dynamic capabilities and ecosystems	Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997); Zahra, Sapienza and Davidsson (2006); Zahra et al. (2009); von Krogh et al. (2012).	Capabilities, adaptation and ecosystems shape how ventures sense, seize and reconfigure resources under uncertainty.	Strategic management theory; entrepreneurship studies; case-based and conceptual research.	Ethics is often implicit rather than central, requiring stronger integration with ethical decision-making and responsible innovation frameworks.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

2.7 Empirical findings synthesis (Sections 2.2–2.6)

Across Sections 2.2–2.6, three recurring tensions are visible. First, the literature alternates between principle-led accounts of ethicality and context-responsive accounts of how ethical judgement is formed and revised in practice. Second, some explanations are leader-centred (values, traits, behavioural mechanisms), while others foreground institutional and socio-technical conditions that shape what is feasible and what counts as responsible action. Third, there is a persistent gap between aspirational ethics language and the operational work of embedding ethics in routines, artefacts, and technical systems. These tensions are particularly salient in early-stage, technology-based ventures, where decisions are taken under constraint and where design and governance choices can become difficult to unwind as systems scale.

Table 6: Synthesis of empirical findings relevant to ethics, innovation and early-stage venture practice

Section	Literature	What prior research has found	Gaps/limits
2.2 Foundations of ethical thought: a framework for analysis	Rawls (1971); MacIntyre (1984); Bauman (1993); Ricoeur (1992); Jones (1991); Freeman (1984); Crane & Matten (2016); Walker (2010).	Justice and fairness judgements are linked to trust, perceived legitimacy and compliance, and to prosocial and organisational-citizenship behaviours (Crane & Matten, 2016; Topcu & Kaya, 2015). Stakeholder salience and value alignment matter for ethical performance and perceived responsibility (Agle, Mitchell & Sonnenfeld, 1999; Freeman, 1984). Moral identity is associated with prosocial action and moral agency (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Relational and constitutive accounts of ethics emphasise dialogic accountability, narrative, and situated judgement (Haraway, 1988; Ricoeur, 1992).	Business ethics scholarship has long noted a persistent gap between normative theory and empirical organisational research, partly because philosophical claims do not translate neatly into measurable constructs (Weaver & Treviño, 1994; Hosmer, 2000). Stakeholder theory reviews also point to tensions between plural conceptual foundations and the operational consistency required for empirical testing (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Parmar et al., 2010). Comparative work further suggests that many foundational constructs and measures travel unevenly across cultural and institutional settings, which limits generalisation (Jackson, 2001; Robertson, 2006).
2.3 Ethical leadership and ethical entrepreneurship	Rest (1986); Jones (1991); Festinger (1957); Harmon-Jones & Mills (1999); Bandura (1977, 1989); Weick (1995); Fauchart & Gruber (2011); Aquino & Reed (2002); Pizarro (2000); Haidt (2001); Rafaeli & Sutton (1987); Caplan (2008).	Sequential models indicate that moral awareness and judgement are important antecedents of ethical intention and behaviour (Rest, 1986; Jones, 1991; Treviño, 1986). Dissonance research documents rationalisation and post hoc justification when behaviour conflicts with values (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999; Stone & Cooper, 2001). Emotions and intuitive responses influence ethical judgements and willingness to act (Pizarro, 2000; Haidt, 2001; Thorne & Gaudine, 2001; Gaudine & Thorne, 2001). Identity and sensemaking shape how dilemmas are framed and interpreted (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Weick, 1995). Self-efficacy interacts	Reviews repeatedly observe that ethical decision-making research is split across traditions (cognitive-stage models, affective/intuitive accounts, identity/sensemaking), with fewer studies that integrate these strands in a single explanatory design (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Craft, 2013; Lehnert, Park & Singh, 2015). They also point to a methodological skew towards cross-sectional/self-report work, which is less suited to capturing evolving decisions and feedback effects over time (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Craft, 2013). Entrepreneurship and new-venture contexts are discussed but remain

Section	Literature	What prior research has found	Gaps/limits
		with dissonance processes and perceived agency (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Wood, 1989).	comparatively less developed in the ethics-by-design and process literatures than large-firm settings (Hannafey, 2003; Vallaster et al., 2019).
2.4 Identity, Culture, and the Social Context in ethical practice	Treviño, Butterfield & McCabe (1998); Treviño, Hartman & Brown (2000); Treviño & Weaver (2003); Kaptein (2008); Victor & Cullen (1988); Thomas & Hardy (2011); Palanski & Yammarino (2007); Mayer et al. (2009, 2012); Piccolo et al. (2010); Weaver, Treviño & Agle (2005); Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991); Rai & Sambasivan (2021).	Ethical culture is associated with employee attitudes, lower misconduct and perceived fairness (Kaptein, 2008; Victor & Cullen, 1988; Treviño, Butterfield & McCabe, 1998; Martin & Cullen, 2006). Ethical leadership is linked to trust, improved core job characteristics and reduced deviance, with evidence of trickle-down effects through hierarchies (Mayer et al., 2009, 2012; Piccolo et al., 2010; Harrison, Brown & Treviño, 2005). Role-modelling and sensegiving are important in shaping ethical climate and responses to change (Weaver, Treviño & Agle, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Thomas & Hardy, 2011). JEDI-aligned cultures connect fairness and inclusion with commitment, innovation and performance (Rai & Sambasivan, 2021).	Meta-analytic work on ethical climate/culture has noted that many studies are static snapshots, which makes it difficult to explain how cultures form, shift, and stabilise (Martin & Cullen, 2006). Ethical leadership reviews also discuss conceptual overlap and measurement convergence with adjacent leadership constructs, which complicates cumulative theory-building (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Bedi, Alpaslan & Green, 2016). Broader reviews of behavioural ethics argue for more attention to context and organisational systems rather than focusing primarily on individual leaders (Treviño, den Nieuwenboer & Kish-Gephart, 2014).
2.5 Ethical Decision-Making: theories and models	Freeman (1984); Carroll (1991, 2016); Porter & Kramer (2006, 2011); Wang & Bansal (2012); Dees (1998); Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern (2006); Moulaert, MacCallum & Hillier (2013); Phillips et al. (2015); Nilssen	CSR is associated with reputation, legitimacy and, in many studies, financial outcomes (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Wang & Bansal, 2012; Vogel, 2005). Strategic CSR emphasises integration with core business rather than symbolic or peripheral initiatives (Porter & Kramer, 2011; McWilliams, Siegel & Wright, 2006; Weaver, Treviño & Cochran, 1999). Social-innovation research documents hybrid logics, partnership arrangements and ways in which ventures	CSR reviews have noted construct proliferation and inconsistent measurement, which weakens comparability across studies and encourages fragmented theorising (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; McWilliams, Siegel & Wright, 2006). Social innovation mapping similarly describes an expanding field with uneven conceptual coherence and mixed empirical depth across sub-streams (van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016). Impact assessment scholarship continues to

Section	Literature	What prior research has found	Gaps/limits
	(2019); Schot & Steinmueller (2018); Bugg-Levine & Emerson (2011); Crane & Matten (2016)	manage tensions between social and commercial aims (Dees, 1998; Austin et al., 2006; Moulaert et al., 2013; Phillips et al., 2015; Nilssen, 2019). Work on impact investing highlights growing market activity but continuing difficulty in capturing and comparing social outcomes (Bugg-Levine & Emerson, 2011).	emphasise practical and conceptual difficulties in specifying outcomes, attributing causality, and sustaining comparable metrics over time (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Lazzarini, 2018).
2.6. Technology and innovation frameworks: ethical and social dimensions	Brey (2000); Floridi (2013); Suchman (2002); Rogers (2003); Moore (1991); Christensen, Johnson & Horn (2008); Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten (2013); DiMaggio & Powell (1983); Scott (2001); Teece, Pisano & Shuen (1997).	ICT ethics and information ethics foreground privacy, trust, data governance and algorithmic bias as central concerns in digital systems (Brey, 2000; Floridi, 2013). Diffusion and adoption research identifies adopter categories and typical propagation patterns, but underlines the role of context and the existence of digital "chasms" (Rogers, 2003; Moore, 1991). Disruption theory explains incumbent vulnerability under technological change (Christensen, Johnson & Horn, 2008). Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) stresses anticipation, inclusion and reflexivity, but implementation, particularly among SMEs, remains uneven (Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013; García-Piqueres & García-Ramos, 2021; Preuss, 2014). Institutional analyses show how legitimacy pressures, isomorphism and formal rules shape CSR and RRI uptake (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Dynamic capabilities work offers a lens on how organisations build and reconfigure capabilities under uncertainty (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).	Responsible innovation scholarship has emphasised the difficulty of turning high-level principles (anticipation, inclusion, reflexivity) into routinised organisational practices, especially outside large-firm settings (Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013; Preuss, 2014). In the AI/algorithmic governance literature, a related "principles-to-practice" gap is described, with recurring problems around accountability, operationalisation, and governance capacity (Mittelstadt, 2019; Morley et al., 2020). CSR research also continues to call for clearer micro–macro explanations that link individual decision-making, organisational capabilities, and institutional pressures (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Treviño et al., 2014).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

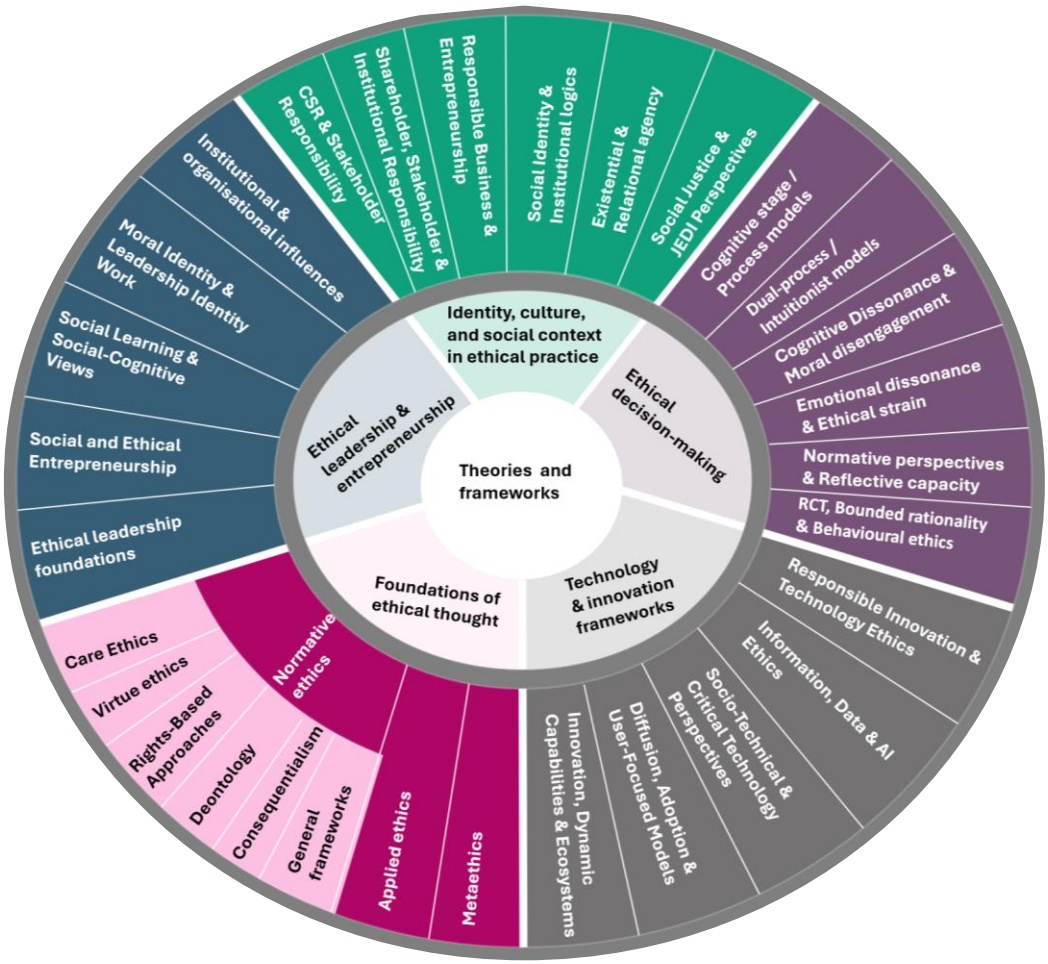
Read together, the studies summarised in **Table 6** point to a substantial but uneven empirical base. Prior work links ethics to leadership, culture, decision-making and organisational outcomes, but much of it relies on cross-sectional designs or on a limited range of organisational and institutional settings. This leaves less room for explaining temporal development, contextual variation and the practical movement from ethical concern to organisational action (Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Conceptual fragmentation, inconsistent operationalisation and publication bias also make comparison across domains difficult (Gond et al., 2017; Den Hartog, 2015; Kepes, Banks, McDaniel & Whetzel, 2012). For this thesis, measurement and impact are therefore not treated as substitutes for ethical reasoning. They matter because they shape how ventures evidence, communicate and contest value claims, but they do not displace questions of principle, judgement, virtue, care and responsibility.

The study responds to these limitations by examining ethical practice in situ within socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures. It focuses on how founders describe the translation of ethical judgement into decisions, routines and socio-technical choices under constraint. **Chapter 3: Research methodology** sets out the interpretive design and the procedures used to support traceability and trustworthiness.

The patterns summarised in **Table 6** are brought together in **Figure 8,** which presents the synthesis as a sunburst diagram. The figure maps how the literature reviewed in Sections 2.2–2.6 is distributed across five domains. The central node represents the broad concern with ethics in socially innovative, technology-based ventures. The inner ring groups the theoretical domains, while the outer rings indicate the principal theories, models and frameworks associated with each. The diagram is descriptive rather than exhaustive. Its purpose is to show where prior work is relatively dense, where it is thinner, and where the present study is positioned.

*Figure 8: Sunburst diagram of the literature reviewed in **Chapter 2: Literature review** (Sections 2.2–2.6) – modified in **Figure 45**, incorporating a mapping research findings and contributions.*



Source: Author synthesis (this thesis).

The sunburst provides a bridge between the literature review and the later analysis of findings. It highlights intersections that the empirical study examines in greater depth, particularly *ethical decision-making*, *leadership*, *CSR*, *small-business responsibility*, *responsible entrepreneurship*, *social innovation* and *technological governance*. **Chapter 5: Discussion** returns to these domains when positioning the study's contribution and when introducing **Figure 45**, which revisits the **Chapter 2: Literature review** synthesis in light of the empirical findings.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the bodies of work used to frame the study: *moral philosophy* and *ethical decision-making*; *CSR*, *Stakeholder Theory, small-business responsibility* and *sustainable entrepreneurship*; *social innovation* and selected *social entrepreneurship scholarship*; *responsible innovation* and *technology ethics*; and *resource* and *capability perspectives* (Rest, 1986; Jones, 1991; Carroll, 1991; Freeman, 1984; Jenkins, 2004; Spence, 2016; Mair and Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012; Owen, Macnaghten and Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013; Floridi, 2013; Barney, 1991; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997). The review positions the study at the point where founder agency, organisational formation, digital build and public-interest claims meet. It therefore supports the empirical focus on how founders of socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures describe, justify and adapt ethical decisions under constraint.

The *ethical decision-making literature* suggests that moral judgement is not simply a matter of applying fixed principles. *Consequentialist*, *Duty-based*, *Virtue-centred* and *Care-oriented* accounts each offer a different way of understanding what may be judged right, responsible or defensible. Work on *Moral Awareness*, *Cognitive Processing*, *Sensemaking* and *Leadership* further indicates that ethical judgement is shaped by context, interpretation, emotion and organisational conditions, rather than by individual reasoning alone (Rest, 1986; Treviño, 1986; Jones, 1991).

CSR, *Stakeholder* and *Institutional perspectives* help explain how responsibility is shaped by firm–society relations, legitimacy expectations and the claims of affected groups. For this study, however, those literatures need to be read through the setting of small, founder-led ventures rather than mature corporations. *Responsibility* may therefore appear less through established CSR systems than through founder judgement, stakeholder dialogue, early routines, product choices, data practices and emerging governance signals (Jenkins, 2004; Spence, 2016).

Social Entrepreneurship and *Social Enterprise scholarship* is used in this thesis as an analytical lens, not as a legal or organisational classification of the sampled firms. Its relevance lies in how it helps frame mission, legitimacy, public-benefit claims, resource

constraint and mission drift. This distinction matters because the empirical sample is composed of for-profit, shareholder-owned ventures, while the intellectual questions partly concern how social or public-interest aims are pursued through market-facing activity (Mair and Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012; Battilana and Lee, 2014).

The review also considered resource-based and capability-oriented perspectives. *The Resource-Based View (RBV)* and *Dynamic Capabilities scholarship* provide background for thinking about resources, routines, trust, adaptation and organisational learning (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997; Teece, 2007). They are not used here to reduce ethical responsibility to competitive advantage. Rather, they help frame how founders may organise scarce resources, stakeholder trust, technical capability and emerging routines while responding to changing risks, evidence and expectations. This provides a supporting basis for the later discussion of ethical responsiveness and navigation, without treating the thesis as a formal extension of RBV or Dynamic-Capabilities Theory.

Technology-focused literatures add a further layer. *information ethics*, *data governance*, *value sensitive design*, *responsible innovation* and design justice help identify ethical issues that may arise where digital systems, data practices, automated processes, platforms or infrastructure shape access, visibility, risk and accountability (Floridi, 2013; Friedman, Kahn and Borning, 2006; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013). These literatures are especially relevant because the ventures examined in this study do not use technology only as a neutral delivery mechanism. Their ethical claims are often carried, tested or strained through design choices, data flows, accessibility decisions, release practices and technical dependencies.

The review therefore points towards an understanding of ethical decision-making in socially innovative, technology-based ESVs as situated, relational and developmental. *Ethicality* is not treated as equivalent to social impact, legal compliance, stakeholder engagement or technological innovation. Each may be relevant, but none is sufficient on its own. A core question remains concerning how founders interpret competing demands, decide what should be protected or refused, and translate ethical

commitments into organisational and technological practice while resources, markets and institutional expectations are still unsettled.

As set out in **Chapter 1: Introduction**, three gaps guide the empirical study: 1) Founder-level ethical decision-making in early-stage, technology-based ventures remains under-examined; 2) there is limited understanding of how founders navigate ethical judgement where growth, resources and institutional expectations are in tension; and 3) more work is needed on how early ethical commitments become operationalised through design, data, governance, stakeholder engagement and mission-aligned diffusion.

Chapter 3: Research methodology now sets out the interpretivist qualitative design used to examine these issues.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Building on the conceptual gaps identified in **Chapter 2: Literature review**, this chapter sets out the philosophical stance, design, and procedures used to examine how founders of socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures (ESVs)—as defined in **Chapter 1: Introduction**—define and apply ethicality in decision-making. The study adopts an interpretivist–constructivist position in which meanings are socially produced, context-dependent, and historically situated (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Burr, 2015). It draws on a hermeneutic phenomenological orientation to examine the lived experiences and practical reasoning of founders, rather than evaluate predetermined variables (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1990).

Methods were chosen to elicit situated judgement. Semi-structured, event-centred interviews surfaced concrete decisions and their justifications; a documentary analysis of public organisational materials located those accounts within stated aims and formal records (Kvale, 1996; Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Analysis followed reflexive thematic analysis with inductive coding, memo-writing, and iterative theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021). As part of reporting transparency, the Findings chapter includes a thematic density summary that tabulates the distribution of distinct participants across sub-sub-themes (n = 25). Counts are non-exclusive (participants may contribute to multiple domains) and are presented as a navigation aid indicating spread across cases, rather than as a ranking of substantive importance (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Credibility was supported through triangulation of sources, an auditable decision trail, and brief participant feedback on anonymised summaries; consent, confidentiality, and data security followed institutional guidance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016; Nowell et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2018). Alternative designs were considered and set aside: grounded theory's drive to formal theory and theoretical sampling did not match the study's abductive engagement with existing concepts; ethnography would require extended single-site immersion rather than cross-venture comparison; and

surveys would estimate prevalence rather than unpack meaning-making in context (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Bryman, 2012). The chosen interpretivist, phenomenological design—semi-structured interviews, case-matched documentary reading and reflexive thematic analysis—examines how founders construe and enact ethicality within their own venture contexts, with patterns later compared across cases (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The chapter proceeds as outlined.

Figure 9: Structure of Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.2 Research philosophy

Positions the study within an interpretivist tradition; sets out a subjectivist ontology and constructivist epistemology; and explains their suitability for the research aim (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

3.3 Research design and strategy

Outlines the qualitative design; explains sampling, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis; and details reflexive thematic analysis (Punch, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2010, 2019).

3.4 Research implementation

Specifies the sequence of procedures, materials, and analytic steps, with associated artefacts listed in the appendices to support replication (Roberts, 2010).

3.5 Conclusion

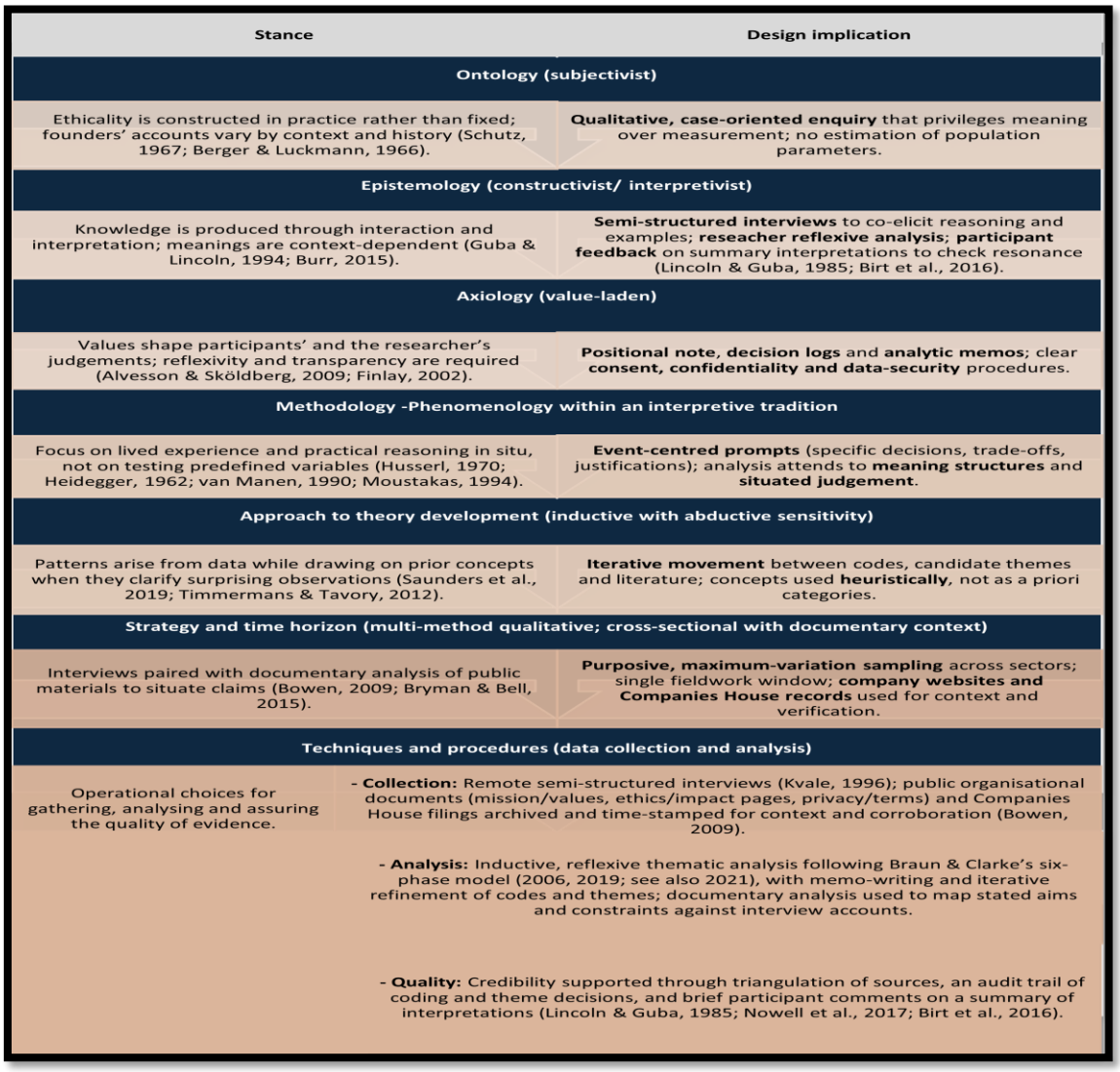
Summarises the methodological rationale and implementation, and links forward to **Chapter 4.**

3.2 Research philosophy

The research adopted an interpretivist paradigm to examine how founders make sense of ethical decision-making in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures (ESVs). The aim was to understand how participants described, justified and applied ethicality in concrete venture contexts. This required attention to personal and professional moral frameworks, lived experience, organisational constraint and the social meanings attached to technology-based innovation. Given the inconsistent conceptualisation of social innovation and the limited founder-level evidence on ethical

decision-making in this setting, an exploratory qualitative design was considered appropriate (Suikkanen, 2021). The study is organised using the research layers set out by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), so that philosophy, design, sampling and analytic technique remain aligned.

Figure 10: Summary of research strategy



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.2.1 Subjectivist ontology

This study starts from a subjectivist view of the social world: reality is made in and through human meaning-making, not found as a single, fixed order (Schutz, 1967; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). More than one account can be defensible at the same time because people read situations through biography, culture and setting

(Schwandt, 1994; Burr, 2015; Van der Walt, 2020). On this footing, "ethicality" is not a stable property of a venture; it is worked out in context, negotiated with others and revised as circumstances change.

This stance fits the decisions founders face. Judgement is shaped by what the past has made salient, by the stories a field tells about good practice, and by the immediate pressures of the moment (Geertz, 1973; Taylor, 1985). What actors notice and how they respond is further channelled by organisational knowledge and routines—how information is created, shared and embedded in practice (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wenger, 1998; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011). The task here is therefore to surface these constructions and the conditions under which they are formed and sustained, rather than to search for a single rule that would hold across firms and contexts.

A realist assumption—one objective ethical framework, equally applicable to every ESV—would miss this variation, especially in early, technology-mediated settings where constraints and stakeholder claims shift quickly (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999; Treviño & Nelson, 2016). The methodological consequence follows: a qualitative, case-oriented design that privileges meaning over measurement and seeks thick description of concrete decisions and their justifications in situ (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.2.2 Constructivist interpretative epistemology

Social innovation is widely practised but unevenly defined in the literature, with competing labels and shifting boundaries across studies. In that setting, this study adopts a constructivist–interpretivist stance: knowledge is produced through situated interpretation and interaction rather than discovered as a single, context-free truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994; Burr, 2015). Meanings are treated as contingent on time, setting and discourse, which accords with classic accounts of how social reality is made and sustained in everyday life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and with reports of conceptual variability in the social-innovation field (e.g., Farinha et al., 2020; Foroudi et al., 2021; van Wijk et al., 2019; Trindade et al., 2017; Nosratabadi et al., 2019).

Within this orientation, two commitments guide the enquiry. First, the focus is on founders' meaning-making: how people describe, justify and revise what "ethical" action is in their work. That emphasis reflects an interpretive concern for lived understanding while remaining alert to the social processes—language, norms, power—that shape those understandings (Crotty, 1998; Burr, 2015). Secondly, knowledge is treated as co-constructed in the research encounter. Interviews are not neutral extractions of fact; they are conversational sites where participants and researcher jointly surface and refine accounts (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

A reflexive posture was maintained throughout. Assumptions were made explicit in memo-writing; decisions about prompts, coding and theme boundaries were logged; and interpretive moves were "bracketed" or "bridled" to slow premature closure (Finlay, 2002; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2012; Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008). This acknowledges the value-laden character of qualitative work while providing a transparent trail for readers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Eliciting tacit ethical knowledge required methods suited to surfacing what is often taken-for-granted. Interviews therefore centred on concrete episodes—specific decisions, tensions and trade-offs—consistent with critical incident techniques and narrative enquiry (Flanagan, 1954; Riessman, 2008). Probing moved from "what happened?" to "how did you decide?" and "why that, then?" (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Laddering questions were used to connect actions to underlying values and ends–means chains (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). These practices help bring tacit norms into speech, consistent with the view that implicit knowledge can be articulated indirectly through stories, metaphors and justifications (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Company materials—mission pages, ethics/impact statements, and Companies House entries—were collected and analysed alongside the interviews to place accounts in context and to note where they converged or diverged (Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

This epistemology is preferred over alternatives because the study seeks a situated understanding rather than variable testing or single-model explanation. A positivist design would prioritise measurement invariance where the object here is meaning

variation; a realist evaluation would emphasise context–mechanism–outcome formulations at a level of abstraction that risks masking founders' interpretive work in early, fluid settings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). An interpretivist–constructivist approach, by contrast, is proportionate to the research aim: to illuminate how ethicality is defined and enacted by founders in practice, under shifting technological and organisational conditions.

3.2.3 Value-laden axiology

This study departs from the premise that values are inescapable. Founders bring moral commitments to their ventures, and researchers bring commitments to their enquiries. In an interpretivist/constructivist tradition, knowledge is therefore understood as value-saturated rather than value-free (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1994; Anderson et al., 2014; Van der Walt, 2020). The study does not seek neutrality. Instead, it adopts disciplined reflexivity: a brief positional note, ongoing memo-writing, and an audit trail of interpretive decisions, together with efforts to "bracket" preconceptions in line with phenomenological practice (Finlay, 2002; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). This approach resolves the perceived tension between "detachment" and "co-construction" – the researcher remains aware of their influence on meaning-making and documents how that influence is managed.

Early-stage, socially innovative ventures routinely couple questions of what is right with questions of what is viable and what is fitting for users and communities. Judgements of moral acceptability sit alongside judgements of economic value and design/aesthetic fit (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999; Treviño & Nelson, 2016; Crane & Matten, 2016; Barao, 2022; Irabor & Onwudinjo, 2016; Günday & Kaçar, 2022; Elliott, 2020). The axiology adopted here therefore treats ethical, economic and aesthetic evaluations as intertwined in practice, rather than as separable domains.

This stance also clarifies why the analysis ranges across applied, normative and metaethical questions (Fieser, 2022). Founders describe what they do in concrete situations (applied ethics), how they define "ethical" in their context (*Normative Ethics*), and why that definition is taken to be credible or binding (metaethics). Interview prompts

were written to elicit all three, and coding attended to how definitions, justifications and actions moved together over time.

The approach also treats ethical judgement as drawing on tacit as well as explicit knowledge. Much of what guides founders' choices sits in habit, intuition and embodied know-how that is hard to state directly (Polanyi, 1966; Reber, 1989; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Methods were selected to surface this implicit layer: event-centred prompts ("tell me about the last time…") and follow-ups ("how did you know what to do?") elicit concrete sequences, metaphors and justifications through which tacit understandings become partially articulable (Haidt, 2001; Sonenshein, 2007). Attention to hesitations, corrections and taken-for-granted terms during interviews, alongside comparison with public materials (mission, ethics/impact pages, Companies House filings), helps identify where practice and stated purpose align or jar, providing further purchase on underlying norms (Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Participant input on summary interpretations, through a Member-Checking exercise, are used to check whether inferred meanings "ring true" without seeking participants' positivist verification (Birt et al., 2016).

3.3 Phenomenological methodology

A phenomenological orientation is used to examine how founders of socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures (ESVs) make sense of "what ought to be done" in concrete situations. The concern is with lived experience and practical reasoning rather than with testing predefined variables. In a hermeneutic vein, experience is treated as already interpreted by actors and further interpreted by the researcher (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1990; Zahavi, 2018). Phenomenology is therefore used here as a way of attending to founders' lifeworlds—the situations, pressures and meanings within which ethical judgement is formed—while remaining reflexive about the researcher's role in making those meanings visible (Finlay, 2002; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

This **stance** fits the topic. Early-stage entrepreneurial decisions are fast, relational and context-bound; what counts as an "*ethical*" course of action is negotiated amid resource limits, stakeholder claims and technical affordances. A phenomenological approach is suited to eliciting such situated sense-making and to tracing how actors justify trade-offs

over time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It offers a better route to the study aim—understanding founders' definitions and applications of ethicality—than designs that presuppose stable constructs and decontextualised measures.

Methods follow from this orientation. Semi-structured interviews invite first-person accounts of specific decision episodes and their justifications ("tell me about the last time…", "what options did you consider, and why?"), drawing on critical-incident style prompts to anchor talk in practice (Kvale, 1996; Flanagan, 1954; Brinkmann, 2013). Public documents (mission or ethics pages, impact statements, Companies House filings) are archived and read alongside interview material to situate claims and check where practice and stated purpose align or diverge (Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015) – to identify new knowledge rather than verify the validity of participant's accounts. Reflexive notes were kept on assumptions, unexpected turns, and the steps taken in interpretation; subjectivity was not bracketed but documented so it could be scrutinised (Finlay, 2002; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Analysis followed a reflexive thematic exercise, reading transcripts to identify patterned meanings, and attempting to ascertain how those meanings arose in their immediate contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021). Transcripts are worked into meaning units, inductive codes and iteratively refined themes, with memo-writing to link episodes, language and emerging interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021). A short summary of interpretations is shared with participants for brief comment to assess resonance rather than to seek positivist "verification" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016). This combination—event-centred interviewing, documentary context and reflexive, theme-building analysis—keeps the focus on how ethical understanding is produced and enacted in situ.

3.4 Research implementation: phased outline

This section sets out how the research design was implemented. **Figure 11** summarises the six implementation phases in the order in which the main research tasks were organised. This phased structure supports transparency, traceability and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). Each

phase includes an overview of its fitness with the interpretivist–phenomenological design, the activity undertaken, its purpose, the outcome and the main artefacts generated. Detailed procedural checklists and replication materials are provided in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps**.

Figure 11: Research implementation 6-phase outline

Phase 1: Ethics approval and consent materials

Institutional approval; participant pack (information sheet, privacy notice, consent form) and a short consent script covering remote recording, withdrawal, anonymisation and retention (BERA, 2018; ESRC, 2015; Creswell, 2014; EU GDPR 2016/679; Data Protection Act 2018).

Phase 2: Participant recruitment and verification

Purposive sampling and eligibility checks; inclusion criteria; "information power" rationale; role and company verification via Companies House and website corroboration (Patton, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2014; Malterud et al., 2016; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Limited, verified referrals to widen reach without narrowing perspective (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008).

Phase 3: Data collection

Remote semi-structured interviews focused on specific decisions, trade-offs and justifications; in parallel, archiving of public materials (mission/ethics pages, policy statements, Companies House filings) with capture date/URL/filing ID for traceability (Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann, 2013; Bowen, 2009; Scott, 1990). Remote interviewing considerations were addressed explicitly (Opdenakker, 2006; Lo Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016).

Phase 4: Data protection and processing

Verbatim transcription with accuracy checks; stable pseudonym scheme; separation of raw and processed stores; encryption and role-based access; documented retention timetable (Creswell, 2014; EU GDPR 2016/679; UK Data Service, 2019). Indirect identifiers were generalised to reduce deductive disclosure risk (Kaiser, 2009).

Phase 5: Data analysis, member-checking and finalisation

The analysis proceeded reflexively using Braun & Clarke's six-phase approach with inductive coding and memo-writing, while reading public documents in parallel with transcripts to note points of convergence and divergence (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021; Bowen, 2009). A dated audit trail recorded codes, memos and theme revisions throughout (Nowell et al., 2017), and a concise, anonymised synthesis of the initial thematic structure with illustrative excerpts was produced to inform participant feedback (Saldaña, 2015). This synthesis was circulated in two short rounds; responses were logged and wording or boundary clarifications were incorporated where they improved fidelity without seeking consensus or verification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016; Smith & McGannon, 2018; Carlson, 2010; Morse, 2015). Finalisation involved tightening theme names, applying explicit selection rules for anonymised excerpts (typicality, salience, negative cases), and embedding the framework in the Findings and Discussion chapters with brief notes on documentary alignment or divergence and carefully curated exemplars (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Kaiser, 2009; Bowen, 2009).

Phase 6: Data deletion

Secure destruction of all research materials 60 days after examination, with a retained manifest; cryptographic/secure-erase methods and logged confirmations in line with institutional policy and recognised standards (EU/UK GDPR; UK Data Service, 2019; ICO, 2021; NIST SP 800-88 Rev.1).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.4.1 Phase 1: Ethics approval and participant consent

Before any contact with participants, the study obtained institutional ethics approval in line with University of Worcester policy and UK/EU data-protection requirements. Approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Committee on 31 July 2023. The submission covered the study aim, interpretivist–phenomenological design, recruitment pathway, remote semi-structured interview protocol, documentary materials, risk assessment, consent arrangements and data-protection measures; and followed sector guidance on research with human participants (BERA, 2018; ESRC, 2015; Creswell, 2014). Personal data processing rested on consent under UK/EU GDPR; safeguards covered collection, storage, access, retention and deletion. The consent process combined written consent prior to scheduling with a short verbal reconfirmation at interview, consistent with good practice in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

A replication checklist is provided in **Appendix A1**: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps **- A1.21 Phase 1**: Ethics approval and readiness to recruit.

Table 7: Ethics approval and participant consent phase (1) workflow.

Step	Overview
1. Objective	• secure **informed, specific and revocable consent** appropriate for conversational, co-constructed data; • minimise risk (emotional discomfort, reputational exposure, privacy in remote recording) through options to pause/skip/stop, stable pseudonyms, and removal/generalisation of identifiers; • ensure **lawful, fair and transparent** processing with clear retention and deletion; • maintain analytic credibility without compromising confidentiality, by separating raw and processed stores and documenting decisions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; BERA, 2018).
2. Fitness with the research design	Arrangements support a design that treats meaning as situated and co-produced while protecting participants' agency and confidentiality: • Autonomy and co-construction: consent options (recording, anonymised quotation, re-contact) allowed participants to shape how their contributions were used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; BERA, 2018). • Context sensitivity: risk assessment and anonymisation rules were geared to early-stage public-facing founders, where reputational sensitivity is heightened (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). • Transparency and traceability: a brief positional note, an audit trail of decisions, and clear retention/deletion schedules align with reflexive, naturalistic inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Step	Overview
3. Activity	The committee reviewed: (i) the aim and qualitative design; (ii) inclusion criteria and recruitment pathway; (iii) the remote, semi-structured interview protocol; (iv) the documentary corpus to be archived; (v) a risk register with mitigations; and (vi) data-protection arrangements. Version-controlled participant materials comprised: • Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Privacy Notice (purpose; participation; burdens/benefits; contacts; controller; lawful basis; data categories; recipients; storage location; retention/deletion; rights; DPO contact). • Consent Form with explicit tick-boxes for audio-recording, use of anonymised quotations, re-contact for member feedback, and permission to retain de-identified material for examination. • Short consent script for verbal reconfirmation at interview start.
4. Process and outcome	• Processing relied on consent (UK GDPR, Art. 6(1)(a)); special-category data were **not targeted**. If volunteered incidentally, such data were redacted at transcription or excluded unless explicit consent under Art. 9(2)(a) was obtained. Storage was on encrypted, institutionally managed systems with role-restricted access; raw recordings, working files and anonymised outputs sat in **separate directories** linked by a data map. The retention schedule mirrored university policy: primary and secondary data held until assessment and then deleted **60 days after successful examination**; the pseudonym key was destroyed at the same time. No international transfers occurred; storage remained in the UK/EU (EU GDPR 2016/679; Data Protection Act 2018; Creswell, 2014). • Institutional approval was granted with the participant pack and data-governance measures as submitted. Interviews proceeded under the two-step consent workflow: **written consent before scheduling** and **verbal reconfirmation** at the interview start. Risk mitigations were enacted in all sessions (right to skip/stop; debrief). The conflict-of-interest screen excluding firms regulated by Ofcom under the Online Safety Act 2023 was accepted and implemented. All materials were handled under the stated retention plan, with secure deletion scheduled **D + 60** (days post-examination) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; BERA, 2018; EU GDPR 2016/679).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.4.2 Phase 2: Participant recruitment and verification

Recruitment followed the study's interpretivist logic: to invite selected founders able to provide detailed, first-hand accounts of early ethical decision-making in technology-based ventures, while prioritising analytic depth and cross-case variation over numerical maximisation (Patton, 2002; Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls and Ormston, 2014). A purposive strategy was used to identify founders who met the eligibility criteria, including active status at the time of sampling and appointment as a company officer at

incorporation or within 60 days of incorporation. Limited initial snowballing widened the search after eligibility checks, although post-interview referrals did not generate further participants (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008).

The study did not begin from a fixed numerical target. Sampling adequacy was judged by the specificity of the research aim, the defined inclusion criteria, the expected quality of interview material and the need for variation across sectors and venture types, drawing on information power and guidance on reporting interview numbers in organisational research (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016; Saunders and Townsend, 2016). Recruitment and data collection took place after ethics approval was granted on 31 July 2023 and closed on 31 March 2024. Twenty-five eligible founders were interviewed within that window, and later expressions of interest were declined. The sample is therefore presented as the achieved dataset within a bounded qualitative design, not as a claim to exhaustiveness or statistical representation.

Organisation size was not used as an inclusion criterion, sampling variable, basis for cross-case grouping or analytic category. Founder accounts indicated team sizes ranging from one person to around 15 people, so the sample is described, on a headcount basis, as comprising micro-to-small early-stage ventures. Case-level size is not reported because, when combined with sector, technology focus, location, company age and verbatim extracts, it could increase the risk of identifying participants or ventures.

A replication checklist is available in **Appendix A1**: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps - **A1.22 Phase 2**: Participant recruitment and verification**.**

Table 8: Participant recruitment and verification (Phase 2) - workflow.

Step	Overview
1. Objective	• Identify founders able to provide detailed, first-hand accounts of ethical decision-making in technology-based early-stage ventures. • Check each case against the study's operational boundaries before contact, to ensure the achieved sample would be information-rich, varied and aligned with the defined scope rather than statistically representative.

Step	Overview
2. Fitness research design	The approach aligns with a design that seeks thick, context-dependent accounts rather than population estimates. Specifically, it: • treats founders as knowledgeable agents able to narrate situated reasoning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011); • uses purposive selection to secure variation in context and perspective (Patton, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2014); • uses information power to assess sample adequacy within the bounded recruitment window, consistent with reflexive, case-oriented analysis (Malterud et al., 2016); • anchors claims in lived accounts, with documentary materials providing organisational context (Bowen, 2009).
2. Activity	Candidates were identified through traceable public sources and practice-based networks, ensuring a clear audit trail: • Companies House; company websites; social-enterprise and tech-for-good directories; sector newsletters; and professional introductions (Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015). • Inclusion criteria were applied before contact. An initial snowballing via professional contacts was attempted to broaden reach after eligibility checks; however, post-interview referrals did not snowball into further participants (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008). • Outreach was direct and personalised; invitations attached the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, set the expected time (60–90 minutes), and explained confidentiality and withdrawal rights.
4. Process and outcome	• Twenty-five eligible founders were recruited and interviewed before the data-gathering window closed on 31 March 2024. • Data saturation was not adopted as the governing sampling logic. Adequacy was judged through bounded design, information power, account quality and cross-case contrast. Further interviews may have added nuance or additional boundary cases, but the achieved dataset was sufficiently rich, varied and coherent to address the research aim within the defined study boundaries.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Figure 12 summarises participant and case characteristics using the study's participant reference numbers and non-identifying descriptors. Protected characteristics were disclosed voluntarily, where participants chose to do so. **Table 31** in **Appendix A1**: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps provides the screened source register and the volume of candidates reviewed from each source.

Figure 12: Sample and recruitment profile (n = 25)

Characteristic	Summary
Recruitment and data-collection timeframe	Recruitment and data collection took place after ethics approval was granted on 31 July 2023 and closed on 31 March 2024.
Venture-stage eligibility	Eligible companies were incorporated less than five years before 31 March 2024.
Recruitment approach	Purposive sampling with eligibility checks; limited verified referrals were used to widen reach. Sampling adequacy was judged through information power, account quality and cross-case variation rather than a fixed numerical target or saturation claim.
Geographic scope	UK-registered companies, covering England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
Legal form and registration	Eligible entities were recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company". Entities designated "by guarantee" were excluded. Firms regulated by Ofcom under the Online Safety Act 2023 were also excluded to avoid conflict-of-interest screen.
Founder identification	"Founder" refers to a registered Companies House officer, director or company secretary appointed at incorporation or within 60 days of incorporation, active at the time of sampling, and publicly recognised as a founder or equivalent senior founding figure.
Organisation size	Founder accounts indicated team sizes from one person to around 15 people. The sample is therefore described as micro-to-small on a headcount basis. Case-level team sizes are not reported to protect anonymity.
Ethical Technology and orientation	Sampling targeted tech-enabled delivery and tech-driven development in ventures pursuing social, environmental, health or public-interest aims.
Diversity and representation	Diversity was considered within the limits of purposive sampling, eligibility and participant availability. Protected characteristics were not primary selection criteria. Gender was recorded only where participants chose to disclose it and is reported in aggregate where relevant to sample description.
Documentary materials used for verification	Public materials and Companies House records were used to support eligibility, founder-role and organisational-boundary checks before contact.
Anonymised reporting	Cases are reported using participant reference numbers and non-identifying descriptors.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.4.3 Phase 3: Data collection

Because the study relies in part on retrospective founder accounts, it does not assume that later narrations reproduce the salience structure of the original moment without distortion. Interview prompts therefore focused on concrete episodes, sequence, options considered, and immediate justifications rather than on generalised self-description. Event-centred prompts, including "tell me about the last time…" and "what options did

you weigh, and why?", were used to keep discussion close to lived decision episodes and practical reasoning in context (Flanagan, 1954; Husserl, 1970; Heidegger, 1962; Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann, 2013).

Public-facing materials and dated organisational records were read alongside interviews to provide temporal anchors and to identify where retrospective accounts aligned with, extended or sat in tension with contemporaneous organisational presentation. This did not eliminate hindsight or selective recall, but it reduced reliance on polished retrospective narratives alone (Kvale, 1996; Bowen, 2009; Flick, 2018).

Guided by the interpretivist–phenomenological stance, two data collection strands were used: semi-structured interviews and a case-matched documentary corpus of public organisational materials. Interviews elicited concrete decision episodes, trade-offs and justifications in founders' own terms. Documentary reading provided a contextual and triangulating layer, rather than an independent adjudicator of truth. Website materials, mission statements and other public records were used to situate interview accounts, identify convergence or divergence, and examine how values, safeguards and governance claims were presented publicly. Because these materials are public-facing and often strategic in tone, they were not allowed to override participants' accounts; instead, they were used to test boundaries, surface omissions and strengthen interpretive accountability (Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann, 2013; Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Flick, 2018).

A replication checklist is available in **Appendix A1**: **Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps** - **A1.23 Phase 3**: Data collection**.**

Table 9: Data collection workflow - interviews and documentary capture

Step	Overview
1. Objective	The design served three linked aims: • to elicit concrete, situated accounts of ethical judgement and action rather than abstract attitudes (Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann, 2013); • to place narrated practice within organisational and documentary context without displacing participants' accounts (Denzin, 1978; Bowen, 2009; Flick, 2018); • to preserve a traceable chain from data collection to later analysis through headers, field notes, capture logs and file records (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

2. Fitness with research design	The arrangements supported situated interpretation by combining event-centred interviews with case-matched public materials. Reflexive notes recorded assumptions, surprises and emerging interpretive questions during data collection, consistent with qualitative guidance on reflexivity and researcher-led interpretation (Finlay, 2002; Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021).
3. Activity	• Interviews and documents were gathered to a consistent protocol: • Interviews: Interviews were remote, audio-recorded and usually 60–90 minutes. Written consent preceded scheduling and verbal consent was reconfirmed at the start of each interview. The topic guide moved from descriptive prompts to decision-focused probes, including what happened, how the founder decided and why that course was chosen. Follow-up questions invited examples and counter-examples where founders referred to rules of thumb, intuitive judgement or tacit assumptions (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). • Sounding interviews: The first two interviews tested sequencing and phrasing. Minor revisions followed, including moving governance prompts earlier and simplifying one impact question. The substantive focus did not change, so both interviews were retained. • Transcription and field notes: Recordings were prepared for transcript checking and later processing. Headers recorded date, mode, duration, consent code and anonymised participant ID. Brief post-interview field notes captured context, rapport, salient incidents and emerging questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Charmaz, 2006). • Documentary capture: Public materials from websites and Companies House filings were captured where relevant, including mission or impact pages, accessibility statements, privacy or data-handling notices, terms, blog/news items, release notes and officer records. Capture date/time, URL or filing ID and checksum were recorded, and PDFs or screenshots were saved into a case-level inventory (Scott, 1990; Bowen, 2009).
4. Process and outcome	• Twenty-five interviews were completed and filed with field notes, transcripts prepared for processing and case-level document inventories. • Documentary packets were assembled for each case, indexed to the relevant interview and checked against file records before analysis began.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.4.4 Phase 4: Data protection and processing

Trust, confidentiality and traceability underpinned the handling of all materials. This phase converted the collected material into a protected analytic dataset through transcript checking, light denaturalisation, anonymisation, secure storage, controlled

access and documented file management, consistent with ethical guidance and UK data-protection requirements (Creswell, 2014; BERA, 2018; UK GDPR; Data Protection Act 2018).

A lightly denaturalised transcription approach was used. This retained participants' substantive wording and meaning, while unnecessary filler, repeated false starts, pauses and paralinguistic features were not systematically reproduced unless relevant to interpretation. This approach was appropriate because the analysis focused on ethical reasoning, decision accounts and meaning, rather than conversational performance (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005). Anonymisation then involved removing, replacing or generalising direct and indirect identifiers to reduce re-identification risk while retaining sufficient contextual detail for interpretation (Kaiser, 2009; Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015).

A checklist of replication steps is available in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps- A1.24 Phase 4**: Data protection and processing.

Table 10: Data protection and processing workflow

Step	Overview
1. Objective	To safeguard participant privacy, maintain dataset integrity, meet legal and ethical requirements, and preserve traceable links from raw material to anonymised analytic files without exposing identities (BERA, 2018; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; UK GDPR; Data Protection Act 2018).
2. Fitness with research design	The phase balanced confidentiality and data minimisation with auditability. This supported candid participation while allowing readers to inspect how claims were built from protected source material (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).
3. Activity	Interview transcripts and case files were processed as follows: • **Transcription and accuracy**: Interview audio was recorded in Glean, which generated draft transcripts. Each transcript was checked manually against the audio and prepared using a lightly denaturalised convention. Substantive wording and meaning were retained, while unnecessary filler, repeated false starts, pauses and paralinguistic features were not systematically reproduced unless relevant. Dragon, Microsoft Word, Excel and dated case files supported transcript checking, organisation and document handling. Glean was not used to generate codes, themes or interpretations. Scholarcy was used selectively as an assistive retrieval aid for locating terms and passages within already assembled material. • **Anonymisation**: Direct and indirect identifiers were removed, replaced or generalised through pseudonyms, ellipses and neutral placeholders, with transformations logged in the anonymisation record. Indirect

Step	Overview
	identifiers, including rare roles, distinctive client sectors, precise revenues or dates, were generalised to ranges or broader categories. Limited contextual details needed for interpretation were retained at higher abstraction. Transformations were logged, and the linkage key was stored separately on encrypted media with access restricted to the researcher (Kaiser, 2009; Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015). • **Storage, access and integrity**: Raw audio, raw transcripts and captured documents were stored on encrypted, institutionally managed systems with role-based access controls. Processed anonymised materials were stored separately. Files were classified as Highly Sensitive—Protected for raw audio, raw transcripts and the linkage key, and Confidential—Protected for anonymised transcripts and documentary packets. File names followed a consistent caseID_stage_version convention. A structured data map linked raw inputs to anonymised outputs and storage locations (Creswell, 2014; BERA, 2018; UK GDPR; Data Protection Act 2018).
4. Process and outcome	• The phase produced checked transcripts, an anonymised dataset, separated raw and processed files, and reduced re-identification risk while retaining interpretive context (Kaiser, 2009; Nowell et al., 2017). • The anonymisation log, linkage-key note, transcript headers, data map, checksum register and retention schedule preserved traceability under the approved data-management arrangements (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; BERA, 2018; UK GDPR; Data Protection Act 2018).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.4.5 Phase 5: Data Analysis, Member-checking and Finalisation

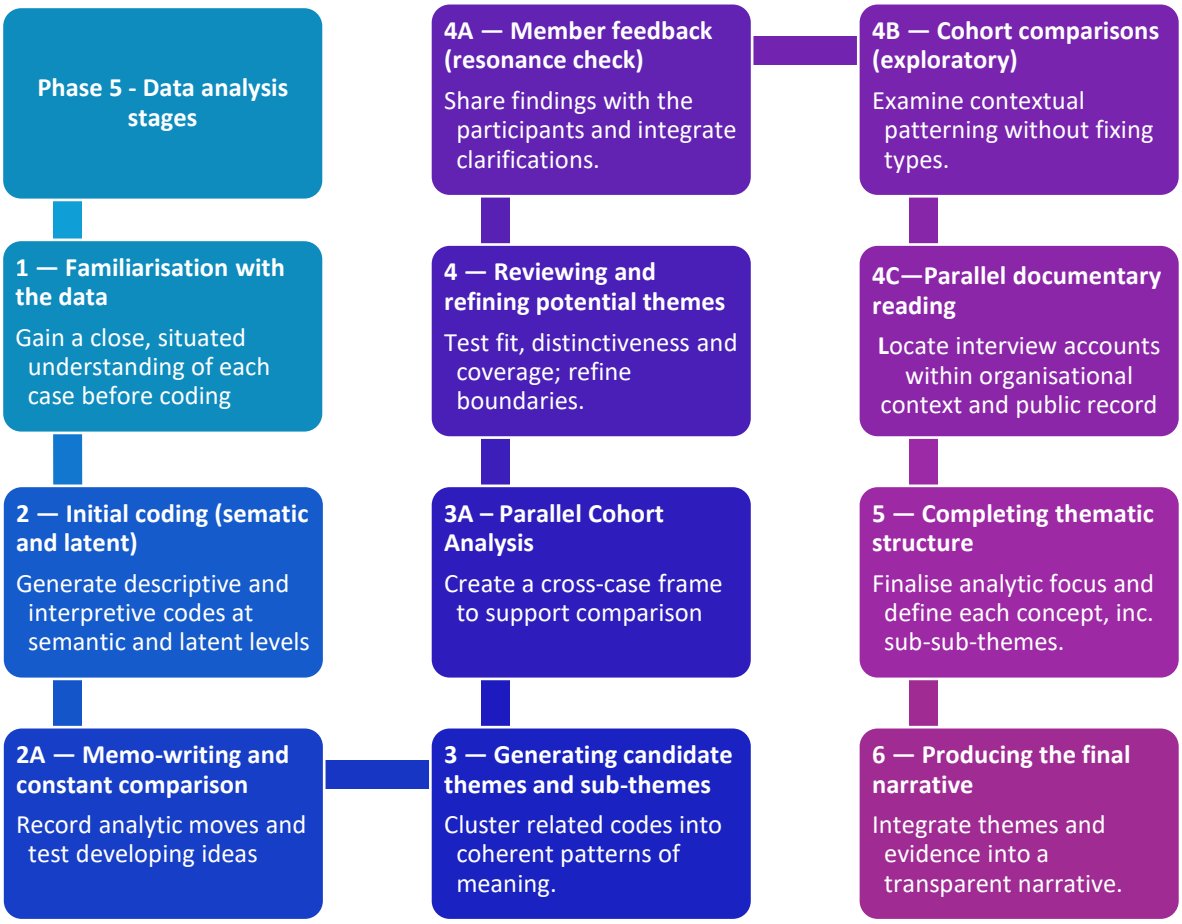
Phase 5 centred on reflexive thematic analysis within the interpretivist–phenomenological design. The primary analytic work followed six stages: familiarisation, initial coding, memo-writing and comparison, candidate theme development, theme review and refinement, and final narrative production. Meaning was treated as situated and examined through close reading, inductive coding, memo-writing and iterative interpretation. Prior literature was used as a sensitising resource rather than as a fixed coding frame; where unexpected patterns appeared, abductive moves drew on relevant concepts without forcing the material to fit them (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021).

Three supporting layers were added to this primary thematic process. First, member-checking was inserted after provisional theme review as a bounded resonance check, not

as respondent validation or a vote on analytic truth. Second, the C1–C4 cohort work was used as a secondary cross-case comparison layer to examine contextual patterning without fixing types or ranking cases. Third, documentary reading ran alongside familiarisation and coding but was synthesised after thematic and cohort work for clarity. Documents were used to locate interview accounts within organisational context and public record, not to overrule participants' accounts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016; Bowen, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Figure 13 maps this analytic sequence. It shows how the six-stage reflexive thematic analysis was extended by supporting analytic layers. Member feedback is shown as Stage 4A because it followed provisional theme review and informed final refinement. Cohort comparison is shown as 3A and 4B because evidence notes were maintained during coding, while exploratory comparison took place after the thematic map had stabilised. Documentary reading is shown as 4C because documents were available during familiarisation and coding but were synthesised after thematic and cohort work to preserve the primacy of participants' accounts. A replication checklist is available in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps** - **A1.25 Phase 5: Data Analysis, Member-checking and Finalisation.**

Figure 13: Data analysis and interpretation map based on Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke) — stages, objectives, and application in this study.



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Table 11 summarises the Phase 5 workflow. It is intended as an overview table. The detailed procedures for thematic analysis, member-checking, cohort comparison and documentary reading are then set out in Tables 13 to 16.

Table 11: Data Analysis, Member-checking and Finalisation workflow

Step	Overview
1. Objective	To develop a transparent, evidence-linked account of how founders defined and applied ethicality; to check interpretive resonance through bounded member-checking; to support contextual cross-case comparison; and to situate claims within organisational materials without estimating prevalence.
2. Fitness with research design	The phase fits the interpretivist–phenomenological design because it treats meaning as situated, uses inductive and reflexive coding, and relies on transparency rather than coder consensus to evidence rigour. Prior literature was used as a sensitising resource, with abductive moves made only where warranted by the data (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).
3. Activity	The primary analytic procedure followed the six-stage reflexive thematic analysis sequence. Supporting layers were added around that sequence: memo-writing and constant comparison, participant-facing resonance checking, descriptive C1–C4 cohort comparison and documentary convergence/divergence reading. These layers supported refinement, contextualisation and traceability, but did not replace the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021; Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bowen, 2009).
4. Process and outcome	The phase produced a stable thematic framework, a curated anonymised excerpt dossier, a member-check change log, a C1–C4 cohort worksheet, a comparison grid and a documentary convergence/divergence matrix. These materials underpin the Findings chapter and provide traceability into the Discussion.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

a) Thematic analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis structured the analytic work. Meaning was treated as situated in practice. Coding, memo-writing, theme development and cross-case comparison were examined through repeated transcript reading, and iterative interpretation, structured documents, spreadsheet-based matrices, colour coding, paraphrase-and-label sheets. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Word and Excel were used as organisational and traceability tools, not analytic engines. Glean supported recording, draft transcription and transcript preparation; Scholarcy was used only in a limited way to locate terms or passages within already assembled material; and Grammarly Pro supported expression and proofreading. These tools had practical and accessibility-related roles but did not shape the analytic logic of the study.

Table 12 sets out how the reflexive thematic analysis was undertaken and what audit-trail materials it generated.

Table 12: Reflexive thematic analysis workflow

1. Objective	To surface patterned meanings in how founders defined and applied ethicality, and to show how claims were built from data rather than to estimate prevalence.
2. Fitness with research design	The approach privileges situated understanding, practical reasoning and researcher-led interpretation. Rigour was evidenced through transparency, memo-writing and an audit trail, rather than coder consensus (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).
3. Activity	• **Familiarisation** involved repeated reading of transcripts and associated documentary material, with salient passages paraphrased and labelled (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2015). • **Coding** attended to semantic content and latent assumptions through close reading, memo-writing, comparison and iterative refinement (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021). • **Analytic memos** recorded conjectures, rival explanations and boundary decisions. Constant comparison tested emerging interpretations against confirming, boundary and negative cases (Charmaz, 2006; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). • **Related codes** were clustered into candidate themes and sub-themes. A theme-evolution table recorded renaming, splitting, merging and boundary changes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019). • **Candidate** themes were reviewed against the dataset for coherence, distinctiveness and evidential support. Anonymised extracts were selected for relevance, typicality, salience and negative-case value while protecting anonymity (Kaiser, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994). • **Following member-checking**, theme labels, boundaries and selected extracts were finalised. Changes were logged and the write-up linked themes to the research objectives, literature and audit-trail materials (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).
4. Process and outcome	The process produced a stable set of named themes, concise analytic definitions, clarified boundaries and a curated anonymised excerpt dossier, all linked to coded material and decision notes through an audit trail. Final definitions reflect member-checking refinements recorded in **Appendix A2: Member-checking template letters** and **Appendix A3: Mapping of domains to thematic findings and member-checking stages**.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) Member-checking (resonance check)

A two-stage member-checking exercise was carried out in which participants were invited to comment on an anonymised summary of provisional themes with the purpose of identifying misreadings, missing nuance or wording that required clarification. The researcher retained analytic responsibility for theme development and final

interpretation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016; Smith and McGannon, 2018). The exercise was used as a bounded resonance check rather than as respondent validation or a vote on analytic truth. In the sequencing shown in **Figure 13**, it followed theme review and supported refinement without recourse to positivist "verification". **Table 13** summarises the member-checking process, timing and resulting amendments.

Table 13: Member-checking (resonance check) workflow.

Step	Overview
1. Objective	To surface misreadings or missing nuance, demonstrate ethical reciprocity, and document consequential changes to labels, boundaries and exemplars.
2. Fitness with research design	Member-checking was used to check whether interpretations "rang true" to participants' experience, consistent with reflexivity (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Carlson, 2010; Morse, 2015).
3. Activity	• Following dataset-level theme review and before final naming/definitions, a five-page anonymised summary (theme titles, plain-language synopses, de-identified paraphrases, two prompts) was emailed to all 25 participants. • Direct quotations were not circulated to avoid identifiability. • Stage 1 (10–24 July 2024) yielded five responses (notes or short calls), logged with proposed actions. A two-page addendum summarised edits and invited further concerns (Aug–Sep 2024). All correspondence was stored on encrypted, institutional systems.
4. Process and outcome	Edits sharpened labels and boundaries, split one sub-theme (compliance- vs value-driven responses), replaced potentially identifying excerpts, and strengthened four areas: cognitive and emotional dissonance; distinction between outputs and impact; explicit link between user-centred design and JEDI; and technology as enabler and risk with concrete mitigations. Several sub-sub-themes ("domains") were named to organise existing material. No objections were raised at Stage 2.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

c) Cohort analysis

A light, cross-case archetypal cohort frame was maintained alongside coding to support structured comparison without fixing types. It operated as a descriptive analytic layer within reflexive thematic analysis, organising cross-case reading as initial themes formed and supporting exploratory patterning checks once the thematic map had stabilised and member-checking edits were integrated.

Classifications were grounded in evidence of routine practice rather than aspiration, with boundary and negative cases retained to avoid reification. Documentary inputs for this comparison were limited to publicly available venture website materials (including policy and impact pages, accessibility statements, privacy/data-handling notices, terms where relevant, blogs/news updates, and release notes or change logs where available) and were used to contextualise interview accounts rather than as confirmatory evidence.

The cohort analysis produced a cohort worksheet with scores and short evidence notes for each case, a consolidated grid showing cohort labels and notable indicators, and brief adjudication notes where suggested and assigned cohorts diverged. The C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame was used as a descriptive analytic layer alongside reflexive thematic analysis. It supported transparent cross-case comparison without replacing the thematic findings.

Three comparison lenses were applied and are reported separately in the thesis:

- **Comparison lens 1: named industry cluster (a priori).** Each venture was grouped by its primary public-interest domain, using publicly available website materials, including mission or impact pages and core product or service descriptions, as the classification basis.
- **Comparison lens 2: technology orientation (a priori).** Each case was classified as predominantly tech-enabled or tech-driven. Tech-enabled ventures used technology mainly to support delivery, coordination, access or operations. Tech-driven ventures depended more directly on a technological system as the main mechanism through which impact was produced. The criteria for this distinction were specified in advance and applied consistently across cases.
- **Comparison lens 3: technology integration depth (emergent).** During theme refinement, an additional lens was developed inductively

to describe how ethical intent appeared to become stabilised through technology, routines, safeguards, organisational controls and evidence practices. This lens was expressed through the C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame. The frame recorded a small set of evidence-anchored indicators per case, with 0–2 scoring used only to support consistent description.

These outputs are reported as exploratory patterning within this dataset. They do not imply statistical inference, prediction, maturity scoring, moral ranking or fixed classification. .

Table 14 summarises how this comparison was produced, checked and recorded.

Table 14: Cohort analysis workflow - objective, fitness, activity, process and outcome.

Step	Overview
1. Objective	To make visible the organisational conditions within which ethical judgements were formed—such as traceability, release discipline and stakeholder routines—so thematic claims could be read in context.
2. Fitness with research design	Cohorts were an organising aid to illuminate contextual patterning without fixing types. Judgements were grounded in evidenced practice, and boundary/negative cases were retained to avoid reification (Ragin, 1987; Braun & Clarke, 2019).
3. Activity	The frame was populated during coding and used for comparisons after the thematic map settled and member-checking edits were integrated. Transcripts and documents were read together; key passages were paraphrased and labelled, with evidence pointers logged (e.g., transcript page/lines; "About us", policy section). Indicators 1–10 were scored 0–2 on evidence of routine practice rather than aspiration. A cohort label (C1–C4) was assigned from the analysis code and cross-checked with a simple rule set using I2–I10 side-by-side grids highlighted typical, boundary and negative cases.
4. Process and outcome	The process produced a cohort worksheet with scores and short evidence notes for each case, a consolidated grid showing cohort labels and notable indicators, and brief adjudication notes where suggested and assigned cohorts diverged. These materials supported transparent cross-case comparison alongside reflexive thematic analysis. Outputs are reported as exploratory patterning within this dataset and do not imply statistical inference, prediction, maturity scoring or moral classification.

Source: author synthesis

Implementation indicator matrix and C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame

To support transparent cross-case comparison, an implementation indicator matrix was developed after the primary thematic analysis had stabilised. It was not introduced as a pre-validated instrument, fixed coding frame or maturity model. It was used as a bounded evidence-led aid to examine a narrower question arising from the findings: not only what founders said about ethics, responsibility, boundaries and technology, but how far those commitments appeared to be translated into operational practice across cases. The thematic analysis remained the primary analytic procedure and the principal basis of the findings.

The matrix was therefore developed as a secondary interpretive device. In keeping with the interpretivist and phenomenological design of the study, the C1–C4 frame was not specified in advance or imposed on the data. It was assembled after the thematic structure had settled, using case-level comparison, memo-writing and pattern review to make recurring ethics–technology integration configurations more visible across the dataset.

The resulting **C1–C4** labels are treated as **within-study archetypal cohorts**. "Cohort" refers to their use as empirical cross-case groupings within this study. "Archetypal" refers to their interpretive function: each cohort captures a recurring configuration of ethical commitments, technological reliance, organisational routines and evidence practices. They should not be read as sectors, maturity scores, fixed organisational types, causal categories, moral rankings or universal stages. Industry clusters are used separately as contextual descriptors.

The evidence base for the matrix comprised interview transcripts as the primary source, supplemented by case-matched documentary materials. Interviews remained central because the study is concerned with founders' own accounts of ethical decision-making, practical judgement and constraint. Documentary materials comprised of public-facing texts were not treated as independent adjudicators of truth. They were used to situate interview accounts, note convergence or divergence, and strengthen interpretive transparency.

The matrix was structured in two steps. **Step 1** addressed whether a case showed an identifiable ethical or public-interest orientation and whether that orientation had begun to take operational form. This distinction was important because the material repeatedly showed that ethical commitment did not always take the same practical form across cases. In some ventures, ethics remained largely at the level of founder intention, personal judgement or informal restraint. In others, those commitments had begun to appear as requirements, constraints or practical expectations shaping development and delivery.

For that reason, the first two indicators were treated as analytically prior. I**1 Ethical Intent captured** whether the case showed an articulated ethical or public-interest orientation that appeared to matter in decision-making. **I2 Non-functional Requirements** captured whether that orientation had been translated into operational expectations, constraints or criteria. This distinction separated what founders said mattered from what had begun to be embedded in practical design, delivery or safeguarding expectations. Because all included cases met the study's scope requirements for public-interest orientation, I1 also functioned partly as a baseline qualifying condition and is therefore best read separately from the later comparative totals.

Step 2 then examined whether that ethical orientation and operational translation were carried through into broader implementation practices. These included verification, release discipline, data governance, stakeholder engagement, organisational governance, artefact production, change management and external alignment. Taken together, these indicators were used to capture the main observable sites at which ethical commitments appeared to become operational, traceable and sustained across the cases.

Each indicator was scored on a simple three-point basis: 0 where no clear evidence of the practice was identified in the available material, 1 where evidence was partial, emerging, informal or uneven, and 2 where evidence was clearer, more consistent, more formalised or more traceable. These scores were not intended to measure moral worth or organisational virtue. They were structured judgements of evidenced practice used to support transparent comparison across cases.

Cohort allocation was not performed mechanically and did not rest on totals alone. Each case was read holistically through its score profile, the confidence attached to the evidential base, and the short evidence notes recorded alongside the matrix. The C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame therefore functioned as a structured comparison aid rather than as an automated classification system. Full indicator definitions, scoring examples, interpretation notes and cohort decision rules are provided in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps**.

The matrix and C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame are used in **Chapter 4: Findings** only as secondary descriptive aids to support cross-case comparison. They do not displace the thematic findings as the primary analytic account.

d) Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis was used to situate interview accounts within public-facing organisational materials. The documents were not treated as independent adjudicators of truth or as a basis for overruling participants' accounts. Their role was to provide organisational and temporal context, identify convergence or divergence with founder narratives, and support interpretation where public claims, governance statements or formal records helped clarify the setting of the account (Bowen, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Flick, 2018). **Table 15** summarises the documentary capture, reading and comparison workflow.

Table 15: Documentary analysis workflow

Step	Overview
1. Objective	To provide organisational and temporal context; to anchor sampling and role verification; and to identify where practice and presentation converged or parted, informing analysis and write-up.
2. Fitness with research design	Triangulation supplied context and anchors (e.g., dates, appointments) while keeping participants' situated reasoning central (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2018).

Step	Overview
3. Activity	For each case, mission/values pages, ethics/impact statements, governance/about pages, privacy/terms, selected blog/news items and Companies House filings were captured with date/time, URL or filing ID, and checksum. Texts were anonymised, segmented and structurally coded; a reading grid noted aims/constraints, compliance claims and factual anchors. Codes were aggregated to categories aligned with the research objectives and compared across domains. Alignment and divergence with interview accounts were summarised briefly. Structural codes were informed by the literature on ethics, technology and social innovation to support consistent categorisation across cases.
4. Process and outcome	An anonymised documentary packet per case; completed reading grids; and a comparison matrix of convergence/divergence points used in Findings and Discussion.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.4.6 Phase 6: Data deletion—plan and procedure

This final phase is scheduled for 60 days after formal confirmation of the examination outcome (D + 60). The same steps apply irrespective of outcome, consistent with the retention and deletion undertakings set out in the participant information and consent materials. The aim is to end the data lifecycle in line with the storage-limitation principle and the undertakings made at consent. Replication steps are available in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps.**

Table 16: Data deletion workflow

Step	Overview
2. Objective	To fulfil consent commitments and legal obligations on storage limitation and data minimisation; to remove any residual link between scholarly outputs and personal data once the anonymisation key is destroyed; and to maintain a transparent audit trail of what was deleted, when, how and by whom.
3. Fitness with research design	Trust, confidentiality and auditability underpin the credibility of interpretive work. Time-bounded retention and verifiable deletion uphold the ethical compact with participants, protect co-constructed accounts, and close the evidential chain without leaving residual identifiers. The schedule and documentation reinforce credibility, dependability and confirmability while honouring consent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; BERA, 2018; UKRIO, 2019).

Step	Overview
4. Activity	Work proceeded in a defined sequence that can be replicated: **1. Dry-run rehearsal**: A dummy deletion on a non-identifiable test set mirrored the live folder structure and file types. This validated the sequence, the tools and the log formats, and informed the final step order. **2) Scope and order of destruction.** Items are removed in a fixed order to minimise re-identification risk and prevent orphaned linkages: raw audio and any residual automated transcripts; b) contact and recruitment files; c) Working transcripts containing identifiers; d) Processed analytical files (coded transcripts, codebooks, node matrices); e) The anonymisation key linking pseudonyms; f) "Trash"/"Bin" areas and application caches. **3) Checks and documentation:** a) Before deletion, a freeze date and a definitive file manifest of Institutional drives, encrypted files and repositories, cloud services and local copies (NIST, 2014; ISO/IEC 27001:2013 controls A.8 & A.18); b) After deletion, spot-checks to confirm the absence of hashed files and successful destruction of encryption keys. (Nowell et al., 2017; UK Data Service, 2019).
4. Process and outcome	Planned outcome: • At D + 60, primary and secondary research data are securely destroyed, including audio files, lightly denaturalised transcripts, field notes, memo files, coded datasets or exports, documentary captures, contact logs, scheduling records and other identifiable research materials. Access tokens are revoked and trash/bin areas are emptied. • The thesis and embedded anonymised appendices are retained as scholarly outputs only where they contain no personal data and are no longer linkable once the pseudonym key has been destroyed. • Project closure is recorded in line with data minimisation, storage limitation and research data-governance requirements (Data Protection Act 2018; BERA, 2018; UKRIO, 2019; ICO, 2021; UK Data Service, 2019).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has set out how the study was designed and enacted to examine founders' ethical decision-making in socially innovative, technology-based ESVs. The design flows from a subjectivist ontology and a constructivist–interpretivist epistemology in which meanings are produced in context and through interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Burr, 2015). Guided by phenomenology, the study attends to founders' lived experience and practical reasoning rather than to the testing of pre-specified variables (Husserl, 1970; Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1990). Accordingly, a qualitative, case-oriented design is used to understand meaning in context; ethical considerations are traced as they are worked out in practice.

The methods were chosen to match that stance. Semi-structured interviews elicited concrete decision episodes, trade-offs and justifications in founders' own terms (Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann, 2013), while a parallel documentary corpus—mission and ethics/impact pages, policy statements and Companies House filings—positioned those accounts within each venture's public claims and statutory record (Bowen, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015). The interview–document combination suits settings where tacit and explicit knowledge meet: interview narrative can reveal habits, heuristics and unspoken norms, while public materials provide the setting and a simple cross-check (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Sampling was set up to capture formative choices under ESV conditions. Using purposive selection, the study recruited UK-registered, for-profit ventures incorporated less than five years before **31 March 2024**, each using digital technology in pursuit of an explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aim. Founder status was confirmed via Companies House officer records and cross-checked on the firm's website. Sectoral spread and attention to founder diversity widened vantage points; the aim was depth and contrast rather than population inference. Sample sufficiency followed the "information power" principle instead of a fixed number (Patton, 2002; Malterud et al., 2016). These boundaries make clear the scope of the claims and help readers judge transferability (Marmer et al., 2011; OECD, 2017; Harper-Anderson & Lewis, 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A light archetypal cohort frame served as an organising aid to read the themes against organisational conditions. It used three descriptive lenses: (i) named industry clusters, used only as contextual descriptors; (ii) a technology-orientation read-out, distinguishing tech-enabled from tech-driven ventures; and (iii) an inductively derived C1–C4 archetypal cohort lens grounded in the ten implementation indicators (I1–I10). The C1–C4 lens was used to support cross-case comparison of how ethical commitments, technological reliance, organisational routines and evidence practices appeared together across the dataset. These labels support structured comparison without implying fixed types, maturity scores, causal claims, moral rankings or sector representativeness. The cohort framing is later developed conceptually through the EthOS Lifecycle.

Table 17: Cross-case comparison lenses and label definitions

Cohort comparison/ lenses	Definition
Industry clusters	Named contextual descriptors used to show sectoral range and situate the findings. The clusters are: education, learning and social care; HealthTech and wellbeing; environmental and sustainability ventures; digital inclusion and accessibility; behavioural, consumer and sustainability analytics; and cultural and creative technologies. They are not analytic cohorts, fixed categories or claims of sector representativeness.
Technology orientation	A descriptive distinction between tech-enabled ventures, where technology supports delivery, coordination or access, and tech-driven ventures, where the value proposition depends more directly on a technological system whose performance and governance shape impact and risk.
C1–C4 archetypal cohorts	Inductively derived cross-case groupings based on the implementation indicators (I1–I10). They are used to compare recurring configurations of ethical commitment, technological reliance, organisational routine and evidence practice. They are not sectors, maturity scores, fixed organisational types, causal categories or moral rankings. The cohort framing is later developed conceptually through the EthOS Lifecycle.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Trustworthiness was pursued through strategies associated with naturalistic inquiry: plausibility checks via brief participant feedback on anonymised summaries (to assess resonance rather than to "verify" findings), a documented record of decisions, and thick description around theme exemplars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016). Reflexive notes recorded assumptions, surprises and shifts in interpretation so that the researcher's position remained examinable rather than assumed neutral (Finlay, 2002; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Together these steps speak to credibility, dependability and confirmability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical conduct and data governance were integral throughout. Ethics approval was secured; consent materials explained recording, withdrawal, anonymisation and retention. Lightly denaturalised and accuracy-checked transcripts alongside pseudonyms and the removal or generalisation of identifiers protected confidentiality. Secure, role-restricted storage, separation of raw/processed data from the pseudonym key, and a retention schedule met institutional policy and legal requirements, with secure deletion

planned 60 days post-examination (Creswell, 2014; BERA, 2018; EU/UK GDPR 2016/679; UK Data Service, 2019).

The approach has limitations. The sample is not statistically representative; interviews rely on recall and narration; the cross-sectional window captures a period rather than trajectories; and remote interviewing may constrain rapport for some participants. Design choices sought to mitigate these issues: purposive "information-power" sampling, attention to sectoral and founder variation, pairing interviews with public records, and maintaining a transparent decision record and reflexive commentary (Patton, 2002; Malterud et al., 2016; Bowen, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study does not aim for prediction; it offers situated explanations that readers can assess for transferability to cognate settings. Reflexive notes and memo-writing were used to make analytic judgements, assumptions, and boundary decisions visible, including where accounts were ambivalent, conflicted, or not readily reconciled. Negative and boundary instances were retained in coding and carried through into theme development to reduce the risk of over-smoothing or over-cohering participants' accounts.

Why this design and not alternatives? Large-scale surveys would have flattened the very context dependence at issue; experiments or quasi-experiments are ill-suited to unfolding, ethically charged choices within young firms; long-term ethnography, while attractive, was impracticable across multiple ventures in early formation. An interpretivist, phenomenological design, combining event-centred interviews with documentary context and reflexive thematic analysis, fits the kind of knowledge the research seeks to generate: how founders understand, justify and revise ethical positions in practice (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Finally, the chapter has been written to enable replication. The six-phase implementation, with analytic sub-phase (ethics; recruitment and verification; data collection; processing and protection; analysis; member feedback; finalisation; deletion) is specified with artefacts—protocols, logs, templates, coding materials and data-management documents—listed in the appendices. The next chapter draws on this analytic pathway to present the themes generated from the data, illustrated with anonymised excerpts and read alongside the documentary record, before the Discussion situates those patterns

within the wider literature on ethics, innovation and entrepreneurial practice (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Crane, Matten, & Spence, 2019).

The analytic sequence was overlapping rather than strictly linear. Data collection was followed by transcript checking and documentary preparation, before coding and theme development proceeded through reflexive thematic analysis. Member-checking was undertaken once the provisional thematic interpretation had stabilised, and resulting refinements were carried into the final thematic structure. Cohort and documentary readings were then used as secondary interpretive layers to support cross-case comparison and contextualisation. **Figure 14** in **Chapter 4: Findings** summarises this movement from data collection to analysis and finalisation.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings on how founders of socially innovative, technology-based ventures navigate ethical decision-making in early-stage contexts. In this thesis, ESVs refers to early-stage ventures that combine a social mission with technology-enabled or technology-driven delivery, and that are treated as public-interest oriented within their stated purpose and operating choices. In this chapter, ethicality is treated as a situated, practice-based construct: how founders define what counts as 'right' or 'acceptable' action in context, how they justify decisions under constraint, and how they translate those judgements into governance, design, and day-to-day operations. The chapter first sets out the overall analysis sequence, then reports the findings produced through reflexive thematic analysis. It subsequently presents participant-facing member feedback (as a resonance check), followed by a light cohort comparison, technology depth and a documentary synthesis that contextualises interview accounts using public organisational materials.

The findings are organised into three themes. Interpretation is unavoidably shaped by the researcher's standpoint. The presentation below therefore reports both majority patterns and less frequent, more conflicted accounts, particularly where founders described compromise, fatigue or unresolved tension. Theme 1, 'Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance', focuses on values, boundary-work, and forms of responsibility. Theme 2, 'Social impact strategy', examines how ethical aims are integrated into financial, strategic, and governance practices. Theme 3, 'Tech for good', explores how ethics are embedded in data practices, design decisions, and technology integration. Each theme is structured into sub-themes and sub-sub-themes, illustrated with anonymised extracts, followed by a cohort and documentary comparison (Section **4.4)**. A thematic map summarising the relationships between the three themes is included at the start of the chapter.

Building on the design and analytic procedures outlined in **Chapter 3**: **Research methodology**, this chapter presents findings generated from 25 founder interviews read alongside case-matched public materials. Founder accounts are treated as situated judgements rather than freestanding truth claims. Documentary sources are used to contextualise what participants described, including mission framing, governance signals, privacy positioning and checkable organisational anchors; they are not used to verify accounts in a positivist sense (Bowen, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The reporting sequence follows the analytic process set out in **Chapter 3: Research methodology**. The chapter first presents the outputs of reflexive thematic analysis, including theme definitions, boundaries and illustrative excerpts. It then introduces the supporting analytic layers: member-checking as a bounded resonance check, descriptive cohort comparison using the ten implementation indicators (I1–I10), and documentary synthesis of convergence and divergence between interview accounts and public-facing organisational materials.

The member-checking outcome is reported in Section **4.3**, where refinements to labels, boundaries and interpretive emphasis are summarised. The C1–C4 cohort comparison is reported in Section **4.4** as a descriptive cross-case reading aid, not as a replacement for the thematic findings. Documentary analysis is reported in Section **4.5** as a contextual layer, not as independent proof of practice.

The study pursues six objectives, outlined in

Figure 2. Given the study's interest in underlying assumptions, attention is paid to how founders frame obligation and justification—whether as universal duties or as negotiated, context-specific norms—and to how these framings inform governance and design choices (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Treviño et al., 2006).

Figure 14 summarises an overlapping process rather than a strictly linear sequence. Interviewing, transcript preparation, documentary capture, coding and memo-writing overlapped in practice rather than occurring as separate blocks. Once the provisional thematic interpretation had stabilised, member-checking, cohort comparison and

documentary synthesis were completed as supporting analytic layers. The process was therefore iterative in analysis, but ordered in presentation for clarity (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

Figure 14: Overlapping movement from data collection to analysis and finalisation (Phases 3–5)



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Four terms are distinguished at the outset. Themes are the primary analytic structure and carry the main findings. Industry clusters are descriptive sector-based groupings used to show how ethical issues appear across six fields of activity. Cohorts are cross-case groupings derived from recurring evidence patterns and used to compare technology depth and ethical focus. The implementation indicators (I1–I10) support the cohort comparison; they are descriptive aids, not findings in their own right.

Figure 15 outlines the chapter structure. It follows the Phase 5 workflow while separating the primary findings from the supporting analytic layers used to contextualise them.

Figure 15: Structure of Chapter 4: Findings

4.2 Reflexive thematic analysis: Analytic sequence and audit trail anchors
4.3 Finalised thematic framework: Themes, sub-themes and member-checking refinements.
4.4 Cohort and industry-cluster comparison: Descriptive cross-case patterning
4.5 Documentary synthesis: Convergence and divergence with public materials
4.6 Conclusion: Integrated recap and link to the discussion.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

4.2 Reflexive thematic analysis — analytic sequence and audit trail anchors

Each interview was read repeatedly alongside its case documents (and any field notes) to support close familiarisation before formal coding. Salient passages were paraphrased

in one sentence and reduced to short provisional labels (typically two–three words) to seed an evolving code list. These labels were then applied and refined as **semantic codes** (what is explicitly stated) and **latent codes** (underlying assumptions, tensions, or implicit logics). Notes on **case coverage and concentration** were recorded descriptively to foreground variation across contexts rather than to estimate prevalence.

Throughout coding, brief dated memos captured conjectures, rival explanations, and boundary decisions, supported by constant comparison within and across cases to retain typical, boundary, and negative instances. Related codes were then clustered into candidate themes and sub-themes, each documented with an organising idea, inclusion and exclusion rules, and indicative excerpts. A theme-evolution table recorded renaming, splits/merges, and boundary edits with time-stamped rationales, and these materials informed the subsequent dataset-level review and final theme definition (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

With candidate themes and provisional boundaries documented, the analysis moved into a dataset-level review to test coherence, distinctiveness, and evidential coverage. This review remained iterative: boundaries were sharpened through return-to-data checks, and refinements were captured in the theme-evolution table. A bounded participant-facing resonance check then supported targeted clarification of wording and scope where this improved fidelity to accounts, and these refinements were incorporated into final theme naming and definition.

*Table 18: Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke) — Stages 1–3 (see Stages 4–6 in **Table 24**)*

Stage	Aim	Activities
1. Familiarisation	Gain a close, situated understanding before coding	Each interview was read several times alongside its case documents. Salient passages were paraphrased in one sentence, then compressed to 2–3-word labels. Margin notes logged links, tensions and follow-ups.
2. Initial coding	Generate descriptive (semantic) and interpretive (latent) codes	Seed labels were applied to segments and refined case-by-case. Code spread/ concentration was noted descriptively across cases (variation, not prevalence). Materials were organised with simple matrices, index cards/spreadsheets, and filed case files; retrieval used page–line references and case IDs.

Stage	Aim	Activities
2A. Memo-writing and constant comparison	Record analytic moves; test and refine ideas	Short memos captured conjectures, rival explanations, and boundary decisions with dates. Constant comparison within and across cases checked typical, boundary and negative instances; notes were flagged for later review.
3. Generate candidate themes	Cluster related codes into coherent patterns of meaning	Related codes were grouped into candidate themes/sub-themes. For each, a memo set the organising idea, inclusion/exclusion rules and illustrative extracts.

4.2.1 Generating and sharing initial findings

During the review of potential themes (Step 4), candidate themes were examined for coherence, distinctiveness and coverage across the dataset; boundaries were redrawn where overlap or gaps appeared, and weakly supported ideas were collapsed or set aside (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). This activity revealed a consistent pattern: founders sought to hold ethical commitments steady while meeting growth and delivery pressures. Several described a duty to apply their know-how to pressing social problems even where this implied slower sales cycles or tighter margins; others reported routine strains where funding, speed-to-market and inclusion goals pulled in different directions.

Member-checking (Step 4A) functioned as a bounded resonance check rather than as a mechanism for transferring analytic authority back to participants (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). An anonymised synopsis of the provisional themes was shared with participants, and responses were logged and used to refine wording, scope and emphasis where this improved fidelity to the accounts. Participants broadly affirmed the structure and offered clarifications around emotional as well as cognitive tensions, impact measurement, inclusive design, and technology's dual role as enabler and risk. No substantial divergence emerged that required the thematic interpretation to be withdrawn or restructured.

Table 19 summarises the themes and sub-themes circulated during Stage 1 and the corresponding feedback received.

Table 19: Stage 1 findings shared for member-checking and refinements incorporated into the final thematic structure

Theme	Subtheme	Summary of findings	Feedback received
Theme 1: Aligning Integrated Values with Business Impact	1.1 Agile Adherence to Values and Boundaries	Founders dynamically adapt ethical practices in response to evolving needs, maintaining value alignment through selective stakeholder engagement.	Affirmed the dynamic nature of values; need to make clearer legal, ethical, and personal boundaries.
	1.2 Values-Based Cognitive Dissonance	Founders experience internal conflict between ethical commitment and profit maximisation. Dissonance is navigated flexibly to ensure mission progress, acknowledging that full ethical purity may not be feasible.	Emphasised emotional discomfort; need to distinguish cognitive and emotional dimensions.
	1.3 Business for Good: Sustainable Strategies	Founders prioritise sustainability, CSR, and ethics, often foregoing short-term gains. Strategic reassessment ensures continuing alignment with ethical standards.	Strengthen treatment of governance; distinguish CSR, sustainability and regenerative practices.
Theme 2: Social impact strategy: the osmotic innovation synergy	2.1 Engagement, Research, and Growth Synergies	Founders actively leverage sectoral expertise and feedback to refine ethical strategies and develop innovations.	Underline the importance of impact measurement and truth-telling as part of ethical learning.
	2.2 Sector-Specific and Tech-Focused Strategic Planning	Profit is reinvested to advance socially oriented goals. Technological limitations and risks are recognised and strategically mitigated.	Clarify governance, operational effectiveness, and the ethical rationale for reinvestment.
Theme 3: Tech for Good: Compliance, Challenges, and Solutions	3.1 Technological Integration: Advantages and limitations	Founders use technology responsibly, acknowledging both its benefits and inherent risks. Investments support ethical innovation.	Articulate technology's dual role and its systemic implications more explicitly.
	3.2 User-Centric Design and Integration	Founders emphasise inclusive, compliant, and ethical design. Legal obligations and equality, accessibility and inclusion as principles underlying development practices.	Emphasise the focus to embed inclusion in organisational culture, not just product features.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Credibility was supported through the resonance check alongside documentary contextualisation, active searching for boundary and negative cases, and a documented audit trail comprising the coding manual, analytic memos, a theme-evolution table and a documentary reading grid; transferability rests on clearly stated boundary conditions—early-stage, UK-registered, technology-based, public-interest ventures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016; Bowen, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Nowell et al., 2017).

These steps completed the review, resonance-checking and refinement of the provisional themes. The next section presents the finalised thematic framework and shows how the shared thematic structure was re-labelled and organised for reporting.

4.3 Finalised thematic framework

This section presents the final thematic framework after member-checking refinement. Following completion of the thematic structure (Step 5), each theme was given a concise analytic definition and a name that captured its central organising idea rather than a topic label. Sub-sub-themes were specified from the shared narrative and the member-feedback record, with inclusion/exclusion rules and excerpt-selection criteria documented. Quotations were anonymised and curated to balance typical and boundary cases, with identifiability checks applied throughout (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021; Kaiser, 2009).

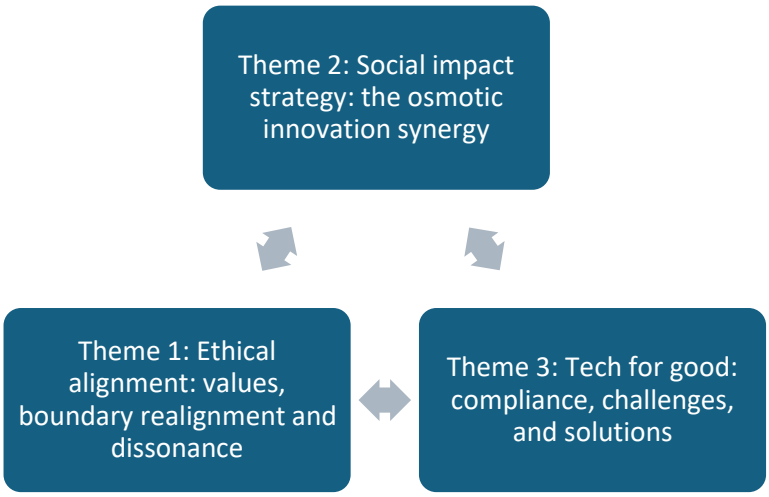
Participant feedback refined rather than overturned the analytic frame. The final structure retains the themes and sub-themes shared during member-checking, while making the sub-sub-themes more explicit for reporting. For transparency, the domains referenced in the final themes were already present in the shared narrative; they are presented in structured form for clarity and traceability, not as new findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

The final write-up (Step 6) links themes and sub-themes to the research objectives and literature, using extracts to show the route from data to claim. Interpretive accountability is supported by the audit trail (coding manual with examples, sample coded transcript, memo log, theme-evolution table, and the documentary reading grid).

Figure 16 presents a relational overview of the three themes. Theme 1, Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance, concerns how founders described the work of articulating, protecting and revising ethical commitments while operating within commercial, operational and regulatory constraints. Theme 2, Social impact strategy, examines how this ethical stance was carried into engagement, research, evidence, reinvestment and organisational practice. Theme 3, Tech for good – compliance, challenges and solutions, considers how ethical commitments were expressed, tested or strained through technological design, data practices, inclusion, compliance and governance.

The themes are presented as related rather than sequential. Ethics and technology cut across all three, with founders moving between values, strategy and socio-technical implementation as circumstances changed. Values work, as used here, refers to the practical activity through which founders interpret, apply, defend, revise and sometimes renegotiate ethical commitments in decision-making. It includes setting boundaries, justifying choices, responding to compromise, and considering whether commercial or technical action remains consistent with what the venture claims to stand for. The figure is therefore intended as a guide to the structure of the findings, not as a maturity ladder. Different ventures placed different emphasis on each theme, but all three were visible across the dataset.

Figure 16: Relational overview of themes: ethical boundary-work, impact practice and tech for good



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Table 20 sets out the same framework in tabular form. It lists each theme, its sub-themes, the updated finding after member-checking, and the domains that became the final sub-sub-themes. The table is not a second set of findings. It records how the shared thematic structure was re-labelled and organised after participant feedback, so that the route from provisional interpretation to final thematic structure is easier to follow. The domains are elaborated narratively in the thematic sections that follow and mapped against the Stage 1 findings and member-checking stages in **Appendix A3: Mapping of domains to thematic findings and member-checking stages**.

Table 20: Finalised thematic structure and summary of findings after member-checking refinements

Theme	Subtheme	Updated findings	Domains (Sub-sub-themes)
Theme 1: Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance	1.1 Dynamic adherence to and evaluation of values, boundaries, capabilities, and legal requirements	Founders continuously reassess ethical boundaries in response to evolving stakeholder needs and operational contexts, regarding their personal ethical identity, dynamic adherence to and evaluation of values, boundaries, capabilities, and legal requirements.	1.1.1 Self-awareness of personal ethics and professional capabilities as a catalyst for moral action.
			1.1.2 Adherence to legal and regulatory rules and standards.
			1.1.3 Adherence to ethical norms and standards.
			1.1.4 Systematic scanning, identification and assessment of moral issues and boundaries adjustment.
			1.1.5 Dynamic post-decision-making implementation of boundary adjustments, rebalancing and reconciling core business values, capabilities and social impact
	1.2 Values-based cognitive and emotional dissonance	Founders experience internal tension, described in both cognitive and emotional terms. This tension appeared to emerge particularly when commercial objectives came into perceived conflict with ethical ideals.	1.2.1 Recognising and accepting cognitive dissonance.
			1.2.2 Recognising and accepting emotional dissonance.
			1.2.3 Alleviating personal conflict through psychological capital
	1.3 Business for good: Sustainable and impactful business strategies	Sustainability and ethical consistency guide decision-making. This orientation was noticeably ahead of other strategic concerns and impact considerations, as an implicit assumption that needs to take precedence over short-term profitability.	1.3.1 CSR: Getting involved in socially responsible and charitable initiatives.
			1.3.2 CSR: Offsetting carbon footprint.
			1.3.3 CSR: Modelling and promoting ethical behaviour.
Theme 2: Social impact strategy: the osmotic innovation synergy	2.1 Engagement, research, and growth synergies	Strategies are informed by structured research and informal input from clients, customers, suppliers and the wider sector. The purpose of these activities is to enhance ethical alignment and enable organisational learning and development.	2.1.1 Building relationships with industry, clients and community.
			2.1.2 Building evidence through research, feedback and impact measurement.
			2.1.3 Building awareness and truth-telling.
			2.1.4 Knowledge sharing and collective learning

Theme	Subtheme	Updated findings	Domains (Sub-sub-themes)
	2.2 Sector-specific and tech-focused strategic planning and profit reinvestment	Profit is re-deployed into mission-aligned initiatives, such as exploratory research, outcomes measurement, free-of-charge services for the community, including knowledge sharing, charitable donations, technological or other business upgrades.	2.2.1 Financial sustainability and contextual navigation.
			2.2.2 Purpose-driven operational effectiveness.
			2.2.3 Profit reinvestment and long-term mission investment.
			2.2.4 Ethical governance and organisational integrity
Theme 3: Tech for good: compliance, challenges, and solutions	3.1 Technological Integration: Advantages and Limitations	Technology has both enabling potential and associated risks. Founders therefore described the need for a measured approach to technological development and deployment, grounded in awareness of practical limitations, cultural fit, user needs, organisational capacity, and the wider implications of system design and adoption.	3.1.1 Navigating technological and cultural limitations.
			3.1.2 Emphasising knowledge sharing and tech integration.
			3.1.3 Systemic change and future directions for social innovation.
	3.2 User-Centric design and integration	Organisational culture needs to be embedded in inclusive design, and Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) principles across both design decisions and operational frameworks, ensuring both internal and external users are safeguarded and compliant with legislation.	3.2.1 Upholding data integrity, regulatory compliance and ethical principles throughout technological processes.
			3.2.2 Designing accessible, inclusive technologies grounded in justice, equity, and diverse user needs.
			3.2.3 Incorporating advanced technologies, gamification and interactive learning experiences to improve user engagement and satisfaction.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The above elements together form the basis for the detailed thematic sections that follow. Distribution statements indicate the number of cases in which material relevant to the domain was identified. Counts are non-exclusive and are used to show spread across the dataset, not statistical prevalence or substantive importance.

Sector references are used as contextual descriptors only. Cohort comparisons and documentary reading informed, but did not determine, theme boundaries. The C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame is introduced separately in Section **4.4** and is not used to define the thematic findings. Specifically, exploratory cohort checks (Step 4B) were used to locate patterned differences by sector and technology depth so that typical and negative cases could be illustrated without reifying types. In parallel, documentary analysis (Step 4C; see Section **4.5**) situated interview accounts within organisational records (mission and ethics statements, governance/privacy texts, selected posts, Companies House filings), providing contextual anchors for dates, roles and organisational claims.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance

This theme examines how founders used values, ethical boundaries and dissonance to judge what could responsibly be done under commercial, legal, operational and technological constraint. *Ethical alignment* is used here to describe a continuing process rather than a settled state. Founders did not present ethics as a fixed statement of principle; they described repeated decisions about what to accept, refuse, revise, delay or re-scope as circumstances changed.

For Theme 1, the analysis is organised through three sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1.1 Dynamic adherence to and evaluation of values, boundaries, capabilities, and legal requirements – examines how founders recognised and evaluated ethical responsibility through values, capabilities, boundaries and legal requirements.

Sub-theme 1.2 Values-based cognitive and emotional dissonance – focuses on the cognitive and emotional dissonance that arose when ethical ideals, commercial pressures and practical limits did not fully align.

Sub-theme 1.3 Business for good: Sustainable and impactful business strategies – considers how founders expressed a wider "business for good" orientation through sustainable, responsible and impact-led business practices.

Across the 25 cases, ethical responsibility appeared through five connected domains. Counts indicate the number of cases contributing material to each domain and are used to show concentration within the dataset, not importance or statistical prevalence:

- Self-awareness and capability (1.1.1; 17/25)
- Legal and regulatory adherence (1.1.2; 10/25)
- Ethical norms beyond compliance (1.1.3; 9/25)
- Systematic scanning and boundary-setting (1.1.4; 15/25)
- Post-decision rebalancing (1.1.5; 14/25)

In this theme, ***values*** refers to the ethical commitments, personal judgement and organisational purpose that shaped founders' sense of responsibility. ***Boundaries*** refers to the limits they drew around conduct, partnerships, design choices, commercial priorities and acceptable compromise. ***Boundary realignment*** refers to later adjustments made when those limits became difficult to maintain in practice. ***Dissonance*** refers to the cognitive and emotional tension that arose when ethical commitments, practical capability and commercial conditions did not fully align. The theme therefore examines not only what founders said they valued, but how those values were tested, revised and operationalised in context.

These patterns were most visible in education, learning and social care, and in environmental or data-led cases, with further illustrations from health, wellbeing, accessibility and impact-measurement ventures. Founders described ethics as work that was situational, cumulative and revisable. In education and care, it appeared as safeguarding and duty; in health and data-led ventures, as governance and risk control;

and in environmental and accessibility ventures, as stewardship, inclusion and truthful representation of impact. Many accounts emphasised that ethically motivated restraint, including delayed launch, refusal of contracts and slower growth, was not a failure of implementation but a condition of trust.

The excerpts used in this chapter are drawn from lightly denaturalised and anonymised transcripts. Denaturalisation refers to the preparation of transcript material in a form that retains participants' substantive wording and meaning while not reproducing every pause, filler, repetition, false start or paralinguistic feature unless analytically relevant. This approach is appropriate where the analysis focuses on meaning, reasoning and decision accounts rather than conversational performance (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005). Anonymisation involved removing, replacing or generalising identifying details to reduce re-identification risk while retaining sufficient context for interpretation (Kaiser, 2009; Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015).

Appendix cross-references are provided. All in-text labels beginning with "EN" (e.g., EN 278) correspond to excerpt item numbers in **Appendix A4: Coded transcript excerpts by Sub-Sub-Theme**. Direct identifiers have been removed or replaced with ellipses ([…]) and neutral placeholders, such as [health condition] or [organisation name]. Placeholders were chosen to keep analytic meaning clear while protecting participants and ventures from re-identification. Where relevant, the same excerpts also appear in the member-checking summaries that contextualise sectoral patterns, including data privacy in MedTech, safeguarding in education and carbon integrity in environmental ventures.

In the thematic sections that follow, cohort references (C1–C4) are used as a descriptive reading aid rather than as a typology. Where industry clustering is referenced, it is labelled using ICs and confined to the section in which it is described. Industry clusters are treated as contextual aids rather than stable classifications. Any cohort patterning noted in **Chapter 4: Findings** is presented as exploratory within this dataset and is not used to imply sector representativeness.

a) Sub-theme 1.1: Personal ethical identity, dynamic adherence to and evaluation of values, boundaries, capabilities, and legal requirements

The first sub-theme focuses on the founder-facing side of ethical alignment. It examines how founders recognised ethical responsibility through self-awareness, personal capability, legal duties, ethical norms, boundary-setting and later adjustment after decisions had been made. The accounts suggest that ethical identity was not simply a matter of personal conviction. It had to be tested through practical capability, compliance, scrutiny, stakeholder effects and the limits of what the venture could responsibly sustain.

The five sub-sub-themes show how this work unfolded. Some founders described ethical action as rooted in personal awareness or professional expertise. Others emphasised legal and regulatory duties, or ethical standards that went beyond compliance. Several described scanning for risks, setting boundaries and revising those boundaries when new pressures, consequences or constraints became visible. Combined, the sub-theme shows ethical alignment as an active process of judgement, not a fixed statement of values.

1.1.1 Self-awareness of personal ethics and unique capabilities as a catalyst for moral action

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 17 of 25 cases; most visible in education, learning and social care, and environmental or data-led cases, with further examples in health, wellbeing, accessibility and creative technologies. Founders described their ventures as vehicles for a felt responsibility to apply their skills and positionality for public benefit. In education and care cases, this centred on protecting pupils, families, and staff, and resisting contractual arrangements that could compromise care quality. In health and wellbeing cases, self-awareness, self-awareness was linked to clinical caution, with product and service design paced to protect users. In environmental and data-led cases, capability meant designing technology and operations so that environmental or data

ethics were embedded rather than appended. In creative and accessibility cases, founders translated personal conviction into inclusion standards and safe user experience.

Practical expressions included selecting slower but values-consistent routes to market, using business structures (rather than solely charitable forms) to retain mission control, and reshaping offerings so that users' dignity and autonomy were not traded for scale. Several accounts positioned purpose as the primary success condition, with revenue framed as a consequence of "doing the right thing" rather than as the main objective. These dynamics are visible in founders' descriptions of mission, responsibility and self-understanding, for example:

> *"[We] had a software background, [...] and a background in business and a bit of startup business before going into it. [When] we identified this issue that we have, and likely the market likely have as well, obviously it was going to be a difficult thing to try and get off the ground from paper. But one of the big drivers for us is we almost felt obliged, like compelled to do it, because we just felt we must be quite unique pairing within our market. [...] It would be so unlikely to get two people running a [this kind of business] that had our backgrounds before and also like the desire and ambition to go on and make a difference and the belief that that was possible as well. [...] We had choices available to us at the time in terms of how we grow the business."* [EN 012]

> *"My purpose in society is to use my ability, skills, talents to bring about positive impact that improves people's quality of life. I would definitely say that's my purpose and to be always contributing to the society and not just taking away from it, I always want to give back whatever I can like I want to I always tell people that I want to die empty like I want to die having exhausted all the potential that I've got that sounds a bit grim but like I wanted to die having exhausted all of the potential that I have and making sure that I was used really well while I'm alive."* [EN 022]

> *"The reason why I personally began my former business, which has led to this business, is about wanting to be able to reflect on my working life with some pride and knowing that I've made a contribution, I've used the skills that I have and what's available to me to do something that's good and it sounds easy and I'm fairly pragmatic. I'm not an extreme tree hugger by any stretch of the imagination. So, we are trying to find a balance between, a pragmatic balance between, what is commercially sustainable but has a purpose."* [EN 024]

> *"If I can use my knowledge and my passion in this area to positively influence companies to do better business and make better business decisions, not just for them, but for wider society, then that's my driver."* [EN 021]

> *"You have to have your values and these, these are not values that corporate organisations come out with and talk about, you know, how good they are to their customers and not all that nonsense. This is by your own personal values and how they wrap into your company, because that makes all your decision making a lot easier." [...] "If you, if you've got your core values, this is what this is, what I'm trying to do. This is how I'm going to do it. And you stick with that, and, as I said earlier, you can defend that."* [EN 032]

Across dataset, self-awareness operated as a **moral engine**: founders linked what they could uniquely do, professionally and personally, to what they ought to do. In practice, this produced cautious market entry in education and health, rigorous scoping in environmental ventures, and explicit inclusion commitments in accessibility and creative technologies. It also legitimised saying no—to certain clients, platforms, suppliers or growth pathways—when these conflicted with the venture's moral centre.

1.1.2 Adherence to legal and regulatory rules and standards

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 10 of 25 cases; most visible in health and wellbeing cases, with further examples in education, care and environmental or data-led ventures.

Regulation was framed as both ethical minimum and operational guardrail. Health and wellbeing founders referred to statutory and professional standards for data, consent and clinical safety; several emphasised formal ethical codes and institutional guidance as parameters for what could responsibly be offered to clients. Education and social-care leaders referenced safeguarding duties and assurance systems as structuring their work with children and vulnerable users. Tech and environment founders described regulatory uncertainty as a material risk, to be managed through advisory input, compliance horizon scanning, staged release and careful documentation.

Illustrative operating practices included maintaining independence and disclosure in audit and assurance roles; instituting escalation pathways and decision logs; slowing roll-

outs until legal frameworks could be satisfied; and adopting conservative defaults on data collection and retention. These patterns are evident in accounts that link ethical intent to concrete legal frameworks and professional standards:

> *""So, as a I'm a [registered professional." [...] "So, because we're mental health care and because we are qualified practitioners we're part of a wider ethical code which gives us a framework to apply to our work with clients and with people directly which kind of helps and that makes it clear I suppose where our some parameters at least lie and gives us a guide that we can sort of go within and operate within."* [EN 037]

> *"Because [Technology] is a medical device it does have to comply with medical regulations... there's a level of ethics that goes into building it in a way that it's not going to be of harm to people's health and that it's enabling people to look after their health safely and properly and in a way that's medically sound."* [EN 038]

> *"We're having to model all the time how to be safe online." [...] "So, when we're working with children one-to-one we need to ensure that what they're seeing us do online is very safe."* [EN 045]

> *"I think it is increasingly scalable because, again, going back to legislation and requirements, the introduction of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive in Europe in the last year, the imminent introduction of the sustainability disclosure standards in the UK and all of the international requirements around ESG reporting mean that increasingly companies are going to have to account for the impact that they have within their value chains and increasingly they are going to pass on they're going to have to pass on a lot of those questions and requirements within their supply chain in order for them to make the standards that they have to meet."* [EN 040]

In these accounts, compliance is **protective ethics**. Founders treated law, regulation and professional codes as instruments to preserve user safety, staff wellbeing and organisational credibility. Where rules were ambiguous, they tended to over-specify controls—for example, by adopting restrictive data practices, seeking independent review or aligning with sectoral guidance even when not legally required—to minimise foreseeable harm and to demonstrate that they had acted within a defensible boundary.

1.1.3 Adherence to ethical norms and standards

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 9 of 25 cases; especially visible in education, care, environmental, accessibility and creative technology cases.

Alongside formal compliance, many founders described an internal ethical baseline that shaped decisions on sourcing, pricing, partnerships, supply chains and product design. In environmentally focused ventures, this included refusing cheaper inputs or substrates that would undermine ecological outcomes, even where they were legally permissible. In accessibility and creative technologies, it meant privileging representation, psychological safety and community fit over reach and short-term revenue. In education and wellbeing, it appeared as restraint in marketing to children and vulnerable users, values-based contracting, and a commitment to transparent communication about errors as well as successes, particularly in relation to access, affordability and content choices.

Founders framed these practices as a broader concern with decency, justice and long-term responsibility rather than only with rule-following. Several linked their approach to explicit theories of justice or to a belief that users and communities are "owed" equitable access and fair treatment. Others emphasised that "every small decision" carried ethical weight and should be taken with care, even when no immediate legal sanction was at stake.

These orientations are visible in accounts of how ethical norms inform everyday choices:

> *"It's very important that we enforce that kind of human aspect in what we are building. And so, what we try to do is every aspect of the business is to be done in a way that is like moral and correct and to code."* [EN 050]

> *"We interpret decisions as being ethical that are in line with our understanding of the theory of justice that we think, which is basically that we really think that disabled people are owed an equity of access and so, to that extent the goal is to be able to provide disabled people with the tools they need to be able to tackle the obstacles that exist in the world around them and those tools should be provided for free that don't need to be earned or paid for, computed for, they're owed to them because we think that's fair and just."* [EN 054]

""We could have changed our substrate [...]. We could have changed that for an organic [...], which means it would be much more available and we'd struggling with guaranteed, it would be much more guaranteed, it would be cheaper, so it would help us with our cash flow a lot. But we are adamant we're going to stay organic and we do believe that we'll pay off in the future financially. But also, there are other benefits to remaining organic, lots actually." [EN 063]

"I guess in a nutshell it's doing the right thing and doing the decent thing. It's often a question when we interview people for our podcast series, it's like organizations ask themselves, what's the right thing to do? And we think the question is, what's the decent thing to do? Because it kind of, it puts a different slant on that question. Are we doing the right thing? It feels more box ticking and you can just sort of talk yourself into the fact you're doing that, but for us it's about doing the decent thing and measuring that and being able to explain how you do the right thing as a business. And we bring that into a lot of what we do and the other parts of what we support as a business. So, it's not just about making profit, you know, that's not that's not a sole priority of ours. But it's how do we share what we do both as an organisation, product wise, but then the financial gain that we make from it, how do we give back to society and to the planet. And we do that through a number of different initiatives that we support. And that's kind of where we base our business on. We want to practice what we teach effectively." [EN 064]

Here, ethics functions as **voluntary constraint**—deliberate choices that narrow commercial options in order to preserve integrity and align practice with a broader moral horizon. Over time, this produces a cumulative effect. Product and brand credibility, internal expectations and partner selection coalesce around a shared ethical baseline that is stricter than regulatory minimums. Decisions are judged not only against law and policy but also against what founders consider fair, decent and just for users, communities and the wider environment.

1.1.4 Systematic scanning, identification and assessment of moral issues; boundary adjustment

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 15 of 25 cases; broadly distributed, with the clearest illustrations in education, care, environmental and data-led cases.

Founders described ongoing ethical diagnostics: weighing user welfare, staff capacity and accuracy claims; checking fit with scope and competence; and anticipating unintended consequences. In education and care, this centred on safeguarding, workload and the point at which free provision would jeopardise staff livelihoods or dilute service quality. In consulting and clinical-adjacent work, attention fell on capability limits and the risk of over-claiming expertise. In small, values-led ventures and creative work, founders spoke about testing whether engagements were fair, sustainable and aligned with their mission, and about taking defensible positions when curating contested or emotionally charged content.

Concrete practices included pausing or redirecting requests outside competence; brokering to trusted peers; tightening transparency about conflicts of interest and independence; declining work where pricing or scope felt unfair or unsustainable; and making deliberate judgements about which opportunities or pieces of work to platform in light of potential harm and benefit.

These dynamics are evident in how founders narrate their own boundary setting:

> *"Within the business part of things so we'll look at what's happening, what our clients' needs are, so we'll consider what that is and see whether we're in the best position or we've got the knowledge internally to support that." [...] "I do have a lot of contacts with other consultants in the industry and perhaps what we get a request for, you know, we are quite honest with them and we will say, you know, this isn't our area of expertise. Are you happy to carry on with this? [...] We do have to have integrity in our world."* [EN 076]

> *"You kind of have to weigh that up and go, well, from a business perspective." [...] "From an education standpoint, we know what we're doing is blooming good and works for these children." [...] "I'm deeply, deeply, passionate about everybody having the educational opportunities that everyone else has." [...] "It's a right and as a business, I want to provide every child... with that opportunity." [But] If I say yes [to giving away services for free] and I say to my staff, well, actually, I've given so much tutoring away for free, I can't pay you, my staff have got a big problem because they can't just go and find more money somewhere."* [EN 087]

> *"At the moment they [personal and organisational principles], are the same because I'm so I am the only person involved in the business and I have total control over like what gets sent out and it's just me." [...] "General principles, I think, that come to mind are like fairness. Is this a fair thing? Is this a fair exchange? Is this a fair agreement? Can I reasonably actually achieve this? Does this company ethically align with my company? Pricing definitely comes into it. What's a fair price to charge?" [...] "I think I reflect a lot on not just financially what was the outcome but did I enjoy that work? Was it challenging? Was it too much in terms of challenging or was it like healthy challenge? What did I take from working with them?"* [EN 089]

> *"So, the piece that I was speaking about and the reason why I chose to show it was because it was narrating the black trans experience. And I felt that was far too important for me not to give that space." [...] "Because on the flip side, how they said no, we would have had hundreds of people that never saw what I can see is quite an important, albeit divisive, and piece of work."* [EN 085]

Across these cases, scanning and boundary adjustment made ethics procedural. Decisions to refuse, refer, re-scope or slow down were narrated as markers of professionalism rather than missed opportunities. The common thread was harm-avoidance through scope discipline and defensible positioning: do the work one can stand behind, document the reasoning, and decline or reconfigure what cannot be delivered without compromising safety, fairness or credibility.

1.1.5 Dynamic post-decision implementation of boundary adjustments; rebalancing of values, capabilities and social impact

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 14 of 25 cases; especially visible in health, wellbeing, environmental and data-led cases, with further examples in education, care, accessibility and creative technologies.

Founders portrayed ethical boundaries as something to be enacted and adjusted over time rather than fixed once and for all. After recognising tensions, they reported concrete realignments: withdrawing from platforms, ending pilots, changing supply geographies, revising offers and contracts, or retuning target groups. These actions often traded speed

for credibility. In health and wellbeing, rebalancing guarded against harm from premature release or misleading reassurance. In environmental ventures, it constrained expansion where logistics (for example, air miles) conflicted with stated ethics. In creative and accessibility contexts, it limited exposure, set time-bound interaction, and adjusted framing to protect users and audiences.

In environmentally focused ventures, boundary adjustment frequently meant seeking "better within the constraint" rather than imagining perfect conditions. One founder described a pragmatic approach to palm oil in supply chains:

> *"So, the example I can give you is all about palm oil, which is a good example. So, we, we have a view that people in the business, the manufacturers are not just going to stop using palm oil. So, what you've got to do is you've got to use the most sustainable palm oil that you can [...]."* [EN 099]

Others focused on the ethics of product and market decisions, including withdrawing offerings that could not be defended:

> *"I've had to pull a plug on a product and on a project that I really want to do because it just wouldn't have laid right with me." [...] "I didn't feel comfortable with [using ... augmented reality tools] because of some of their policies and the way that they share certain things over others."* [EN 123]

> *"So, the first thing that I do in making a decision is to think about the child's best interests, and then I think about the parents' wishes, and then I think about our own policies and procedures, and then I think about the law, and then I think about our own kind of moral compass, and then I think about the research, and then I think about the evidence, and then I think about the potential consequences of our actions."* [EN 113]

Rebalancing also appeared in decisions about employment and organisational promises, where founders recalibrated plans in light of their duty of care to staff or business sustainability:

> *"One thing that could be unethical, that has come up before is giving people the impression that we have enough funds to keep them on the team for like indefinitely when we actually don't have enough money at all."* [EN 103]

Corrective adjustments were visible in inclusion practices. One health-technology founder described revising their positioning and language after feedback that men had been implicitly excluded:

> *"So, now in our pictures, we don't say, oh, [Org] is a tool that's designed for women. We'll say [Org] is a tool that's designed for people who want to [learn more about their health] or things like that."* [EN 115]

A related pattern concerned how founders managed their own authority, the evidential basis for claims, and transparency, particularly in public or recorded settings. Rather than minimising uncertainty, some foregrounded it at the outset to avoid over-claiming and to situate their statements within the limits of available evidence:

> *"Just to be clear at the start, I just want to say that most of the research has been done on like why cis-gendered men. So, most of my understanding and most of the, everyone's understanding as far as researchers go is on that particular group."* [EN 114]

> *"There's a huge transparency factor here. So, what we decided to do was communicate regularly with our customers and be talking about how we're getting on with that mission." [...] "I think when that isn't done the consumer can be a little bit skeptical. So, what I found is our ethics and our values are one thing, but a failure to communicate that and show transparency in the steps you are taking is really detrimental."* [EN 105]

These accounts suggest that ethical boundary-setting can be enacted through explicit epistemic discipline: making scope conditions visible, marking uncertainty, and communicating what the evidence can and cannot support. This positions transparency not only as a reputational practice, but as a means of reducing the risk of audiences inferring claims that founders are not in a position to substantiate.

Across these cases, post-decision implementation is where ethical commitments are made concrete. Boundary adjustments are operationalised through changes to sourcing, channels, hiring, communication, targeting and timing, rather than through abandoning values. Founders described these moves as doing the best they could within real constraints: rebalancing profit, capacity and reach against environmental, distributive and

inclusion goals, and making visible, defensible trade-offs so that core values, capabilities and social impact remain in alignment over time.

Overall, the five domains (1.1.1–1.1.5) show ethics as continuous alignment across people, processes, and products and services. The cohort labels do not denote sector categories. However, within this dataset, some sectoral concentrations were more visible within particular cohorts and are noted here as descriptive tendencies rather than defining features.

Patterns vary by sector and technological depth:

- **C1 (Education and social care)** expressed ethics through protection, restraint and refusal where risk to pupils, families or staff exceeded capacity.
- **C2 (HealthTech and wellbeing)** used regulation, validation and careful communication to operationalise caution, balancing risks of false reassurance and false alarm.
- **C3 (Environmental and technology-led ventures)** embedded ethics in design choices, supply chains, measurement and transparent communication, including pacing growth and geography.
- **C4 (Accessibility and creative technologies)** linked inclusion and emotional safety to design standards, usage limits and curatorial decisions.

Across all settings, saying no—to particular revenues, partnerships, growth pathways or speeds—was an available and routinely used ethical tool. The next theme examines how these values and boundary practices are translated into social impact strategy through engagement, research, measurement and reinvestment (Theme 2.1 and 2.2).

b) Sub-theme 1.2: Values-based cognitive and emotional dissonance

Founders described internal tension in both cognitive and emotional terms. Cognitive dissonance appeared where commercial action, strategic choice or operational necessity sat uneasily with professed values or ethical commitments. Emotional dissonance

appeared where founders experienced distress, unease, frustration or moral discomfort in response to those tensions. These dimensions were related, but they were not treated as interchangeable.

This sub-theme examines the psychological discomfort that arises when founders experience misalignment between their values and the realities of operating in resource-constrained, impact-oriented markets. References to cognitive or emotional dissonance appeared in 17 of 25 cases overall. Cognitive dissonance was identified in 8 cases, emotional dissonance in 7 cases, and psychological capital in 10 cases. These domains were not evenly distributed. Some founders described routine reconciliation through governance, measurement or refusal, while others described more persistent unease where mission and market demands pulled apart, for example around charging for essential services, delaying release for safety or rejecting misaligned contracts.

1.2.1 Recognising and accepting cognitive dissonance

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 8 of 25 cases; most visible in health, wellbeing, behavioural and data-led cases, with further examples in education and care.

Founders described noticing points where their ethical commitments and their operating choices did not fully align. These tensions surfaced around sector selection, pricing and access, growth and geography, and the use of mainstream platforms. Several participants recounted weighing up whether to work with sectors they regarded as harmful in order to influence them from within, or whether to accept contracts that would secure revenue but sit uneasily with their values. Others highlighted structural dilemmas: fee-based education that advantages families who can pay; export opportunities that conflict with localist or low-carbon principles; or dependence on digital platforms whose policies they personally contest.

In these accounts, dissonance was recognised and named rather than suppressed. Founders set out both sides of the conflict—what they believed ought to happen and what was practically or commercially possible—and held them together as a standing problem to be managed. For some, this took the form of a conscious compromise for

potential influence; for others, it led to decisions to reject particular markets, platforms or contracts even at a financial cost.

One participant in sustainability consultancy described an ongoing tension between sector-level reservations and the possibility that engagement might enable incremental improvement. In this account, decisions about whether to accept work were framed as ethically ambiguous: the founder recognised the risk of "box-ticking" and reputational laundering, while also considering whether their involvement could shift organisational practice in a more responsible direction:

> *"So, sometimes I can be approached by clients, potential clients, and maybe I don't want to work with a business in that sector because I think that sector is damaging and maybe they are doing the box ticking and trying to get some marketing that will make them look better. But I also have to think is there an opportunity to influence positively this company as part of this work? So, that's probably where my biggest ethical dilemma comes in."* [EN 119]

A related version of this dilemma appeared in relation to platform dependence. Here, the participant indicated that ethical preferences did not always translate into feasible avoidance, producing a "push and pull" between personal convictions and professional requirements:

> *"I feel like I don't have the choice at this particular moment in time to not have some engagement with platforms that ethically and personally I don't want anything to do with, really." [...] "There's a bit of a push and pull between what I would prefer personally, what I prefer professionally."* [EN 124]

In education, a founder articulated the tension between their beliefs about equal access and the realities of paid provision:

> *"Actually, no, my whole business is unethical actually." [...] "I think everybody should have access to whatever education they need, nobody should have to pay extra for education." [...] "And it really grinds me that some people are able to afford to pay for my services, you know, to get a better education and somebody who can't afford to pay for it."* [EN 122]

Environmental founders similarly weighed principled commitments against survival and growth. One described the difficulty of reconciling a domestic sourcing ethos with export opportunities:

> *"We wanted everything to stay in the UK so our supply chain, wherever possible is UK and we've got the Made in Britain logo to show the consumer that and our other suppliers that it's all UK. But we are contemplating pushing some of our products into Europe. And to be honest, we are trying to justify that, effectively. Even though it goes against our initial principles. Because of the slow returns. Yeah. So, yeah. So, the slow returns are preventing your further establishment in Europe or are there any other policies and decisions that you would have to make along the way. I think half of the projects would be more readily accepted in Europe, so we could get some, you know, start earning better revenue. [...] But it's the, it's the whole, the air miles [...] of the exports that go against our ethics reading."* [EN 134]

Another reflected on turning down a contract to avoid diluting their social and environmental stance:

> *"If people come back to me I can sort of say well I haven't used anything particular words that I'm not comfortable with and this is what we can do." [...] "It's been good already having this interview because I think I need to think more on what could be the trade-offs and potential trade-offs going forward." [...] "I just thought that the short term pain if you like was far better than the longer term sort of pain in the sense that, you know, I thought if I'm going to demonstrate ethics and social and environmental and nature responsibility and spout on about it, it would be better not to get this contract?"* [EN 135]

Across these cases, cognitive dissonance appears as deliberate awareness of contradiction between ethical standards and feasible action. Rather than being resolved through rationalisation, it is often kept visible and used as a reference point for later adjustment—linking forward to emotional strain (1.2.2) and to the boundary shifts and refusals described under 1.1.4 and 1.1.5.

1.2.2 Recognising and accepting emotional dissonance

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 7 of 25 cases; most visible in education, care and creative or cultural cases, with further examples in health and wellbeing.

Emotional responses—frustration, sadness, worry and fatigue—were most evident where a perceived duty of care collided with limits of capacity, safety or business viability. Alongside cognitive recognition of tension, several founders described a distinctly affective layer: guilt, resentment or unease when inclusion, protection or sustainability could not be fully realised. In education and care settings, this centred on the distress of turning away or limiting service where need exceeded capacity, and on the strain of holding users' interests above commercial convenience. One founder explained:

> *"So, reasonable adjustments have to be reasonable both for the person who has the disability but also for the person doing accommodation. [...] We generally say, and it really hurts to say it, but we would generally say that those children aren't ready for our service because our service is although it is holistic and we try to understand needs of things like autism, anxiety, whatnot, primarily we're a [student support venture] and there have been a few students where we've kind of almost been dragged into getting involved far more deeply with their mental health than we are trained and able and willing to do. And we've had to take that step back, because actually that's not what we do. And it wouldn't be ethical for us to start doubling [our service] in areas that we're not trained for. You know, we're all attachment trained, we've all got trauma training, but that doesn't mean that we're counsellors and therapists, it just means that we can deliver our [service] in a way that hopefully won't cause damage to these children."* [EN 136]

Here, refusal is framed as necessary to safeguard quality and staff livelihoods, but the decision is still experienced as emotionally painful.

In wellbeing and advisory work, participants reported resentment and self-doubt when under-pricing left them feeling over-extended, and expressed concern that public guidance might inadvertently increase pressure on those least able to act on it. One founder described how pricing and client selection had to be calibrated to prevent emotional fallout as well as financial loss:

> *"What did I take from working with them?... valuing myself appropriately in the work that I do and accepting that sometimes that's going to price me out of the work. The trade-off is, you know, maybe I don't get the work, but actually the benefit to that is that I'm not then resenting the client or feeling that I'm giving more than I should be."* [EN 142]

Another, reflecting on people-first commitments, articulated the emotional cost of decisions that might protect users while constraining the business:

> *"Always doing what's in the best interest of people even if it might have harmful effect on the business... do just what's best for the people? But if we do that, it might sit in some ways significantly on the business... it's always a balance. But I think ethicality is kind of for us making sure that we're aware of that balance."* [EN 146]

Emotional dissonance also emerged where founders moderated the expression of strong personal views to maintain influence in less aligned settings:

> *"I suppose that's where I sometimes put my personal views to the side in order to have the hope of having some positive influence and changing those companies... I have to harness those a little bit and temper them in the professional context because if I wanted to completely embrace my personal views I would probably be working for an NGO... and that's not the path I've gone down. I think it's too late to change."* [EN 143]

In public communication, one participant described adding caveats to advice on children's mental health, motivated by concern for parents whose circumstances might not allow them to follow ideal guidance:

> *"I have learned actually to be very 'boundaryed' about what I share publicly about my life online, about the way I speak about it, and actually the way I speak about specific issues... in children's mental health week... I felt the need to caveat that... put your mental health as a priority... and I felt the need to caveat that with not everyone is going to be able to do that all of the time, it depends on your financial situation, your work situation, etc."* [EN 150]

Across these examples, emotional dissonance is not treated as a sign of failure but as information about ethical tension. Feelings of discomfort, resentment or regret prompt founders to reconsider pricing, client choices, growth plans and communication, linking

this domain to the boundary adjustments described under 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 and to the more cognitive weighing of trade-offs in 1.2.1.

1.2.3 Alleviating personal conflict through psychological capital

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 10 of 25 cases; distributed across the dataset, particularly where founders linked ethical tension to purpose, repair, influence and mutual responsibility. Founders often described drawing on inner resources—hope, conviction, a sense of obligation and confidence that change is possible—to live with the strains outlined in 1.2.1 and 1.2.2. Rather than resolving dissonance by lowering standards, they reframed their work as contributing to longer-term ethical improvement: influencing less aligned organisations from within, "putting back" what had been harmed in earlier environments, or modelling alternative ways of doing business. This forward-looking orientation helped to soften personal conflict while sustaining engagement in imperfect conditions.

Several participants framed work with only partially aligned clients or sectors as justified by the possibility of gradual influence. One participant, working with a company whose initial motivation was largely defensive—centred on meeting client and investor expectations—described how sustained engagement over several years shifted both their own expectations and the organisation's practices:

> *"One company that I started working with nearly about three and a half years ago is in the [...] sector. And initially seemed to be, they brought me in because they lost a large contract with a retailer and on the basis of not having enough sustainability considerations and not have no plan in place, but over the last four years. So, their motivation maybe wasn't where I would have liked it to have been to start with, but over those four years the engagement that some of their senior team have had who were very disengaged to start with and the innovations that they have come up with and invested in are really encouraging to me. So, I think even if the motivation isn't right in my eyes to start with, somewhere along the journey, a light bulb can switch on and I think it's worth working with companies who maybe are not you know the most ethical if you like to start with because you have a chance to influence them and do something better."* [EN 153]

Others located their efforts in a longer arc of personal or social repair, using this framing to offset feelings of guilt, regret or insufficiency. One founder described their work as a way of addressing perceived harms in their earlier environment:

> *"I'm trying to put back what was taken up society in the environment I grew up in."* [EN 155]

Another, in a therapeutic context, expressed a felt debt arising from prior support and privilege:

> *"I feel somehow, particularly in the therapy space, I have like a debt to pay... I feel like there's some kind of... sense of owing something."* [EN 170]

Psychological capital was also articulated as courage of conviction and willingness to learn from missteps. One participant explicitly connected business decisions, reflection and moral growth:

> *"So, we had... I think everybody in life grows... everybody in life grows and develops, but to grow a business, we won't have made our final mistake. We will go on and make more. But I think to organically make decisions needs to come by listening to other people, sticking by your morals... it needs to have the core strength of the courage of your own convictions to say, that doesn't work, we're going to go in this direction."* [EN 160]

Environmental and climate-focused founders described being driven by a mix of urgency and hope, using long-term visions as anchors when trade-offs felt uncomfortable:

> *"I'm just passionate about nature and protecting planet Earth and I don't like inequalities... social injustice... I think it's incumbent on all of us... I want to be able to leave the world in a better place than it currently is... I want to be able to, in my lifetime, see the global warming trend going the other way... If you've got a passion, like wildlife and conservation or certain aspects of social justice, keep to your convictions."* [EN 171]

> *"Because a vision is just about just being able to, I work on what they call the staircase strategy. So, you've got to dare to stand on the top step. So, if we're down here now, then the top step is what utopia looks like. And utopia is that the only thing we're collecting from people's houses or businesses is glass and metal, which are very sustainably recyclable, and which stand up on its own*

> *financially for those to be collected. And everything else is processed and produced into energy because it's all very well saying we're going to recycle material but if the recycling is causing more harm to the environment than it is just to pop it into the here and it's all renewable sources of energy in any event why wouldn't you just choose the better option? It's like we just keep putting the house in the flood zone all the time. We're going to take the house out of the flood zone. And the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result. So, we've got to make a fundamental change. So, that's what drives me, drives me mad and drives me forward."* [EN 172]

Across these accounts, psychological capital does not remove ethical conflict but reframes it as something to be worked with rather than eliminated. Narratives of influence, repair and conviction help founders tolerate dissonance, sustain effort and translate unease into incremental action, linking this domain to the boundary adjustments described under 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 and to the cognitive and emotional tensions in 1.2.1 and 1.2.2.

c) Sub-theme 1.3: Sustainable and impact-driven business strategies

This sub-theme explores how founders embed socially responsible and environmentally sustainable principles into their business strategies. It highlights the deliberate integration of values into operational practice, emphasising the pursuit of positive societal outcomes over commercial gain. In this study, activity clustered around three CSR domains: social/charitable initiatives (1.3.1; referenced by 12 of 25 participants, most visible in Education, Learning and Social Care and Creative/Cultural cohorts), environmental repair and carbon responsibility (1.3.2; referenced by 8 of 25, concentrated in Environmental and Sustainability, with supporting references in HealthTech), and modelling/promoting ethical behaviour (1.3.3; referenced by 9 of 25, distributed across Education, Environmental and Sustainability, and Behavioural/Data-led ventures). Not all founders emphasised the same domains: education- and care-oriented participants prioritised equitable access and community benefit; environmental ventures focused on measurable ecological outcomes and restraint in scaling; data- and culture-oriented

founders used communication, public learning and example-setting to normalise ethical practice.

1.3.1 Socially responsible and charitable initiatives

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 12 of 25 cases; most visible in education and care, with further examples in creative, cultural and environmental cases.

Founders frequently framed their ventures as vehicles for community benefit, integrating socially oriented activities into the core business rather than treating them as peripheral "give-back" schemes. In education and care, this was expressed through low-barrier access, subsidised or pro bono provision, and targeted support for users in vulnerable circumstances. Creative and cultural ventures described aligning artistic outputs and participation opportunities with wider social. Environmental organisations, on the other hand, linked commercial activity directly to decarbonisation, local food systems or conservation aims.

These commitments were made operational through concrete mechanisms—routine pro bono work, advocacy and outreach, earmarked donations, community projects and the planned creation of charitable vehicles. Several participants emphasised that such initiatives were not only about redistribution of surplus profits but about running the business in a way that they and their teams could be "proud of" in day-to-day practice. In some cases, this involved declining more lucrative work or pacing growth where it might compromise the ability to sustain community-oriented commitments.

One founder described how socially oriented work was tracked and governed alongside commercial indicators:

> *"We ask about how much pro bono work we do and measure it. We ask about how much advocacy and outreach we do and how many people we've reached."* [EN 173]

For others, the venture's mission itself was defined in explicitly social terms, with access and affordability positioned as central rather than discretionary:

> *"Our mission and goal is to 'make therapy easy, accessible, affordable and modern, [and…] to improve people's mental health and relationships'."* [EN 175]

Another participant articulated a model in which commercial operations were deliberately structured to fund ongoing ethical work:

> *"We are on a mission to […]." […] "Our aim and our dream is to basically rid the world of [this problem]. We want [this] across the globe but our focus is the UK to start with." […] "I'm building [Org] as a business that will fund and fuel our […] work." […] "I wanted it to be clear to the consumer that whilst you can donate, we've also put a lot of time, energy and risk into this." […] "I knew that later on when we were in a position to, we could start a foundation or a charity, CIC… that would deliver on our promise." […] "It will be through donations to existing charities and ultimately it will be the more [we do] the more we will grow and scale… through commerce."* [EN 185]

Across these cases, socially responsible and charitable initiatives function as part of how the venture defines "doing business well": community-oriented activities are embedded in the business model, tracked over time, and used to anchor the organisation's ethical identity as it grows.

1.3.2 Neutralising and reversing environmental degradation

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 8 of 25 cases; concentrated in environmental and sustainability cases, with further examples in health-related and platform-based ventures.

Founders in environmentally focused ventures described deliberate restraint in product, infrastructure and scaling decisions where ecological outcomes were uncertain, and a consistent preference for verifiable reduction over performative offsetting. Practices included scrutinising supply chains, redesigning infrastructure to reduce energy and carbon intensity, prioritising waste prevention over downstream recycling, and sequencing growth to match environmental "proof points". Health-adjacent and platform businesses also acknowledged their own digital carbon footprints and articulated a responsibility to mitigate these as their services expanded.

Several participants emphasised the importance of backing claims such as "net zero" or "climate positive" with demonstrable evidence, treating environmental credentials as a matter of accountability rather than branding:

> *"I'm making sure that if I sort of say that [Venture] is operating at the particular moment as a climate positive organisation or we've achieved net zero, when we achieve net zero, that we can demonstratively prove that that's what we're able to do."* [EN 188]

Others explicitly rejected offsetting as a primary strategy, framing it as inadequate where reductions were still possible:

> *"The carbon footprint of technology is going past the carbon footprint of the aviation industry... We sat down and said... how can we balance that off in a way that's meaningful?... We didn't want to go down offsetting because it's essentially a licence to pollute."* [EN 189]

Waste- and resource-focused ventures described designing technology and business models to prevent waste from arising in the first place, linking this to energy generation, public health and fuel poverty:

> *"The ethics behind it are all about stopping waste arising. Whilst we're in the process of stopping waste arising, we are producing energy from predominantly renewable sources of energy, uneaten food, garden trimmings, paper, cardboard etc. Then we are also looking at how we can improve public health because at the moment we're contaminating our water courses with plastics which are being now found inside the human body". [...] "So, then we reduce fuel poverty because we've got eight to 900 pounds worth of energy locked up in resources which are being transported all around the world and using humongous amounts of carbon to reprocess repurpose."* [EN 195]

Across these cases, environmental responsibility was treated as part of "doing business properly", not as an optional add-on. CSR in this domain is expressed through carbon- and waste-related decisions embedded in core operations—choices about servers, logistics, materials and growth trajectories—aimed at neutralising or reversing environmental harm rather than merely compensating for it.

1.3.3 Modelling and promoting ethical behaviour

Distribution within the dataset: Distribution within the dataset: identified in 9 of 25 cases; distributed across education, environmental, data-led, creative and cultural cases.

Founders frequently described "leading by example": evidencing claims, communicating trade-offs plainly, and inviting scrutiny through public updates, advisory input and transparent pricing. This modelling extended beyond their own organisations to clients, peers and suppliers. Several participants used their platforms to normalise ethical choices (for example around circularity, accessibility and decarbonisation), to refuse work in sectors they considered incompatible with their values, and to challenge superficial ESG performances. The intent was to shift practice in the wider ecosystem by making principled conduct visible, consistent and practically workable.

One accessibility-focused venture framed its service as an entitlement rather than a discretionary benefit, with transparency positioned as the precondition for meaningful choice:

> *"I think the most important thing is that we don't believe that people need to earn or buy the service that we provide. We think if they're owed to it and so, therefore our mission is to make it easy for them to have access to the tools."* [EN 198]

An environmental/data-led founder described adopting recognised standards as a way of demonstrating, not just asserting, their approach:

> *"We chose early in our journey as a business that we would demonstrate our own approach through becoming a certified B-Corp. And that was a framework of operation that we chose in part because we embraced the idea of considering all stakeholders and our deeds."* [EN 199]

Others positioned their role as helping organisations to decarbonise in practice, preferring patient influence over compliance policing:

> *"The outcome is reduced carbon in the atmosphere... Sometimes customers struggle to decarbonise... what we find is that you*

influence the customer and help them longer term to make change happen." [EN 207]

Across these accounts, CSR takes the form of lived example: embedding ethical commitments in day-to-day decisions, making constraints and trade-offs explicit, and using expertise and voice to encourage others to adopt more responsible practices.

Theme 1 indicates that ethical navigation is a continuing adjustment between values, capabilities and external demands. Founders describe self-awareness, boundary-setting and follow-through as part of their work, not as background assumptions, and use these practices to sustain resilience under pressure. Alongside this, several accounts note points where ethical intentions could not be fully realised, for example when fatigue, financial pressure or organisational resistance led to partial or delayed implementation; these cases mark the limits of what can be achieved rather than a lack of concern. Taken together, Theme 1 provides the basis for treating ethical responsiveness as a capability within DEN, and clarifies how founders define ethicality and how that definition informs their identification, assessment and handling of moral issues (Objective 1).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Social Impact Strategy

This theme examines how founders developed social impact strategy through engagement, evidence, operational learning and reinvestment. Financial viability was acknowledged as necessary for continuity, but participants generally framed profit as a means of sustaining mission rather than as an end in itself. Strategy was therefore presented as both managerial and ethical: a way of deciding what to grow, what to evidence, what to fund and what to refuse.

This discussion is structured through two sub-themes:

Sub-theme 2.1 Engagement, research, and growth synergies – examines how ventures operationalised ethical aims through consultation, experimentation, and knowledge integration;

Sub-theme 2.2 Sector-specific strategic planning and profit reinvestment – considers how founders balanced growth, governance, and mission fidelity through fiscal and structural choices

Four domains were especially visible: stakeholder engagement, identified in 11 of 25 cases; evidence, feedback and impact measurement, identified in 12 cases; awareness and truth-telling, identified in 13 cases; and knowledge sharing, identified in 9 cases. These practices appeared across the dataset, although their form varied by sector. Education and care cases emphasised dialogue with parents, practitioners and local authorities. Health and wellbeing cases foregrounded clinical consultation, validation and feedback. Environmental and data-led ventures prioritised audit, research and transparent reporting. Accessibility and creative cases used co-design, advocacy and knowledge sharing to support justice, representation and emotional safety.

While financial viability was acknowledged as necessary for continuity, profit is not treated as an end in itself. Where surpluses are generated, they are re-deployed into mission-aligned initiatives such as exploratory research, outcomes measurement, community-facing provision, charitable giving, technological improvement, or wider organisational strengthening. Participants across cohorts placed greater emphasis on ensuring that their activities generated **meaningful, measurable benefit** for people and the planet, not on expansion for its own sake. Strategy and reinvestment were therefore framed as moral, as well as managerial, processes.

a) 2.1: Engagement, research, and growth synergies

Founders across all cohorts described **engagement and research as moral as well as strategic instruments**. Collaboration with community stakeholders, policy actors, research institutions, or peer networks was repeatedly cited as central to shaping responsible innovation.

For early-stage founders in education and social-care contexts, this ensured that services remained safe and relevant. For health and environmental innovators, it validated design

choices and framed accountability. For digital-inclusion and creative ventures, engagement sustained empathy and authenticity.

Four interlinked sub-sub-themes capture these processes.

2.1.1 Building relationships with industry, clients, and community

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 11 of 25 cases; most visible in education, care, health and wellbeing, with further examples in environmental, data-led, accessibility and creative technology cases.

Founders described stakeholder engagement not as a compliance exercise or marketing channel, but as joint work on ethically robust practice. Relationships with universities, regulators, local authorities, community organisations, user groups and aligned businesses were used to test assumptions, refine offers and calibrate boundaries of responsibility. In education and care, this meant working with parents, schools and local authorities to decide what level of support could be offered without overstretching staff or compromising quality. In health and wellbeing, ventures sought acceptance from clinicians and healthcare providers before integrating new tools into care pathways. Environmental and data-led businesses described close collaboration with utilities and industry partners to validate technical choices and sustainability claims, while accessibility and creative ventures worked with charities and advocacy groups that shared their ethos.

One consultant emphasised the value of working with smaller, independent firms who were prepared to adapt their practices:

> *"You can have those conversations [with smaller, independent companies] and work with them to look at their ethical practices around how they support their staff team, what their social and environmental responsibilities are and so on." [...] "I've always tended to prefer to work with people who are a little bit more independent because they tend to be... more willing to actually meet me halfway and adapt."* [EN 212]

In environmental advisory work, collaboration extended to technology suppliers, with curated vendor relationships used to support clients' sustainability reporting while maintaining strategic independence:

> *Very often a company will want to help to identify a suitable piece of software to help them measure, monitor, and report on their sustainability. And I do have one or two kinds of preferred suppliers in that space that I will refer to for those companies."* [EN 216]

Beyond client- and supplier-facing collaboration, some founders described actively seeking or convening communities of practice with aligned organisations. These networks were framed as a way to exchange expertise, test assumptions, and build legitimacy in high-trust or regulated settings.

> *"It's a combination of like some stuff has happened accidentally... and then some stuff I've purposefully kind of sought out groups because they were the charity I was speaking about before." [...] "I'm trying to build these relationships with people because they're similar, they have a similar kind of ethos to what I'm trying to do." "In the academia it's definitely a growing area. I think in the UK it's still very small but in the US and in Australia it's growing. I'm working with my [PhD] supervisors to try and kind of make some kind of group or something in this country to get it more kind of going."* [EN 214]

> *"I think the real role that I'm having is bringing people together to have a chat about certain things that might be quite topical." [...] "I definitely see the organisation, even my personal role as bringing people into a space. Whether that space is virtual, or whether it's physical, it seems to be that the role is to bring people together under the umbrella or the guise of a topic or an RPS that seems to be that."* [EN 225]

An environmental technology founder likewise described building a coalition of technical and institutional partners:

> *"We engage with [...] on the [...] element, and... on the [...] element. We worked really closely with [...] authorities, [...] companies... they are one of our early adopters."* [EN 228]

Health-focused participants framed engagement with clinicians as necessary to ensure both safety and system fit:

> *"I think a huge obstacle could be if medical professionals do not readily accept the introduction of our technology, that because if they are not in favour of it, then it can really damage our image in the market, how people perceive [Org/Device], how much trust people are willing to put into it as well. I think one obstacle that we definitely foresee is increasing the number of people who are going to their GP saying that I found something, I found something and then they, them having a lot more pressure on them to see more patients that they weren't, but they wouldn't have been seeing if the [Org/Device] was not alarming people. So, we really have to check that line so carefully and understand how can we be integrated within the healthcare system in a way that doesn't cause more burden to an already overburdened system."* [EN 222]

Across these accounts, engagement functions as a relational safeguard: it anchors innovation in lived experience and operational realities, exposes blind spots earlier, and distributes ethical responsibility across a network rather than locating it solely with the founder.

2.1.2 Building evidence through research, feedback, and impact measurement

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 12 of 25 cases; most visible in health, wellbeing, environmental and data-led cases, with further examples in education, care, accessibility, creative and platform-based ventures.

Research, feedback and impact measurement were presented as central to making ethical claims defensible. Health-technology ventures highlighted structured outcome studies and ongoing data collection to assess whether products achieved their intended benefits before and after market launch. Environmental businesses described commissioning independent lifecycle assessments and tracking quantifiable reductions in waste or emissions to substantiate sustainability narratives. Education, wellbeing and accessibility-focused founders relied on participatory evaluation—user surveys, qualitative feedback and informal conversations—to assess fairness, accessibility and emotional impact (for example, confidence, peace of mind or sense of welcome).

One health-oriented founder described a deliberate decision to measure impact from the outset:

> *"We decided very early on that we wanted to measure the positive impact of the product." […] "We need to actually measure whether we're doing that." […] "We do that using a number of different ways… quality feedback, but also some doing a big research study at the moment."* [EN 230]

> *"The whole kind of development of the technology is based on that direct user feedback and direct user interaction." […] "Users telling us 'this doesn't work for me', 'this isn't accurate'… [and] what they are [is] improvements needed here." […] "We're very much reliant on user feedback… to help us to refine and develop the technology." […] "We use technology to see… anonymised data of how people are using the platform and which features are being used and which features aren't being used."* [EN 232]

An accessibility venture emphasised affective outcomes as key indicators:

> *"Ultimately we're seeking to create impact… impact that can be measured quantitatively… but in particular qualitatively. So, it's basically how do people feel?" […] "Do they feel like they have more confidence? Do they feel more welcome? Do they feel like it's easier to go out? Because really what we're trying to engender is a feeling of confidence or peace of mind."* [EN 232]

Environmental founders linked ethics directly to scientific evidence, including independent assessment:

> *"It's got to be driven by science… Only science can tell you for certain" […] "we had to invest […] before we could have a life cycle assessment carried out, an independent life cycle assessment."* [EN 240]

In some cases, evidence of behaviour change was used to justify further development: one consumer app reported that 83% of surveyed users had changed their purchasing decisions after using the tool [EN 242]. At the same time, a number of participants acknowledged resource constraints and gaps in their current feedback systems [EN 238, EN 243].

These accounts depict evidence-gathering as moral verification rather than a purely commercial metric. In fast-moving technological and social contexts, ethics is framed as requiring an empirical rhythm of trial, feedback and revision, with research and impact data feeding back into both product changes and the governance of the venture.

2.1.3 Building awareness and truth-telling

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 13 of 25 cases; most visible in environmental and data-led cases, with further examples in education, care, accessibility and creative technology cases.

Across cases, transparency and public communication were framed as ethical practices in their own right. Founders described "truth-telling" as necessary to educate markets, resist greenwashing, and clarify complex issues such as ecological limits, digital carbon footprints, data privacy and inclusion. Rather than presenting simplified success narratives, they foregrounded constraints, failures and trade-offs, actively inviting scrutiny of their claims. For some, this was articulated as a moral progression from candour to follow-through, paired with a refusal to "sell" certainty where it could not be justified:

> *"It starts perhaps with truth telling. It continues through doing the right thing and perhaps it then ends with seeing things through." [...] "We have a no quibble guarantee... we'll keep going until we deliver to a client satisfaction, even when the fee runs out."* [EN 244]

Several participants used accessible channels—podcasts, public talks, and documentaries—to surface issues that they believed were under-recognised, misunderstood, or difficult to discuss openly. In these accounts, awareness-building was positioned as both an educative and a preventative practice, seeking to reduce harm by improving understanding among users, carers, professionals, and wider audiences:

> *"The main focus... is to support with generating and disseminating knowledge about appearance concerns... disorder eating... body image issues..." [...] "I run a podcast... work on research projects... and do... talks at universities and healthcare services around these topics."* [EN 245]

> *"I feel that my role is attempting to generate and share information about the topic that I feel a lot of people experience without realising... [and] don't feel comfortable sharing." [...] "I'm hoping that by... making people more aware of it and educating the people who care for people with these concerns I will have a positive influence."* [EN 246]

> *"I do TV documentaries... and they get seen by a lot of people." [...] "The influence... in the information that people get because of what I'm saying and what I'm sharing, I think I owe society honesty and integrity..."* [EN 247]

Truth-telling also involved challenging misleading or incomplete narratives in environmental systems and supply chains, including the gap between "recyclable" claims and viable end markets. One founder described confronting the practical limits of recycling infrastructure directly with local authorities, including where this created uncomfortable implications about export and waste flows:

> *"The plastic situation was just becoming... it's untenable." [...] "the local authorities would say... we need you to take the pots, tubs and trays and we would say there is no market in the world for pots, tubs and trays." [...] "they can be recycled in a laboratory but there's no sustainable market for those items globally." [...] "send it to Indonesia, Vietnam, Asia, China... [and] Turkey."* [EN 249]

A related pattern concerned deliberate choices about communication format. Rather than relying primarily on social media, some founders described creating settings for longer-form dialogue and collective sense-making (for example, convening stakeholders and sharing insight), explicitly rejecting what they viewed as reductive or performative modes of engagement:

> *"We have a [communication channel]... and... we're also running round tables where we get folks together and we talk about the issues at hand and there's a bit of education and insight shared..." [...] "we don't do a lot of social media... we don't like the shallow format of it... we might get across content that's a little bit more considered, not just... sound bites."* [EN 251]

These accounts position awareness-building as a form of ethical labour: founders are not only promoting a venture, but actively managing the quality of public understanding by making limits, trade-offs and system constraints visible. This also links closely to evidence-building in 2.1.2, where transparency depends on being able to substantiate claims and explain uncertainty without overstating what the evidence can support.

2.1.4 Knowledge sharing and collective learning

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 9 of 25 cases; most visible in education, care, accessibility and creative settings, with further examples in

A further strand of engagement concerned active dissemination of knowledge beyond organisational boundaries. Founders described sharing tools, frameworks and lessons learned with peers, clients and wider communities, treating this as part of their ethical responsibility rather than as a threat to competitive advantage. This sharing took multiple forms: mentoring, sector workshops, co-authored reports, podcasts, and contributions to professional networks and associations.

Accessibility and digital-inclusion ventures, in particular, linked knowledge sharing to design justice. Insights generated in one context (e.g. accessible wayfinding, inclusive communications) were deliberately made available across ecosystems so that other organisations could avoid repeating harmful or exclusionary patterns. Environmental participants likewise described sharing methodologies—such as lifecycle assessment approaches or decarbonisation roadmaps—to encourage replication of effective practices rather than guarding them as proprietary advantages.

One participant working on body image and exercise concerns articulated knowledge creation and dissemination as a responsibility to provide truthful information with wider social benefit:

> *"I'm trying to kind of create knowledge and through research and through those kinds of things and also disseminate it." [...] "I feel like there's a responsibility to try and give truthful information and in a way that is hopefully positive on the world."* [EN 264]

They also noted a practical limitation: the effects of public-facing work can be difficult to observe, creating uncertainty about outcomes and a desire for feedback loops:

> *"I use social media to kind of share the podcast..." [...] "There might be hundreds of people who have gone on massive changes because of what they listened to but just never told me... I just don't know." [...] "if I could get more communication, more feedback, that would be useful."* [EN 265]

A related account emphasised the rationale for open dissemination as cumulative progress, where sharing enables others to iterate and extend what has been developed:

> *"[It's important] to share knowledge because if you just learn something new or you develop something new but you're not sharing it to the wider society… what was really the point…?" […] "You share that knowledge and another organisation or individuals can come in and develop that further… that's kind of what keeps progression going…"* [EN 268]

> *So, I started [Venture] to provide that learning to people. So, we got an e-learning platform. I developed e-learning for our own clients. So, some clients come to us and say can you help us develop some of this. Some I do available in the public domain."* [EN 267]

At the same time, founders described communicative boundary-work in translating complex or uncertain knowledge for public settings. One participant highlighted the tension between ethical precision (including caveats) and the communication norms of media formats:

> *"It's a fine balance that I constantly have to deal with… I could add an infinite number of caveats to everything I say… but then… people aren't going to want to listen…" […] "when I do media things… the media don't like that. They want you to give them… snippets of the truth."* [EN 270]

Collective learning also appeared internally as structured reflection and organisational sense-making, where knowledge-sharing was treated as a two-way process rather than top-down dissemination. One founder described a recurring strategic rhythm designed to surface staff observations and translate them into stakeholder-relevant priorities:

> *"We do have an overall business strategy. Awareness of a document quite regularly… every quarter… what's our targets where we want to go…" […] "We want to know from our staff what have they seen, what do they come across, what do they think is going to be beneficial to our stakeholders."* [EN 275]

Across these accounts, collective learning operates as a form of distributed ethics: responsibility is not confined to doing the "right thing" within a single organisation, but extends to enabling others to improve. Through teaching, co-publication and open

collaboration, founders seek to normalise ethical reflection and practice as part of their sectors' everyday operating fabric.

Overall, engagement and learning were presented across Sub-theme 2.1 as part of the infrastructure through which ethical intent was translated into practice.

> **C1** emphasised dialogue with parents, practitioners and local authorities to keep services inclusive and safe, alongside participatory evaluation of impact.
>
> **C2** embedded consultation with clinicians and regulators, empirical validation, and ongoing feedback to maintain clinical accountability and guard against harm.
>
> **C3** prioritised research, audit and transparent reporting to substantiate environmental and social claims and to challenge misleading industry narratives.
>
> **C4** extended learning outward through co-design, advocacy and knowledge sharing to promote justice, representation and emotional safety in design and use.

Although the specific mechanisms varied—from advisory panels and user communities to research studies, podcasts and roundtables—the underlying intention was shared: to turn ethics into relational and evidential processes that can be examined, criticised and improved over time. In this sense, engagement, evidence-building, awareness-raising and knowledge sharing together form the ethical "infrastructure" through which ventures continually align their innovations with the interests and safety of those they affect.

b) 2.2: Sector-specific strategic planning and profit reinvestment

This sub-theme examines how founders shaped strategy within sectoral constraints and opportunities, and how financial decisions were connected to mission continuity. Four interlinked domains were identified: financial sustainability and contextual navigation;

purpose-driven operational effectiveness; profit reinvestment and long-term mission investment; and ethical governance and organisational integrity. These domains show how founders linked growth, governance and resource allocation to ethical commitments, rather than treating strategy as separate from responsibility. The accounts below integrate cohort signals with verbatim extracts, each labelled with its EN for cross-reference in the appendix.

2.2.1 Financial sustainability and contextual navigation

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 10 of 25 cases; most visible in education, care, health and wellbeing, with further examples in environmental, data-led, platform and creative cases.

Founders described contextual awareness as the practical skill of operating within sector-specific rules whilst managing commercial constraints. This was particularly evident in education and health, where safeguarding, tendering and data protection conditions shaped what could be offered, to whom, and at what pace. Environmental and platform ventures reported similar pressures around timing, resourcing and technological readiness, especially where regulatory expectations or societal norms were still emerging.

In some cases, the point of departure was simply the realism of early-stage finance: returns were treated as uncertain and temporally distant, particularly where product adoption depended on trust-building, compliance, or sequential engagement.

> *"Yes, we look at what a monetary return is likely to be but we are at an early stage within the business."* [EN 276]

Several participants described intentionally slowing or sequencing growth to remain within ethical and regulatory bounds. For multi-service consultancies, this meant accepting longer sales cycles and more complex procurement routes than larger competitors, particularly where service uptake depended on phased adoption across different divisions:

> *"So, financial is an obstacle, timing is an obstacle... it might take five wins of new business, whereas a bigger company will say, yeah, we'll use this and this."* [EN 277]

Others linked contextual awareness directly to funding decisions. In health and wellbeing settings, founders described remaining bootstrapped or limiting external investment to avoid commercial pressures that could undermine user agency or sector safeguards, especially where investors might prioritise lock-in or short-term conversion over ethical caution:

> *"We do it iteratively and slowly because we're not externally funded. We're bootstrapped and we want to try and keep control for ethical reasons because if you get a VC involved all the ethics are, I would say, more challenged because the financial side becomes paramount rather than the ethical side. And sometimes they work. I believe actually they work hand in hand, but when you do the ethical thing, the profit follows, but I'm not sure that investors always see it that way. In the short term, they might choose the more obviously profitable route. [...] So, you know, [investors] like say, lock people into a 10 session bundle up front and we're like no you can't lock people in it's that you're giving an agency the whole point is that it's their choice we don't want to lock people in we also want them to give them a pay as you go option and they might insist well that doesn't make sense to the commercial model you need to lock them in so, there's there could be a conflict for example right there."* [EN 279]

Contextual navigation also involved reconfiguring monetisation and client selection. Some founders described the difficulty of shifting from free provision to paid services whilst continuing to act as an ethical organisation, including decisions about whether to work with large organisations whose conduct appeared misaligned but where influence might still be possible:

> *"One of the biggest challenges is switching from doing free work to charging... Another challenge is deciding who to work with, as an ethical organisation... Working with big businesses... can be a moral challenge, but it may be necessary to drive real change and progress."* [EN 280]

These trade-offs often converged in founder capacity limits. A founder described a point at which personal effort and savings could no longer sustain expansion, making "ethical growth" contingent on financing routes that did not compromise intended standards.

> *"We're at the stage now where... without a cash injection... I can't then take [Org] forward to resource the other things that we need to be able to do."* [EN 282]

Across these accounts, founders traded speed for integrity: accepting demanding procurement requirements, phasing builds to match regulatory and social readiness, and resisting funding terms or lock-in practices that conflicted with user autonomy or sectoral safeguards. This aligns with member-checking reflections that highlighted MedTech priorities around privacy and accuracy, arts/education concerns with safeguarding and dignity, and environmental emphasis on carbon and sourcing, often encapsulated in the metaphor of "not building houses in floodplains" [EN 303].

A smaller group of founders also described accepting work or partnerships that sat uneasily with their stated values, highlighting that financial sustainability sometimes required compromises they regarded as imperfect.

2.2.2 Purpose-driven operational effectiveness

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 11 of 25 cases; visible across several sectors, particularly education, care, health, wellbeing, environmental and data-led cases.

Beyond statutory compliance, many founders leaned on field-specific norms—educational inclusion, environmental stewardship, clinical robustness—as working standards for everyday decisions. Rather than treating ethics as an add-on, they described governance and performance through sector-shaped benchmarks: safeguarding and personalisation in education, carbon and fuel poverty in environmental ventures, and accuracy, safety and fairness in health and data settings.

In practice, this translated into integration of ethical expectations into strategic and operational planning. One sustainability-focused founder rejected the separation of "sustainability strategy" from core business planning:

> *"I don't think there should be a sustainability strategy on the left hand and the business plan... I think the two need to be married."* [EN 292]

Environmental ventures frequently articulated sector-led ethics through co-benefit logics (for example, linking resource systems to justice outcomes). Here, governance is expressed as a framing choice: defining the problem in ways that connect technical intervention to wider social consequences.

> *"We reduce fuel poverty because we've got eight to 900 pounds worth of energy locked up in resources which are being transported all around the world and using humongous amounts of carbon to reprocess, repurpose."* [EN 298]

This translated into success criteria that were not reducible to growth metrics. Rather than rejecting commercial measures, founders framed them as insufficient unless projects remained faithful to the ethical basis on which they were conceived.

> "Our success is only measured by producing these projects according to the ethics that they're built upon." [EN 295]

Finally, some founders used prevention-oriented reasoning—closely aligned with engineering ethics—to justify risk-averse or evidence-led decisions that avoid foreseeable harm. The sector standard becomes, in effect, 'do not build avoidable harm into the system'.

> *"Socially now it's acceptable to build houses on the floodplains, on the known floodplains, with all of the science that we have in front of us today. And we watch people regularly on television with brushes sweeping out their houses, and then fighting with insurance companies, and not being able to then insure their houses then the mortgage companies won't mortgage their houses. And it's so wrong on so, so many levels that if you were to go back to basic engineering, you just wouldn't build it there in the first place. And with the technology that we're looking at, there's a couple of fronts. One is that we must stop polluting our water. We must stop polluting our environment overall, whether it's water or whether it's air. And you've got to, so the social elements is important, but it's got to be driven by science because science, as in engineering, has this ability to be able to produce sensible results. I don't build a house in the flood plain, or for our point of view [...] after we sold our last business, we said that we wanted to put something back into society. So, we put aside [resources] to put into this [...] technology."* [EN 303]

Across these cases, sector-led ethics functioned as applied governance: inclusion, carbon justice, clinical safety and user autonomy operated as reference points for strategy, resource allocation and product design. Performance was evaluated not only through product–market fit, growth or unit economics, but through the extent to which ventures remained faithful to these field-specific standards. This echoes member-checking feedback that strategic planning was understood as "beyond foundational CSR", with sector priorities providing the practical grammar through which ethics was made operational.

2.2.3 Profit reinvestment and long-term mission investment

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 8 of 25 cases; most developed in environmental, sustainability, behavioural, consumer and analytics cases, with further examples in education, care, health, wellbeing and digital inclusion where surplus was channelled into access, programmes or further innovation.

Founders described the deliberate redeployment of surplus into mission-critical areas such as subsidised access, research and development, technological upgrades, and ecosystem-building. Reinvestment was framed as a way of retaining independence from short-term pressures, building resilience in lean periods, and maintaining credibility with users and partners. Several participants reported pacing capital raises or remaining bootstrapped until they were confident that potential investors would not dilute user agency or ethical priorities, before investing more heavily in technology and capability once fit and timing improved. This approach, echoed in member-checking as a route to "long-lasting, sustainable social impact", positioned growth as conditional on value alignment rather than purely on commercial opportunity.

In environmental ventures, reinvestment was sometimes tied directly to scientific validation. Investment in independent assessment was framed as a commitment to accountability: a way of ensuring that impact claims could be defended and scrutinised.

> *"We had to invest [so] we could have a life cycle assessment carried out... we wanted to have it done by a recognised body." [EN 308]*

> *"So, we invest that money... we think we know, but only science can tell you for certain."* [EN 309]

Others were explicit that profitability was pursued not as an end in itself but as a means of extending social contribution, even where this created tensions about charging for services, including cross-subsidy work might otherwise be inaccessible.

> *"So, like in terms it is in some way a mix between profitability and also keeping that same mission alive." [...] "Yeah, so the principles is mainly basically profitability and the reason why that is so I can invest that back into other things that I do for other people. So, it's, I like to call it like a Robin Hood model."* [EN 311]

At the same time, several accounts emphasised that reinvestment ambitions were constrained by funding availability, with mission momentum slowing where research or development could not be financed.

> "Where there's availability with money-wise, so with the research projects and things, if I can't get it funded, or if [organisation] doesn't have funding for a certain project that I want to do, then I can't do it, or at least it slows it down massively." [EN 317]

Environmental founders described a similar orientation in relation to nature and long-term ecological outcomes, with profit partially earmarked in advance for planetary benefit:

> *""We've got huge plans for [Venture]." [...] "We're all about investing in nature and the environment. 'Delivering positive outcomes and change in the world' is a key aim of the organization."* [EN 296]

> *""That's where we work with 1% for the Planet, which is we give 1% of all of our profits at the end of every year to the planet through the organisation 1% for the Planet."* [EN 312]

These accounts position profit as a means rather than an end: a resource to deepen access, strengthen evidence, and scale technologies and practices that remain aligned with purpose. At the same time, several participants acknowledged that funding constraints, investor expectations and the practical demands of growth meant that reinvestment ambitions were unevenly realised, and at times fell short of what they considered ideal.

2.2.4 Ethical governance and organisational integrity

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 7 of 25 cases; most visible in health, wellbeing, environmental, sustainability, digital inclusion and accessibility cases, where governance practices were used to connect affordability, access, accountability and organisational integrity.

Founders also described internal structures designed to stabilise ethical intent as ventures grew: board-level challenge, independent advisers, contractual clauses protecting values, case reviews, and standards that exceeded formal compliance. Some traced a trajectory from early, largely implicit ethos to more formalised processes as teams, products and risks expanded. Others built governance "in from the start", using tools such as B Corp diagnostics, explicit decision principles and escalation routes to harden initial commitments into routinised practice. Governance was thus characterised as both preventative (reducing drift and safeguarding users and staff) and enabling (providing clarity for scaling and partnership decisions).

A recurrent governance move was distinguishing outputs from outcomes, with deliberate post-delivery checks to understand downstream effects. This frames accountability as ongoing rather than episodic.

> *"We consider both outputs or deliverables and outcomes. And in our governance model, we remind ourselves, even after an assignment or project is finished, to check back on and what were the subsequent outcomes."* [EN 321]

One founder linked decision-making directly to an explicit ethos of integrity and refusal to compromise under client pressure:

> *"The process of decision making in our business is based on honesty, integrity, morality…" […] "We value what we do, we know we're good at what we do, so we won't undermine what we do." […] "If there isn't a connection, you can't get on with everybody, but if there isn't a connection and you feel you're being squeezed or your integrity isn't going to be honoured because it's a financial gain…"* [EN 324]

Others highlighted the role of independent oversight and challenge in strengthening internal deliberation:

> *"So, [our decision-making process] is not technological. This is human to human. It happens in two ways. So, internally from within our employees or from within the finders, we will actually simply challenge each other and that's the bulk of what we do. However, externally as part of our governance, we have an independent board advisor and so, as part of our governance and review process, we'll also have those discussions externally as a check-in balance."* [EN 331]

Several participants described embedding values into contracts, with clear exit routes where alignment could not be maintained:

> *"Walked away from a partnership... [There's a] clause in all contracts that protects our values."* [EN 332]

Specialist tools were also used to assess counterparties' ethical commitment. A governance consultant described using the B Corp Business Impact Assessment as both an audit device and a way of gauging genuine intent:

> *"So, I often will use that as a tool to do an initial audit with a company to see where they are when it comes to sustainability and you know, ethicality etc." [...] "So, it helps to identify and also in the process of going through it with them often online like this or it might be face to face. Their response to the questions very often gives a good indicator of whether they've really thought this through at all or whether it's like, wow, seriously, we've never even considered half of these things or these all requirements, you know, so it's a good tool to assess their commitment in this area, how much they've already done and how much further they're prepared to go and might need to go, depending on what their goal is."* [EN 330]

In operational terms, governance extended into everyday workflows. One organisation described team reviews that flag sensitive cases for collective decision-making, while others reported redesigning fulfilment and wholesale models to reduce barriers, waste and unnecessary complexity, even where this increased short-term operational challenge:

> *"Fulfilment is a big challenge" [...] "Fulfilment data, delivery route planning, driver app, finance dashboard." [...] "Box schemes lack*

> *economies of scale… we plan to create a virtual fulfilment network of vans and drivers." […] "We're creating that on a micro, local level." […] "We've tweaked the direction… […] building a wholesale platform for seasonal fresh healthy produce wholesalers." […] "The product has been received more positively than I could have budgeted for… greater opportunity for our product to make a difference."* [EN 323]

Across these accounts, ethical governance appears as an evolving architecture—moving from personal conviction to structured processes—that seeks to protect people, standards and mission as ventures expand and their environments become more demanding. Together, these patterns indicate a dominant orientation towards mission-led strategy, while the divergent accounts underline that ethical practice was negotiated and, at times, fragile under commercial and institutional pressure.

Across Theme 2, social impact strategy appears less as a formal add-on and more as a way of organising how growth, evidence, and reinvestment are handled. Founders trade speed for integrity, build feedback and research into everyday routines, and redeploy surplus to deepen access or improve technical robustness. At the same time, some narratives describe working with misaligned partners, adopting interim arrangements or accepting slower validation than ideal under resource constraints in order to keep ventures viable. The combination of committed practice and pragmatic compromise illustrates the strategic cadence that DEN and VISION seek to capture: ethical commitments are neither static nor cost-free, but negotiated over time through sector-specific constraints. Theme 2 therefore shows how ethical aims shape strategic choices around growth, evidence, reinvestment and the selection of socially innovative approaches (Objectives 2–5), while also highlighting the fragility as well as the persistence of these commitments.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Tech for good – compliance, challenges and solutions

This theme examines how founders approached the design, deployment, and governance of technology as a matter of ethical practice. Participants engaged with the dual nature of technology—its capacity to enable social benefit while also creating risks

of exclusion, misuse, and over-reliance. These considerations informed strategic choices about compliance, inclusivity, and long-term risk mitigation.

Two sub-themes structure the analysis:

Sub-theme 3.1 Technological Integration – Advantages and Limitations – examines the advantages and limitations of technological integration, including cultural fit, practical constraints, knowledge sharing and future directions for social innovation.

Sub-theme 3.2 User-centred Design and JEDI Principles – considers how user-centred design and JEDI principles were addressed through data integrity, regulatory compliance, accessibility, inclusion and safeguards for users.

Each sub-sub-theme below includes a short distribution line to indicate coverage across the dataset. Counts are non-exclusive and are used to show spread across cases, not statistical prevalence, ranking or importance.

a) Sub-theme 3.1 Technological Integration – Advantages and Limitations

Across the dataset, founders treated technology not only as a delivery channel but as part of their ethical identity. This stance was strongest in **C3 (Environmental and Data ventures)** and **C4 (Accessibility and Evaluation technologies)**, with parallel concerns visible in **C1 (Education and Wellbeing)** and **C2 (HealthTech)**. Three domains capture their accounts.

3.1.1 Navigating technological and cultural limitations

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 9 of 25 cases; most developed in health, wellbeing, digital inclusion and accessibility cases, with further examples in environmental and sustainability ventures.

Founders highlighted a range of constraints that shaped how technology could be ethically deployed: uneven digital literacy, affordability gaps, organisational resistance, and the emotional and cognitive demands of new interfaces. Several stressed that the

barrier was rarely the absence of tools as such, but rather the capacity to use them confidently and consistently, especially in smaller organisations. One adviser contrasted the readiness of large firms to purchase expensive licences with the realities of smaller businesses:

> *"If I contrast large business with small, large business would think nothing of paying 10,000 pounds for software license. To a small or medium-sized business 10,000 pounds for software license would be unheard of. So, you get this sort of sense of scale and access but it's not the tool itself, the tool is present."* [EN 338]

Others described a persistent "technology gap" in understanding complex concepts such as carbon accounting or net zero, positioning their own role as a human interface that translated specialist tools into usable guidance:

> *"I think there's still a 10 year [digital] gap. I think there's still a technology gap. So, one of the reasons we exist as consultants is to be the interface between the technology and the customer because the customer doesn't understand pilot change, doesn't understand carbon foot-printing, doesn't understand net zero and so, they rely on us to be to use the technology for them most of the time. They've allowed us to interpret, to play, to affirm, correct. [...] "It's still very human."* [EN 340]

In health and wellbeing contexts, participants emphasised the ethical work involved in choosing and configuring digital systems, particularly around data protection and psychological safety. A solo practitioner, for example, described the weight of decisions about platforms, servers, and information security when handling sensitive client notes:

> *"I use [...], all the social media platforms that I'm on, it's just [...] and [...], all of these kind of small pieces of software all mashed together kind of mean that I can do the job if I didn't have them I wouldn't be able to do it." [...] "I use a digital course platform called [... and] whilst I don't use that to make decisions, there have been lots of kind of lots of thinking has had to go into that in terms of what's the cyber security process like, what's the information security, where's the server, all of these things." [...] "I will think about, for sure, what I do in terms of my clients' data if I keep notes digitally... am I taking notes on a portal? How secure is the portal? Who else has access to it, etc."* [EN 337]

Immersive and extended-reality ventures further underlined the emotional risks of novel technologies. Here, ethical use meant constraining what the technology could do in practice, even when more intensive use might be commercially attractive:

> *"It's still a bit of an uphill battle to get to exactly where we want to go with that technology and I think it is also because it is still somewhat of a novelty." [...] "Just because of the technology, if it was on a 2D screen, absolutely fine. But with that added level of immersion, it became quite scary." [...] "There are so many things I have to think about in the context of using that technology and making sure that people are safe and that I'm not scaring people or that I'm not going to trigger a big emotional response because that tends to happen quite a lot." [...] "So, yeah it's mostly around well-being and not hurting people basically."* [EN 345]

Alongside technical and financial limitations, some founders foregrounded cultural assumptions as an ethical barrier in their own right. One participant described their mission as increasing empathy for a group whose suffering is routinely discounted due to appearance-based stereotypes:

> *""A huge part of [Venture] is about increasing empathy for people that we don't tend to be empathetic towards because I think that the population that struggle with [this] stuff, they tend to be people that nobody feels sorry for because we assume that they have it good because of the way they look and we assume that oh well you know they've got this thing that society seems to idolise so, they must be fine..." [...] "but just because of the way someone looks that we assume that they must be fine." [...] "we need to be more empathetic for people who are struggling [with condition] and no one seems to be caring about."* [EN 335]

Across these accounts, technological and cultural limitations were treated as ethical conditions that shape what is permissible and responsible, rather than mere operational hurdles: founders responded by

i) simplifying toolsets, constraining functionality where user well-being could plausibly be compromised;

ii) acting as intermediaries where literacy was low, prioritising security; and

iii) triaging "nice-to-have" features in favour of safe, usable, and affordable provision.

A minority founders also reported decisions to delay or limit adoption, accepting that resourcing, skills gaps and user resistance constrained what could be implemented ethically in practice.

3.1.2 Tech integration of socially innovative solutions

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 8 of 25 cases; most visible in environmental, data-led, accessibility and evaluation cases, with further examples in HealthTech.

Founders tended to treat technology as an instrument for social purpose rather than a goal in itself. Integration was framed as aligning digital tools, pricing and architecture with specific missions such as inclusive med-tech, decarbonisation or equitable access to learning. In several cases, this involved using tech-driven business models while filtering clients or sectors so that technical effort was directed towards "doing good in the world". One founder described this positioning explicitly:

> *"[Venture] is a small design and software development agency focused on building websites and applications for companies within [...] that are doing good in the world, with a particular emphasis on med tech." We're very tech-driven. We want to be producing tech for the right reasons."* [EN 349]

Rather than pursuing scale through automation alone, some environmental and advisory ventures emphasised deep, relationship-based work underpinned by software tools. Here, impact was understood as the effect of sustained engagement with a small number of high-leverage actors, even if this limited breadth of reach:

> *"We use software [but] we have less scalability than pure face software companies." [...] "We're not scalable in terms of breadth, but it is depth, much deeper and much deeper impact." [...] "Our human interaction with a few people can actually have a big impact on climate change as a problem over time."* [EN 350]

In education and accessibility, integration was explicitly tied to fairness in access and affordability. One founder explained how a global student user base led them to adjust their commercial model, while also recognising the technical limits of natural language processing:

> *"In terms of scaling the business for us it's really important that we're providing access to this technology to any student regardless of where they are in the world." [...] "we've implemented a regional pricing strategy." [...] "It's really important to us because we know the value of technology to students but it's important to us that wherever you are you've kind of got fair access to it as well." [...] "the technology does work best with English language because the way that it works is all around, well it's natural language processing so it's built around sentence structure"* [EN 355]

For hardware-focused environmental innovators, integration also meant removing friction at the point of use whilst making underlying evidence radically transparent. One participant argued that users should not have to understand complex science to act ethically, provided the technology is simple and the validation is publicly available:

> *"So, it's the way things are reported. So, it's the social element, the truthfulness of reporting, and then science, all combined. And then if you take the technology, the technology needs to be, again, using that simple approach, needs to be simple to use as a bin. So, from our point of view, open the lid, pop the material in, close the lid, press a button. The customer doesn't need to understand, or the user doesn't need to understand the science, they can understand if they want to, because we put our life cycle assessment front and centre on our website. I don't know of another technology that's done that because for me, I want the world to know that this is a piece of technology."* [EN 357]

Across these accounts, tech integration is treated as an ethical design task: combining tools, pricing models and interfaces in ways that instantiate social purpose, respect user constraints and make verified, socially beneficial choices the easiest available option.

3.1.3 Systemic change and future directions for social innovation

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 10 of 25 cases; most developed in environmental, data-led, accessibility and evaluation cases, with further examples in education and wellbeing.

Many founders located their ventures within a wider project of systemic change rather than isolated innovation. They linked day-to-day decisions to concerns about intergenerational justice and planetary limits, describing their work as a response to the

perceived unsustainability of current trajectories. One environmental entrepreneur framed their motivation in explicitly long-horizon terms:

> *"For me, the ongoing future of humanity was very important. It would be a shame if we had great lives now but it wasn't sustainable in the students who generated this time and you can't live properly after what we've got and I'm still very concerned about that and I think it is all shown."* [EN 359]

Systemic ambition was often coupled with a critique of superficial ethical claims. Several founders suggested that only organisations with genuine purpose and coherence between talk and practice would endure, positioning anti-greenwashing as both an ethical and a strategic stance:

> *"I think businesses that have a future are the ones that actually have a purpose, that do some good, that don't need to employ big brains to try and justify the profit that they, you know, with the future." [...] "If we genuinely avoided greenwashing and actually meant what we say, then I think those businesses would become more sustainable and have a happier, longer-term future."* [EN 360]

Some participants translated this into specific market-shaping goals and metrics, particularly in environmental food systems. One founder described commercial targets (such as increasing the organic share of a national market) as proxies for structural change in public health, local economies and climate impact, while stressing that ethical ambition depended on a robust business model:

> *"We set our business principles around what we are trying to achieve, the bigger picture around helping and whether you look at an example of moving, you know, increasing the size of the organic [food] market, we have commercial aims, let's say we want to move it from, help move it from 2.2% to 4.2% over five years, but you still drive the business in in similar ways to you would drive any other commercial for profit business, but ultimately it has a purpose. If we are successful we help improve our local food systems, we help improve public health and we that we need to balance that with commercial success because as I keep saying to our users if we are not focused on running a profitable, commercially successful business, we cannot deliver the long-term benefits to the environment or the climate of a local economy or to public health."* [EN 364]

Others articulated systemic change through explicit reinvestment commitments, treating profit as a vehicle for redistribution rather than an endpoint. One partnership envisaged demonstrating that a for-profit business could normalise high levels of give-back as part of its operating model:

> *"I'm not against growth, I'm very pro-growth... but what I want to be able to also do is use these opportunities... to put back into what people would call good corporate policies and so on [and] get to the day... where our partnership can say that as we operate with the profits and the financial income that we deliver, 30% of that profit is put directly back into supporting and growing our 12 [Org] priorities. This includes supporting indigenous people, social issues, carbon and nature conservation, and being able to demonstrate that it's possible to run a successful business while giving back at a minimum of 30%."* [EN 366]

System-level thinking also informed founders' approach to growth and investment, with some explicitly rejecting offers or models that risked undermining long-term control, purpose or standards. Here, pacing and autonomy were framed as ethical considerations as much as strategic ones:

> *"I think sometimes you get offered something and on face value it looks like it's the perfect thing at that point. But then when you look into the future and you think actually what's going to be like in two years' time, five years' time and it's sometimes better to go slower and steadier and be in control."* [EN 369]

These accounts suggest that systemic change is pursued through a combination of narrative (how problems and responsibilities are framed), metrics (what is tracked and reported), redistribution (how surplus is used) and restraint (what forms of growth or investment are declined). Social innovation is thus positioned as an ongoing reconfiguration of market norms and infrastructures, rather than a set of isolated ethical products.

b) Sub-theme 3.2 User-centred Design and JEDI Principles

Inclusivity was treated as an organisation-wide commitment, extending from interface design to recruitment and leadership. This was most explicit in **C4 (Digital Inclusion and Accessibility)** and **C2 (HealthTech)**, with reinforcing references in **C1** and **C3**.

3.2.1 Upholding data integrity, regulatory compliance and ethical principles

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 11 of 25 cases; most developed in health, wellbeing, digital inclusion and accessibility cases, with further examples in environmental and sustainability ventures.

Founders framed data governance, privacy and accessibility as ethical undertakings rather than solely compliance tasks. Across sectors, they described designing for consent, minimising avoidable exposure of sensitive information, and investing in processes that protect trust, reduce harm and make claims defensible. In several accounts, this began with how people are engaged in testing and research: voluntariness, comfort and inclusion were treated as part of "handling data correctly", rather than as separate concerns.

> *"We deal with a lot of people's data. So, handling data correctly, we do some like user testing with people as well. So, just ensuring that everything we do is making people comfortable, that we're not manipulating people to come and get involved, it's always their choice. Our hiring is also very inclusive. It's just quite deliberate in the way that we go about making our business as, I always use the word moral, but yeah, as ethical as ethical as possible."* [EN 370]

Privacy-by-design, deliberate restriction of data use, and investment in accessibility testing as part of a moral promise to users, often choosing to exceed statutory minima to protect trust and reduce harm. For digital tools mediating access to the physical world, this meant treating digital accessibility as an ethical precondition rather than an optional enhancement:

> *"I think how we conduct ourselves as a business, what our mission is, I think even if we look beyond just the academic space, the*

> *potential to make more evidence-based research more accessible to more people is something that I would say is very important to me both personally and professionally, [... as well as] combating misinformation and making sure that as many people as possible have got access to and understand evidence-based research." [...] "Whatever way you do it, however you do it and it doesn't have to be in a traditional way, to keep learning and keep educating yourself... as long as you are always learning and developing I think is the important thing."* [EN 375]

In finance- and blockchain-adjacent contexts, participants noted that reputational risk and sector "red flags" increased the need for explicit mission discipline, codified values, and team-based delivery norms:

> *"So, something that is really important for us is how we develop this project... [...] Because it is a finance project, it's company and it's connected with blockchain, there are lots of red flags. It would be a company like ours, in a situation where we want to just make money, we don't care about nobody, and we will do everything it's possible to make as much money as possible"* [EN 372]

> *"We deliver our professional handbook [...], where inside with everything that is connected with the country and with how we're going to move forward with the company and the values that we have and one of the things that we have is collaboration."* [EN 384]

For health-related technologies, ethical concern centred on dataset integrity and the clinical implications of error. One founder of a diagnostic device distinguished between types of error and emphasised the responsibility to minimise the risk of false reassurance in particular:

> *"I think the key one is [Org/Device] not being trained on a wide enough data set. And so, when certain users who we may have not, we may not have considered initially by the device, use the device, it's not reading [...] accurately, that's one of my biggest concerns that, oh, it's flagging things aren't actually there, that's another one. But yeah, the collection of data is really, really important. And training it on a wide enough data set so that anyone who picks it up can be assured that what this device is reading is true and is accurate. And then, just like I kind of alluded to, a big ethical concern is [device] raising false alarm amongst people or false reassurance telling you that there's nothing there when there is or telling you that there is something there when there isn't. So, it's that line that we're trying to deal with too. So, I think warning*

> *people of something that could exist when it doesn't actually exist is not as detrimental as telling people that you know you haven't got a [symptom of the health condition] when you definitely do. So, that's a big ethical concern for us."* [EN 373]

Integrity-by-design also appeared in decisions about how far to automate interpretation. One education-technology founder explained the choice of extractive rather than generative summarisation as a way of safeguarding academic honesty:

> *"So, [Org] uses extractive summarisation rather than abstractive summarisation, so that means that anything you see in the contents of the summary [solution] is pulled directly from the original text." [...] " So, the argument from librarians that this is going to help students to write their essay, it just doesn't hold up because essentially the text that they're reading within the [solution] is taken directly from the original paper. So, if they were to copy and paste it into an essay it would just get picked up by a plagiarism detector."* [EN 374]

In sustainability and consumer-information platforms, ethical data practice was associated with granular transparency and user agency. Rather than simplifying complex assessments into a single score, one venture provided multi-dimensional ratings so that users could make their own trade-offs, even where this challenged retailer preferences:

> *"Transparency is key." [...] "We've been very careful to make sure that users can actually make their own choices based upon their own values, their own ethics, their own sustainability by showing them being transparent on the data of across the fourteen measures that we have." [...] "Some retailers, some brands who've said the consumer isn't ready for that. What the consumer wants is simple simplification." [...] "Our consumers are users of our app... have said that's absolutely not what we want. We want the transparency to be able to make it a sufficient based upon what we care about, not what the retailer thinks we should care about."* [EN 376]

Operationally, some founders described "compliance-by-design" through templating, audit trails, and automation, while still acknowledging that regulatory constraints can shape which tools are permissible:

> *"We use electronic signatures... additional regulation... templates... contracts... audit plans... audit reports... we produce a certificate... that's all automated."* [EN 378]

In education and care settings, privacy-by-design was described as requiring workflow redesign, such as avoiding standard email when children's data is involved and shifting to secure portals despite added friction:

> *"I think children's privacy is really important and using emails to discuss children is really quite dodgy around, you know, it's end-to-end encrypted and all of that sort of thing." [...] "But there's always a balance between accessibility for the people who need to see it and data protection and privacy." [...] "We use [...] The council use it." [...] "So, instead of sending you an email, they send an email to this sort of whizzy thing in the [Cloud] and then you get an alert, you log into the whizzy thing in the [Cloud] and you can see the email."* [EN 381]

Across cases, founders also described ethical responsibility as an ongoing learning task, undertaken to keep advice accurate, transparent and defensible:

> *"We're always learning... always reading... always networking... so that whatever we're telling our consumer... is as accurate and... honest as possible."* [EN 383]

> *"Ethicality... is... integrity... transparent... accountability... upholding data privacy, patient confidentiality... aligning our vision through whatever decision we make."* [EN 382]

Across these examples, data integrity and compliance are positioned as sustained ethical work rather than one-off compliance events. Founders treat technical design and operational choices (such as system architecture, algorithmic approaches, access controls and record-keeping) as directly implicated in consent, autonomy and the prevention of harm. In response, they put in place practical safeguards: consent-aware recruitment and testing practices; attention to dataset adequacy and error risks; transparency about criteria and limitations; and routinised governance mechanisms such as handbooks, templates and auditable workflows.

Read together, 3.2.1 indicates that ethical intent is translated into technological process through a combination of protective data decisions and procedural infrastructure that helps maintain standards as products, teams and user bases scale.

3.2.2 Designing accessible, inclusive technologies grounded in justice, equity and diverse user needs

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 13 of 25 cases, making it the highest-density domain in Theme 3; most developed in digital inclusion, accessibility and HealthTech cases, with further examples in education, wellbeing, environmental and data-led ventures.

Across cases, inclusivity was presented both as an ethical imperative and as a practical design method. Founders described keeping "the user always [at the] forefront", treating accessibility and inclusion as baseline conditions rather than late-stage refinements. This involved deliberate attention to language, interaction patterns, pricing, and assistive features, with an explicit link to fairness, dignity and justice for those who are routinely excluded by mainstream provision.

Some participants grounded their approach in the diversity of users' relationships with technology. One founder, working with nature-based activities and online groups, emphasised the need to design for people who may be reluctant to adopt new tools:

> *"What I've realized is that there isn't actually a one size fits all, that each of our customers comes at it in a very different way and we all have very different relationships with technology."* [EN 387]

Several ventures described choosing "appropriate" rather than novel technology to widen access, combining simple tooling with clinical or evaluative work to ensure it is effective:

> *"We haven't created any new technology. It's all kind of existing technology. The technology is actually very simple. It's just making, we've just, we need audio sessions, and we've made those sessions more accessible to. [...] We've made CBT more accessible to people with [health condition] more accessible than it would otherwise be. But the technology is actually very simple. We've not, would not create any new technology here. You know, we've done some exploratory work and some research, and, [...] clinical scientific work to make it make it effective but we've not no kind of new technology that we've created specifically for this."* [EN 389]

Disability-led cases explicitly grounded inclusion in lived experience and fairness. One founder linked the venture's purpose to structural barriers created by inaccessible information, while another highlighted how ableist defaults shape interface choices (for example, map-first design):

> *"Most of our team are disabled. I [have a disability] myself. I think it's born from a sense of frustration that in order to do things, there is this need for this information, which is so hard to find, and that creates a tangible barrier, which doesn't seem fair, based off of things which people don't choose."* [EN 394]

> *"We considered disability across the whole spectrum." [...] "One of the things that I wasn't aware of is that for people with visual impairment, so for blind users, the whole concept of a map is really challenging. And so, therefore, the application that we built, the mobile app is based around a map to help people find places. But obviously for someone who's visually impaired, a map is not a particularly useful tool." [...] "I think on our end, one of the challenges we have is that the reason for the outcome that we're trying to improve, which is that lots of disabled people are isolated or lonely or excluded from society, we know is or relate to the lack of accessibility and the lack of accessibility information."* [EN 395]

Accessibility was also linked to everyday tools in education and care. One provider described the benefits of an online whiteboard and video platform for tuition, while simultaneously foregrounding the duty to manage associated risks for children:

> *"One way that technology is massively helping us is by making our services more accessible." [...] "So, we use a program called [...], which is, it's kind of video chat, but it's got an online whiteboard, you can upload worksheets, you can draw on the screen, so it's a shared screen I guess, but it's designed for tuition, it's got maths tools and all sorts, it's brilliant." [...] "There are ethical issues obviously around accessing the internet with a child." [...] "Even things that there's the obvious stuff about like what they're accessing when we're online, if you know viruses and unsuitable materials popping up and things like that."* [EN 400]

Founders also described inclusion as reducing learning burdens by building on familiar interactions, offering options, and making transparency visible as a trust-building practice:

> *“We're trying to create a solution that is quite intuitive to use and the way we do that is to build on existing interactions that people have around them rather than trying to introduce something that's completely novel and is just too difficult it's too steep of a learning curve for them to be able to integrate into their lives." […] "We give people that option, just so they can see that we're trying to be as transparent as possible with our dealings with them.”* [EN 397]

In education contexts, inclusion was discussed in terms of cognitive load, language, and neurodiversity. Assistive benefits were described as real but unfinished, with multilingual equity framed as a developmental direction rather than an achieved state:

> *“"We've become a tool that is useful, it's a useful assistive technology, it's a useful tool for neurodiverse students and that kind of segment of society […] "it's breaking down barriers in that way in terms of, like, for example, language barriers, it's making that material easier for people who speak other languages to access." […] "we do see an opportunity to improve the technology and make it more adaptable to other languages."* [EN 398]

> *“"It's really about enabling them [students and academics] to do that and whether […], if they're a new undergraduate or they're a PhD or a postdoc researcher that are just swamped […] but they need to make sense of [what they are reading] to be able to produce you know good quality work themselves." […] "I could use this application and I could get a better understanding in layman's terms of that subject without being an expert in the field."* [EN 390]

Some participants framed inclusion as requiring independence from commercial pressure, particularly where brands prefer aggregated narratives over “unfavourable truths” about ingredients, additives or harms:

> *“We're on their [consumers] side by trying, trying to have it more transparent. So, they all depend on who you talk to. They all want to add something else or can you measure this? Can you show me this? And sometimes we can sometimes just can't get the data retailers? Yeah, probably also because they and brands within that. So, it's both the manufacturers of the product, but also the retailers of the product. They want to appear their best. So, when you are transparent and you show that, I don't know. It's got, it's got chemicals, it's got additives in there that are harmful. They don't want you to show that they would rather bundle that up into a broader picture to say, actually, we as a product or we, as a company went in. All right, don't go into the detail. We don't need the detail, just, we're OK. So, it's a, we've been very clear to all the*

> *retailers, all the brands. We're not, we're not going to do it your way. We're going to do it hard way. We're going to do it hard way. Play with us if you want to play with us, but if you don't, that's fine when we're out there doing it anyway."* [EN 391]

Several founders sought to embed inclusivity into the smallest elements of user experience—icons, colours, layout—explicitly connecting simplicity and navigability to equity of access:

> *"The technology empowers us to be innovative and develop new solutions to address such challenges, and we're continuously wanting to drive continuous improvements and to be different..." [...] "That's one of our key aims and mission, to ensure that our technology that we are setting to develop is as accessible and as exclusivity as possible, ensuring that we make our products and services more accessible and diverse to the whole population, regardless of your age, gender or your disability, for example." [...] "We've really wanted to ensure that we build a software system that is simple to use, even from the icons and the colours that are used, it's very simple and it can be very easily navigated from the user's perspective."* [EN 402]

At a more systemic level, participants also linked inclusive design to who participates in building future technologies. Reflecting on the transition from Web 2 to Web 3, one founder argued that representation in development teams is crucial if new infrastructures are to avoid reproducing past exclusions:

> *"So, I think when we're at the precipice of, you know, I guess, Web 3, if you wanna call it, about the precipice of like a new technology, a new form, a new possibly way of living, more hybrid, I think it's vitally important to have people that are different represented, and people that are different building it." [...] "This is a huge thing. This will lead on to what I want to do. I think it's great to have people in gains or people in the artworks that are diverse, have women, have, you know, people from ethnic minorities, but I think it's also critically important that you have those people building it, people with those skills to say that I want to go work on meta and work on their meta better."* [EN 404]

Across these accounts, accessible and inclusive technology is treated as a matter of justice in both outcome and process. Founders respond by centring diverse users from the outset, drawing on lived experience, lowering cognitive and technical barriers, and challenging ableist or narrow defaults in how systems are imagined and built.

3.2.3 Incorporating advanced technologies, gamification and interactive learning experiences

Distribution within the dataset: identified in 9 of 25 cases; most developed in digital inclusion, accessibility, environmental and data-led cases, with further examples in HealthTech and creative or cultural ventures.

Advanced tools such as AI, VR, speech-to-text and gamified interfaces were adopted where founders believed they could deepen understanding, support autonomy or enhance wellbeing. These technologies were rarely presented as ends in themselves. Instead, participants described careful boundary-setting to prevent dependence, distress or exclusion, and emphasised that immersive or playful features should scaffold reflection and behaviour change rather than drive compulsive use.

In health and care settings, advanced features were often used to reduce cognitive and literacy burdens and improve learnability and options, including how speech-to-text and icon-based interfaces were introduced to support users who might find typing or written English difficult:

> *"We've incorporated this speech text kind of thing and also kind of where from our app perspective where the users can be able to kind of just click on click on different icons and it generates that daily notes." [...] "So, things like, you know, a person that may not necessarily be so, I guess, confident and, you know, maybe writing English or maybe pretty difficult to type for whatever reason based on their abilities. It's much more simple for them and it's much more simplified from that perspective."* [EN 411]

Other ventures used mobile guidance and familiar device interactions to make technically complex processes feel manageable, particularly when asking users to collect data on their own bodies:

> *"We use your mobile phone [...] it's going to guide you through the process, you just download the app [...] you can hold the phone in front of you the same way you would like unlock your phone using your face that helps you to build them up to your chest. So, we do it in a way that's very learnable from the user perspective. And we also give them options because we know that people's relationship*

with technology can be poor, can be good, depending on the experiences in the past." [EN 410]

Immersive technologies were used most experimentally in creative and cultural contexts. One founder described choosing VR to enable deeper engagement with digital fine art, but also reflected on the responsibility not to encourage excessive or addictive use:

"I guess I mean the first thing would be like the fact that I'm using VR headsets. That was a decision that I made because I loved immersion and I wanted to get people immersed in art in a different way." [...] "In terms of like how we pick that technology, that's an interesting one because it's a lot of that accessibility really." [...] "I have different layers of what we're trying to achieve." *[EN 417]*

"I thought, yeah, you know, I want to get people in the headsets, get them in as long as possible. That was after much consideration and kind of testing out. It didn't feel very ethical to encourage people to spend hours on end." [...] "I've really had to start looking at limiting people's time, not encouraging them to basically find another thing to be addicted to." [EN 423]

In environmental and sustainability ventures, participants explored gamification as a way to make abstract concepts such as "being more sustainable" tangible and motivating over time. One founder drew an explicit analogy with fitness and calorie-tracking apps:

Yeah, it's, it's kind of gamification. It's something that will keep them coming back. So, are you familiar with the [...] fitness apps? [...] This is how far I've run or have cycled or have done or even the food calorie counter. So, what is what I've eaten in this? So, with those you get to plot what I went on today, what earlier yesterday? Am I getting better? Can I compare it with my friends? What do I really need to do to actually make this really good over the next month? And feel good about myself. They kind of said, that's what they want. So, something that they can see. [...] I am becoming more sustainable. If I do this and this and this, actually, I could do, I could even better. And I want to compare that with myself with my friends, with my family. So, it's, it's that kind of gamification that we need to, that we need to look at to how to get people using them consistently." [EN 419]

Founders also used online learning platforms and webinars to scale limited expert capacity while retaining the depth of in-person training, particularly in climate and carbon literacy work:

> *"The issue we're finding is by doing a lot of virtual training that we were doing on [online meeting platforms] and stuff that we just can't be available all the time. And if we really want to get that information and that knowledge out there, we have got to find a way to scale that." [...] "Scalability, how do we get that knowledge to as many people as quickly as we possibly can was our absolute number one reason for going down an online learning platform." [...] "The technology gave us all of that as a positive." [...] "So, the engagement of the topic is quite deep and immersive. This technology allows us from an online learning experience for us to go in and update it at any point and we do update everything we do all the time."* [EN 418]

Across these examples, advanced and interactive technologies are positioned as tools that can widen access, deepen engagement and support learning, provided they are bounded by clear ethical intentions. Founders actively negotiate trade-offs between immersion and wellbeing, convenience and safety, and motivation and manipulation, seeking to harness technological affordances without relinquishing their responsibility for how users experience and are affected by these systems.

A minority of participants explicitly described turning down more intensive or commercially attractive uses of immersive and gamified tools, indicating that their commitments to wellbeing and autonomy sometimes led them to contain, rather than maximise, technological engagement. Therefore, these trajectories reflect a strong aspiration to embed "tech for good", but also show that the translation of ethical intent into systems remained uneven, particularly where resource constraints, market expectations or user fatigue pulled in different directions.

Theme 3 shows that "tech for good" is approached as a set of design and governance choices rather than a label. Founders associate responsible technology with accessible interfaces, proportionate data use and clear limits around immersion and automation, and work to engineer ethicality into systems through accessibility standards, validation, audit trails and escalation routes. Not all ventures are able to embed these features to the extent founders would wish; some reported shelving more ambitious safeguards or inclusive functions because of cost, time or capability limits. Together, these accounts portray technology depth and JEDI principles as matters of degree and timing, and highlight the risk of drift where technical and commercial pressures outpace ethical

safeguards. Theme 3 underpins the treatment of technology and data practices in DEN and in the VISION, ETIS and EthOS tools, and explains how technology in the cases studied is used to support, rather than replace, ethical practice (Objectives 1, 3, 5 and 6). (ETIS, the EthOS Lifecycle, and the archetypes are defined and developed in Chapters 5–6; references here serve only as forward signposts to the later synthesis.)

4.4 Cross-case comparison: industry clusters and C1–C4 archetypal cohorts

The thematic findings remain the primary analytic structure of this chapter. Section 4.4 provides a secondary cross-case comparison, used to examine how ethical commitments, technology use and implementation practices appeared across the dataset after the thematic analysis had stabilised. The comparison supports interpretation; it does not replace the thematic findings, generate causal claims or rank cases.

Two comparison lenses are used. Industry clusters provide sectoral context by showing how the three themes appeared across different fields of activity. The C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame provides a separate cross-case reading of ethics–technology integration. These lenses serve different purposes. Industry clusters describe field of activity; C1–C4 describe recurring configurations of ethical commitment, technological reliance, organisational routine and evidence practice.

The C1–C4 frame was developed from implementation indicators I1–I10, short evidence notes, case-level comparison and adjudication notes where provisional and final allocations differed. Provisional comparison notes were maintained during coding, but final cohort allocation was settled only after the thematic map had stabilised. Where inconsistencies appeared, the relevant case material was re-read and the decision was recorded in the audit trail.

The cohorts are described as archetypal because they capture recurring patterns within this dataset. They should not be read as sectors, maturity scores, fixed organisational types, causal categories, moral rankings or universal stages. Individual cases may show features associated with more than one cohort.

References such as 2.1.3 or 3.2.1 refer back to the sub-sub-themes presented in Section **4.3**. The C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame was used to organise comparison matrices and summaries only. Full scoring definitions, examples and interpretation guidance are provided in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps - Stage 4B: Cohort comparisons (exploratory).**

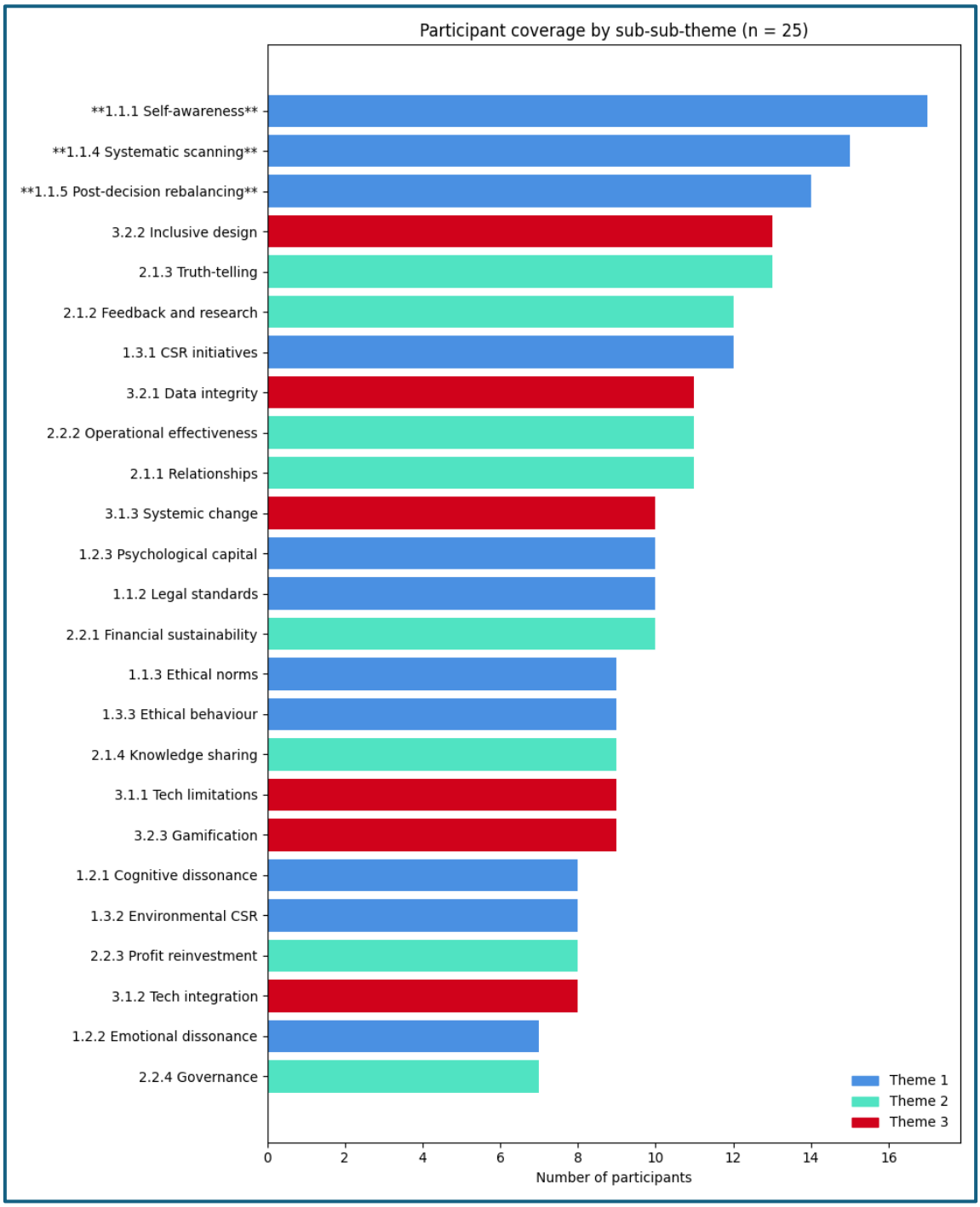
The analysis also distinguishes between tech-enabled and tech-driven ventures. Tech-enabled ventures use technology primarily to support delivery, coordination or access within an offer whose value is not principally the technology itself. Tech-driven ventures depend more directly on a technological system, model or product whose performance and governance materially shape impact and risk. This distinction is used only to organise comparison. It is not treated as a maturity ladder or as a proxy for impact.

The next subsection outlines industry clusters as a contextual reading aid and uses the C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame to compare technology depth and ethical focus across cases.

4.4.1 Industry cluster overview

The twenty-five cases were first read across industry clusters to show where ethical concerns were most visible within and across sectors. These clusters are used as a contextual aid and should not be confused with the C1–C4 cohort frame. In education, learning and social care, participants emphasised safeguarding, proportionality and fair access. HealthTech and wellbeing cases centred on clinical caution, privacy and escalation routes. Environmental and sustainability ventures linked ethical claims to measurement, stewardship and paced scaling. Digital inclusion and accessibility teams treated representation and usability as standards to be considered in design and governance. Behavioural, consumer and sustainability analytics firms focused on transparency, interpretability and user agency rather than ESG claims alone. Cultural and creative technologies prioritised authenticity, consent and emotional safety, particularly in immersive settings. **Figure 17** and **Table 21** show non-exclusive participant distribution across the full dataset; they do not indicate prevalence, ranking or statistical weight.

Figure 17: Non-exclusive participant distribution by sub-sub-theme (n = 25)



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

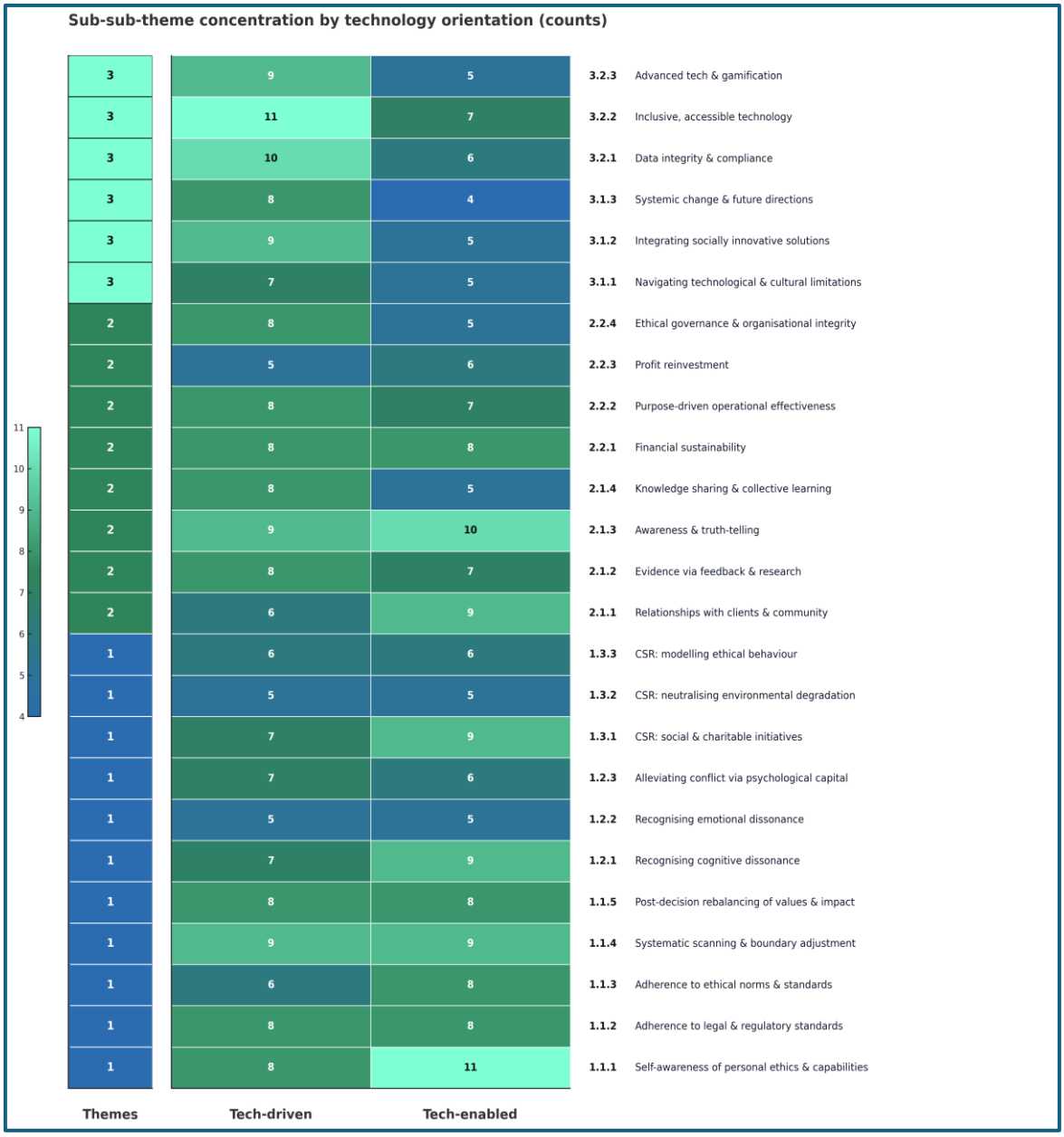
Across industry clusters, Theme 1—values and boundary-work—was especially visible in education, care and health-related cases, where safeguarding, professional responsibility and refusal of misaligned opportunities appeared prominently. Theme 2—social impact strategy—was present across all sectors through engagement, evidence and

reinvestment, although its form varied by field. Examples included clinical validation in health-related cases and regeneration, stewardship or verified reporting in environmental ventures. Theme 3—tech for good—was particularly visible in accessibility, evaluation and data-led ventures, where inclusion and data integrity were treated as technical as well as ethical concerns.

These patterns are used to situate the findings, not to create fixed sector categories or over-systematise differences. Documentary reading provided a further contextual layer, including safeguarding pages, privacy statements, accessibility materials and impact reports where available.

The distribution material that follows uses the full dataset of 25 cases and serves as a navigation aid before the C1–C4 cohort comparison. While **Figure 17** (above) gives a sub-sub-theme overview, **Figure 18** (below) provides a broader theme-level aggregation before the detailed counts in **Table 21**. These materials indicate thematic spread across cases; they do not treat frequency as equivalent to importance, ranking or statistical prevalence.

Figure 18: Participant distribution by main theme (n = 25)



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

4.4.2 Thematic distribution by sub-sub-theme (n = 25)

Table 21 outlines thematic density, expressed as the distribution of distinct participants across sub-sub-themes. The table provides the most detailed version of the distribution material introduced in Figures 17 and 18.

Table 21: Non-exclusive participant distribution by sub-sub-theme (n = 25)

Theme/Sub-theme/Sub-sub-theme	Part's (#)	Descriptive note – recurrent points
Theme 1: Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance	20	
1.1 Dynamic Values Adherence		
1.1.1 Self-awareness of personal ethics and professional capabilities as a catalyst for moral action*	17	Moral self-reflection and consistency between principles and conduct.
1.1.2 Adherence to legal and regulatory rules and standards	10	Regulatory literacy featured as a standard operational safeguard.
1.1.3 Adherence to ethical norms and standards	9	Fairness, honesty, and proportionality.
1.1.4 Systematic scanning, identification and assessment of moral issues; boundary adjustment*	15	Regular review practices supported decision-making under uncertainty.
1.1.5 Post-decision boundary adjustment and rebalancing of values, capabilities and social impact*	14	Follow-through after decisions form part of routine governance.
1.2 Values-Based Cognitive and Emotional Dissonance		
1.2.1 Recognising and accepting cognitive dissonance	8	Tensions between impact aims and commercial requirements.
1.2.2 Recognising and accepting emotional dissonance	7	Emotional strain associated with ethical work is an ordinary practice.
1.2.3 Alleviating personal conflict through psychological capital	10	Confidence, optimism, and self-regulation as stabilising resources.
1.3 Sustainable and Impact-Driven Strategies		
1.3.1 CSR: socially responsible and charitable initiatives	12	Direct community-oriented activity.
1.3.2 CSR: neutralising and reversing environmental degradation	8	Environmental regeneration a baseline rather than an add-on.
1.3.3 CSR: modelling and promoting ethical behaviour	9	Leadership by example and transparent communication.
Theme 2: Social Impact Strategy (Thematic density: 18/25)		
2.1 Engagement, Research and Growth Synergies		
2.1.1 Building relationships with industry, clients, and community	11	Long-term trust and collaboration prioritised over transactional gains.
2.1.2 Building evidence through research, feedback, and impact measurement	12	Feedback loops and measurement informed adjustments to practice.

Theme/Sub-theme/Sub-sub-theme	Part's (#)	Descriptive note – recurrent points
2.1.3 Building awareness and truth-telling*	13	Clear communication and openness were used to educate stakeholders.
2.1.4 Knowledge sharing and collective learning	9	Shared learning environments supported ongoing improvement.
2.2 Sector-Specific Strategy and Reinvestment		
2.2.1 Financial sustainability	10	Revenue stability was linked to continuity of mission delivery.
2.2.2 Purpose-driven operational effectiveness	11	Operational discipline was aligned with stated social aims.
2.2.3 Profit reinvestment	8	Surplus was redeployed into mission-aligned activities.
2.2.4 Ethical governance and organisational integrity	7	Oversight structures and escalation routes were described across cases.
Theme 3: Tech for Good	17	
3.1 Technological Integration: Advantages and Limitations		
3.1.1 Navigating technological and cultural limitations	9	Adoption choices were paced to protect users and context.
3.1.2 Tech integration of socially innovative solutions	8	Social purpose was specified in design and delivery decisions.
3.1.3 Systemic change and future directions for social innovation	10	Planning referenced long-term social outcomes as part of scale-up.
3.2 User-Centric Design and JEDI Principles		
3.2.1 Upholding data integrity, compliance, and ethical principles in technology processes	11	Data transparency and compliance embedded in workflow.
3.2.2 Designing accessible, inclusive technologies grounded in justice, equity, and diverse user needs*	13	Inclusive design a standard practice rather than an exception.
3.2.3 Incorporating advanced tech, gamification, and interactive learning to improve engagement and satisfaction	9	Interactivity used with attention to autonomy and clarity.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Part's (#) = Number of Participants; counts are non-exclusive and are used to indicate spread across the dataset, not statistical prevalence, ranking or importance.

To support identification within the table, cells highlighted in green and marked with an asterisk (*) indicate **higher-density domains by prevalence within this sample**, operationalised as sub-sub-themes supported by **13 or more** participant interviews (i.e., evidence from at least half of the cohort). These results suggest that ethical reflection was widely distributed across operational, relational, and design processes, with recurrent emphasis on individual ethical awareness, structured review practices, and inclusion-oriented technology design.

However, counts are not mutually exclusive, since a single participant may contribute to multiple domains, and they are used to indicate distribution across cases rather than to rank substantive importance. In addition, cross-checks against publicly available materials (Step 4C) support the direction of travel; for example, accessibility statements align with Theme 3.2 domains, while privacy and escalation notes align with 3.2.1 and 2.1.2 in health- and data-intensive cases.

The table is intended to show how many individual participants contributed material to each analytical domain indicating where ethical attention most frequently clustered across the dataset (for example, self-awareness and dynamic boundary-setting in Theme 1; evidence loops and truth-telling in Theme 2; inclusive design and data integrity in Theme 3). Counts are non-exclusive and indicate thematic density across cases. They should not be read as a ranking of importance or as statistical prevalence.

Here, **analytic sufficiency** is used in its established qualitative sense: a defensible judgement that the dataset is sufficiently rich and wide-ranging to support the claims advanced, without treating repetition as the sole marker of adequacy. In this framing, the participant counts function as descriptive indicators of spread across cases (thematic density), rather than as a hierarchy of substantive importance. Sub-sub-themes evidenced by **13 or more participants** are characterised as **higher-density** domains, indicating support from at least half of the cohort (n = 25) and therefore a broadly distributed pattern across cases. Sub-sub-themes evidenced by **7–12 participants** are characterised as **moderately distributed** domains: they are supported by multiple cases and therefore exceed isolated or idiosyncratic reporting, but they do not represent a majority pattern within the cohort. In practice, such domains often reflect ethically

relevant issues whose articulation varies with contextual conditions (for example, venture maturity, sector, product risk profile, user group, or founder role responsibilities). Sub-sub-themes evidenced by **fewer than seven participants** are characterised as **more localised** domains. These may signal context-specific practices or exposures (for example, heightened regulatory requirements, user vulnerability, or data intensity), boundary or negative cases that refine interpretation, or domains that are present but less developed in participants' accounts. Within reflexive thematic analysis, lower prevalence does not in itself reduce analytical significance, provided interpretive claims remain grounded in meaning, context, and coherence.

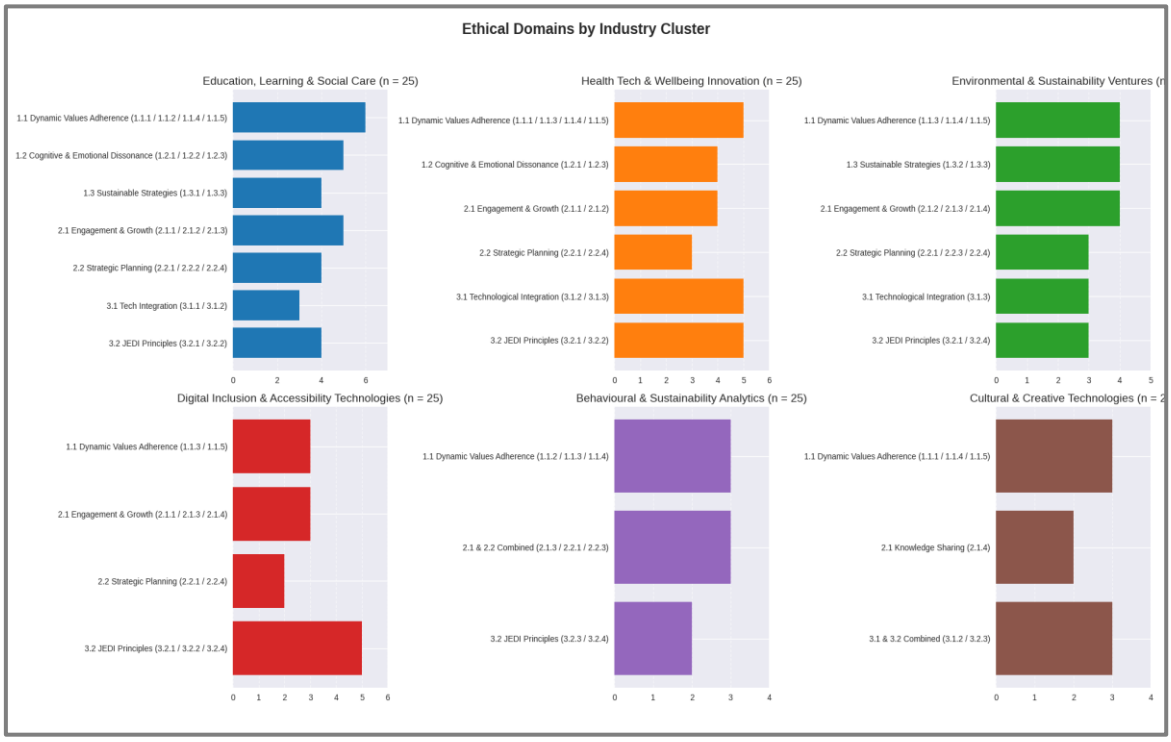
4.4.3 Industry-based findings (cluster summaries)

The industry-based summaries show how the three themes appeared across six fields of activity. They are included to provide sectoral context, not to create a separate typology.

- **Education, learning and social care** cases emphasised safeguarding, proportionality and refusal where risk exceed capacity. Theme 1 and Theme 2 were especially visible, while Theme 3 appeared more selectively.
- **HealthTech and wellbeing** cases combine clinical caution, privacy-by-design and clear escalation routes. Theme 1 and Theme 3 were particularly prominent.
- **Environmental and sustainability** ventures anchor claims in measurement, paced scaling and stewardship. Theme 2 and Theme 3 were visible, with Theme 1 appearing in choices about restraint, sustainability and governance.
- **Digital inclusion and accessibility** embed representation and usability as design standards Theme 3 was especially visible, alongside Theme 2 collaboration and feedback routines.
- **Behavioural, consumer and sustainability analytics cases** prioritise transparency, interpretability and user agency over performative impact claims (2.1.3 and 3.2.1). These accounts were most closely linked to awareness-building, evidence and technology-related accountability.
- **Cultural and creative technologies** set explicit limits around immersion, consent and emotional safety, connecting values-based boundary-setting with user-

centred and inclusive technology practice (Theme 1; 3.2.3) were most noticeable in boundary-setting around user experience, safeguarding and emotional risk.

Figure 19: Ethical domains by industry cluster



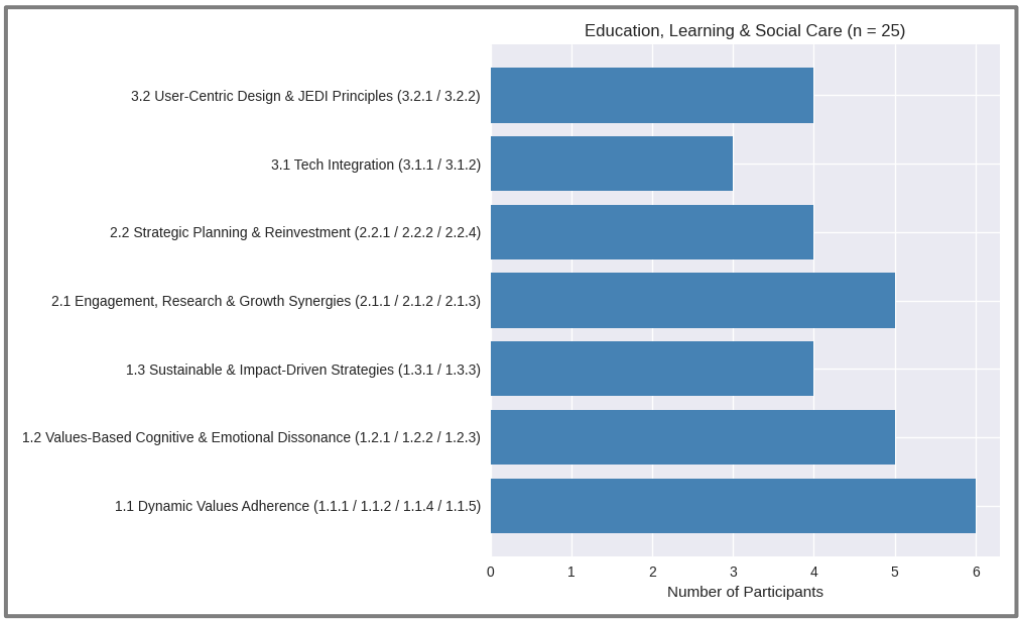
Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

These descriptions are grounded in interview material and read alongside public materials where available. They remain descriptive rather than typological. Taken together, they show how sector context shaped the form taken by values alignment, social impact strategy and technology-related responsibility across the dataset.

d) Education, Learning, and Social Care Technologies

Organisations in this cluster (alternative provision, online tutoring, wellbeing tools) emphasised inclusion and equitable access, with ethical attention closely tied to care and safeguarding. As **Figure 20** indicates, Theme 1 is most dense here (values and safeguarding), with Theme 2 present through collaborative governance and Theme 3 used selectively to support—not lead—practice. Founders described ethics as both personal and procedural: being protective of staff as well as students and declining contracts that threatened care quality. Digital platforms were used to sustain continuity of support and broaden reach, while tensions arose around data protection, online safeguarding and risks of digital dependency. Several adopted risk-averse data practices that exceeded statutory minima. Discomfort with profit mechanisms in education was noted, with a stated duty to preserve dignity, empathy and psychological safety for vulnerable users. Decisions were guided by duty of care and a bias towards long-term benefit over short-term gain.

Figure 20: Education, learning and social care overview

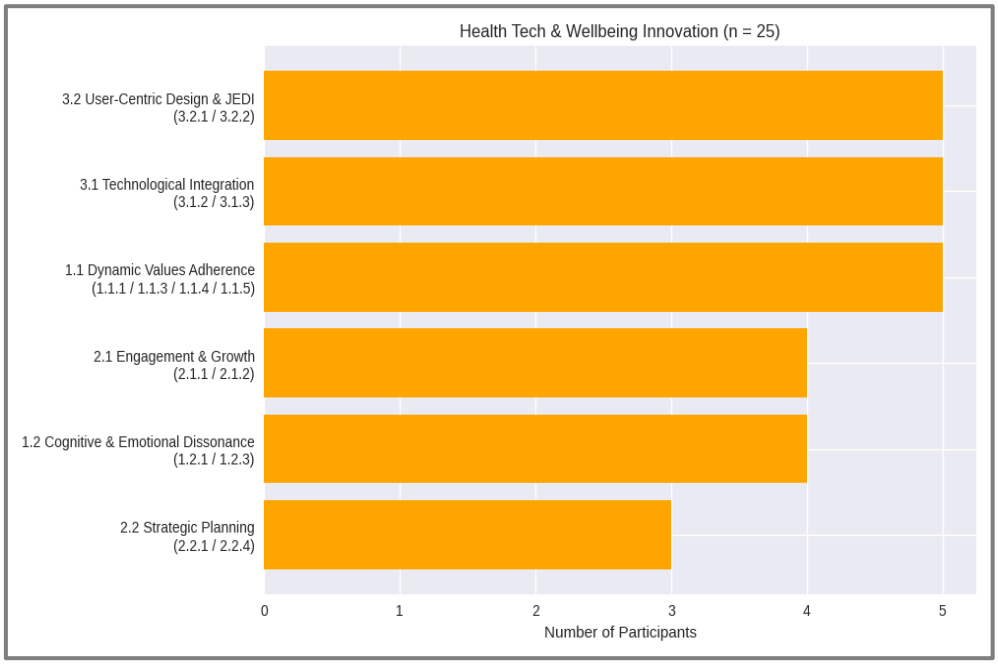


Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

e) HealthTech and Wellbeing Innovation

Digital therapy, diagnostic devices and care-management systems framed ethics around safety, transparency and user trust, with frequent reference to accountability structures and clear escalation procedures. Regulatory requirements (e.g., medical-device standards, confidentiality, data governance) were woven into everyday choices about data use, algorithm performance and user communications. Several founders weighed "false reassurance" against "false alarm" when considering release prior to full validation and reported iterative improvement as a norm. Emotional strain linked to responsibility was acknowledged, yet decisions were anchored in "the decent thing".

Figure 21: HealthTech and wellbeing overview



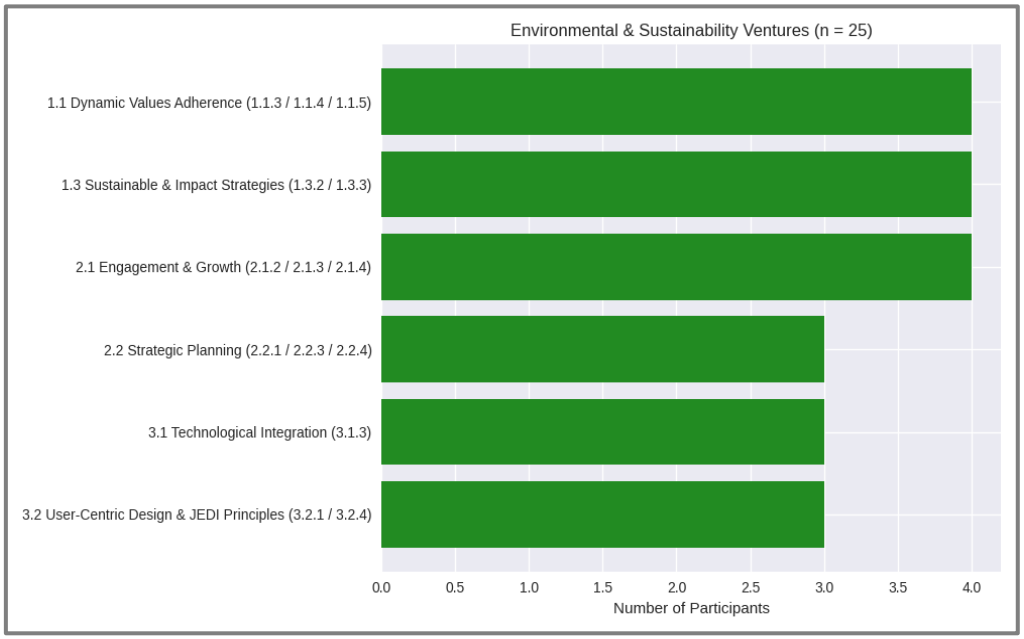
Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

f) Environmental and Sustainability Ventures

Activities spanned waste reduction, circular-economy approaches, energy conversion and carbon transparency. Founders described tight coupling between ethical motivation and technical choice, rejecting expedient options that jeopardised environmental outcomes. Lifecycle assessment and external audit were used to evidence claims. Scaling brought tensions under resource constraints and in markets judged "too early"; environmental outcomes were prioritised and governance processes used to hold that line.

Theme 1 highlighted responsibility beyond compliance and disciplined boundary-setting (1.1.3/1.1.4/1.1.5), with sustainable and impact strategies (1.3.2/1.3.3) focused on verifiable stewardship. In Theme 2, transparency, evidence and shared learning (2.1.2/2.1.3/2.1.4) underpinned credibility; strategic planning and reinvestment (2.2.1/2.2.3/2.2.4) treated surplus as an ecological commitment. Theme 3 emphasised systemic integration (3.1.3), positioning technology as regenerative rather than extractive; user-centred/JEDI (3.2.1/3.2.4) aimed at clarity and stakeholder empowerment.

Figure 22: Environmental and sustainability overview

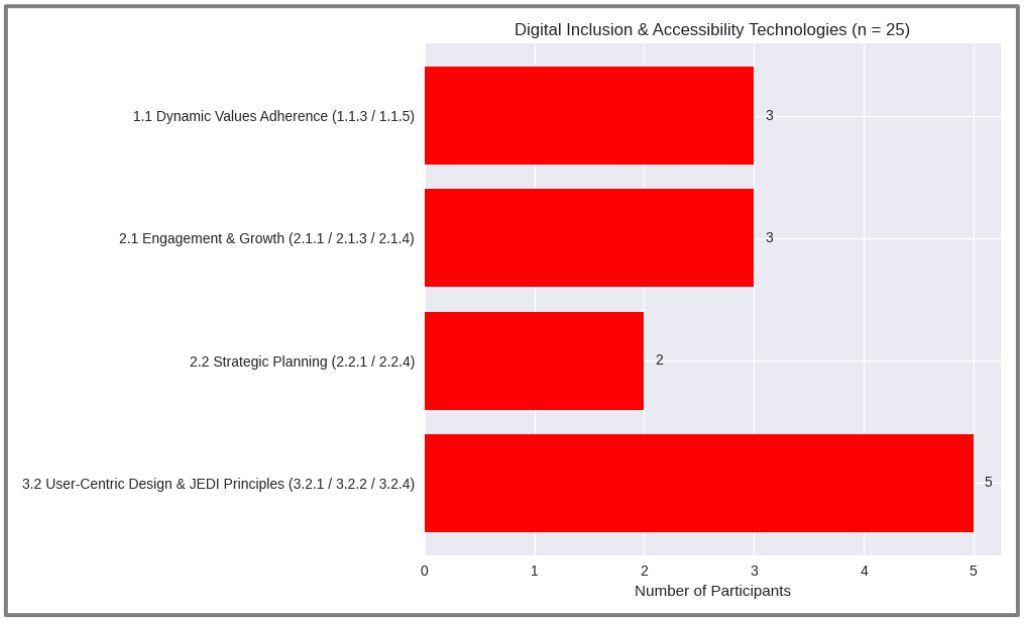


Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

g) Digital Inclusion, Accessibility, and Disability Technologies

These ventures built inclusion into design and governance from the outset. Many teams drew on lived experience, often through user advisory groups. Access was treated as an entitlement. Founders worked to keep products affordable without undermining viability, testing pricing for fairness. Work was collaborative, with users invited into choices on features and roll-out. In Theme 1, references centred on representation and justice beyond bare compliance (1.1.3; 1.1.5). In Theme 2, co-design and shared decision-making were routine (2.1.1; 2.1.3; 2.1.4), and planning choices linked affordability with accountability (2.2.1; 2.2.4). Theme 3 was the most developed area: user-centred/JEDI work (3.2.1; 3.2.2; 3.2.4) ran through product and operations.

Figure 23: Digital inclusion and accessibility overview

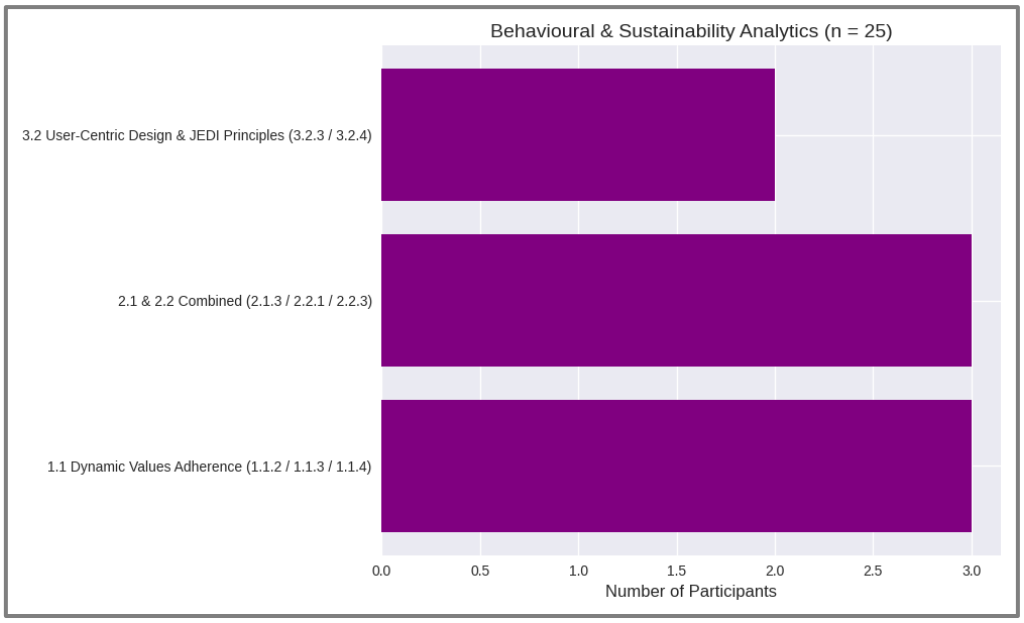


Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

h) Behavioural, Consumer, and Sustainability Analytics

Firms in this group focused on clear information and interpretable metrics. They rejected box-ticking ESG and aimed to give users enough evidence to decide for themselves. Teams saw their role as explaining data, not dictating action, and used external checks and iterative updates to keep outputs credible. Investor pressure—and the risk that ethical choices slow revenue—was acknowledged; openness and trust were kept in view. Theme 1 combined legal compliance with straightforward moral reasoning and data ethics (1.1.2; 1.1.3; 1.1.4). In Theme 2, openness and reliable data acted as accountability tools (2.1.3; 2.2.1; 2.2.3). Under Theme 3, user-centred design (3.2.3; 3.2.4) emphasised informed consent and clarity over persuasion.

Figure 24: Behavioural, consumer and sustainability analytics overview

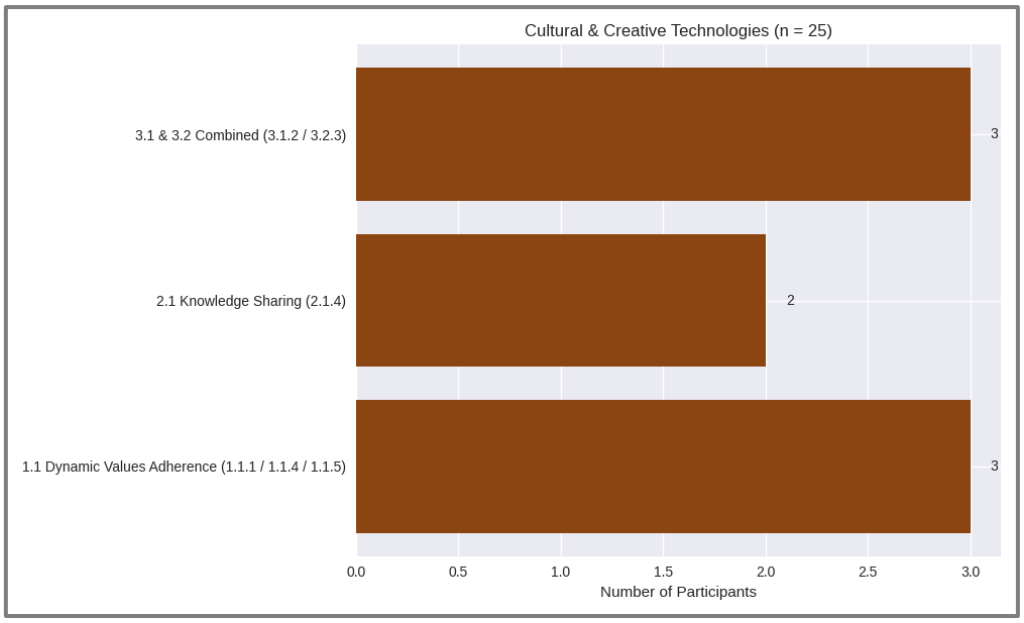


Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

i) Cultural and Creative Technologies

Founders working in digital arts, immersive media and cultural education prioritised representation, consent and emotional safety. Several set limits on session length or content to avoid immersion becoming compulsive, and aligned artistic aims with user wellbeing. Ethical use of technology meant protecting the quality of experience and avoiding exploitative design, with accessibility and safety built in rather than added later. Theme 1 highlighted reflection and restraint (1.1.1; 1.1.4; 1.1.5). In Theme 2, knowledge sharing (2.1.4) supported authenticity and peer challenge. Theme 3 combined technical integration with careful engagement (3.1.2; 3.2.3), so immersive experiences ran with clear boundaries and explicit consent.

Figure 25: Cultural and creative technologies overview



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The analysis now turns from industry clusters to the C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame. Unlike industry clusters, which provide sectoral context, the cohorts are cross-case groupings based on recurring patterns in technology depth and ethical focus. They are used as a descriptive comparison aid. They do not imply a fixed sequence, maturity ranking or sector-wide classification.

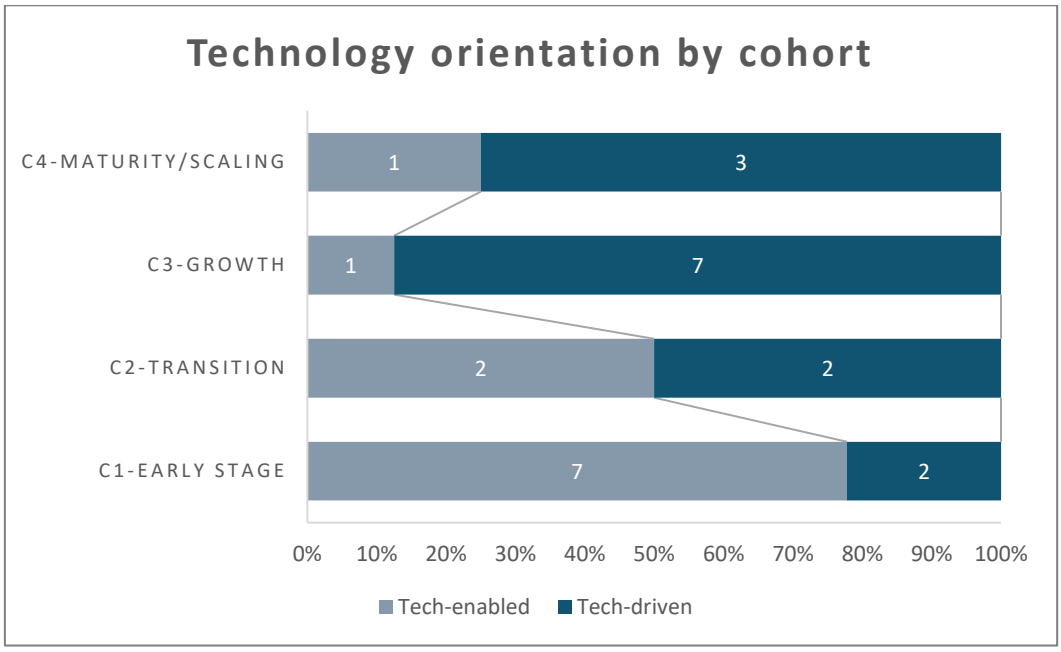
4.4.4 C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame

Ventures were classified as **tech-driven** when a core technological innovation formed the primary value proposition (e.g., AI diagnostics, health-data platforms, automation, circular-economy technologies, digital accessibility software), and **tech-enabled** when technology chiefly supported delivery or evidence of social outcomes (e.g., online wellbeing provision, digital tutoring, social-impact consultancies, e-learning, inclusive engagement platforms). Across the 25 cases, **14** ventures (**56%**) were tech-driven and **11** (**44%**) tech-enabled. A cohort pattern was visible:

- **C1** (early social innovators) used technology to facilitate educational and wellbeing aims and emphasised user welfare, values alignment and restraint;
- **C2** showed a balanced orientation where technology and governance intersected, with attention to proportionality and fairness;
- **C3** (growth-stage innovators) were predominantly tech-driven, with emphasis on data integrity, transparency and accountable automation;
- **C4** were largely tech-driven: the core value proposition is the technology itself (e.g., accessibility software, evaluation platforms), with governance, inclusion and validation frameworks ensuring safe use.

Two ethical emphases follow from this split. **Tech-enabled** ventures express ethics through care and values-based restraint in delivery (safeguarding, proportionate data use, relationship-centred governance). **Tech-driven** ventures express ethics structurally, building governance, transparency and inclusion into product and data practices (audit trails, accessibility standards, algorithmic accountability). In short, the ethical baseline established in **Theme 1** (values and boundary-work) is put to work through **Theme 2** (strategy and routines) and then built into systems and data in **Theme 3** (design, testing and release), marking a shift from relational care in earlier stages to system-level accountability in later stages.

Figure 26: Technology orientation by cohort (n=25)



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

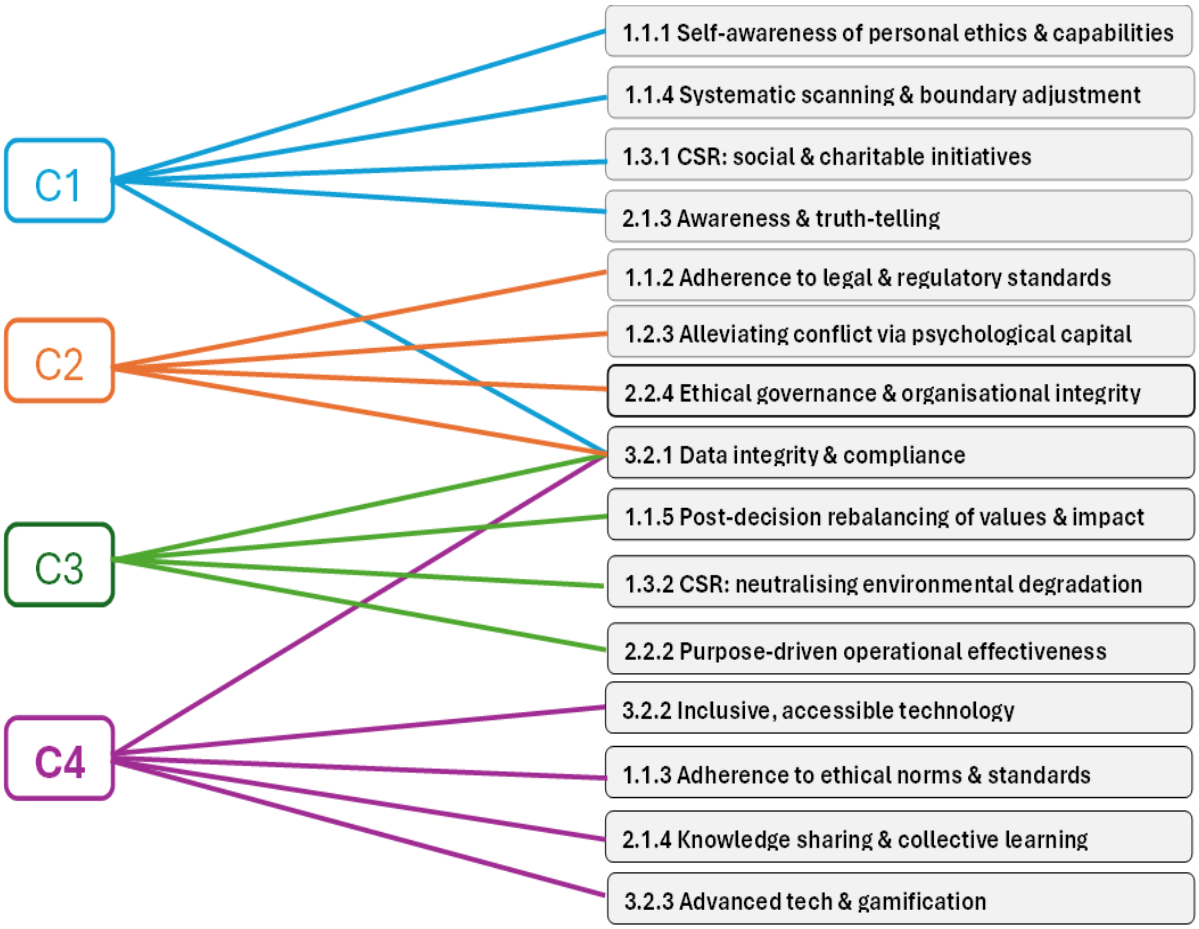
The figure shows (i) a tech-enabled emphasis in C1; (ii) a balanced profile in C2; (iii) a predominantly tech-driven profile in C3; and (iv) a largely tech-driven profile in C4 where technology is used to validate, measure, and scale impact.

4.4.5 C1–C4 archetypal cohort comparison by technology depth and ethical focus

Viewed as a continuum of technology depth, the cohorts show how the locus of ethical work can move as ventures remain tech-enabled or become more tech-driven. In **C1**, assurance rests mainly with people and practice (care, safeguarding, proportionate use). By **C2**, assurance is expressed through procedures (clear governance, escalation, documentation). In **C3**, assurance is engineered into data and design (traceability, testing, auditability). In **C4**, assurance is reinforced through governance, standards and public validation (accessibility conformance, impact measurement, external review). None of these positions is superior; they reflect different combinations of risk, capability and purpose.

For ventures that deepen integration, the task is to translate relational commitments into coded safeguards and accountable infrastructure without losing the moral sensibilities present at the outset. Boundary and negative cases were retained, and provisional allocations were checked against interview and documentary evidence (Steps **3A** and **4C**) and re-read where needed during exploratory comparisons (Step **4B**).

Figure 27: The most dominant Sub-sub-themes



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Table 22: C1–C4 cohort comparison by technology depth and ethical focus

	C1 – Community-anchored, early-stage ventures (lower tech depth)	**C2 – Practice-structured, transitioning ventures (moderate tech depth)**	**C3 – System-embedded, technology-based innovators (high tech depth)**	**C4 – Ecosystem-shaping, mature platforms (very high tech depth)**
Profile	Early stage ventures or pre-scaling organisations, typically in education, wellbeing, community development, or creative services. Technology supports delivery (communications, scheduling, basic platforms) but is not the core offer.	Ventures consolidating operations and formalising governance. Mix of tech-enabled and tech-driven models, often in HealthTech, digital inclusion, environmental data, or accessibility design. Technology begins to shape service logic (workflows, basic automation).	Growth-stage ventures where technology is the core product or infrastructure (e.g., AI tools, analytics, automation, blockchain, environmental monitoring). Data pipelines and algorithms increasingly determine outcomes.	Scale-ups or mature organisations whose platforms and standards influence partners, supply chains, or sectors (e.g., circular-economy platforms, environmental tech, health evaluation, inclusive UX at scale).
Ethical focus	**Ethics is enacted through *relationships and practice***: fairness, care, and dignity in day-to-day work. Governance is often light and emerging; judgement is exercised case-by-case rather than through formalised controls.	**Ethics is *documented and reviewable***: emerging policies, delineated responsibilities, early audit trails. Founders balance moral purpose with regulatory and market constraints; intuitive judgement is supplemented by procedure.	**Ethics is *engineered into systems***: data integrity, transparency, explainability, and inclusion by design. Responsible Innovation and information-ethics practices are operationalised (testing, documentation, monitoring).	**Ethics is *institutionalised***: board-level oversight, external assurance, equity and inclusion embedded across culture, governance, and product. Transparency and accountability are treated as strategic assets.

	C1 – Community-anchored, early-stage ventures (lower tech depth)	C2 – Practice-structured, transitioning ventures (moderate tech depth)	C3 – System-embedded, technology-based innovators (high tech depth)	C4 – Ecosystem-shaping, mature platforms (very high tech depth)
Characteristic practices	Decisions framed by "what is right for this person/context now", with explicit attention to safeguarding and proportionality. • Trust-building, empathy, and transparent communication with users, especially where vulnerability is present. • Willingness to pause or refuse activity that would compromise care standards, even at commercial cost	Routine reflection and after-action reviews; stakeholder engagement used to validate integrity claims. • Early codification (codes of conduct, DPIAs, privacy notices, escalation processes). • Explicit attention to system constraints • Recognising where regulation and resources shape what is ethically and reasonably possible.	Adoption of inclusive design frameworks and accessibility standards from the outset. • Formal protocols for data provenance, model documentation, bias assessment, and post-deployment monitoring. • Periodic impact reviews and transparent reporting to users, partners, and regulators.	Multi-stakeholder advisory structures, audits, and ethics committees with independent input. • Safeguards for scaling risks (e.g., monitoring for data misuse, guardrails against "inclusion fatigue"). • Framing ethics as a driver of product quality and innovation rather than a constraint.
Key themes	1.1 Self-awareness of personal ethics; 1.1.4 Boundary adjustment; 1.3.1 Social initiatives; 2.1.3 Awareness and truth-telling.	1.2.1 Cognitive dissonance; 1.2.3 Psychological capital; 2.2.1 Financial sustainability; 2.2.4 Ethical governance.	2.1.2 Building evidence through research; 3.2.1 Data integrity and compliance; 3.2.2 Inclusive design; 3.1.2 Tech integration of socially innovative solutions.	3.2.1 Data ethics; 3.2.3 Gamification and engagement; 2.2.4 Ethical governance; 3.1.3 Systemic innovation and future directions.

	C1 – Community-anchored, early-stage ventures (lower tech depth)	C2 – Practice-structured, transitioning ventures (moderate tech depth)	C3 – System-embedded, technology-based innovators (high tech depth)	C4 – Ecosystem-shaping, mature platforms (very high tech depth)
Tech–ethics linkage (interpretative note)	At this depth, ethical assurance sits predominantly in people and practice (training, discretion, dialogue). Strengths include responsiveness and moral clarity; risks include founder-dependence and variability. When ventures intend to deepen tech integration, the most immediate shift is translating these relational safeguards into repeatable procedures (e.g., consent flows, escalation routes, data minimisation rules).	As tech depth increases, ethical assurance starts to move from people to process. Strengths include reliability and clearer accountability; risks include proceduralism that outpaces culture. Ventures choosing to transition further typically prioritise designing controls into systems (e.g., adding permissions, logging, consent UX) rather than relying only on policy.	At this depth, ethical assurance is **in the architecture** (code, data, interfaces). Strengths include scalability and measurable accountability; risks include reducing ethics to compliance if reflective practice and lived user perspectives are not maintained. Ventures deepening integration typically invest in independent testing and user-panel governance to keep systems grounded.	Ethical assurance spans **systems and society** (standards, disclosure, equitable participation). Strengths include consistency and sector influence; risks concern performative compliance or lock-in. Periodic "values resets", sunset/rollback criteria, and open assurance statements help avoid drift.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The detailed comparison in **Table 22** shows how the C1–C4 profiles differed in technology depth, ethical focus and characteristic practices. **Figure 28** provides a simpler visual summary of the same pattern. It shows how the main locus of ethical assurance appeared to shift across the cohort frame: from founder judgement, relationships and practice in C1; towards procedures and early governance in C2; into design, data and system architecture in C3; and towards wider assurance, standards and external accountability in C4.

Figure 28: C1–C4 cohort patterning by technology depth and locus of ethical assurance

C1	cases were characterised by values-led ethical intention, close founder involvement and relatively informal implementation. Ethical commitments were often held through direct judgement, relational accountability and narrow scope.
C2	cases showed more structured consolidation. Ethical commitments had begun to move into lightweight procedures, feedback loops, consent materials, role-based checks or early governance routines.
C3	cases showed stronger product and systems integration. Ethical commitments were more visible in design requirements, data practices, testing routines, evidence processes and technology-related safeguards.
C4	cases showed more formalised embedding. Ethical commitments were more likely to be supported by governance structures, assurance processes, external scrutiny, supplier expectations, reporting or documented release controls.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The figure should be read as a descriptive comparison, not as a ranking or maturity pathway. The cohort labels identify dominant patterns in the dataset, and some cases showed features associated with more than one cohort. The point is not that later cohorts were ethically superior, but that ethical commitments became more visible and traceable in some organisational and technical arrangements than in others. Error! Reference source not found.

Table 23 then provides a compact cohort-by-theme cross-table for the 25 cases.

Table 23: Summary of C1–C4 cohort comparison by technology depth and ethical focus

Row / Category	C1 – Community-anchored, people-practice ventures (n=9)	C2 – Practice-structured, transitioning ventures (n=4)	C3 – System-embedded, technology-based ventures (n=8)	C4 – Ecosystem-facing, assurance-oriented ventures (n=4)
Tech orientation	Mainly tech-enabled	Mixed tech-enabled and tech-driven	Mainly tech-driven	Mainly tech-driven
Tech depth	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Defining tendency	Values-led; founder-centred	Governance-centred	Design-centred	System-centred
Ethical mode	Ethics as authenticity, care, reflexivity and trust-led judgement.	Ethics as governance, proportionality, resilience and formalisation.	Ethics as design integrity, data responsibility and technical embedding.	Ethics as systemic culture, inclusion, assurance and institutionalised responsibility.
Where ethicality was most visible	Founder judgement, direct relationships, safeguarding and restraint.	Procedures, feedback loops, consent materials, role-based checks and early governance routines.	Design requirements, data practices, testing, evidence processes and technology-related safeguards.	Governance structures, assurance processes, external scrutiny, supplier expectations, reporting and release controls

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Together, **Table 22, Figure 27** and

Table 23 show that ethicality was not held in one place across the dataset. In some cases it remained close to founder judgement and relational practice; in others it became more traceable through procedures, design choices, data practices, governance routines or assurance signals. The next section turns to the documentary analysis, which was used to

situate these interview-based interpretations within public-facing organisational materials.

4.5 Documentary analysis: role and contribution

Documentary reading was used as a contextual and triangulating layer. It helped situate interview accounts within organisational and public-facing material, but it did not override interview evidence, which remained primary.

For this section, documentary reading refers to publicly available venture materials, including website pages, mission or ethics statements, privacy or governance texts, selected public posts and other relevant public-facing material. These sources supported a structured convergence/divergence reading: how ethical claims were framed publicly, what forms of practice were visible, and where public presentation aligned with, extended or sat in tension with founder accounts. Website text was not treated as proof of practice. Companies House material was used separately during recruitment to verify eligibility, incorporation dates, company-type designation and officer appointments. It is therefore not treated here as part of the interpretive documentary corpus (Bowen, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Miller, 2018; Zahra, Korri and Yu, 2005; Mair and Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012).

Objective 1: Determine how founders of socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures define ethicality, and how those definitions shape the identification, assessment and handling of moral issues.

Materials broadly reflected the Theme 1 finding that ethicality was described less as an abstract statement than as conduct made visible through access, inclusion, transparency, care and proportionate safeguards. Examples included safeguarding procedures, equitable design claims, proportionate data practices and clearer user communication. The C1–C4 cohort comparison provided a descriptive reading of this pattern: C1–C2 materials tended to emphasise fair access, dignity and safety through plain-language commitments and usage boundaries, while C3–C4 materials more often presented similar concerns through traceable requirements, testing notes, logging or audit-ready artefacts. Health-oriented materials foregrounded privacy and informed use; education cases

emphasised equitable participation; environmental ventures linked stewardship to measurement and verification. These materials suggested ethical positioning beyond minimal compliance, while remaining public-facing claims rather than independent proof of practice (Bowen, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Objective 2: Examine the challenges and opportunities founders encounter when integrating ethical considerations into early-stage decision-making.

Public materials suggested three recurring constraints that were consistent with the strategic tensions highlighted in Theme 2: limited capacity for compliance and accessibility work; pressure to deploy quickly while still validating safety or fairness; and uncertainty around evolving regulation. These constraints were most visible in health-related, data-intensive and accessibility-focused cases. Mitigating practices included pilots, staged roll-outs, co-design with users or practitioners, and clearer reporting of methods, limits and trade-offs. Such practices appeared to support credibility, but they were also time- and expertise-intensive, which is relevant to how ethical commitments were negotiated under early-stage constraint (Bowen, 2009; Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2007).).

Objective 3: Describe how founders use organisational, institutional and technological resources when making decisions and pursuing socially innovative aims.

Materials often positioned technology as a means of supporting fairness, access or accountability, rather than as an end in itself. Health-oriented ventures described secure platforms, limits around self-diagnosis and privacy checks. Education ventures highlighted interactive tools intended to widen participation. Environmental ventures used dashboards or reporting tools for carbon, waste or resource tracking. Usability, proportionate data collection and clear consent appeared as ethically relevant design

concerns. Advisory panels, practitioner guidance and sector codes also appeared in some cases as scaffolding for day-to-day judgement (Khatri and Brown, 2010; Bowen, 2009).

Objective 4: Establish how founders select, justify and adapt socially innovative approaches under early-stage conditions.

Public materials usually justified innovation through an identified need or access gap, rather than through novelty alone. Documents referred to co-production with intended users, consultation with domain experts and evidence-gathering through pilots, feedback synthesis or alignment with recognised impact frameworks. In education and inclusion cases, co-design with learners or community panels was prominent. In environmental cases, data transparency and third-party verification carried greater weight. These materials suggested iterative and pragmatic decision-making, balancing social or public-interest claims with technical feasibility and longer-term sustainability (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Bowen, 2009).

Objective 5: Identify the principles, anticipated returns and outcome claims that inform operational decisions in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures.

Public materials tended to define success through contribution to capability, access, evidence or environmental stewardship, rather than through revenue alone. Financial sustainability was usually framed as a condition for continuity and independence. Some ventures described reinvesting surplus into research, outreach, subsidised access or product development. Environmental ventures emphasised reductions in resource use or carbon, while education and wellbeing ventures highlighted engagement, satisfaction and user outcomes. These claims were treated as public evidence of positioning and priorities, not as conclusive evidence of achieved impact (Power, 1997; Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2007).

Objective 6: Develop an empirically grounded conceptual account of how ethical considerations are integrated into founders' decision-making in early-stage, socially innovative, technology-based ventures.

Public materials alone cannot establish a framework, but they helped identify three recurring dimensions that informed the later synthesis: ethical premise, operational mechanism and reflective adaptation. Ethical premise appeared in purpose statements grounded in fairness, responsibility or care. Operational mechanism appeared through technology, governance, feedback and assurance processes. Reflective adaptation appeared through evaluation, transparent reporting, staged release, reinvestment or revision of practice. These dimensions were used alongside interview accounts and the C1–C4 comparison to support the later development of DEN, VISION, ETIS and EthOS, without treating public materials as determinative evidence (Bowen, 2009; Power, 1997).

Across cases, four threads were visible in the documentary record. First, accessibility was often framed as a baseline condition, linking simplicity and clarity to fairness. Secondly, transparency about methods, pricing, limits and data governance was used to support trust. Thirdly, governance signals, including board challenge, external review, peer input or assurance processes, were presented as ways of reducing drift. Fourthly, technology was often framed proportionately: enough to support access, insight or coordination, but not necessarily as much as possible (Khatri and Brown, 2010; Humble and Farley, 2010; Power, 1997).

These threads appeared in different forms across cases. Health and wellbeing materials described self-guided support within clinically informed boundaries, with privacy protections, security checks and signposting to professional care. Education and skills materials presented modular learning for varied needs, with fairness and clarity framed through explanations of methods and feedback processes. Environmental materials referred to waste or emissions tracking, verified reporting, dashboards and shared accountability for reductions. Accessibility materials described community contribution, participation and representation as design principles.

Read alongside interview accounts and the C1–C4 comparison, these materials supported the thematic analysis without replacing it. They suggested that transparency, inclusion, environmental stewardship and proportionate innovation were often presented not only as claims, but as matters linked to design, measurement and communication. This helped situate Themes 1–3 and provided contextual material for the

later discussion of ethical navigation and ethics–technology integration (Bowen, 2009; Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2007).

*Table 24: Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke) – Stages 4–6: aims, actions, outputs (See Steps 1-3 in **Table 18**)*

Stage	Aim	Activities
4 — Review potential themes	Test fit, distinctiveness and coverage; refine boundaries	Read the candidate map against the full dataset; redrew boundaries where overlap or gaps appeared; collapsed weakly supported ideas; logged decisions
4A — Member feedback (resonance check)	Check resonance; sharpen wording/scope (not a vote)	Circulated an anonymised synopsis; logged responses; integrated clarifications that improved fidelity; noted differences rather than forcing consensus; recorded all exchanges in the audit trail
4B — Cohort comparisons (exploratory)	Examine contextual patterning without fixing types	Maintained a cross-case frame; used simple matrices to scan sector and technology signals; flagged inconsistencies for re-reading
4C — Parallel documentary reading	Locate interview accounts within organisational context and public record	Read mission/ethics pages, policy/privacy texts and Companies House filings; captured to a reading grid; checked convergence/ divergence; anchored names, dates and roles
5 — Complete thematic structure	Finalise analytic focus; define themes, sub-themes and domains	Wrote concise definitions and inclusion/exclusion rules; assigned domains; selected anonymised extracts; checked identifiability
6 — Produce the final narrative	Integrate themes and evidence transparently	Linked claims to extracts and documents; placed cohort/documentary notes where helpful; finalised figures/tables; updated the audit trail

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from 25 founder interviews read alongside case-matched public materials. The primary findings are carried by three themes: Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance; Social impact strategy; and Tech for good – compliance, challenges and solutions. Together, these themes show how

founders described ethical judgement as values-led, relational, situated and repeatedly adjusted under commercial, organisational and technological constraint. Ethics was not presented as a fixed framework or a set of universal answers, but as continuing work through which founders interpreted values, assessed limits and adjusted practice in response to changing evidence, stakeholder expectations, resource constraints and technological possibilities.

Theme 1 showed how founders worked through personal ethical identity, boundary-setting, dissonance and responsibility. Participants described ethical reflection as part of everyday decision-making, especially where professional capability, legal duties, stakeholder needs and commercial pressure placed limits on what could responsibly be done. Ethical boundaries were therefore treated as revisable rather than fixed. This was evident in decisions about clients, growth, pricing, safeguarding, environmental impact, platform use, data handling and acceptable compromise.

Participants also described cognitive and emotional dissonance where ethical ideals came into tension with commercial imperatives or external expectations. These tensions were not always resolved, but founders reported ways of living with and responding to them, including psychological resources such as confidence, resilience and conviction, as well as practical mechanisms such as refusal, re-scoping, staged implementation and recalibration of commitments.

Theme 2 showed how ethical commitments were translated into social impact strategy through stakeholder engagement, evidence-building, truth-telling, knowledge sharing, financial sustainability, reinvestment and governance. Engagement with clients, communities, civil society actors, sector peers, clinicians, local authorities and other stakeholders was not presented only as market validation. It also appeared as a way of testing accountability, surfacing needs, refining practice and sustaining legitimacy. Research, feedback and impact evidence were used to assess whether stated aims remained credible, responsive and proportionate.

Profit was generally framed as a condition for continuity and mission delivery, rather than as an end in itself. Several founders described directing surplus into subsidised access,

community programmes, research, product development, environmental stewardship or wider organisational strengthening. At the same time, these commitments were negotiated under resource constraints, investor expectations, market uncertainty and sector-specific pressures, showing that social impact strategy was neither linear nor cost-free.

Theme 3 showed how ethical commitments were embedded, tested or strained through design, data and technology practice. Founders described technology as enabling access, coordination, innovation and service improvement, but also as a source of dependency, exclusion, opacity, data risk, environmental cost and possible harm. Issues such as data integrity, privacy, algorithmic bias, accessibility, informed consent and technological exclusion were therefore treated as matters requiring judgement, safeguards and governance. User-centred design appeared as one route for managing these risks, through accessibility checks, participatory testing, careful language, transparency about data collection and limits, and attention to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in design and delivery.

Where ventures used tools such as AI, VR, gamification or automated systems, some founders described setting limits around session length, claims made, escalation routes or user engagement to reduce risks of harm, manipulation or over-reliance. The findings also show that ethical technology practice remained uneven where time, cost, capability or user readiness constrained what could be implemented. Member-checking supported refinement of wording, emphasis and boundary clarity, particularly around the distinction between cognitive and emotional dissonance.

The C1–C4 archetypal cohort comparison provided a secondary cross-case reading of technology depth and implementation profile, while documentary analysis situated interview accounts within public-facing organisational material. These supporting layers strengthened traceability and comparison, but did not displace the thematic findings. The themes remain the primary analytic account; the cohort and documentary layers are used to clarify how the findings appeared across different sectoral contexts, technology orientations and levels of operational embedding.

Across the dataset, ethical decision-making appeared as continuing work to hold direction while adjusting practice. This work involved stakeholder dialogue, evidence-gathering, reflective judgement, staged implementation and, at times, deliberate restraint where resources, evidence or system conditions did not support safe or fair delivery. The findings suggest that ethical entrepreneurship in these ventures involved repeated movement between values, context, capability and constraint.

Chapter 5: Discussion takes these patterns forward by relating them to the literature and research objectives, and by developing the study's conceptual synthesis and contribution to knowledge.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Building on the findings presented in **Chapter 4: Findings**, this chapter interprets the study in relation to the research aim, objectives and the literature reviewed in **Chapter 2: Literature review**. It examines how founders of socially innovative, technology-based ESVs described, justified and adapted ethical decision-making as values, viability, social impact and technology became intertwined under constraint.

The discussion follows the three themes developed in the findings: Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance; Social impact strategy; and Tech for good. These themes are not treated as sequential stages. They are used as connected interpretive anchors through which ethical commitments can be examined as they move between founder judgement, stakeholder relations, organisational practice and technological implementation.

The chapter first interprets the findings against the research objectives and relevant literature. It then develops the contribution to knowledge, including the Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN), the VISION model, the SMAG cadence, the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) and the EthOS Lifecycle. The chapter closes by drawing together the interpretive argument and preparing the transition to the conclusion.

This Chapter continues as follows:

Figure 29: Structure of Chapter 5: Discussion

5.2 interpretation of findings: Interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and relevant literature, while retaining the bounded scope of the study.
5.3 Contribution to Knowledge: Articulates how the study addresses the knowledge gaps identified in **Chapter 1**, and develops its empirical, conceptual and theoretical contribution.
5.4 Conclusion: Summarises the main interpretive insights developed in the chapter and provides a clear transition to the focus of the next chapter.

5.2 Interpretation of findings

This section interprets the findings presented in **Chapter 4: Findings** in relation to the research objectives, the knowledge gaps identified in **Chapter 1: Introduction** and the literature reviewed in **Chapter 2: Literature review.** The interpretation draws primarily on founder interviews, read alongside case-matched public materials, documentary synthesis and the C1–C4 cohort comparison. These materials are used to examine how founders described ethical judgement, how those accounts were situated in public-facing organisational evidence, and how implementation patterns varied by technology depth and ethical focus.

The interpretation follows the three themes reported in **Chapter 4: Findings**: Aligning values with business impact; Social impact strategy; and Tech for good. Industry clustering is used only where it helps situate sector-specific differences. The C1–C4 comparison is used to clarify variation in implementation depth and technology orientation. These devices support interpretation; they do not create a separate typology or replace the thematic findings.

The section also returns to the three knowledge gaps set out in **Chapter 1: Introduction**. First, it addresses the limited founder-level account of ethical decision-making in early-stage, technology-based ventures by examining how founders described moral judgement, boundary-setting, dissonance and responsibility in their own venture contexts. Secondly, it addresses the limited understanding of how founders navigate ethical judgement where growth, resources and institutional expectations are in tension. Thirdly, it addresses the need for closer attention to operationalisation by examining how ethical commitments were translated into stakeholder engagement, impact evidence, reinvestment, design choices, data practices, governance routines and mission-aligned diffusion.

Across the findings, ethical decision-making is interpreted as situated, relational and adaptive. In line with accounts of situated ethics, founders' moral reasoning appeared context-bound: decisions were described in relation to who was affected, what resources or data were available, what risks were foreseeable, and how competing values could be

handled under practical constraint (Haraway, 1988; Suchman, 2002). Participants did not describe ethics as the simple application of fixed rules. Their accounts pointed instead to practical judgement shaped by reflection, dialogue, evidence, experimentation and revision.

This reading helps explain the six DEN mechanisms developed from the study. Bounded Ethics describes principled constraint where ethical aims exceed available resources, evidence, authority or system readiness. Omission-based Dissonance describes the strain associated with unrealised good, particularly where founders judged that financial, technical, regulatory or organisational limits prevented them from delivering the public-interest contribution they sought. Osmotic Alignment describes reciprocal adjustment between founders and stakeholders, through which expectations, evidence and constraints were interpreted and revised. Ethical Capabilities Capital describes the reusable capacity built through values-in-practice, safeguards, routines, trust, assurance and resource buffers. Micro-Transformative Innovation describes small, values-led adjustments through which ethical commitments were translated into practice. Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion describes the cautious widening of adoption where explicit ethical criteria were met, reviewed and documented.

These mechanisms are introduced in this Chapter as interpretive threads running across the findings, rather than as a separate analytical structure. Theme 1 shows how founders worked through values, identity, ethical boundaries and dissonance. Theme 2 shows how ethical commitments were carried into engagement, research, evidence, reinvestment and organisational routines. Theme 3 shows how those commitments were embedded, tested or strained through design, data and technology practice. These interpretations provide the basis for the contribution to knowledge developed in Section **5.3**, where DEN, the VISION model, the SMAG cadence, ETIS and the EthOS Lifecycle are presented as the study's conceptual and applied synthesis.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance

Theme 1 concerns ethical alignment through values, boundary realignment and dissonance. It examines how founders recognised moral issues, revised boundaries and managed tension while operating under commercial, operational and institutional constraint. Alignment is not treated as a smooth reconciliation between ethics and business activity. It refers to ethical boundary-work: holding direction, weighing trade-offs, setting limits and deciding what should be advanced, delayed, narrowed or refused.

Across the cases, participants described ethical judgement as closely connected to founder identity, professional responsibility and perceptions of what the venture could credibly claim to do. Ethical commitments were often expressed through values such as fairness, care, access, inclusion, sustainability, safeguarding and transparency. Yet these commitments were rarely presented as self-executing. Founders described having to interpret what those values required in specific contexts, particularly where resources, evidence, regulation, stakeholder expectations or technical capacity remained unsettled.

This finding speaks to the first knowledge gap identified in **Chapter 1: Introduction**: the limited founder-level account of ethical decision-making in early-stage, technology-based ventures. Rather than presenting ethics as an abstract organisational position, the findings show how ethical responsibility was described through situated judgement. Founders made sense of ethicality through everyday decisions about users, partners, pricing, data, access, delivery pace and the limits of what the venture could responsibly offer.

The theme also helps explain why ethical decision-making in these ventures cannot be reduced to compliance, social impact or business purpose alone. Compliance provided one boundary, but participants often described ethical concerns that exceeded minimum legal requirements. Social impact offered a direction, but impact claims still required evidence, proportionality and attention to possible exclusion or harm. Business purpose gave coherence, but it also created tension where survival, growth or funding pressures pulled against stated commitments.

Stakeholder engagement appeared as one way of testing these boundaries. The findings can be read alongside stakeholder theory, particularly work concerned with legitimacy, dialogue, responsiveness and stakeholder salience (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997; Greenwood, 2007; Parmar et al., 2010). The claim made here is narrower. In this study, stakeholder engagement was not treated as inherently ethical. It appeared ethically significant where users, clients, practitioners, communities or partners influenced decisions, challenged assumptions, altered design choices or prompted founders to reconsider scope, pace or safeguards.

Across the C1–C4 comparison, the form of engagement varied. In C1, engagement was more often direct and relational, grounded in trust, proximity and mutual learning. In C2, founders described more structured consultation and feedback loops as early governance checks. In C3, stakeholder input was more likely to inform system design, transparency, metrics or interpretability features. In C4, participation was more often formalised through user panels, advisory structures, reporting or assurance processes. This pattern suggests movement from relational dialogue towards more durable forms of oversight in some cases, without implying a fixed sequence.

Theme 1 also gives rise to two central mechanisms: Bounded Ethics and Omission-based Dissonance. Bounded Ethics describes principled constraint where ethical aims exceed available resources, evidence, authority or system readiness. In the findings, this was visible where founders narrowed functionality, delayed release, refused misaligned opportunities, limited claims, retained human oversight or accepted slower growth because the conditions for responsible delivery were not yet in place. The concept is therefore not used to excuse limited action. It describes the boundary within which ethical action appeared possible and defensible at a given time.

Omission-based Dissonance describes the ethical strain associated with unrealised good. It was visible where founders described discomfort because an access route, safeguarding feature, sustainability aim or impact commitment could not yet be delivered. This differs from a simple account of wrongdoing or hypocrisy. The tension arose because founders judged that something ethically important remained unfinished, under-resourced or deferred. Within the study, this form of dissonance appeared both

diagnostic and motivational: it signalled a gap between ethical aspiration and feasible delivery, and in some cases prompted revision, re-sequencing or renewed stakeholder engagement.

The member-checking process helped sharpen this distinction. Feedback did not displace the thematic interpretation, but it supported clearer separation between cognitive dissonance and emotional dissonance. Cognitive dissonance concerned tensions between beliefs, decisions and actions. Emotional dissonance concerned the affective strain of carrying responsibility, disappointment or unease when ethical aims could not be fully realised. Both were relevant, but they operated differently in the accounts.

Identity work helped founders make these tensions workable. In C1, founders often described values-led authenticity and spoke of their organisations as closely connected to personal conviction. In C2, ethical identity became more formalised through emerging governance documents, partnership criteria or funding decisions. In C3, identity was more often translated into technological architecture through data protocols, accessibility standards and accountability tools. In C4, founder ethos appeared more institutionalised through culture, oversight, board-level discussion or organisational codes that echoed the original mission. Public materials, where available, supported a cautious reading of movement from personal conviction towards more formal organisational expression.

This identity work also appeared to function as a coping practice under strain. By reaffirming their ethical role and mission, founders could frame unmet goals as part of an ongoing process of learning and recalibration rather than as simple failure. Some described pausing growth plans or product releases to preserve alignment. Others treated commitments to inclusion, justice, care or sustainability as non-negotiable elements of what the venture stood for. Where these commitments could not yet be met because of financial constraint, regulatory delay or technical limitation, reflection, stakeholder dialogue and pragmatic goal-setting helped make that unease actionable.

Read together, the findings under Theme 1 suggest that ethical alignment involved repeated boundary-work under constraint. Founders described working out what could

responsibly be accepted, refused, revised, delayed or re-scoped as commercial, legal, operational and technological pressures changed. Values were therefore not presented as settled statements of principle, but as commitments tested through practical judgement, compromise and restraint. Theme 1 provides the values-based and identity-based grounding for the wider contribution by showing how ethical direction was formed, defended, strained and recalibrated before being carried into social impact practice and technology design in Themes 2 and 3.

This theme is developed through:

- ethical boundary-work and adaptive judgement;
- stakeholder engagement and reflexive practice;
- omission-based dissonance and the strain of deferred good;
- founder identity, capability and ethical consistency;
- responsibility as part of venture formation, not an external CSR layer.

a) Ethical boundary work through a dynamic-capability lens

The observed pattern of dynamic value adherence can be read alongside dynamic capabilities scholarship (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997), as it shows how founders sensed ethical signals, embedded safeguards and adjusted practice under constraint. The claim made here is interpretive rather than a formal extension of dynamic capabilities theory. The findings show how ethical responsiveness operated as an adaptive practice within the cases studied. Founders did not only sense–seize–reconfigure for markets; they **sensed** shifts in ethical norms (for example, accessibility expectations, data minimisation requirements, consent standards), **seized** opportunities to embed them (through product defaults, partner criteria, user agreements), and **reconfigured** pricing, governance, and delivery so that mission integrity was protected alongside commercial viability.

The expression of this capability varied by cohort. In **C1**, it appeared as ethically motivated restraint and refusal of misaligned work. In **C2**, it took the form of codified

safeguards and early workflow automation to reduce foreseeable risk. In **C3**, it was visible as responsible-innovation routines—impact checks, bias reviews, data governance, and measurable accountability—woven into design and release. In **C4**, it matured into system-level controls, including enterprise audit, external assurance, and the application of inclusion standards at scale. Adaptation was directed simultaneously to market fit, ethical fit, and social fit, with boundary work providing the connective tissue between them. Later sections build on this pattern to characterise ethical decision-making in these ventures as an ongoing form of navigation, in which adaptive boundary work operates as a context-specific capability rather than a secondary effect of commercial adjustment.

b) Stakeholder engagement as reflexive, not static

The findings enact Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), adding detail to how engagement functions in early-stage, socially innovative ventures. Existing scholarship emphasises legitimacy, dialogue, and responsiveness as defining features of stakeholder relations in complex settings (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Greenwood, 2007; Parmar et al., 2010). This study shows how such engagement operates when ethical intent, limited capacity, and technological development intersect.

Across all cohorts, interaction with stakeholders was reflexive rather than representational. Founders did not aim to settle competing interests once and for all; they treated engagement as moral sense-making. Dialogue with users, clients, and domain experts was used to test ethical boundaries, validate design assumptions, and surface unanticipated risks. Where concerns were raised about inclusivity, data use, or environmental impact, responses included adjusting delivery models, revising commitments, or declining partnerships that threatened mission alignment. In this respect, stakeholder work was not an adjunct to product development but a means of continuously interpreting what counted as responsible action.

Patterns varied by stage. In **C1**, engagement was direct and relational, grounded in trust and mutual learning. In **C2**, founders added structured consultation and feedback loops that served as early governance checks. In **C3**, stakeholder input informed system design

and algorithmic transparency, with contributors shaping metrics and interpretability features. By **C4**, participation was formalised through mechanisms such as user panels, ethical advisory boards, and public reporting, moving engagement from ad hoc dialogue to institutionalised oversight.

These dynamics can be read alongside Mitchell, Agle and Wood's (1997) salience model: as ventures matured, power, legitimacy, and urgency were deliberately redistributed through formal channels so that previously peripheral voices could influence specification and release. Consistent with Greenwood's (2007) critique of engagement as a potentially instrumental practice, the evidence here suggests a more substantive orientation: stakeholders affected design requirements and governance thresholds, not merely communication outputs. Similarly, the plural account of firm–stakeholder relations in Donaldson and Preston (1995) is reflected in founders' willingness to balance instrumental considerations with normative commitments where mission integrity was at stake.

Documentary analysis corroborated this reflexive pattern—release and change logs, accessibility and data-handling statements, references to audit/assurance in later-stage cases—evidenced how feedback altered interface flows, consent language, and data-handling rules. Public statements and reporting packs recorded how stakeholder concerns translated into commitments that could be tracked over time. These materials and narratives show engagement functioning less as an external obligation and more as a core instrument of ethical governance—one through which criteria for responsible practice were articulated, tested, and revised as ventures grew. This reflexive pattern of engagement later informs a broader account of ethical leadership in which values, impact, sustainability, innovation, ownership and navigation are treated as interdependent domains rather than discrete concerns.

c) Extending cognitive dissonance: omission-based dissonance

Classical Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains tension when behaviour conflicts with belief. Here, founders described a different unease: moral strain from unrealised good. Participants reported frustration and guilt when financial, technical, or regulatory limits prevented delivery of the social outcomes they regarded as essential. For example, in **C1 (n = 9)**, codes *1.3.1* and *2.1.3* recorded disappointment when access initiatives did not reach marginalised users despite extensive testing; in **C4 (n = 4)**, monitoring materials from 2021 noted missed sustainability targets and the unease that followed. Documentary analysis (change and release logs, KPI summaries, and assurance reports) corroborated these accounts, showing how unmet objectives were tracked and discussed in internal reviews. These experiences indicate that ethical identity in socially innovative ventures is grounded as much in the pursuit of positive outcomes as in the avoidance of harm. As discussed below, identity work helped founders to manage this tension.

This form of moral strain is conceptualised here as **omission-based dissonance**—ethical tension produced by unfulfilled potential rather than by transgression. In this study it is proposed as a forward-looking extension of Cognitive Dissonance Theory, adding an omission-focused, prospective dimension that is not explicit in Festinger's original model and later ethical adaptations (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). The discomfort stems from a perceived gap between ideal impact and feasible delivery—the point at which aspiration outpaces structural capacity. It is distinct from research on **omission bias** (Spranca, Minsk, & Baron, 1991; Cushman, Young & Hauser, 2006), which examines how observers judge harmful omissions less harshly than commissions. Here, the dissonance is **internal**: founders evaluate their own shortfall in achieving intended good.

Across cases, omission-based dissonance appeared **persistent rather than episodic**, reflecting continual negotiation between purpose and practicality. The concept partly overlaps with **Self-Discrepancy Theory** (Higgins, 1987), which distinguishes between actual and ideal selves, but the emphasis differs. Founders' discomfort centred less on

personal inadequacy than on **collective shortfall**—the sense that the organisation had not yet delivered its intended contribution to society.

In reality, omission-based dissonance operated both **diagnostically** and **motivationally**. Diagnostically, it signalled misalignment between ethical intent and realised practice, prompting scrutiny of assumptions, resourcing, and timelines. Motivationally, it spurred corrective action: strategies were revised, products redesigned, and stakeholder relationships renegotiated to restore coherence. This dynamic resonates with **Social Cognitive Theory** (Bandura, 1986): ethical decision-making evolved through reciprocal influences between individual standards, social norms, and observed outcomes. Feedback from users, partners, and regulators—captured in release and change logs, accessibility and data-handling statements, references to audit/assurance in later-stage cases—shaped subsequent choices, with omission-based dissonance acting as a self-regulatory mechanism that sustained alignment between moral intention, technological practice, and social effect.

Two implications follow. First, ventures that make omission-based dissonance **visible and discussable**—for example, by recording unmet ethical objectives alongside technical debt and by requiring explicit remediation plans—are better placed to convert discomfort into improvement. Secondly, when the source of dissonance is structural rather than attitudinal, **pace control and sequencing** (as outlined in Theme 3) become legitimate responses: slowing or re-phasing delivery to protect inclusion, transparency, and safety is not mission drift but fidelity to purpose under constraint. In this way, omission-based dissonance links Theme 1's alignment work with Theme 3's SMAG Cadence, providing the motivational bridge through which values are translated into auditable change. Subsequent theoretical discussion treats this form of tension as a prospective extension of Cognitive Dissonance Theory, with unrealised good used to prioritise corrective iteration rather than to rationalise compromise.

d) Identity work as a mechanism for coping and consistency

Drawing on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and research on identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), founders described deliberate efforts to construct and sustain an ethical self-image capable of withstanding commercial and contextual pressures. Across the study, participants held together multiple roles—ethical leader, innovator, and business owner—each carrying distinct responsibilities and expectations. This identity work was a principal means of managing **omission-based dissonance**: a coherent ethical self-concept helped founders decide which compromises were tolerable, which partnerships to refuse, and when to slow or redirect growth to preserve inclusion, safety, or social purpose.

Evidence of this process appeared across all cohorts. In **C1**, founders emphasised values-led authenticity and often spoke of their organisations as extensions of themselves. Intuition and moral reflection were used as checks on decisions, particularly where duty of care was salient. In **C2**, identity work became more formalised as ethical commitments were written into emerging governance documents and partnership agreements; interview codes *2.2.1* and *2.2.4* capture decisions to decline funding perceived as ethically misaligned ("the money was there, but the compromise was too big"). In **C3**, identity was translated into technological architecture through data protocols, accessibility standards, and accountability tools; participants also reported periods of "ethical exhaustion" when sustainability initiatives planned for 2022 were delayed. In **C4**, the founder's ethos was institutionalised through culture and oversight—board-level ethics committees, standing agenda items, and organisational codes that echoed the original mission. Documentary materials (where public materials allowed) corroborated this progression from personal conviction to institutional expression.

Identity work also functioned as a coping practice under strain. By reaffirming their ethical role and social mission, founders reframed unmet goals as part of an ongoing cycle of learning and recalibration rather than as moral failure. Several participants described pausing growth plans or product releases to preserve alignment; one noted

that keeping values intact mattered more than being first to market, encapsulating the balance between conviction and pragmatism. Positive obligations—commitments to inclusion, justice, or sustainability—were frequently treated as non-negotiable elements of self. When such obligations could not be met because of financial constraints, regulatory delays, or technical limits, founders reported distinct ethical unease; yet re-engagement with values through reflection, stakeholder dialogue, and pragmatic goal-setting often converted frustration into renewed purpose.

Combined, these accounts suggest that identity work provided **continuity amid uncertainty**. It acted both as compass and stabiliser: anchoring moral decision-making while enabling adaptive responses to complex technological and social demands. By making identity explicit in governance and design, founders created a bridge between aspiration and feasibility that supported consistent behaviour under pressure. This mechanism complements the dynamic capability outlined in **5.2.1**—linking values to action—and offers a pathway through which omission-based dissonance is channelled into constructive adjustment rather than erosion of ethical intent.

e) Concluding synthesis: From compliance to constitutive responsibility: responsibility as moral agency

The findings challenge interpretations of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that confine responsibility to philanthropy, reputation management, or legal compliance (Carroll, 1991; Garriga & Melé, 2004). Across cases, responsibility was described as inseparable from purpose—woven into design, delivery, and governance rather than appended as an external expectation. Ethical and environmental goals were positioned at the centre of operations in ways consistent with the shift towards creating shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and with regenerative enterprise thinking (Elkington, 2020). The driving mechanism was founder-led **moral agency**: declining misaligned revenue, reinvesting surpluses in access or sustainability, and rejecting superficial innovation in favour of inclusion, transparency, and verifiable impact.

Evidence from **C2 (n = 4)** showed founders questioning compliance-led CSR. Workshop transcripts (codes *3.2.4* and *4.1.1*) rejected "tick-box responsibility", recasting ethics as action—doing what matters even when it carries cost. This orientation was reinforced in **C3 (n = 8)**: internal reports from 2021 documented carbon targets and accessibility metrics embedded in product lifecycles despite financial strain, while codes *2.2.3* and *2.4.1* recorded repeated decisions to retain inclusive features that increased development time or spend. Documentary analysis—governance packs, product roadmaps, release logs, and audit or accessibility statements—corroborated these accounts, showing reinvestment lines, decision logs, and assurance artefacts that translated intention into structure. Responsibility appeared as **moral action**, not symbolic compliance: it directed daily choices about specification, partnership, and pace.

This re-conceptualisation supports a reading of CSR as **transformative and participatory**, grounded in deliberation, stakeholder dialogue, and continuous reflection rather than external performance metrics alone (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). The evidence enacts these arguments by showing how participatory responsibility manifests in early-stage, technology-based settings with limited capacity. Ethical agency was visible less in formal CSR reports than in micro-practices: internal audits that triggered redesign, transparent communication of limitations in release logs, and proactive inclusion policies that functioned as gates to deployment.

Responsibility in these ventures thus operated as **moral agency in motion**. Founders made ethically charged decisions about whom to work with, what to build, and how fast to grow—even when those choices constrained profitability or slowed expansion. Several participants stated, in effect, that if scaling would compromise access, growth should be moderated. Framed this way, responsibility is constitutive of entrepreneurial identity rather than an afterthought.

By grounding responsibility in personal conviction and reflective governance, the findings bridge normative theories of transformative CSR with the practical realities of ESV life. Structural constraints—funding scarcity, regulatory complexity, technical risk—were treated not as reasons for inaction but as parameters for **ethical innovation**. This stance resonates with values-based leadership and stakeholder-oriented agency (Maak

& Pless, 2006; Derry, 2012): ethical deliberation becomes a catalyst for adaptive learning and creative resilience under pressure.

Responsibility is reframed here as **constitutive rather than compensatory**. For socially innovative, technology-based ventures, ethics is not an external measure to satisfy but an internal logic that defines legitimacy, trust, and impact. Practices such as declining misaligned funding, reinvesting in inclusion, and prioritising verifiable over performative outcomes show how moral agency operates as both compass and strategy for sustainable innovation. These patterns of iterative alignment and structured reflection set the stage for Theme 2, where ethics is enacted as strategy and social impact becomes an explicit organisational function. Read across the cohorts, they also correspond to configurations in which ethics is carried primarily through proximity, reflection and lightweight checks, which later sit at the values-led end of the ethics–technology configurations and lifecycle signatures described in this thesis.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Social impact as strategic and iterative practice

Theme 2 moves from the internal, reflective work of ethical alignment discussed in Theme 1 to the external enactment of those ethics in the real world. Whereas the first theme examined how founders recalibrated principles and identities, this theme considers how values were operationalised through deliberate strategy, structured collaboration, and iterative learning. In line with the study's outcome triad, these practices are pursued for their effects on Capability (users can act independently), Access (wider participation), and Evidence (transparent, auditable indicators), not for scale alone.

Across the ventures, social impact was not treated as a by-product of commercial success but as an integrated, continuing process—central to decision-making, product development, and organisational design. Founders described a cyclical mode of working: researching needs and risks, testing prototypes or delivery models, reflecting on results with stakeholders, and refining scope or method. These feedback loops were used to evaluate social value and to reconfigure delivery, producing a pattern of iterative ethical governance rather than one-off interventions. Documentary analysis supported this

account: roadmaps, change logs, and reporting packs recorded how stakeholder input, accessibility results, and data-protection reviews altered specifications and release plans over time.

The strategic character of impact work was visible in how aims were specified and resourced. Many ventures translated purpose into measurable objectives (for example, access, inclusion, or environmental targets) and linked these to delivery artefacts—design standards, consent tooling, audit schedules, and public statements. Impact was budgeted and timetabled: co-design sessions, assurance activities, and remediation windows appeared in planning documents alongside functional milestones. Impact functioned as an organisational capability, not merely an aspiration.

Practices varied with maturity. In **C1**, teams relied on small-scale pilots and close, relational engagement to ensure duty of care. In **C2**, procedures emerged—lightweight policies, role-based checks, and documented review points—so that values were carried consistently through delivery. In **C3**, impact considerations were embedded in architecture and measurement: accessibility standards, data-governance routines, and accountability tools were built into pipelines. In **C4**, the work extended across the enterprise: board oversight, external audit, and public reporting formalised expectations and made progress auditable. This cohort pattern suggests a shift from values expressed by individuals to values institutionalised in systems.

The findings can be considered through the lens of **Social Entrepreneurship** scholarship (e.g., Dees, 1998; Austin et al., 2006) by showing how founders sustained mission through paced growth, reinvestment, and stakeholder participation, prioritising depth and legitimacy over rapid scale. The evidence reinforces several established frameworks. It complements **Social Capital** perspectives (Putnam, 2000) by illustrating networks as sites of ethical calibration as well as operational advantage, with co-design and partnership serving to test and improve the justice of design decisions. It contributes to **impact investing** debates by showing capital used as a circulating resource for ethical continuity—funding access, inclusion, and verification—rather than solely as a lever for acceleration. Finally, it aligns with classic **change-management** models (Lewin; Kotter;

Bridges) while demonstrating how ethical commitments are carried from narrative (urgency and coalition) into procedure, architecture, and culture.

This theme examines how founders moved from ethical intention to social impact practice. Impact was not described as a fixed claim or a by-product of growth. It appeared as ongoing work: identifying need, engaging stakeholders, testing delivery, measuring effects, revising scope and deciding how growth should be paced.

This theme is developed through:

- social capital as ethical infrastructure;
- social entrepreneurship as disciplined mission protection;
- impact investment and reinvestment as mission-supporting practice;
- change management and the movement from values into routines;
- resources, capabilities and relational credibility;
- ethical leadership under practical constraint.

a) Social capital as ethical infrastructure in ESVs

The data indicate patterns consistent with Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), in which networks and trust underpin collective action. Participants consistently described collaboration, partnership, and cross-sector engagement as essential not only to operational delivery but to sustaining integrity. Networks were used as living systems of knowledge exchange and ethical calibration rather than solely as routes to funding or legitimacy.

In several cases, partnerships with universities, charities, and user communities acted as testing grounds for socially responsible design. Ventures in **C2 (n = 4)** ran co-design workshops to refine health and accessibility tools, with user input shaping both features and ethical parameters. In **C3 (n = 8)**, founders formed data alliances with environmental research groups to validate sustainability claims and co-develop responsible data-sharing protocols. Interview accounts and Documentary analysis corroborated these practices: memoranda of understanding, data-sharing agreements, in-house or externally commissioned data collection—research studies, audits/assessments—

recorded how stakeholder input altered specifications, consent language, and governance arrangements.

These patterns add detail to Social Capital accounts by showing that, in these ventures, social capital functions as ethical infrastructure as well as operational resource. Collaboration functions as a mechanism for ethical validation as much as for operational advantage. Trust and reciprocity enable founders to test boundaries, surface risks, and adjust delivery in ways that maintain inclusion, transparency, and fairness.

To capture this dynamic, this study introduces the notion of **Osmotic Alignment**: strategic direction and moral priorities evolve through a continuous, bidirectional exchange of ideas, values, and expectations between founders and their ecosystems. Like osmosis, influence is reciprocal and diffused—stakeholder insights permeate decision-making, while the venture's ethical stance reshapes stakeholder expectations in turn. This differs from open or participatory innovation models by placing **ethical learning**—rather than novelty or speed—at the centre of co-creation.

Social capital operates as both **infrastructure and conscience**. It provides the channels through which information, scrutiny, and support flow, and it supplies the normative checks that keep purpose aligned with practice. Governance artefacts observed in the documentary analysis—terms of reference for advisory panels, joint protocol documents, and public reporting packs—show how these relationships are institutionalised so that ethical commitments can be specified, tested, and audited over time.

b) Social entrepreneurship as disciplined, ethics-paced strategy

The findings can be read alongside social entrepreneurship scholarship (Dees, 1998; Austin et al., 2006), particularly where that literature examines mission orientation, legitimacy, hybrid tension and the pursuit of social value. In this study, social purpose operated as an organising principle that shaped operational, financial and technological decisions within private-sector, founder-led ventures. Participants often pursued depth before scale: they refined internal systems, reinforced community trust and embedded

accountability before, and sometimes instead of, rapid growth. This does not classify the sampled ventures as social enterprises; rather, it shows how social entrepreneurship concepts can help interpret purpose-led decision-making beyond formally constituted social-enterprise settings.

This stance challenges the normative assumption that legitimacy follows from speed and size. In **Cohorts 2–3**, founders routinely resisted growth opportunities where value alignment was at risk, treating sustainable impact as inseparable from ethical coherence. The strength of these ventures derived less from reach than from the integrity of their architectures—governance routines, inclusion standards, and verifiable accountability—together with the authenticity of their relationships with users, partners, and communities. Documentary materials evidenced this orientation, recording paced release schedules, co-design commitments, and the allocation of surpluses to access, assurance, and equity work.

The evidence supports an extension of Dees' (1998) conception of the social entrepreneur as a **system reformer**. Here, systemic change was advanced not only through novel offerings but through three interlocking mechanisms: **strategic restraint** (sequencing growth and deliberately slowing release to protect inclusion, transparency, and safety); **ethical reinvestment** (recycling surpluses into capabilities that preserve integrity—co-design, assurance, and measurement); and **participatory governance** (granting stakeholders structured influence over specification and oversight). Rather than seeking disruption primarily through acceleration, founders **reconfigured expectations** by modelling integrity in everyday practice—aligning structures, partnerships, and resource flows with moral commitments at the venture's core.

Placing these practices alongside Zahra et al.'s (2009) typology suggests a hybrid posture. Elements of the **social bricoleur** (contextual problem-solving with limited resources) and the **social engineer** (building scalable institutional solutions) were present, but scaling was **conditioned by ethics**: growth proceeded only as fast as safeguards could be institutionalised. This conditional scaling reframes entrepreneurial effectiveness: the salient question was not how quickly a solution spread, but how reliably it preserved fairness and accountability as it did so.

Two implications follow for theory. First, **legitimacy can be generated endogenously** through reflective governance and controlled scaling; external validation and rapid growth are neither necessary nor sufficient where integrity is central to value creation. Secondly, **ethical capability is path-dependent**: early investments in inclusion, measurement, and assurance create cumulative advantage by lowering the cost of later verification and reducing the likelihood of trust-eroding reversals. These extensions connect Theme 1's alignment work with Theme 2's strategic enactment and provide a basis for the capital practices outlined next where reinvestment is shown to function as a durable engine of mission continuity.

c) Re-reading impact investing through mission-anchored reinvestment

The findings speak to debates in the impact investing literature by repositioning capital as an **internal, circulating resource** for sustaining ethical innovation rather than solely an external lever for scale. Whereas much of the field emphasises how third-party finance accelerates mission delivery (e.g., Bugg-Levine & Emerson, 2011; Jackson & Harji, 2013), participants described a practice of **mission-anchored reinvestment**: surpluses were directed to expanding access, improving inclusivity, and funding ethical research rather than maximising extraction. In **C3 (n = 8)**, several ventures used profits to subsidise community subscriptions or to open-source accessibility tools, treating reinvestment as a mechanism of ethical continuity so that financial success reinforced rather than diluted purpose. Documentary materials—public impact statements and selected release and change logs; in a few cases references to budget allocation and reinvestment—corroborated these choices, recording ring-fencing of revenues for inclusion features, budget lines for equity audits, and public statements linking surplus allocation to stated social outcomes.

This orientation deepens accounts of **blended value** by showing how values-based governance and stakeholder trust can substitute for, or complement, external financial leverage (cf. Emerson, 2003). Founders viewed financial capital as a way to **thicken social and ethical infrastructure**—funding co-design, assurance, and slower, staged

releases—rather than as a vehicle for rapid expansion alone. Trust, transparency, and reputation functioned as convertible forms of capital: they attracted patient partners, reduced coordination costs with regulators and clients, and lowered the risk premium associated with responsible delivery. Operationally, these intangible assets underwrote decisions to delay automation pending safeguards, to maintain accessible pricing, or to publish audit trails that might otherwise be seen as commercially costly.

Two mechanisms were recurrent. First, **ethical reinvestment loops**: surpluses were routinely channelled into capability that protects integrity (accessibility, governance, and measurement), creating a self-reinforcing cycle in which credibility begets uptake and, in turn, further reinvestment. Secondly, **paced deployment financed from operations**: teams funded staged roll-outs and remediation windows from earned income, aligning cash flow with the time required for testing, audit, and user education. Both mechanisms reposition impact finance from a question of "how much capital and from whom" to "how capital is structured and governed so that integrity is maintained at speed."

In doing so, the study adds to impact investing discourse beyond funding volumes and headline metrics towards an ethics-informed model of sustainability. **Internal reinvestment** and **ethical alignment** emerge as equal drivers of credible impact alongside external capital. The implication for investors and funders is that signals of integrity—transparent reinvestment policies, audit-ready pipelines, and governance that gives stakeholders meaningful influence—are not peripheral; they are part of the investable proposition.

d) Reinforcement of change-management theories

The findings show how ethical intent was translated into routines, controls, and culture in ways that mirror—and extend—established change-management models. Across the four cohorts, founders described a disciplined movement from values-led urgency and experimentation to formal governance and cultural anchoring.

A **Kotter-style sequence** was evident (Kotter, 1996). In **C1 (n = 9)**, founders created urgency around access, care, and fairness, using values narratives to form small coalitions

before any formal structures existed. As ventures moved into **C2 (n = 4)**, these coalitions were formalised: standing ethics items appeared on meeting agendas, basic policy packs for consent and safeguarding were introduced, and visible "quick wins" were delivered, such as clearer user pathways or fair-use pricing. **C3 (n = 8)** broadened the coalition beyond the firm by involving data-protection advisers and accessibility auditors; the shared vision was expressed in product roadmaps that combined measurable inclusion targets with scheduled audits. By **C4 (n = 4)**, change had been anchored: onboarding modules **included Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)** commitments, board committees owned data-ethics KPIs, and quarterly reports tracked performance, embedding the vision in enterprise rhythms. Urgency led to coalition, coalition to a structured vision, and vision to anchoring in systems and culture. Documentary analysis—policy impact pages and public terms of reference; otherwise, interview accounts—corroborated each step in this sequence.

A parallel **Lewinian pattern** of *Unfreeze → Change → Refreeze* also appeared (Lewin, 1951). Unfreezing in **C1** took the form of questioning sector defaults (for example, paywalls that excluded low-income users). **C2** enacted change through low-risk pilots—trialling alternative pricing, rewriting consent text, and testing light-touch governance checklists—so that intention translated into repeatable practice. In **C3**, refreezing became visible as pilots matured into standard operating procedures: feature gates tied to ethics reviews, release checklists requiring accessibility sign-off, and service-level rules for complaints and redress. **C4** extended refreezing across the enterprise: privacy-by-default settings, supplier standards, and independent assurance became routine rather than exceptional. These stages were recorded in release checklists, and audit certificates reviewed in the documentary analysis.

The **psychological transitions** described by Bridges were also present (Bridges, 2004). Founders in **C2** spoke of leaving behind purely commercial logics while holding uncertainty as procedures "caught up" with values. **C3** navigated that neutral zone through structured trials—shadow A/B tests for accessibility changes, staged roll-outs, and impact reviews—until a "new beginning" took hold in playbooks, design systems, and audit trails. In **C4**, identity shifts were explicit: the founder moved from "doer" to

"steward of governance", with staff-led inclusion forums and external oversight treated as part of normal leadership practice. Minutes, playbooks, and training materials evidenced this shift from individual to institutional identity.

These cohort patterns portray ethical entrepreneurship as **continuous transition**, not a single reform. In the earliest stage, change begins with values-led urgency and small coalitions; in transition, light governance turns intention into routine; in growth, ethical checks are wired into product architecture and measurement; and at scale, ethics is anchored by enterprise controls and cultural ownership. Two practical implications follow. First, **embedding ethics requires designed transitions** that carry values from narrative (**C1**) into procedure (**C2**), architecture (**C3**), and culture with oversight (**C4**). Secondly, **moral leadership is exercised through ambiguity**: founders guided collective learning, accepted slower adoption when necessary, and translated principles into durable organisational form—showing that ethical impact depends as much on *how* change is managed as on *what* is changed.

e) An ethically orientated reading of the Resource-Based View

The findings can be read through Resource-Based View (RBV) as a supporting lens, particularly where the cases show technological capacity, ethical credibility and stakeholder trust being cultivated together over time (Barney, 1991). The claim made here is not that the thesis develops a new RBV variant. Rather, RBV helps interpret how technological, ethical and relational resources appeared to become consequential when they were organised through routines, governance and practice.

Across the C1–C4 comparison, value appeared to arise less from technology alone than from the way technical capability, ethical credibility and stakeholder relationships were combined. This reading supports the later discussion of Ethical Capabilities Capital and ethics–technology integration, while remaining bounded to the empirical setting of this study.

In C1, technology was often used to support access, care or coordination. Digital inclusion platforms and low-cost wellbeing tools were described less as proprietary assets alone than as ways of expressing ethical purpose. Founders treated fairness and user trust as part of the value proposition, although this should be read as relational credibility rather than as capital in a purely financial sense.

In C2, similar commitments appeared more formalised through ethics statements, user-feedback mechanisms, concise impact reporting or early accountability materials. These systems seemed to support stakeholder confidence and internal decision quality. The evidence suggests ethical reflexivity as a productive organisational practice, rather than proving it to be a capability in a formal RBV sense.

By **C3 (n = 8)**, ventures began to integrate ethics directly into product architecture. Transparency tooling, inclusive design systems, and responsible-data frameworks were built to operationalise fairness and accountability. Founders described these artefacts as "core intellectual property", valuable not primarily because they were difficult to replicate technically, but because they embodied **moral legitimacy** and verifiable compliance. In **C4 (n = 4)**, mature enterprises treated trust, transparency, and inclusion as enterprise assets managed through audits, certifications, training, and open-data mechanisms. These systems translated ethical credibility into organisational resilience—supporting investor relations, public legitimacy, and staff retention.

Read through an RBV lens, these patterns suggest a resource bundle made up of technological expertise, ethical credibility, stakeholder trust and the routines that connect them. This bundle can be interpreted through VRIN/VRIO language, but cautiously. It appeared valuable where it reduced regulatory, reputational or operational risk; comparatively rare where technical capability was combined with more explicit ethical governance; difficult to imitate where practices depended on social complexity, path-specific learning and accumulated relationships; and organised where commitments were embedded in governance, measurement, communication and culture.

The relevant isolating mechanisms were therefore not patents alone. They also included co-design practices, assurance routines, transparent communication and stakeholder relationships that could not easily be copied without recreating the underlying norms and trust on which they depended.

Public and organisational materials provided contextual support for this interpretation. Ethics statements, release checklists, accessibility materials, audit certificates and open-data portals, where available, offered traces of how integrity and trust were presented or maintained. Board papers, training materials and operating procedures also showed how some ventures linked these commitments to risk management, market access or organisational learning.

Two implications follow from this reading. First, ethical orientation may become strategically significant where it is embedded in product architecture, governance and stakeholder relationships. In volatile contexts, the capacity to evidence fairness and accountability may support trust, legitimacy and resilience. Secondly, investment in inclusion, measurement and assurance may create path dependence: early routines can reduce later verification costs and lower the risk of trust-eroding reversals.

This is not intended as an extension of RBV. It is a bounded reading of how technological capability, ethical credibility and stakeholder trust appeared to gain significance when organised through routines, evidence and governance.

Later in the chapter, the same bundle of technological, ethical and relational resources is read as part of a wider spectrum of ethics–technology configurations and as one of the routes through which founders recalibrate decisions about impact, sustainability and innovation under constraint.

f) Ethical leadership as contextual and bounded

Ethical leadership in socially innovative, technology-driven ventures was exercised under constraint. Founders led with conviction, but decisions were taken within the limits set by regulation, funding models, data quality, partner expectations, and organisational

capacity. Progress therefore appeared as an iterative practice rather than a settled end-state, with leaders recalibrating pace, partnerships, and product choices to preserve integrity.

This study introduces **bounded ethics** to describe values-based decision-making when ethical ambition outstrips what systems presently allow. The term parallels Simon's notion of **bounded rationality** (1957): not a failure of judgement, but principled navigation amid structural limits. In contrast to accounts that locate ethical lapse chiefly in individual weakness or moral disengagement (e.g., Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006), bounded ethics situates moral tension in the misfit between intent and context, explaining why partial or sequenced advances can be the most ethical course.

Evidence across cohorts shows how leadership practices matured with organisational and technical depth. In **C1**, care and fairness were expressed through selective partnering, refusal of misaligned work, and close human oversight in sensitive processes. **C2** teams encoded values in lightweight governance—policy packs for consent and safeguarding, role-based checks, and documented decision logs. **C3** embedded safeguards in architecture and measurement—accessibility standards, bias reviews, and data-governance routines—so that ethical criteria became release gates rather than aspirations. **C4** coupled internal controls with external assurance via ethics committees, audits, and public reporting, extending accountability beyond the firm. Where public materials allowed training or onboarding extract and public statements evidenced this progression from individual vigilance to institutionalised capability; otherwise this pattern is drawn from interview accounts.

Operationally, bounded ethics **legitimised deliberate restraint**. Leaders slowed releases until safeguards were verified, declined revenue that compromised access, and redesigned features to minimise exclusion. Pace control, scope limitation, and partner selection functioned as ethical levers alongside technical ones (for example, constrained model domains, human-in-the-loop escalation, and staged roll-outs with feature flags). These choices preserved trust and mission coherence while acknowledging real limits; integrity was maintained not by insisting on ideal outcomes regardless of feasibility, but by sequencing change so that protection kept pace with innovation.

Three leadership competencies were recurrent. First, **reflexive judgement**: founders routinely tested whether delivery still matched purpose, using decision logs and after-action reviews to surface and address drift. Secondly, **boundary-setting**: explicit "will-not" lists and partnership criteria clarified where trade-offs would stop. Thirdly, **coalition-building**: user panels, domain experts, and advisers were engaged to surface risks early and to share ownership of difficult choices. These competencies converted personal conviction into organisational routines that could withstand turnover, scrutiny, and scale.

The implications are twofold. Substantively, ethical success is best read as **fidelity through constraint** rather than the absence of compromise: where systems lag, principled sequencing and slower growth can be signs of leadership, not inertia. Methodologically, evaluation should attend to **auditability and pace discipline**—for example, whether pause points, assurance pipelines, and public notes are present—rather than to speed alone. Ethical leadership here is less a matter of unimpeded will than of **steady moral agency under constraint**, translating values into durable forms that hold when delivery pressures arise.

g) Pace and scope control as ethical practice

Founders used pace and scope as levers to protect their standards under constraint. They slowed growth, limited partnerships and reworked features where faster expansion would have put social purpose at risk. These decisions were tied to concrete limits in regulation, funding, data quality and partner practice, rather than to a general preference for caution.

The pattern was visible across all cohorts. In **C2**, founders turned down opportunities for rapid expansion when investor priorities conflicted with mission, choosing steadier growth that safeguarded access and inclusion commitments. In **C3**, automation was postponed until safeguards—bias audits, accessibility checks, and human-in-the-loop escalation—had been completed, even where this carried commercial cost. In **C4**, policies limited data collection and introduced internal reviews beyond legal minima, with staged releases dependent on independent assurance. In **C1**, caution took the form of hybrid

delivery and selective partnering to protect duty of care while prototypes were tested. Documentary materials—change and release logs and public explanations of limitations—recorded these decisions and the reasoning behind pacing and scope limits.

This behaviour accords with accounts of institutional agency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991; Battilana et al., 2009), in which actors shape and reinterpret contextual rules rather than merely conform to them. The notion of bounded ethics supplements this view by providing a moral vocabulary for agency under constraint: ethical action remains both principled and pragmatic, sequencing change so that protection keeps pace with innovation. The parallel with Simon's (1957) bounded rationality is instructive. In Simon's account, the focus is on limits to what decision-makers can know; in bounded ethics, the focus is on limits to what they can responsibly do when systems are misaligned. Founders did not lack clarity about right action; they made informed, values-conscious decisions that reflected what was possible within regulatory, financial, and technical realities.

Operationally, pace and scope were managed through concrete levers: staged releases with pause points, constrained model domains and disabled out-of-distribution inference, partner criteria that excluded misaligned funders or suppliers, data minimisation through collection caps and privacy-by-default settings, and assurance gates such as ethics items on release checklists and external audits prior to scale. Decision and change logs made these levers auditable, turning moral judgement into organisational routine.

Bounded ethics is therefore not a justification for compromise but an interpretive lens for principled adaptation: a way to preserve moral integrity—sometimes imperfectly—when ideal outcomes exceed operational feasibility. The near-term cost of controlled pacing was visible in slower deployment and foregone revenue; the dividends were reduced reversals, stronger regulator and community confidence, and clearer accountability over time.

Two implications follow for practice and evaluation. First, deliberate pacing can be a positive signal of leadership where systems lag; assessment should attend to documented gates, remediation budgets, and external assurance rather than to release

velocity alone. Secondly, learning is path-dependent: ventures that institutionalise pace and scope controls early—through policies, metrics, and culture—accumulate credibility that lowers future transaction costs and enables ethically robust scale. In this light, bounded ethics can be read as ethical capability applied under systemic misalignment: a disciplined commitment to advance purpose at a pace that safeguards those affected.

h) Situating bounded ethics in ethical leadership

Bounded ethics offers a situated account of ethical leadership in socially innovative, technology-based enterprises. It portrays founders as moral agents steering within incomplete systems in which institutional readiness often lags behind ethical ambition. In this context, resilience, reflexivity, and adaptability become defining attributes of leadership: resilience to persist when safeguards slow delivery; reflexivity to interrogate whether action still matches purpose; and adaptability to sequence change so that protection keeps pace with innovation.

The cohort evidence illustrates how this leadership takes shape. In **C1**, leadership was expressed through personal authenticity amid uncertainty, with duty of care maintained through selective partnering and hands-on oversight. In **C2**, leaders built nascent governance—policy packs, role-based checks, and decision logs—to safeguard integrity as work formalised. In **C3**, leadership moved into system design, with transparency tooling, accessibility standards, and data-governance routines making ethical commitments operational. In **C4**, leadership became institutional stewardship: accountability was embedded through culture, audits, and board-level oversight. Documentary materials (governance packs, release checklists, audit certificates, public statements) corroborated this progression from personal stance to institutional capability.

The lens links **Institutional Theory** and cognitive-dissonance perspectives. Institutional analysis (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991; Battilana et al., 2009) highlights how actors negotiate, reinterpret, and sometimes reshape the rules that constrain them. Cognitive dissonance research (Festinger, 1957), extended here through **omission-based**

dissonance, explains the discomfort that arises when intended good is not yet realised. Bounded ethics situates leadership at the intersection: it is the ongoing work of keeping aspiration and feasibility in constructive tension, converting discomfort into pacing, redesign, and coalition-building.

On this view, ethical success is not the absence of compromise but the **persistence of moral fidelity under constraint**. Leaders demonstrate maturity when they can justify restraint, document trade-offs, and hold direction while sequencing progress. Evaluation should therefore attend to evidence of reflexive practice—pause points, assurance gates, stakeholder influence—alongside outcomes, recognising that in lagging systems principled pacing may be the most ethical course.

i) Concluding synthesis: From Bounded Ethics to ethics in technological practice

The analysis above showed that founders pursued ethical intent under real constraints—what this study terms **bounded ethics**. Those constraints were sharpest where technological work met moral decision-making. Choices about automation, data stewardship and interface design intensified the tension between aspiration and feasibility, making technology the place where values had to be specified, implemented and tested.

Theme 3 therefore examines technology as the arena in which ethical ambition encounters structural, regulatory and epistemic limits. In this study, "Tech for Good" is not a declaration but a mode of practice: founders assembled ethical architectures—standards, checks and release controls—so that inclusion, transparency and safety could be maintained under pressure. Bounded ethics becomes applied: ethical reasoning is materialised, negotiated and, at times, constrained by technological systems themselves. Where available, the documentary analysis (accessibility documentation and compliance materials) evidenced these arrangements, showing how safeguards and pacing decisions were recorded and reviewed.

The routines established in Theme 2—stakeholder participation, measurement and governance—created the conditions for this technological work. Code, data and delivery cycles made ethical intent **testable** through reviewable artefacts and auditable decisions. Combined, these local, values-led adjustments are consistent with accounts of transformative innovation (Schot & Steinmueller, 2018), indicating how disciplined micro-practices can accumulate into system-level change. Theme 3 therefore traces how intentions are translated into technical form, how safeguards are verified at pace, and how pace and scope controls function as a safeguard when systems lag.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Tech for Good – constraints and possibilities

Technology was the point at which ethical intent had to be specified in practical terms. As values were translated into code, data handling, interfaces and release decisions, tensions emerged between what founders sought to achieve and what could responsibly be delivered. This theme examines how ethical ambition was specified, implemented and made traceable within technological systems, and how founders used pace control and design restraint to reduce foreseeable harm.

Across cases, ethical credibility at scale appeared strongest where three conditions were present. First, values were expressed as non-functional requirements, including accessibility, transparency and data minimisation, so that inclusion and accountability operated as specifications rather than aspirations. Second, verification was built into delivery through practices such as bias review, consent-refresh cycles and traceable change logs. Third, release tempo was calibrated to protect inclusion and safety, with staged roll-outs, pause points and rollback options used where risk was material. These patterns are consistent with Value Sensitive Design, which integrates stakeholder values into design criteria (Friedman, Kahn and Borning, 2008), and with Information Ethics, which treats information and its flows as morally significant (Floridi and Sanders, 2002). They also map onto anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion and responsiveness in responsible innovation literature (Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013). Documentary sources

helped make these claims more traceable by showing how ethical intent was expressed in public-facing materials, governance artefacts and product-related evidence.

This theme is developed through:

- technology as both catalyst and constraint;
- the C1–C4 cohort patterning as a descriptive comparison;
- paced release, safeguards and human oversight;
- SMAG as a practical cadence for ethical navigation;
- technology as moral practice through design, data and verification;
- ETIS and the EthOS Lifecycle as ways of reading ethics–technology integration.

a) Technology as catalyst and constraint: the cohort arc

Across the study, technology both **enabled** founders to pursue their social purpose and **constrained** what could be done responsibly. It widened access, reduced delivery costs, and improved measurement; at the same time it introduced exposure to ethical risk through data handling, automation, and interface design. This dual character is explicit in the Findings (Theme 3, "Tech for Good: compliance, challenges, and solutions"), where participants caution against "blind trust in technology", describe technology as "just a tool", and explain how profits were reinvested to strengthen safeguards and impact. These accounts sit alongside commitments to data integrity, legal compliance, and inclusive design, including the explicit link made between user-centred design and JEDI principles.

A staged progression is visible when reading the EthOS lifecycle (C1–C4) against the findings and the privacy/consent statements, accessibility notes, selected release and change logs, and (in several later-stage cases) references to assurance. At **C1 – Values-led Inception (n = 9)**, lightweight tools were used to extend reach while preserving human judgement; automation was deliberately limited in sensitive contexts and hands-on oversight was retained to keep efficiency from displacing care. **C2 – Structured Consolidation (n = 4)** formalised this stance: impact dashboards and consent packs were introduced alongside concise governance checklists and explicit manual gates that

constrained risk. By **C3 – Productised Scale-Up (n = 8)**, ventures were distinctly tech-driven. Fairness, transparency, and accessibility were treated as build-time requirements and encoded in standards, testing, and data architecture (for example, explainability prompts and periodic consent refreshes). **C4 – Systemic Embedding (n = 4)** shows convergence between technology and governance: platforms were backed by internal ethics boards and external audits, and release cycles were deliberately slowed or staged so that social effects could be verified before scale. The Findings under Theme 3 ("technological integration" and "user-centric design and integration") and Theme 2 (on impact measurement and reinvestment) document these shifts. Importantly ethical intensity did not fade with maturity; it changed form—from personal vigilance to system-level capability. This provides the bridge into 5.3. *Responsible innovation* was enacted as routine rather than rhetoric. In practice, teams applied **the SMAG Cadence architecture—Scan–Measure–Anticipate–Gate—**a pattern that aligns with core responsible-innovation concerns while remaining workable under ESV conditions (Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013).

The SMAG cadence translated ethical review into a staged release rhythm. **Scan** canvassed context and risk, including user needs, inclusion, regulatory cues and technical limits; **Measure** gathered evidence through user feedback, accessibility checks, telemetry and audits; **Anticipate** considered likely consequences and set proportionate thresholds for widening; and **Gate** converted evidence into pass, hold or rollback decisions through pause points, feature flags and staged release. This maps closely to participants' descriptions of compliance, user-centred design and reinvestment in safeguards reported in the findings. Collectively, the cadence provided a testable architecture for ethics in technology work: reducing foreseeable blind spots, producing auditable traces, setting bounds for scope and pace, and making restraint actionable across C1–C4.

b) Navigation cadence (SMAG) as practice architecture

The preceding discussion showed that technology was the point showed that technology was the point at which values had to be expressed as concrete specifications. This section sets out how the SMAG Cadence architecture was organised in effect. Following the

dimensions identified by Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten (2013), SMAG ventures translated ethical intent into repeatable routines that shaped pace, scope and accountability. These routines were visible across cohorts in interview accounts and, in documentary sources reported in the Findings, through **accessibility documentation and compliance materials**. They operated as gates in delivery rather than as after-the-fact adjustments.

Scan (context and risk): Scanning preceded major builds and releases. Teams ran pre-mortems and structured reviews to surface plausible harms (accessibility regressions, proxy bias from small/skewed datasets, over-reliance on automation in sensitive workflows). Where uncertainty was material, scope was narrowed in advance and exposure planned as staged cohorts.

Measure (evidence and feedback): Measurement converted intention into proof. Ventures instrumented products, ran accessibility and comprehension checks, and captured stakeholder feedback through co-design and trials. Results were logged (dashboards, change notes, audit artefacts) so decisions could be traced and revisited.

Anticipate (consequences and thresholds): Anticipation translated signals into explicit criteria for widening: inclusion baselines, consent clarity, proportional data use, explainability/interpretability, and risk bounds. Delivery plans scheduled verification windows so that safeguards could be tested before scale.

Gate (pass/hold/rollback): Gating linked evidence to action. Roadmaps included pause points; feature flags and hold-backs enabled controlled exposure; high-stakes tasks retained human-in-the-loop with escalation criteria. Where thresholds were unmet, teams held or rolled back and recorded conditions for re-activation. In earlier stages this was lightweight; by later stages it was formalised and auditable.

In combination, SMAG provided the **practice architecture** that tied scope and pace to evidence, yielding fewer trust-eroding reversals and clearer reasoning when scrutinised.

c) Ethical tension and paced release decisions

Technological work brought ethical tension to the surface. Design decisions on automation, data handling and interface choices exposed the limits of what could be delivered responsibly, even when intentions were unambiguous. Across cases, founders addressed this tension by modulating pace and scope rather than lowering standards. Release schedules were extended for additional accessibility testing; machine-learning features were postponed until bias reviews had been independently checked; and algorithmic parameters were adjusted to avoid excluding small or hard-to-measure groups.

Pace control operated as a strategic mechanism rather than as indecision. Teams built pause points into roadmaps, used feature flags and staged roll-outs, and maintained human-in-the-loop arrangements for high-stakes decisions. Where uncertainty was material, model scope was narrowed and out-of-distribution inference disabled until protections were verified. Documentary materials recorded the rationale for these decisions and the conditions under which deferred features would be reconsidered, converting value judgements into auditable practice.

Commitments to JEDI principles were most visible in product decisions. Inclusion moved from consultation to specification: co-design with affected users was embedded in sprints; representation checks and comprehension testing were part of acceptance criteria; and accessibility conformance (for example, WCAG) and plain-language rules were treated as non-functional requirements. This orientation echoes design-justice arguments that digital systems can reproduce structural harm unless equity is built into specification and testing (Benjamin, 2019; Costanza-Chock, 2020). Operationally, inclusion gates often determined pace: where risks of exclusion were identified, releases were delayed or split into stages so that remedial work could be completed before scale.

Participants also described sustainability in multidimensional terms. Beyond environmental performance, sustainability meant preserving ethical coherence and stakeholder trust over time. Three strands were recurrent: (i) ecological—mindful management of environmental impact; (ii) organisational—governance, oversight and

verification routines that endure beyond individuals; and (iii) social—continuing commitments to accessibility, fair representation and duty of care. Slower, staged releases were justified on this basis: "sustainable" growth was that which maintained fairness and accountability as systems expanded.

These practices were supported by tools that gave institutional form to ethical intent: equity or bias audits, user advisory panels, accessibility scorecards, and public change notes that explained corrective updates. Telemetry was used to detect exclusion or unexpected behaviour; patch-first policies prioritised remediation over feature velocity; and scheduled follow-up reviews confirmed whether fixes had worked. Together, these arrangements made correction normal rather than exceptional and ensured that responsibility was traceable.

Read through the lenses developed earlier, the pattern is coherent. Bounded ethics explains why paced release decisions are often the most responsible course when ambition runs ahead of institutional readiness; omission-based dissonance accounts for the discomfort founders reported when socially beneficial features were deferred; and the routines described here show how that discomfort was converted into sequenced delivery rather than diluted standards. Ethical progress in technology-based ventures was achieved by calibrating pace to protection, treating the product as a moral object whose release is justified only when inclusion, transparency and safety can be evidenced.

d) Concluding synthesis: technology as moral practice

Theme 3 has shown that technology was the site where ethical intent had to be specified, implemented, and evidenced. Founders translated values into non-functional requirements (for example, accessibility, transparency, data minimisation) and then built verification into delivery through bias review, consent refresh, traceable change logs, staged releases, and audit trails. Read together with Themes 1 and 2, the picture is consistent: ethical entrepreneurship relied on an operational discipline in which design choices, data practices, and release tempo were governed so that inclusion, fairness, and safety could be demonstrated rather than asserted.

Three elements were decisive. First, bounded ethics explained why ambition had to be paced: when institutional readiness lagged behind moral intent, the responsible course was to sequence work, constrain scope, or defer features until safeguards were in place. Secondly, omission-based dissonance captured the unease founders felt when beneficial outcomes were delayed; this discomfort did not lead to dilution of standards but to renewed scrutiny and revision of plans. Thirdly, SMAG-informed pace and scope controls formalised these responses in practice: pause points on roadmaps, human-in-the-loop for high-stakes tasks, feature flags and staged roll-outs, and refusal of misaligned partnerships.

The cohort analysis reinforced this progression. In **C1 (Values-led Inception)**, protection came from proximity and discretion: limited automation, narrow scope, and close human oversight. In **C2 (Structured Consolidation)**, values were written into simple procedures—consent packs, checklists, and documented gates. In **C3 (Productised Scale-Up)**, ethics was encoded in architecture and measurement—standards, testing, data-governance routines, telemetry, and auditable change logs. In C4 (Systemic Embedding), controls became institutional—board oversight, supplier standards, external audit, and public reporting. Ethical intensity did not fade with maturity; it changed form, moving from personal vigilance to system-level capability.

Read alongside the **EthOS archetypes** and **ETIS as a continuum**, this progression suggests that a common cadence was already in use. In earlier, values-led signatures, scanning and measurement drew mainly on founder knowledge, close contact with users and simple indicators; anticipation relied on narrative judgements about users, partners and foreseeable risk; and gating took the form of informal stop/go decisions, narrow scope and sustained human oversight in more sensitive flows.

In later, more technology-embedded signatures, scanning incorporated structured risk reviews, telemetry and external advice; measurement was formalised through defined metrics, accessibility checks and audit artefacts; anticipation was framed in explicit thresholds for inclusion, consent and safety; and gating was implemented through documented pause points, feature flags, staged roll-outs and, in some cases, board or committee oversight. The underlying rhythm remained the same; what changed was the

degree of codification, the evidential base, and the institutional weight behind gate decisions as ethics and technology became more tightly coupled. The next subsection reads this progression as an ethics–technology integration spectrum and a set of recurring organisational signatures, which together make visible how ethical intent and technical depth co-evolve across the cases.

Delivery followed a SMAG Cadence—Scan, Measure, Anticipate, Gate (see **Table 27**:). Two implications follow. For practice and policy, slower or staged releases, audit-ready pipelines, and transparent remediation should be read as signals of integrity rather than inertia; evaluation criteria need to recognise pace discipline and evidence of safeguards alongside delivery velocity. For research, the mechanisms observed here—bounded ethics and omission-based dissonance—together with the SMAG practice architecture and the observed patterns of cautious, values-based restraint in growth and release decisions, offer transferable constructs for studying ethical work in other technology-intensive, resource-constrained settings.

e) Ethics–technology integration across the case set (ETIS)

Drawing on standard distinctions (Bacharach, 1989; Sutton & Staw, 1995; Gregor, 2006), an explanatory account moves towards the status of theory when it specifies a bounded phenomenon, a set of constructs, and patterned relations between them under identifiable conditions. The analysis in section **5.2.1** meets these criteria in a provisional, mid-range sense. The phenomenon is founders' ethical steering of socially innovative, technology-based ventures under uncertainty and systemic misalignment. The constructs are the mechanisms developed inductively from the data—bounded ethics, omission-based dissonance, ethical capabilities capital, osmotic alignment, micro-transformative innovation and ethically gated impact diffusion—supported by the cohort patterns and documentary evidence. The proposed relations link contextual limits, ethical tension, capabilities, stakeholder engagement, micro-level change and diffusion.

First, the explanatory scope is delimited. The account is restricted to settings where social purpose is explicit, user risk is non-trivial, and institutional arrangements lag behind ethical ambition. Ethical decision-making is treated as continuing practice rather than as a discrete event. Founders keep a clear direction in view while repeatedly recalibrating scope, pace and safeguards. This framing synthesises the observations made under Themes 1–3, including the progression from proximity-led ethics in earlier cases to more systematised safeguards at later stages.

Second, the mechanisms are internally specified. Bounded ethics marks the principled limits of what can responsibly be done at a given time. Omission-based dissonance captures the discomfort generated when desired impact is deferred rather than when explicit harm is committed. Ethical capabilities capital denotes the reusable capacity built from values-in-practice, codified safeguards, reflexive routines, relational credibility, assurance and resource buffers. Osmotic alignment refers to the reciprocal adjustment of scope and pace in response to stakeholder expectations and contextual signals. Micro-transformative innovation describes small, values-led changes that can be trialled safely. Ethically gated impact diffusion denotes stage-gated widening in which non-functional requirements such as inclusion, consent and transparency operate as explicit criteria for adoption. Each mechanism is grounded in the empirical material and linked to existing literature earlier in the chapter.

Third, the relations between mechanisms and context are articulated as indicative propositions for future empirical examination. These propositions concern, for example, how stronger misalignment may intensify omission-based dissonance; how higher Ethical Capabilities Capital may channel that tension into guardrailed recalibration rather than dilution of standards; and how more developed gating practices may reduce late-stage reversals linked to consent or inclusion.

Taken together, these propositions make the underlying logic of the interpretation explicit. They should be read as theory-building propositions generated from this qualitative study, rather than as confirmed causal claims. The Contribution to Knowledge section later in the chapter returns to these elements and positions them as part of the thesis's mid-range theoretical contribution.

f) Positioning the navigation mechanisms in the literature: synthesis and explanatory contribution

The mechanisms developed from the data sit at the intersection of several bodies of work. They draw together ethical decision-making and moral psychology, stakeholder theory and organisational sense-making, dynamic capabilities, responsible and transformative innovation, and diffusion and impact investing. Rather than adding entirely new domains, the analysis refines existing accounts by introducing contextual bounds, pacing and explicit ethical gate criteria.

Within ethical decision-making and moral psychology, the emphasis on bounded ethics and omission-based dissonance complements phase-based and individual-level models. It redirects attention from isolated dilemmas to sustained navigation under constraint, and from dissonance about wrongful acts to tension around unrealised good. In stakeholder theory, osmotic alignment depicts engagement as continuing moral sense-making rather than a static balance of interests, highlighting reciprocal adjustments in scope and pace between ventures and their ecosystems. Read alongside dynamic capabilities research, ethical responsiveness appears as an adaptive practice within these cases: founders sensed ethical signals alongside market cues, translated them into safeguards and scope decisions, and reconfigured pacing or design where continued delivery risked weakening mission integrity. Ethical capabilities capital gives this practice-based responsiveness a concrete form.

In innovation and diffusion studies, the focus on micro-transformative innovation and ethically gated diffusion qualifies accounts that emphasise speed and reach. Small, values-led interventions are treated as meaningful in themselves and as building blocks for later system change. Diffusion is conceptualised as a sequence of evidence-generating loops, with widening contingent on explicit, auditable thresholds for inclusion, consent and safety rather than on demand alone. For impact investing, the material on reinvestment and remediation indicates how capital can be structured to support these gated trajectories instead of serving only as a lever for acceleration.

Table 24 (see section **4.5**) summarises how the mechanisms developed here sit across these foundational domains and indicates the elements most closely associated with each. The table is intended as a guide for readers who wish to trace how the constructs relate to established debates. The Contribution to Knowledge section later in the thesis consolidates this positioning when the navigation account is presented explicitly as part of the overall conceptual contribution.

Across Themes 1–3, the analysis has shown how founders describe ethical judgement and action as situated, iterative, and shaped by shifting constraints as ventures develop. In this chapter, the themes are treated as the empirical platform for engaging the literature: they make visible the recurring tensions, practices, and decision logics evident across cases, and they indicate where established concepts explain the data well and where explanatory gaps remain. The next section therefore moves from thematic interpretation to formal consolidation, drawing these recurring patterns into a coherent theoretical account that specifies constructs, boundary conditions, and propositional relationships.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This section sets out the thesis's main contribution to knowledge and the related elements that make it operational. Together, these elements form an integrated conceptual framework for explaining how ethical decision-making is enacted, reviewed and recalibrated under constraint.

i. ***Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN)*** is the central theoretical contribution. It explains how founders in socially innovative, technology-based ventures seek to hold ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and safeguards under constraint. Dynamic Ethical Navigation is developed through six mechanisms: *Bounded Ethics*, *Omission-based Dissonance*, *Osmotic Alignment*, *Ethical Capabilities Capital*, M*icro-Transformative Innovation* and *Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion*.
ii. ***VISION*** is the process model through which the Dynamic Ethical Navigation mechanisms are organised in practice. It structures ethical navigation across six

interdependent domains: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation.

iii. **The *Scan*, *Measure*, *Anticipate* and Gate cadence (*SMAG*)** provides the cross-cutting decision rhythm. It describes how founders move across the VISION domains by identifying signals, reviewing evidence, anticipating consequences and reaching proceed, hold, redesign or rollback decisions.

iv. **The *Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS)*** and the ***Ethics–Technology Organisational Signatures Lifecycle* (*EthOS Lifecycle*)** provide the ethics–technology integration layer. The Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum is used as an assessment model for examining how ethical and technological work are configured in venture routines, artefacts and governance arrangements. The Ethics–Technology Organisational Signatures Lifecycle provides the associated lifecycle archetypes, from people–practice through procedural integration to architecture- and ecosystem-level embedding. These archetypes make ethics–technology integration more legible without treating ventures as fixed classifications, moral rankings or universal development paths.

The hierarchy is deliberate. Dynamic Ethical Navigation supplies the explanatory core and mechanism set. The VISION model identifies the domains through which ethical navigation is enacted. The SMAG cadence describes the recurring rhythm through which signals and evidence are translated into paced decisions. The Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum and the EthOS Lifecycle make patterns of ethics–technology integration observable and comparable across the cases. Together, they provide a bounded, empirically grounded account of how founders try to preserve ethical direction while building viable technology-based ventures under uncertainty and misalignment.

Together, these elements form a single explanatory system:

i. **Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN), a mid-range theory, is the central contribution**. It explains how founders in socially innovative, technology-based ventures hold ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and safeguards under constraint. It sets out the mechanisms that shape ethical conduct under constraint: Bounded Ethics, Omission-based Dissonance, Osmotic Alignment,

Ethical Capabilities Capital, Micro-Transformative Innovation and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion.

ii. **VISION, a process model,** describes the practical route through which these mechanisms are enacted, structuring ethical navigation across six interdependent domains: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation.

iii. **SMAG** provides a cross-cutting **cadence** — **Scan, Measure, Anticipate and Gate** — through which founders move across these domains, turning signals and evidence into proceed, hold, redesign or rollback decisions.

iv. **ETIS/EthOS** locates ethics–technology integration along a single, non-hierarchical spectrum.

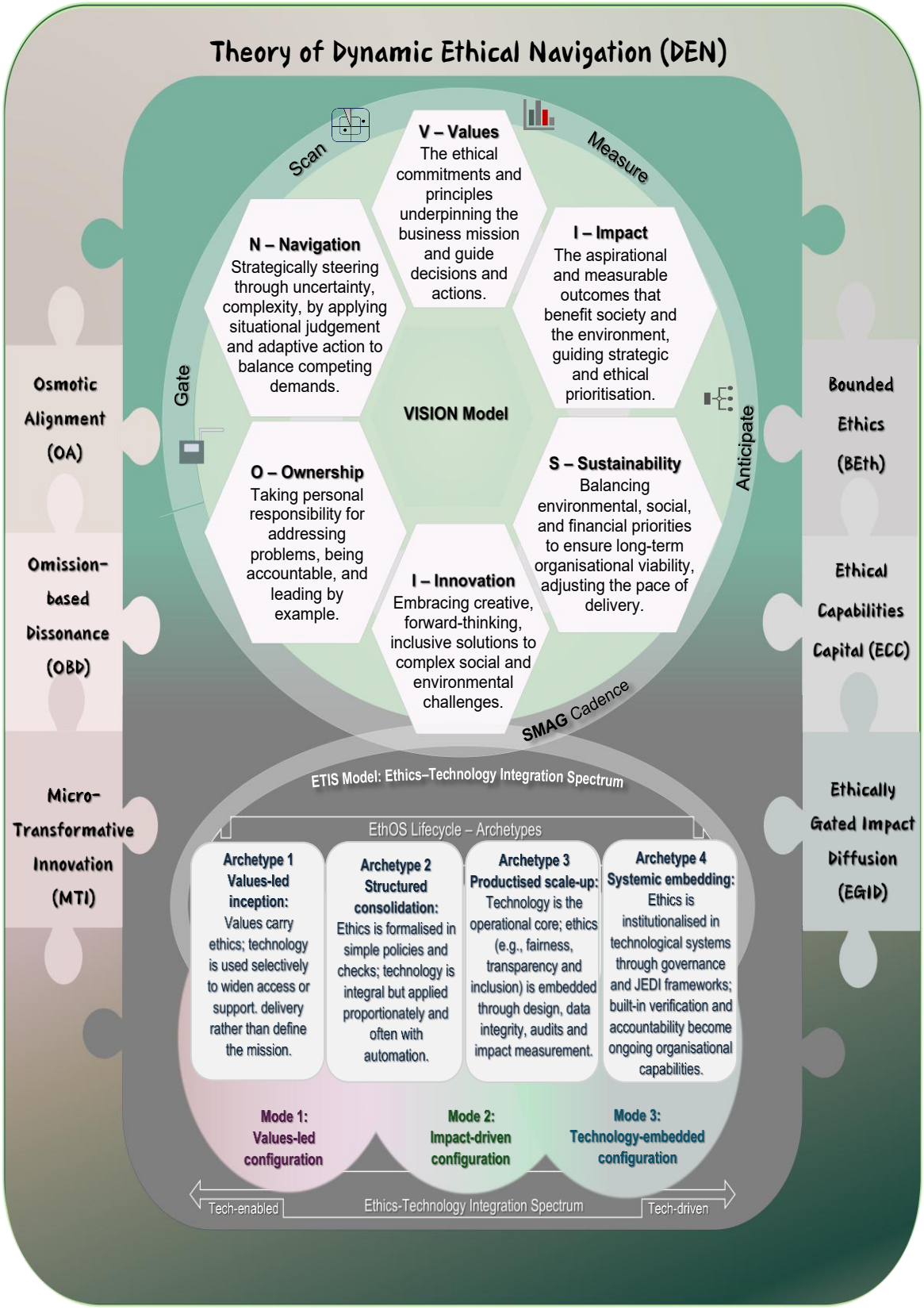
- **The Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS)** is used as an **assessment model** that maps how ethical and technological work are configured in venture routines, artefacts and governance arrangements.
- **The Ethics–Technology Organisational Signatures (EthOS) Lifecycle** gives the associated **archetypal explanation**, from people–practice through procedural integration to architecture- and ecosystem-level embedding, making those positions legible without treating them as fixed classifications or moral rankings.

Combined, DEN and these three specifications provide a coherent, empirically grounded account of principled innovation under uncertainty and misalignment. The hierarchy is deliberate. DEN supplies the explanatory core and mechanism set. VISION identifies where ethical navigation sits in practice: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation. SMAG describes the cross-cutting routine that links these domains by structuring how founders scan for ethical signals, measure effects, anticipate consequences and gate decisions. ETIS, with EthOS, draws on this architecture to render patterns of ethics–technology integration observable and comparable across ventures, without treating those patterns as fixed developmental stages or moral rankings. In earlier, proximity-led archetypes (A1–A2), the SMAG Cadence is evident in relational scanning and measurement, narrative anticipation and informal gating through narrow scope and sustained human oversight in more sensitive flows. In more technology-embedded archetypes (A3–A4), scanning draws on telemetry

and structured risk reviews; measurement is formalised through metrics and audits; anticipation is articulated in explicit thresholds and non-functional requirements; and gating is embedded in release pipelines and enterprise governance. A dedicated subsection later in **5.2** sets out ETIS and EthOS in detail and shows how the three Research Themes map to Modes (Mode 1–Mode 3), and how the empirical cohorts (C1–C4) are abstracted into archetypes (A1–A4) along that route.

Figure 30 synthesises these contributions and clarifies how the analytic elements introduced in this chapter relate to one another. It positions Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) as the overarching mid-range theory of ethical navigation in socially innovative, technology-based ventures. It then shows three linked specifications derived from DEN: the VISION model as a process model that operationalises DEN at the level of day-to-day decision-making; the SMAG Cadence as a cross-cutting practice architecture that structures the timing and content of decisions; and the ETIS assessment model, with the EthOS lifecycle Archetypes, as a way of classifying ethics–technology configurations. The upper panel depicts the micro-level dynamics of ethical navigation, while the lower panel depicts how these dynamics translate into venture-level patterns of ethics–technology integration over time.

Figure 30: Overview of contributions to knowledge: Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) as the central theory, and its supporting specifications—the VISION process model, SMAG Cadence, the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) and the EthOS lifecycle (archetypes and modes).



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Reading **Figure 30** from the centre outwards, **the VISION process model** identifies six domains through which founders conduct ethical navigation: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation and Ownership, coordinated through Navigation. These domains sit within the **Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation**, represented by the surrounding ring of mechanisms, including Osmotic Alignment, Omission-Based Dissonance, Ethical Capabilities Capital, Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion and Micro-Transformative Innovation.

The **SMAG Cadence** forms the intermediate ring and marks the recurring pattern of scanning, measuring, anticipating and gating decisions as founders move across the VISION domains.

The lower panel shows the **Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum** alongside the **EthOS Lifecycle Archetypes**. It illustrates how different combinations of DEN mechanisms and VISION/SMAG practices correspond to four venture archetypes and three ethics–technology configurations, without implying a moral ranking between them. The configurations include values-led inception, impact-driven consolidation and more technology-embedded modes.

Overall, the figure summarises how a single theoretical core—DEN—is expressed through three interlinked specifications (VISION, SMAG, ETIS/EthOS), and how ethical navigation influences the configuration and scaling of technology in socially innovative ESVs. DEN provides the explanatory account; VISION expresses this as a six-domain process model; SMAG captures strategic cadence in decisions about pace and scale; ETIS examines the extent to which ethical safeguards are built into technology and data practices; and EthOS traces how these elements develop across stages of venture growth.

The subsections that follow address these elements in turn. The next section sets out DEN and its constructs as the central theoretical contribution. Subsequent sections present the VISION model, the EthOS lifecycle and the SMAG Cadence as derived, practice-oriented specifications that make DEN's mechanisms observable, discussable

and, in principle, testable. The analysis draws on the interview material and documentary sources reported in the Findings chapter.

5.3.1 Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN)

The **Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN)** consolidates the thematic account developed above into a structured explanation of how founders navigate ethical choice under conditions of uncertainty, resource constraint, and external misalignment. It treats ethical decision-making as dynamic and relational: founders seek to hold a clear direction while negotiating regulatory gaps, funding conditions, data limitations, partner dependencies, and uneven institutional readiness. Rather than re-describing the themes, DEN formalises what the themes collectively indicate: (i) the core constructs that organise founders' ethical reasoning and action, (ii) the conditions under which these constructs become salient or constrained, and (iii) the directional relationships that connect values, trade-offs, and enacted governance as ventures scale.

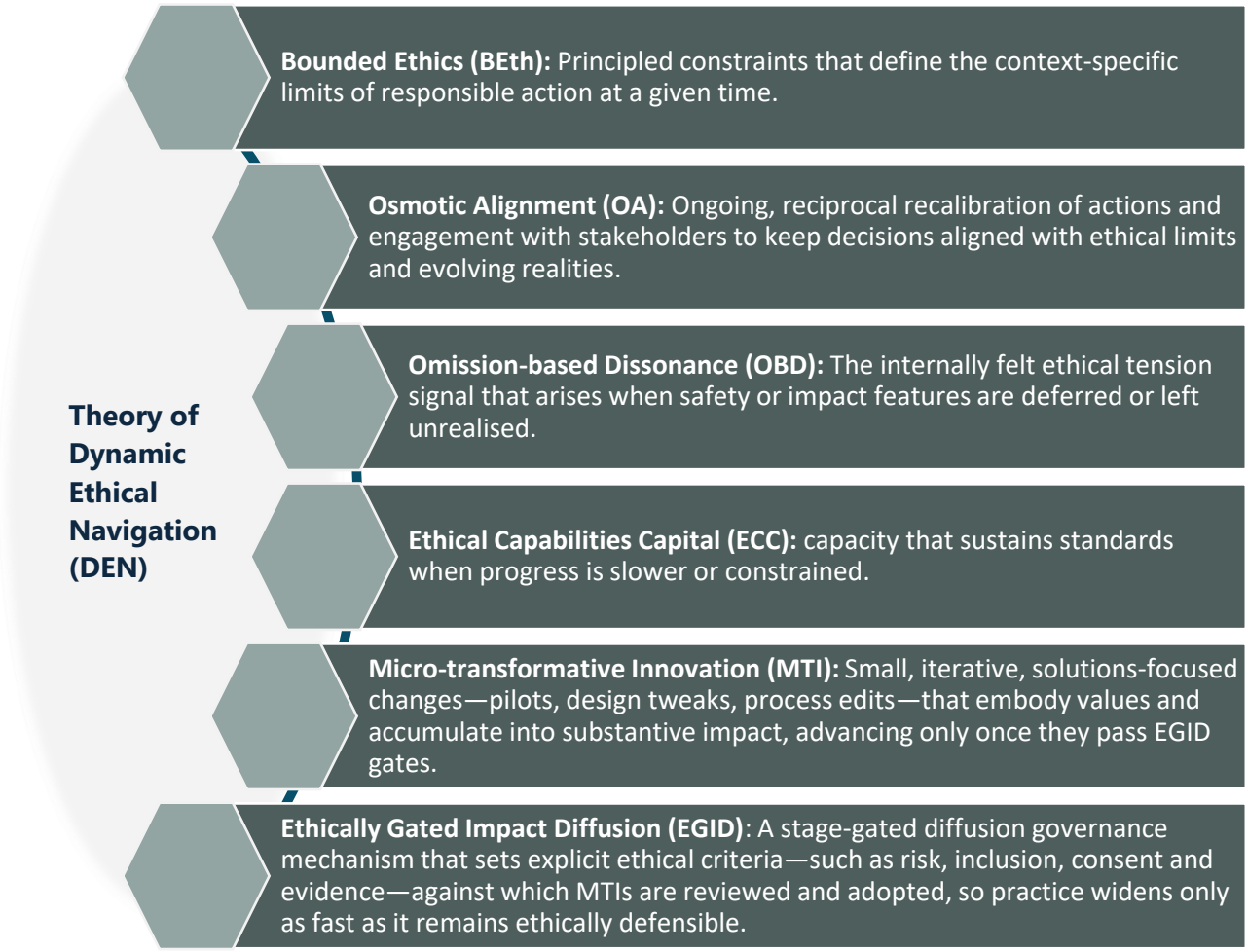
Where Themes 1–3 provide an empirically grounded interpretive bridge to the literature, DEN offers a tighter explanatory synthesis. It specifies the mechanisms suggested by the thematic patterns (for example, how value commitments are translated into operational controls, how founders respond to ethical friction created by growth pressures, and how adaptive governance routines stabilise ethical intent over time). This shift in level of analysis is deliberate: it separates interpretive description (themes) from theoretical consolidation (DEN) to improve clarity and minimise repetition.

The theory emerged inductively from analysis of interviews and documentary sources reported in the Findings, where recurring patterns of paced delivery, scoped releases, and reasoned deferral were observed. These patterns were frequently accompanied by ethical strain, expressed in accounts of unease, frustration or relief as decisions were revisited and safeguards were introduced, delayed or tightened. Ethical navigation is used here as the main lens for understanding founders' ethical leadership, with a focus on how decisions are made, justified and revised over time.

DEN identifies a set of mechanisms that operate together when ethical ambition meets system limits: Bounded Ethics (Beth); Osmotic Alignment (OA); Omission-based Dissonance (OBD); Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC); Micro-Transformative Innovation (MTI); and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion (EGID). Each is introduced below and situated in the relevant literature.

These mechanisms consolidate recurring patterns observed in the data and offer an analytically distinct account of ethical work in socially innovative, technology-based ESVs. While grounded in this cohort, they are intended to be transferable to comparable settings and refined through future research.

Figure 31: Overview of the Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN)



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

I. BOUNDED ETHICS (BETH)

a. Definition and lineage

Bounded Ethics (BEth) refers to principled constraints that define the context-specific limits of responsible action. It draws on Herbert Simon's account of bounded rationality, in which decision-makers operate under cognitive constraint and incomplete information (Simon, 1957). In this thesis, Bounded Ethics shifts this concern from what can be known or optimised to what can responsibly be done in the immediate term – and under constraint – to preserve inclusion, fairness, and safety (Simon, 1957).

Bounded Ethics therefore captures situations in which founders narrow, sequence, delay or refuse action in order to preserve inclusion, fairness and safety where conditions are not yet adequate. Relevant limits include misaligned policy environments, divergent stakeholder expectations, ethically ambiguous market practices and limited organisational capacity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991). Rather than treating constraint as a dilution of agency, the concept shows how ethical agency is moderated by institutional, relational and temporal conditions (Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006).

b. Empirical grounding

Bounded ethics was evident across the cohorts reported in the Findings. Founders paced adoption "to protect users and context", specified social purpose in design and delivery decisions, and embedded data transparency and compliance in workflow. Inclusive design was treated as standard rather than exception. These accounts align with the cohort comparison by depth of technology integration and ethical focus from people-practice ethics through procedure and architecture to ecosystem-level oversight.

- **C1:** scope kept deliberately narrow; manual handling for sensitive steps (e.g., safeguarding/eligibility); accessibility documentation noted pauses where digitisation risked displacing valued face-to-face support.
- **C2:** concise written materials to hold the line on consent/safeguarding; simple stop/go points for pilots; basic compliance artefacts capturing requirements and sign-offs.

- **C3:** embedded accessibility requirements and pre-release checks; sequenced releases so issues surfaced before wider exposure; records referenced controls and reviews.
- **C4:** internal controls coupled with formal oversight (documented responsibilities; periodic review cycles); materials set out conditions under which paused work would be revisited.

Documentary analysis (privacy and accessibility information, policy/impact pages, press notices, blogs, social posts) corroborated these patterns: ethics was presented as **relational and procedural**—practical conduct tied to access, inclusion, transparency, care, and proportionate use of technology—rather than slogan or afterthought. Organisations acknowledged constraint (resources, regulatory uncertainty, pressure to deploy), described safeguarding procedures and equitable design choices, and framed paced development (pilots, staged roll-outs) with clear consent pathways and selective adoption to keep risk proportionate. Technology was positioned as a **means to fairness**—privacy checks, limits to self-diagnosis, simplified interfaces, proportionate data collection—rather than an end in itself. Governance appeared as infrastructure (board oversight, external audits, peer review, multi-stakeholder advisory structures) that guards against drift, especially at scale.

c. Contribution to literature

The construct clarifies how ethical action is shaped—**not diluted**—by institutional, relational, and temporal constraints (Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006). It complements prevailing models of ethical decision-making by offering a **systems-oriented account of moderated agency** and addresses an implicit limitation in traditional models that presuppose agents are free to enact fully their moral principles. DEN instead contends that ethical action should be interpreted within the **bounds of practical viability and external alignment**. In doing so, it offers a vocabulary for **sequencing and scoping** as ethical moves—distinct from compromise—when external feasibility is incomplete; a reading that is particularly salient for early-stage ventures operating with evolving capabilities and partial institutional support (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997; Freeman, 1984).

In such settings, commitments remain intact but enactment is sequenced and scoped to preserve inclusion, fairness, and safety. In this study, this was described in practical terms as narrowing functionality, staging releases, retaining human oversight for high-stakes decisions, or declining revenue where alignment could not be assured. This reading is consistent with the emphasis on prudence, particularly the need to anticipate and respond to risk rather than default to acceleration (Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013).

d. Boundary conditions and implications

Bounded ethics is most salient in early- and mid-stage, mission-led, technology-enabled ventures operating amid evolving regulation, resource pressure, and uneven partner capacity. Under such conditions, responsible action is limited by feasibility; enactment is **sequenced** (pilots, staged roll-outs) and **scoped** (appropriate, not maximal, technology; proportionate data) to preserve inclusion, fairness, and safety. Two cautious, testable expectations follow from the cases:

- ventures that formalise explicit pause gates and criteria **are expected to** experience fewer post-release reversals attributable to inclusion or consent concerns, controlling for product complexity; and

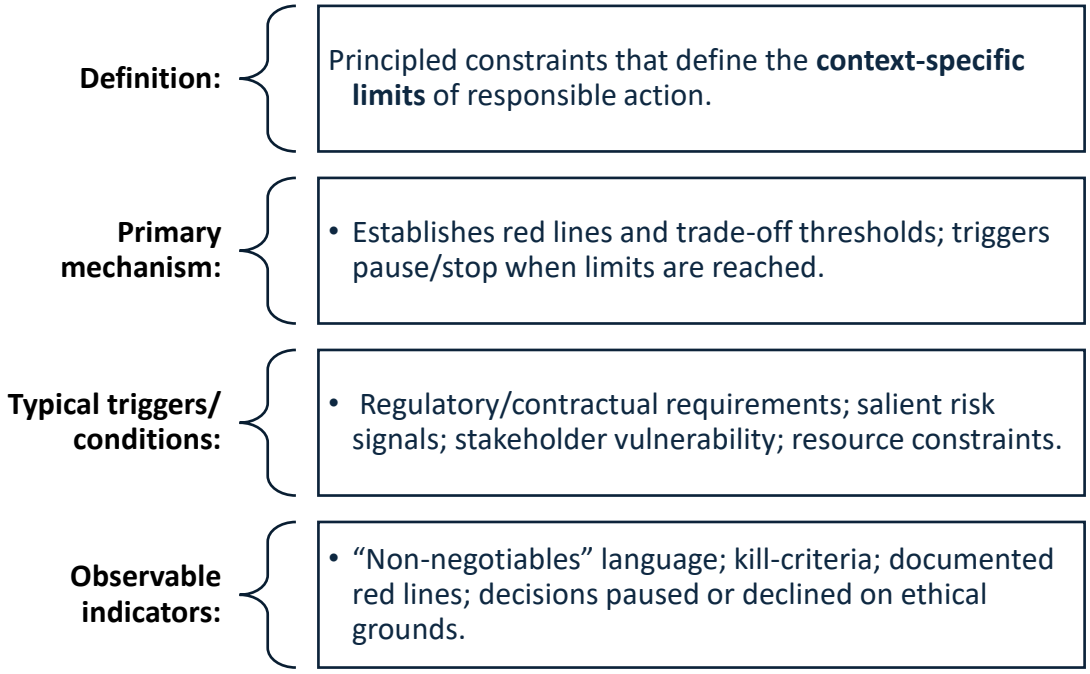
- ventures that record conditions for deferral and re-activation **are expected to** resolve inclusion issues **more quickly** than those relying on informal deferral. These expectations warrant examination beyond the sample.

e. Relation to adjacent DEN constructs

DEN constructs are all interconnected. Within these confines, **Bounded Ethics is most closely related to Osmotic Alignment, which** describes the characteristic response—realigning scope, pace and partnerships through reciprocal exchange with stakeholders—whereas bounded ethics marks the line of what is presently responsible. **Omission-Based Dissonance** often provides the signal that a desired good must be deferred; **Ethical Capabilities Capital** explains why standards are maintained despite slow progress; **Micro-Transformative Innovation** captures the small, governed changes (e.g., accessibility gates, representation fixes) that can be advanced within limits; and **EGID cycles** describe how such changes are paced, evidenced and reinvested over time.

Bounded ethics **defines the limits** of responsible action at a given moment; **Osmotic Alignment** (introduced next) describes the characteristic response inside those limits. This is an important distinction: bounded ethics identifies **where the line lies** for responsible action given constraints, while Osmotic Alignment explains **how founders realign scope, pace, and partnerships through reciprocal exchange with stakeholders** to ensure ethical intent and feasibility remain aligned.

Figure 32: Summary of the concept of Bounded Ethics



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

II. OSMOTIC ALIGNMENT (OA)

a. Definition and lineage

Osmotic Alignment (OA) describes Founders' continuing, two-way recalibration of strategic, operational and ethical practice in which there is a reciprocal exchange with the external environment and context. Alignment is "osmotic" in that expectations and constraints **flow in both directions**: founders absorb external signals (shifts in norms, regulatory cues, inclusion risks, and stakeholder expectations or concerns) and, in turn, their stance and artefacts shape what partners expect to count as responsible delivery. The construct draws on **Dynamic Capabilities** —the ability to **sense–seize–reconfigure**—by specifying that ethical signals are sensed alongside market cues;

seizing involves embedding those signals in product scope, partner terms and delivery plans; and reconfiguring entails pacing releases or redesigning features to preserve coherence (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).

In keeping with Stakeholder Theory, engagement was depicted not as a static balancing of interests but as a reflexive and interpretive process through which ethical criteria were clarified and re-aligned over time (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Stakeholder input was not simply weighed; its moral salience was processed and then integrated into scope decisions, partner selection, and release sequencing. Across cohorts, participants reported **re-scoping features** following user concerns about inclusion, **adjusting data practices** in response to client or community feedback, and **re-sequencing releases** where risks to accessibility or comprehension were identified. Opportunities were sometimes **declined** where alignment could not be assured. In later stages, these adjustments were built into delivery through staged roll-outs and pre-release checks.

Social osmosis is used here as a sensitising idea: ethical expectations and practices diffuse gradually through routine interactions and shared artefacts rather than by formal mandate.

b. Empirical grounding

In this study, osmotic alignment was most evident in **C1–C3**: ventures with a social mission delivered through technology, operating in contexts where regulation, funding conditions and partner capacity were still catching up. Under these conditions, founders regularly recalibrated scope, pace and safeguards to keep ethical intent and feasibility in step. By **C4**, similar adjustments were present but had been **institutionalised** through governance and assurance, so they were less visible as ad hoc decisions.

The **documentary analysis**—limited to publicly available materials such as **websites, policy/impact pages, blogs and social posts**—aligned with these accounts. Organisations publicly described **pilots and staged releases** as safeguards where fairness or safety could be at risk; signalled **co-design and consultation** with intended users; referenced **advisory structures or guidelines** as decision scaffolding; and

emphasised **transparency about methods, limitations and data handling**. Where such materials were shared with clients or partners, participants noted that they **set expectations** around consent routes, accessibility baselines and delivery pace—an instance of social osmosis played out in reality.

c. Contribution to literature

OA portrays the **ethical dimension** of sensing–seizing–reconfiguring by illustrating how ethical responsiveness shaped adaptive judgement in these cases (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). In line with Stakeholder Theory, engagement appears as **reflexive moral sense-making** rather than a static balance of interests: stakeholder input is interpreted and integrated into scope, pace and partner selection (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). The osmotic lens clarifies the **reciprocal** character of this process: ventures absorb expectations and, through visible safeguards and pacing decisions, contribute back to the norms that frame subsequent interactions.

d. Boundary conditions and implications

OA was most evident where regulation, funding terms and partner capacity were **still catching up** with ventures' aims, notably C1–C3). Under these conditions, founders regularly recalibrated scope, pace and safeguards so that ethical intent and feasibility remained in step.

The implications of these should be cautiously tested: ventures that **formalise periodic alignment checks**—for example, scheduled reviews linking recent stakeholder feedback to decisions on feature scope and release pacing, supported where relevant by updated accessibility and compliance notes—**are expected to** exhibit **more consistent ethical coherence over time** than ventures relying on ad hoc adjustments, **controlling for product complexity**. Here, "formalise" refers to a standing review cadence with brief records of feedback received, scope/pacing decisions taken, safeguards applied or deferred, and follow-up ownership; "more consistent ethical coherence" refers to auditable signs such as fewer late-stage reversals attributed to inclusion or consent concerns, traceable links between feedback and decisions, and stable accessibility/comprehension results with timely remediation when issues arise.

e. Relation to adjacent DEN constructs

Within DEN, **Bounded Ethics** marks the **current limit** of responsible action given constraints; **Osmotic Alignment** is the **characteristic response within that limit**, achieved through reciprocal engagement and paced adjustment. **Omission-based dissonance** is the **signal** of shortfall (unrealised good) that prompts review; **Ethical Capabilities Capital** is the **disposition** to hold standards as alignment proceeds; **Micro-Transformative Innovation** provides the **unit of change** (small, values-led interventions agreed through OA); and **EGID cycles** describe the **pattern** by which such changes diffuse (pilot → review → adjust → widen).

Here, ethical responsiveness is presented as an adaptive ethical practice rather than as a by-product of commercial adaptation. Participants described adjustments made not only to meet demand or technical constraints, but to reflect evolving ethical expectations and internal reflection on purpose. This meant negotiating persistent tensions—speed versus sustainability, inclusion versus scalability, innovation versus absorptive capacity—and calibrating decisions to what could responsibly be delivered at a given time.

Figure 33: Summary of the concept of Osmotic Alignment



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

III. OMISSION-BASED DISSONANCE (OBD)

a. Definition and lineage

Building on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), ***Omission-Based Dissonance*** **(OBD)** emerges through DEN, denoting the discomfort that arises not from committing harm, but from **intentionally or unintentionally failing to realise an intended good**—for example, advancing inclusion, justice, or sustainability. Whereas classical accounts emphasise tension when behaviour contradicts belief, omission-based dissonance captures the tension founders experience, even when no immediate harm is visible, when they perceive that necessary ethical work cannot be realised, needing to be deferred because conditions are not ready.

In the data this tension is not only cognitive but affective, surfacing as worry, discomfort or a sense of "drag" when founders describe postponed safeguards, incomplete processes or unresolved risks.

This reframing adds a forward-looking, aspirational dimension to Cognitive Dissonance Theory and complements work on ethical decision-making that focuses on transgression or post hoc rationalisation (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). It is distinct from research on **omission bias**, which concerns how observers judge harmful omissions versus commissions (Spranca, Minsk, & Baron, 1991; Cushman, Young & Hauser, 2006). Here, the evaluation is **internal**: founders assess their own shortfall against self-endorsed standards of impact. The construct aligns with literatures on **prosocial motivation** and **moral identity**, in which unease can follow perceived failure to live up to personally important, other-regarding goals (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Grant & Berg, 2010).

b. Empirical grounding

Participants across cohorts reported frustration, guilt, or disappointment when constraints—financial, technical, regulatory, or partner-related—meant that ethically important features, access commitments, or sustainability aims were delayed, reduced in scope, or deferred. In response, teams paused or sequenced releases to **prevent foreseeable exclusion**—that is, to avoid introducing changes that would make particular

users less able to access the service or be treated fairly (for example, users relying on assistive technologies, people with lower literacy, or those with limited connectivity).

Practical measures included retaining human review for decisions affecting vulnerable users, limiting new functionality to well-tested domains, or keeping existing interfaces in place until alternatives had been trialled with relevant users. Where available, accessibility documentation and compliance materials recorded the reasons for deferral, the user groups at risk, and the conditions for revisiting the work, indicating that the discomfort was acknowledged and channelled into paced decision-making. These accounts suggest that ethical identity in socially innovative ventures is anchored not only in **preventing harm** but in **delivering positive outcomes**.

c. Contribution to literature

Omission-based dissonance adds to classical dissonance theory by specifying a prospective form of ethical strain centred on unrealised positives rather than transgressive acts (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). It helps explain why mission-driven founders may experience tension even where no direct harm has been done: their ethical identity is tied to the achievement of social value, not solely to the avoidance of misconduct. The construct complements psychological accounts by showing how self-discrepancies can be anchored in collective aims, organisational promises and deferred public-interest commitments, not only in individual behaviour.

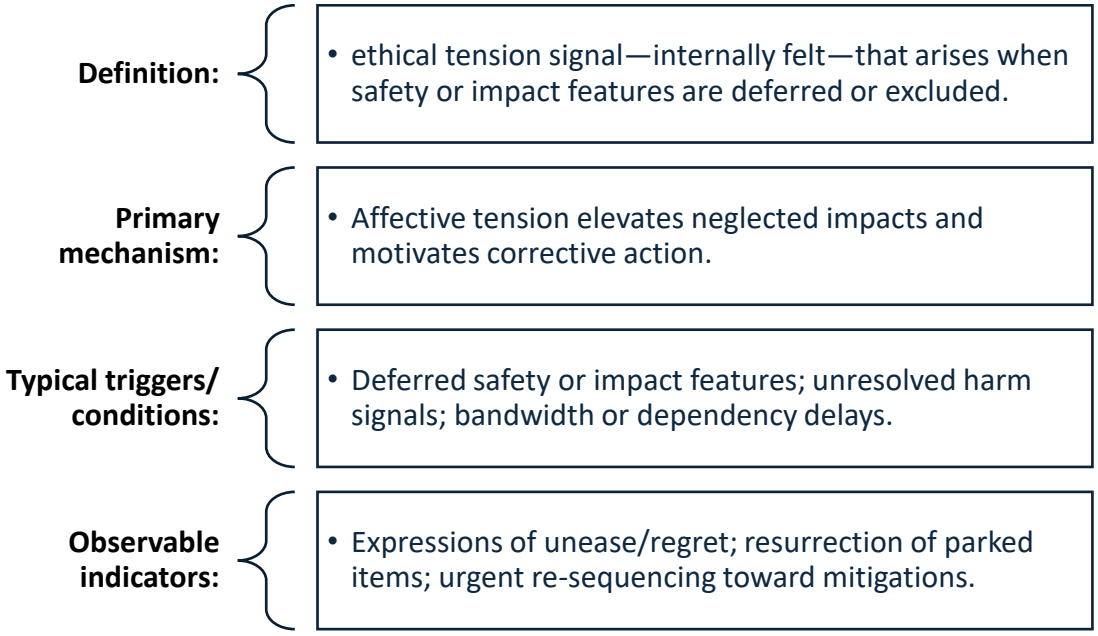
d. Boundary conditions and implications

This mechanism is most salient where positive obligations, such as inclusion or sustainability, are explicitly articulated and publicly held, and where external readiness is uneven. It suggests cautious, testable implications: ventures that document unmet ethical aims and the reasons for deferral may be more likely to adopt structured pacing, such as staged roll-outs or narrowed scope, than ventures that register such tension informally. Clearer articulation of intended good may also increase the salience of omission-based dissonance, prompting earlier recalibration of scope and safeguards.

e. Relation to adjacent DEN constructs

Within DEN, omission-based dissonance functions as the diagnostic signal that a desired good remains unrealised. It arises at the boundary set by Bounded Ethics, where the question is what can responsibly be done now. It is shaped through Osmotic Alignment as stakeholder input clarifies readiness, and is translated into governed action by Ethical Capabilities Capital through re-scoping, pausing, sequencing or strengthening safeguards. The signal helps prioritise Micro-Transformative Innovations and routes them towards EGID cycles. Subsequent pass, hold or rollback decisions then either dampen the signal, where evidence supports widening, or sustain it, where further remediation is required.

Figure 34: Summary of the concept of Omission-based Dissonance



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

IV. Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC)

a. Definition and lineage

Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC) is the accumulated, practice anchored capacity—rooted in internalised values, practised norms, and earned credibility—that enables teams to maintain core standards under external misalignment and translate intent into guardrailed action. In this study, ECC is evidenced through a set of constituent dimensions: values-in-practice that operationalise principles; codified safeguards that set

red lines and refusal criteria; reflexive routines that strengthen judgement; relational credibility that grants licence to pause or redesign; assurance and escalation pathways that enable independent checks and stops; and resource buffering that preserves time and budget for remediation. ECC is adjacent to psychological capital and identity work, yet remains practice-anchored and governance-linked—functioning as an ethics-holding capability within dynamic capabilities, and distinct from firm-level "ethical capital" as a reputational intangible.

Figure 35: Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC) components

Values-in-practice: Habits and routines that operationalise principles day to day.

Codified safeguards: Red lines, kill-criteria, refusal scripts, and gate criteria that constrain action.

Reflexive routines: Pre-mortems, after-action reviews, and learning logs that strengthen judgement.

Relational credibility: Trust with users/partners that gives licence to pause, pace, or redesign.

Assurance and escalation: Independent checks, audit trails, and clear authority to hold or stop.

Resource buffering: Time/budget reserved for remediation so standards do not erode under pressure.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b. Empirical grounding

Across cases, **ECC** appeared as **paced, proportionate responses** to misalignment: narrowing functionality, staging releases, **retaining human oversight** for high-stakes tasks, **deferring or refusing** features, switching partners/suppliers on ethical grounds, and **accepting slower revenue** rather than diluting standards. Artefacts—**accessibility/compliance documentation, decision memos, gate logs, refusal scripts**—recorded reasons for deferral and conditions for re-activation, evidencing **disciplined rather than reactive** practice. Participants also described ECC **accruing over time** through prior refusals, explicit red lines, and the use of independent review.

c. Contribution to literature

Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC) specifies the capacity through which founders sustain integrity in action under pressure. It contributes to psychological-capital literature by locating resilience, hope, efficacy and persistence within ethical maintenance rather than individual performance alone. It also complements identity work and moral-identity scholarship by showing how a valued moral self is enacted and protected through routines, safeguards, artefacts and decisions.

ECC can also be read alongside dynamic-capabilities scholarship because it draws attention to how founders adapt without allowing mission coherence to erode. Its contribution is not to propose a new variant of dynamic capabilities, but to show how adaptation may be ethically held through values-in-practice, codified safeguards, reflexive routines, relational credibility, assurance and resource buffers.

The concept differs from broader accounts of organisational "ethical capital". ECC is founder-level, practice-embedded and visible in decisions, artefacts and routines. It is therefore not limited to reputation, goodwill or external legitimacy; rather, it describes the reusable ethical capacity through which founders preserve standards while responding to constraint.

d. Boundary conditions and implications

ECC is most salient where ventures face **heterogeneous stakeholders**, **regulatory ambiguity**, **resource constraints**, and **non-trivial user risk**. Two cautious, testable expectations follow (controlling for product complexity):

1. Ventures with **strong ECC proxies** (codified red lines, escalation rights, remediation budgets, independent checks) will show **fewer trust-eroding reversals** and **fewer standards breaches** than peers lacking them.

2. Ventures that **document deferral triggers and re-activation conditions** will sustain **steadier stakeholder trust** (e.g., renewals, references) than those deferring informally.

Indicative indicators: presence and use of red-line/kill-criteria documents; count of recorded refusals/deferrals; gate pass/hold/rollback rates; **ratio of remedial to net-new work** per cycle; **time-to-escalate** and audit-trail completeness; frequency of partner/supplier changes on ethical grounds.

e. Relation to adjacent DEN constructs

ECC **operationalises Bounded Ethics** by codifying and enforcing red lines and refusal criteria, and it **channels omission-based dissonance** into paced, defensible moves rather than drift. It **underpins Osmotic Alignment**, lending legitimacy to negotiate scope and pace, and it **protects and resources MTIs** so that small changes can proceed without eroding standards. ECC is also the **capacity that enacts EGID outcomes**—to pause, remediate, or widen with auditability. Over time, **successful MTIs and EGID passes** tend to **replenish ECC** (learning, credibility, routines), whereas repeated **overrides or unfunded holds** may **deplete ECC**, signalling the need to reset expectations or rescope ambition.

Figure 36: Summary of the concept of Ethical Capabilities Capital

Definition:	• The practical, reusable capacity—rooted in internalised values, practiced norms, and earned credibility—that founders draw on to **hold core standards under misalignment** and keep progress within guardrails
Primary mechanism:	• Built and reinforced through prior ethical decisions, reflection, and codified safeguards (e.g., red lines, refusal scripts, gate criteria). When pressure mounts, it is deployed to translate intent into action: re-scoping or re-sequencing work, insisting on minimum protections, securing time/resources or allies, and choosing slower, values-consistent routes over expedient shortcuts.
Typical triggers/ conditions:	• Investor or funder pressure to dilute safeguards; regulatory ambiguity or lag; partner non-compliance; delivery deadlines that conflict with protections; scaling risks (e.g., data governance, inclusion, consent); reputational scrutiny; safety or harm signals that make shortcuts unacceptable.
Observable indicators:	• Documented non-negotiables and kill-criteria; principled deferrals or refusals; phased roll-outs that preserve safeguards; recorded rationale linking decisions to ethical criteria; use of escalation or independent review; supplier/partner changes on ethical grounds; alternative financing or timelines adopted to avoid compromising standards.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

V. MICRO-TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION (MTI)

a. Definition and lineage

***Micro-Transformative Innova*tion (MTI)** denotes small, iterative, solutions-focused changes—pilots, design tweaks, and process edits—that embody values and advance only once they pass EGID gates. It builds on transformative innovation literature (Stirling, 2014; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018) by focusing on local, incremental moves that are explicitly designed to be ethically exemplary rather than immediately scalable.

b. Empirical grounding

Across cases, founders initiated modest interventions that served as **ethical exemplars or proofs of concept** rather than attempts at immediate scale. Illustrative actions included: adding an **accessibility gate** to release checklists; introducing a **consent-refresh prompt** to sustain user autonomy; constraining **model scope** to trained domains to avoid over-reach; providing **offline modes** for low-connectivity users; and running **community-focused pilots** to check for exclusion before wider deployment.

Where available, **accessibility documentation and compliance materials** recorded these steps and the reasons for adopting them. Participants described such interventions as practical ways to uphold inclusion and safety when broader conditions were not yet aligned, for example, partner capacity or regulatory guidance) indicating a deliberate strategy of making the next step safe, legible, and auditable.

c. Contribution to literature

MTI enacts the transformative-innovation literature by showing that meaningful movement can proceed through modest, ethically anchored adjustments initiated by small ventures, without presupposing action by macro-level institutions (Stirling, 2014; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018). In this reading, micro-interventions build credibility and exemplars ("what good looks like"), reduce foreseeable harm, and can be replicated, adapted or referenced by partners and peers. MTI also clarifies JEDI commitments are translated into product design and organisational choices, rather than remaining programmatic aims.

d. Boundary conditions and implications

MTI is most salient where products carry non-trivial ethical risk and institutional guidance is incomplete.

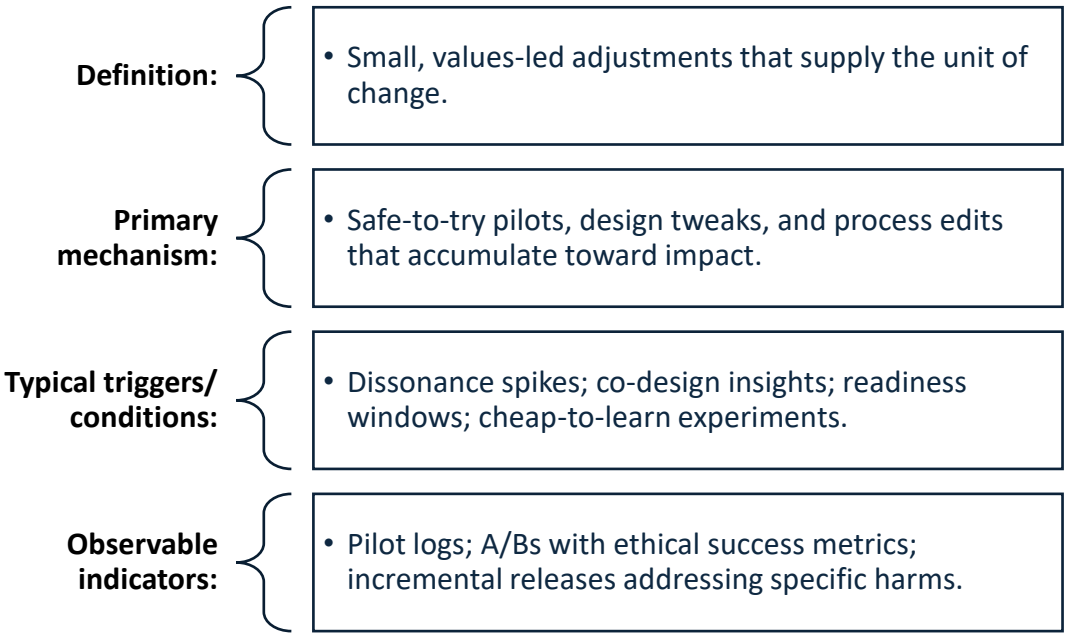
A cautious, testable implication follows from here as well:

i) ventures that implement and document micro-interventions (e.g., accessibility gates, consent-refresh mechanisms, constrained model scope) are expected to experience fewer remedial changes after release than ventures that omit such steps, controlling for product complexity. Indicative signs include shorter time-to-remediation when issues arise and clearer audit trails linking identified risks to mitigations. Further work could examine how such interventions travel—by replication, standard-setting, or reference in compliance reviews—without assuming linear diffusion.

e. Relation to adjacent DEN constructs

MTI operates within bounded ethics (it is what can responsibly be done now) and often proceeds through Osmotic Alignment (reciprocal adjustment with stakeholders to agree scope and safeguards). Over time, sequences of MTI moves contribute to EGID cycles, in which pilot → review → adjust → widen becomes the patterned route by which ethically credible practice diffuses.

Figure 37: Summary of the concept of Micro-transformative innovation



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

VI. Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion (EGID)

a. Definition and lineage

Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion (EGID) is a stage-gated diffusion governance mechanism that sets explicit ethical criteria—such as risk, inclusion, consent, and evidence—against which MTIs are reviewed and adopted, so practice widens only as fast as it remains ethically defensible. Importantly, adoption is not speed-led. EGID is **a governance posture rather than a delivery method**; it decides when to **pass, hold, or roll back** under uncertainty.

Constituent dimensions:

- **Gate orientation:** Progression depends on non-functional thresholds (e.g., accessibility, consent clarity, proportional data use, explainability/interpretability, inclusion, risk bounds).
- **Pacing norm:** Default to staged widening—or hold/rollback—where material risk remains.
- **Evidence discipline:** Traceable justification for pass/hold/rollback (audit trails, public change summaries, stated limitations).
- **Remediation priority:** Fixes before features where fairness or safety is at stake.

- **Reinvestment linkage:** Time or surplus channelled to safeguards and inclusion so ethical readiness keeps pace with reach.
- **Transparency habit:** Where appropriate, plain explanations of scope limits, methods, and known constraints to sustain trust.

EGID aligns with staged decision frameworks and classic diffusion work (Rogers; Moore), but its novelty here is the **ethical content of the thresholds** and the **evidence obligations** attached to widening, rather than the presence of phases per se.

Across cases, founders adopted or widened an approach only when four criteria were satisfied: **purpose alignment**, **stakeholder need**, **feasibility with safeguards**, and **governance readiness**—operationalised through SMAG and EGID gates (pass/hold/rollback).

b. Empirical grounding

Across cases, teams used **pilots, bounded cohorts, feature flags/hold-backs**, and **staged releases** as safeguards, widening only after **remedial work** was completed. **Accessibility and consent corrections** were prioritised ahead of new functionality; automation for high-stakes tasks was **paused or kept under human oversight** until justified. Where available, **accessibility/compliance artefacts** recorded reasons for deferral and conditions for re-activation. Public-facing materials (concise change notes, brief statements of limitation) were used, where appropriate, to explain scope and known constraints. Together, these practices show diffusion managed as **repeatable evidence-producing loops** before exposure increases.

c. Contribution to literature

EGID enacts diffusion in socially innovative, technology-enabled ventures as a **recursive, ethically filtered** process rather than a race for rapid market penetration. It complements Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962/2003) by specifying **non-functional requirements**—such as accessibility, inclusion, consent clarity, proportional data use, and explainability—as **adoption filters**. It also qualifies Moore's "crossing the chasm" (1991) by showing that mainstreaming may be **deliberately deferred** until safeguards are evidenced/

EGID aids work on responsible/ethical innovation and impact investing by detailing governance mechanisms—auditable pass/hold/rollback gates, remediation-before-features norms, reinvestment to keep readiness with reach, and transparent change logs—that sustain progress when growth is paced by ethical defensibility rather than demand (Bugg-Levine & Emerson, 2011). The novelty lies not in staging per se, but in the ethical content of thresholds and the evidence obligations attached to widening, shifting emphasis from speed to credibility at scale.

d. Boundary conditions and implications

EGID is most salient where ventures face **heterogeneous stakeholders**, **evolving regulation**, and **non-trivial user risk** (e.g., health, education, environmental assessment). Under these conditions, diffusion should proceed in **evidence-generating cycles**. Two cautious, testable expectations follow (controlling for product complexity):

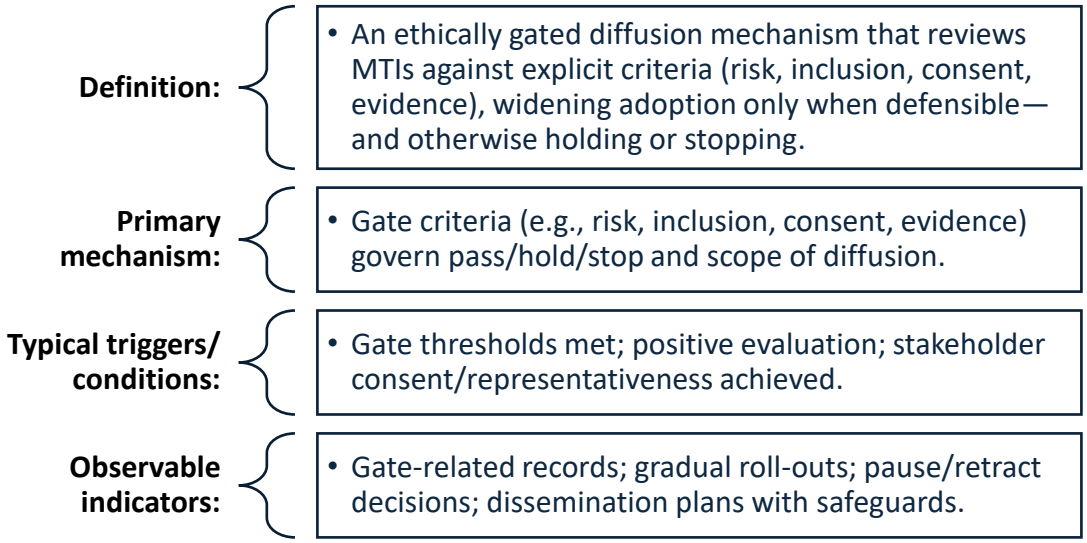
1. Ventures that **budget for remediation in each release cycle** and operate explicit **pass/hold/rollback gates** will experience **fewer late-stage reversals** tied to inclusion or consent, and **higher retention**, than peers without such gates.
2. Ventures that **publish traceable change logs** and maintain **standing feedback channels** will evidence **steadier stakeholder trust** (e.g., renewals, references) than those relying on ad hoc communication.

Indicative indicators: gate pass/hold/rollback rates; ratio of remedial to net-new work per cycle; time-to-fix for accessibility/consent issues; share of releases accompanied by public change summaries; stability of accessibility/comprehension results across releases.

e. Relation to adjacent DEN constructs

EGID **governs widening**. Its gate criteria are **derived from Bounded Ethics** and **refined via Osmotic Alignment**; it evaluates **MTIs** against those criteria and **relies on ECC** to implement pass/hold/rollback decisions with discipline. EGID **feeds back** into the system: **passes** typically **reset local limits** and normalise practice (updating expectations for Bounded Ethics and Alignment), while **holds/rollbacks maintain the OBD signal** and direct attention to further MTIs or resourcing needs. In this way, EGID stitches discrete improvements into defensible diffusion.

Figure 38: Summary of the concept of Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion (EGID)



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

5.3.2 Theoretical justification: Why DEN constitutes a Theory

Drawing on standard distinctions (Bacharach, 1989; Sutton & Staw, 1995; Gregor, 2006), a theory comprises clearly specified constructs and causal propositions that explain how and why a phenomenon occurs under identifiable conditions. **DEN** meets these criteria as follows.

a) Explanatory scope: what DEN explains

DEN accounts for the ethical decision-making and adaptive leadership of founders in socially innovative, technology-based ESVs operating under uncertainty, systemic misalignment, and shifting stakeholder expectations. Rather than treating ethical choice as a discrete, linear event (cf. Rest's Four-Component Model, 1986), DEN models it as **continuous, recursive, and adaptive**. Founders combine proactive ethical intent with situational recalibration, balancing fidelity to values with practical limits in emergent, resource-constrained contexts. Ethical navigation is therefore an unfolding, non-linear leadership practice that integrates reflection, adjustment, and perseverance over time.

b) Causal mechanisms and conditions

An interconnected set of mechanisms operate when ethical ambition meets system limits:

I. **Bounded Ethics (BEth)—principled constraints that set context-specific limits on responsible action.** Within DEN it is formulated as an extension of Simon's (1957) notion of bounded rationality into ethical decision-making by tracing how misaligned policy, scarce resources or stakeholder incoherence shape what can responsibly be done at a given time (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991; Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006).

II. **Omission-based Dissonance (OBD)—the ethical tension signal—experienced internally when safety or impact features are deferred.** Within DEN it is treated as an omission-focused, prospective extension of Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), foregrounding discomfort associated with deferred safeguards and unrealised good rather than only with transgressive acts (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004), and aligns with work on moral identity and prosocial motivation (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Grant & Berg, 2010).

III. **Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC)—reusable capacity built from values-in-practice, codified safeguards, reflexive routines, relational credibility, assurance and resource buffering.** It helps teams maintain standards under systemic misalignment and is informed by work on psychological capital and moral identity, while remaining practice-anchored and governance-linked (Luthans et al., 2007; Aquino & Reed, 2002).

IV. **Osmotic Alignment (OA)—continuous two-way recalibration with stakeholders that keeps scope and pace aligned with ethical limits.** OA provides an ethical lens to sensing–seizing–reconfiguring (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997) and treats stakeholder engagement as reflexive moral sense-making rather than static interest balancing (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997).

V. **Micro-Transformative Innovation (MTI)—**small, iterative, solutions-focused changes (pilots, design tweaks, process edits) that embody values and are advanced only once they pass EGID gates. MTI shows how local, low-risk moves can seed credible change without presupposing macro-level intervention (Stirling, 2014; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018).

VI. **Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion (EGID)—a stage-gated diffusion governance mechanism in which approval depends on evidence meeting explicit ethical criteria** (e.g. accessibility, inclusion, consent, proportional data use, explainability). EGID provides an ethically gated form of diffusion that qualifies classic diffusion logics

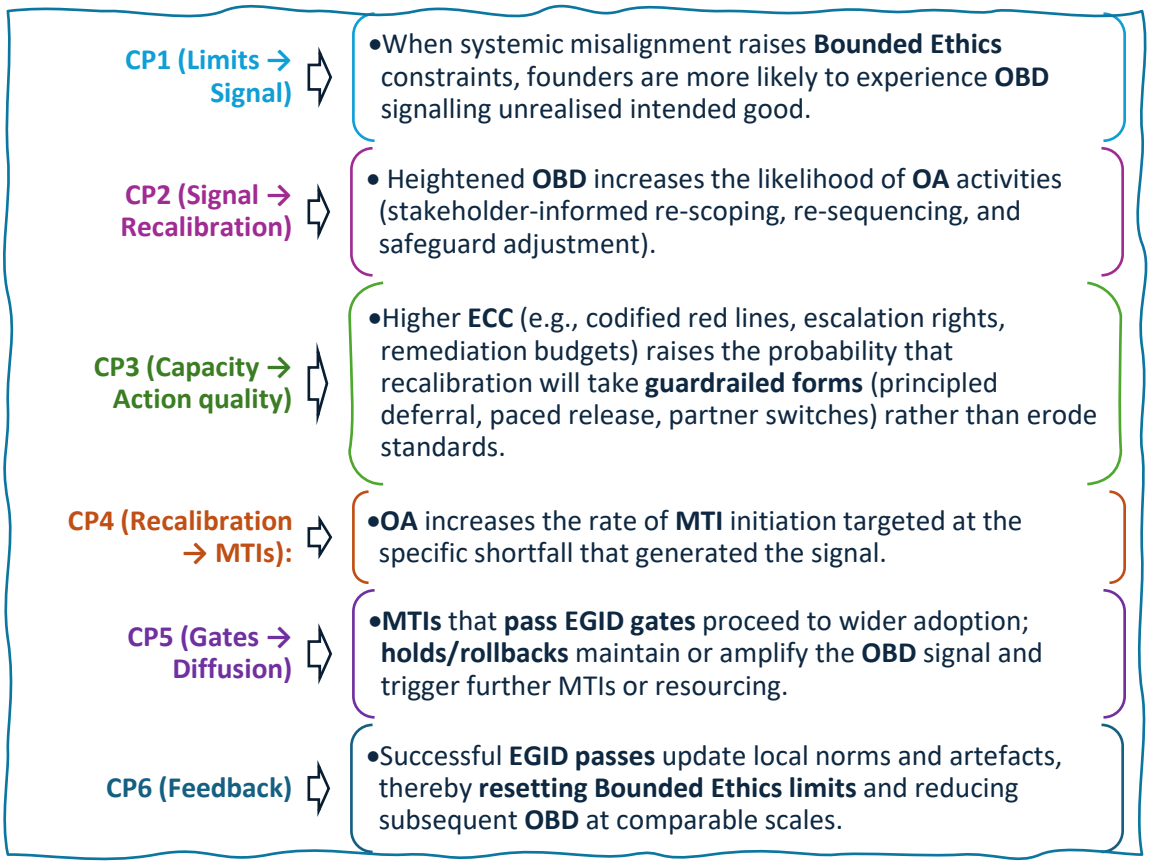
(Rogers, 1962/2003; Moore, 1991) by making mainstreaming contingent on demonstrable safeguards.

c) Causal propositions (illustrative and testable)

The propositions below specify directional relations among conditions, mechanisms, and outcomes implied by DEN. They are framed so they can be examined with process tracing, longitudinal audits, founder/employee surveys, artefact analysis (decision logs, change notes, gate records), or mixed-methods designs.

Figure 39 presents the explanatory logic of DEN. It shows how the six mechanisms relate to one another within the bounded context of the study. The pathways are not presented as statistically tested causal claims. They are offered as theoretically informed propositions that may guide later empirical examination.

Figure 39: Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN): exploratory pathways and indicative propositions



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

d) Status relative to prior work

DEN strengthens ethical decision-making accounts by showing how ethical judgement is shaped by contextual constraint, iterative review and paced adjustment. It qualifies diffusion accounts by introducing ethical gate criteria for widening adoption, rather than treating scale as an inherent good. ECC can be read alongside dynamic-capabilities scholarship because it explains how founders preserve mission coherence while adapting products, routines, safeguards and stakeholder relationships. MTI and EGID connect small values-led interventions with cautious, evidence-informed diffusion.

Together, these mechanisms form a coherent explanatory system with identifiable constructs, boundary conditions and indicative propositions for future empirical testing, grounded in the early-stage, socially innovative, technology-based venture context examined in this thesis.

e) Positioning DEN in the literature: theoretical synthesis and interpretive contribution

Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) brings together several established strands of scholarship to explain how ethical stance and adjustment unfold in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures. It draws on ethical decision-making and moral psychology by developing an ethical interpretation of bounded rationality through Bounded Ethics, where contextual limits shape what can responsibly be done at a given point in time. It also reframes dissonance around unrealised good, where ethical strain arises not only from inconsistency between belief and action, but also from the recognised gap between intended public-interest contribution and what the venture can presently deliver.

DEN also speaks to stakeholder theory and organisational sensemaking by showing how founders interpret expectations, evidence and constraints through reciprocal adjustment with users, partners, regulators, funders and other relevant actors. It can be read alongside capability-oriented perspectives because Ethical Capabilities Capital draws attention to how founders seek to preserve ethical standards while adapting products, routines, safeguards and stakeholder relationships. Finally, DEN qualifies innovation and

diffusion accounts by linking small values-led interventions to cautious widening through explicit ethical gate criteria.

In this way, DEN specifies a coherent mechanism set: Bounded Ethics, Omission-based Dissonance, Osmotic Alignment, Ethical Capabilities Capital, Micro-Transformative Innovation and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion. These mechanisms link context, judgement, capability, adjustment and widening without treating ethical decision-making as a single moment or assuming that diffusion is inherently desirable. The contribution lies in consolidating these insights into an explanatory account of ethical work in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures, with identifiable constructs, boundary conditions and indicative relationships for future empirical examination.

Table 25: Positioning Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) within existing theory: interpretive links across ethics, stakeholders, capabilities and diffusion

Existing academic domain	Baseline proposition in existing theory/model	DEN: synthesis/contribution	DEN constructs
Bounded rationality (Simon, 1957)	Decision-makers do not optimise under perfect conditions. Their choices are shaped by limited information, limited cognitive capacity, uncertainty, time pressure and the need to satisfice rather than maximise.	DEN adapts this logic of constraint to ethical judgement through bounded ethics. It shifts attention from what can be known or optimised to what can be responsibly done under constraint. In the cases studied, founders made principled adaptations within structurally imposed limits, using ethical commitments as guardrails rather than treating constraint as a reason to abandon responsibility.	BEth; ECC
Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957)	Dissonance arises when beliefs, values, actions or self-understandings are inconsistent, producing psychological discomfort that individuals seek to reduce through adjustment, justification or change.	DEN specifies omission-based dissonance as ethical strain linked to unrealised good, deferred safeguards or incomplete impact. This extends the dissonance discussion beyond inconsistency or harm already caused, showing how founders may experience tension when intended social or ethical value remains delayed, partial or out of reach.	OBD → OA/ECC → MTI/EGID
Dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997)	Organisations adapt to changing environments by sensing opportunities or threats, seizing them through strategic action and reconfiguring resources, routines and capabilities.	DEN uses sensing, seizing and reconfiguring as an interpretive lens for ethical adaptation. Founders sense ethical signals alongside market and operational cues; respond by adjusting scope, safeguards and routines; and reconfigure products, partnerships or pacing to preserve mission fidelity under constraint.	OA; EGID; ECC
Social entrepreneurship (Dees, 1998; Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern, 2006)	Social entrepreneurs recognise and pursue opportunities to create social value, often combining mission, innovation and resource mobilisation under conditions of constraint.	DEN moves beyond opportunity recognition by showing how founders revise and re-scope impact through stakeholder work, ethical insight and iterative adjustment. Public-benefit intent is not treated as sufficient; it becomes meaningful where it is carried into micro-moves, safeguards and decisions about when or whether to widen.	OA; MTI; EGID
Responsible and transformative	Innovation should be shaped through anticipation, reflexivity,	DEN contributes MTI and EGID as mechanisms for moving from ethical intention to staged action. MTIs describe small,	MTI; EGID

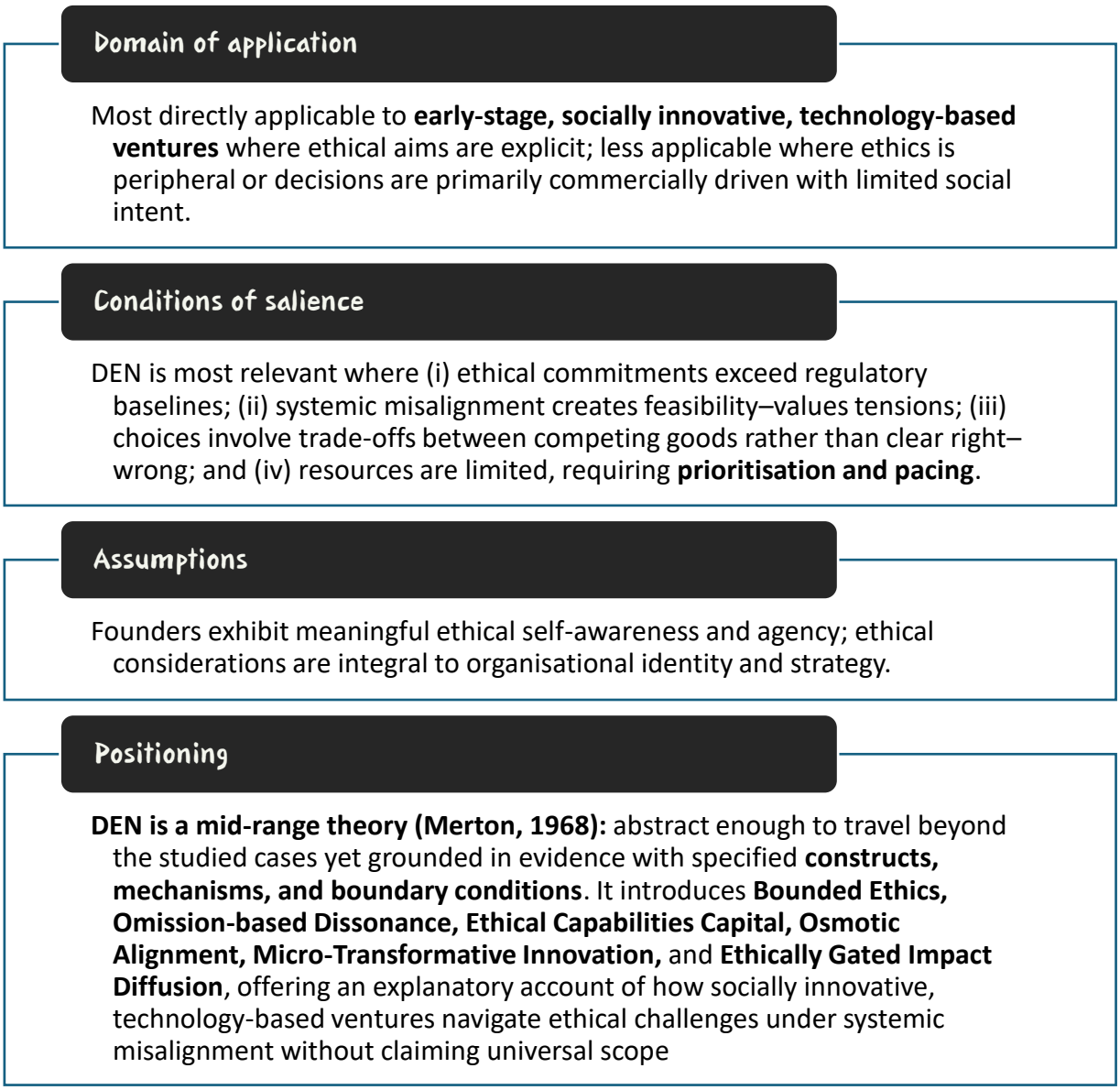
Existing academic domain	Baseline proposition in existing theory/model	DEN: synthesis/contribution	DEN constructs
innovation (Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013; Schot and Steinmueller, 2018)	inclusion and responsiveness, and may contribute to wider system change where technological and social directions are deliberately steered.	values-led changes that embody ethical commitments in products, processes or safeguards. EGID explains why such changes should widen only where evidence, capacity and safeguards are sufficient.	
Diffusion of innovations and impact investing (Rogers, 1962/2003; Moore, 1991; Bugg-Levine and Emerson, 2011)	Diffusion theory explains how innovations spread across adopter groups over time, while impact-investing literature links capital allocation to the pursuit of measurable social or environmental impact alongside financial return.	DEN qualifies scale-first assumptions by treating dissemination and growth as ethically conditional. In the cases studied, success was not only speed, reach or capital readiness, but defensible widening: growth paced by safeguards, trust, reinvestment, capability and evidence that the venture could continue responsibly.	EGID; ECC

Notes: ***BEth=*** *Bounded ethics;* ***OA*** *= Osmotic Alignment;* ***ECC*** *= Ethical Capabilities Capital;* ***EGID*** *= Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion;* ***MTI*** *= Micro-Transformative Innovation;* ***OBD = Omission-based Dissonance.***

Source: author synthesis (this thesis)..

Table 25 shows how DEN draws from and extends selected literatures. **Figure 40** takes a different step: it clarifies the type and limits of the theoretical claim being made. DEN is positioned as a mid-range theory, sitting between case-specific description and broad general theory (Merton, 1968). It is not advanced as a universal theory of entrepreneurship, innovation or technology ethics. Its explanatory reach is bounded by the empirical setting of this study: founder-led, technology-based ESVs with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims, operating under resource, market, institutional and technical constraint. The figure therefore identifies the conditions under which DEN is most relevant, the mechanisms it seeks to explain, and the areas where further empirical testing would be needed before wider claims could be made.

Figure 40: Boundary conditions and positioning as a mid-range theory



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

f) From DEN to the VISION model

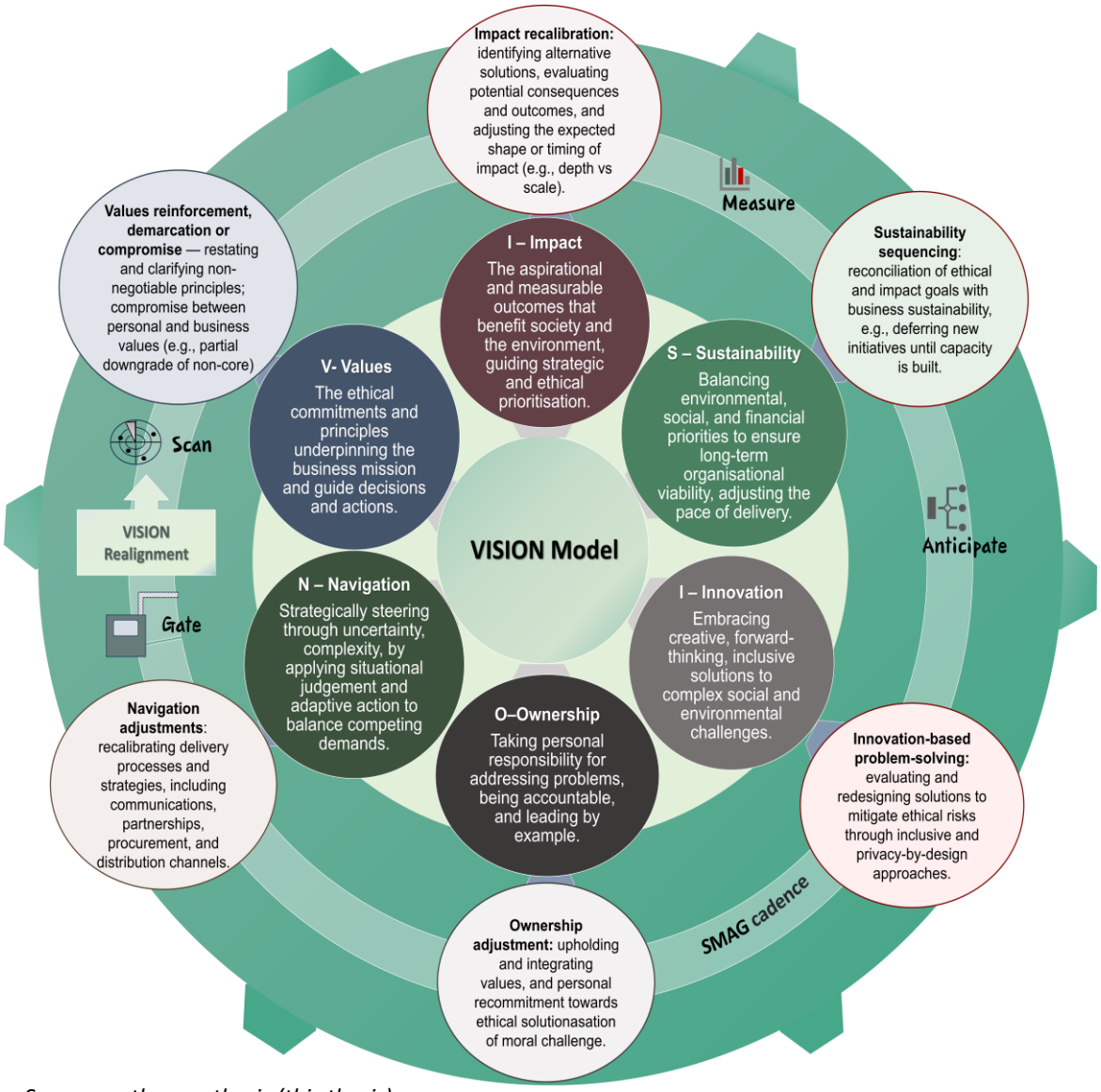
Where **DEN** explains **why** and **under what conditions founders** act as they do under ethical strain, setting out the mechanisms and tensions that shape ethical navigation, the **VISION recalibration process model** describes **how** founders respond when those tensions are felt. It organises ethical work into six domains – Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation – and treats movement across these domains as iterative rather than linear. The model captures the way founders revisit and realign commitments, articulate their values, uphold safeguards and adjust the delivery plans as circumstances change. The SMAG Cadence then specifies the rhythm with which this recalibration work is carried out over time.

These concepts comprise a cohesive account of ethical leadership and decision-making in socially innovative, technology-based ESVs. **DEN** conceptualises the process as **conditional** (bounded by context), **aspirational** (oriented to moral fulfilment as well as harm avoidance), **sustained** (supported by capacities such as Ethical Capabilities Capital), and **adaptive** (requiring continuous ethical recalibration). By integrating existing literature and introducing new constructs supported by empirical findings, this contribution provides a theoretical basis for future research on values-based leadership, ethical resilience, and adaptive ethics in early-stage ventures.

5.3.3 The VISION Model: Ethical navigation in socially innovative technology-based ESVs

The *VISION model* translates DEN into six domains of founder practice: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation. It is a conceptual model rather than a causal framework. Its purpose is to show where ethical navigation takes place in founder-led, technology-based ESVs and how the domains interact as founders try to hold mission, viability, responsibility and technological development together.

Figure 41: The VISION model and SMAG Cadence



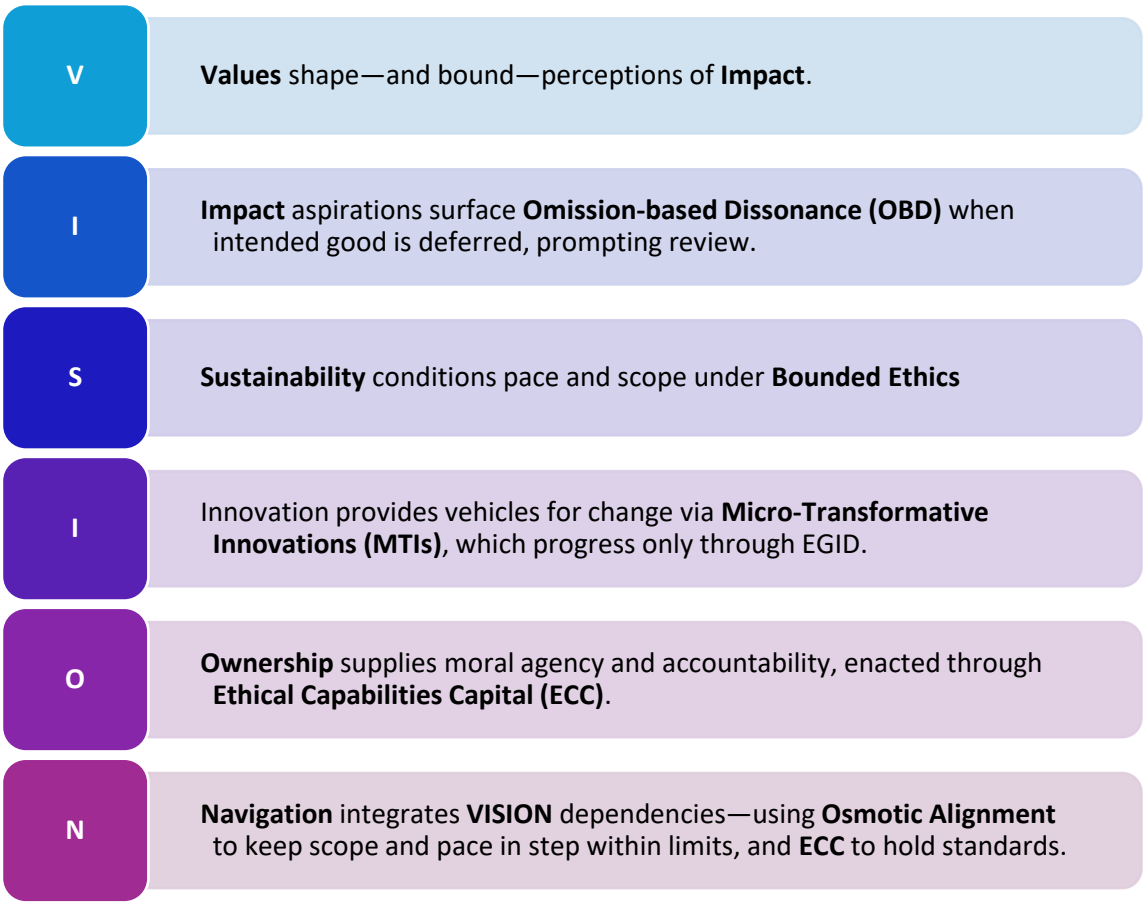
Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The circular form of **Figure 41** is a readability device rather than a claim that founders move through the domains in a fixed sequence. The dynamics are—**processes within processes**—nested and iterative. Founders may begin with values, impact, sustainability or innovation, but each domain can unsettle or reshape the others. A product decision may expose a data risk; a partnership opportunity may test values; a revenue constraint may limit impact; a user need may require a safeguard before scaling. The model therefore depicts ethical navigation as repeated recalibration with forward momentum, rather than linear implementation.

The diagram distils a **recursive, process-oriented** view of ethical leadership in socially innovative, technology-based ESVs. It depicts how founders **sense, deliberate, adapt, and realign** moral and strategic practice over time. Ethical navigation is an ongoing, context-sensitive journey in which **Bounded Ethics** and **Omission-based Dissonance** are integral to understanding how moral agency is exercised under systemic and relational constraints.

The figure also makes the **interdependencies and tensions** between domains explicit, framing ethical leadership not as a closed cycle but as an **open-ended trajectory**: founders navigate toward ongoing alignment, maintaining ethical coherence in an evolving and often misaligned ecosystem.

Figure 42: VISION Model's structure and domains' interplay



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

i) Purpose of the model

As a model, **VISION** does not claim causal status. It:

- **Illustrates** recurring domains of ethical navigation evidenced in the data;
- **Structures** components of ethical leadership into a reflexive and developmental schema;
- **Supports practice** by giving researchers, practitioners, and educators a way to identify and reflect on key areas shaping ethical conduct in values-led ESVs.

Thus, VISION bridges theoretical explanation (**DEN**) and applied practice, serving both as a **conceptual map** and a **heuristic tool**.

ii) Structure and interplay

The VISION model is **non-linear and iterative**: the domains are mutually reinforcing, not hierarchical. As seen in **Table 26**, each letter in **VISION** names a domain that appeared consistently and interdependently in founders' narratives. Domains are continuously realigned as founders navigate ethical complexity.

Table 26: Vision Model description, relation to DEN and contributions embedded in the VISION Model

	Definition	Description	Relation to DEN	Overview of contributions
Values	The ethical commitments and principles that anchor purpose and guide choice.	Values act as compass **and** constraint; they evolve through experience, stakeholder dialogue, and reflexive deliberation.	Grounds **Bounded Ethics**; conditions all other domains.	Makes **principled limits** explicit in the domain that sets standards. Bounded Ethics is treated as domain policy (e.g., red lines), converting ideals into scope and pacing rules.
Impact	Intended and unintended social, environmental, and systemic effects.	Treated as an ongoing aspiration; when impact is deferred, founders experience **Omission-based Dissonance** (ethical tension signal—internally felt).	Links Impact ⇄ **OBD**; motivates recalibration via **OA/ECC**.	Turns **omission-based dissonance** into a prioritisation signal. When intended good is deferred, Impact records what is missing, for whom, and what must change before widening.
Sustainability	Capacity to endure ethically, operationally, and financially over time.	Emphasises pacing, integrity, and well-being; prevents mission drift; a moral as well as operational imperative.	Expresses **Bounded Ethics** (what can be done responsibly now).	Locates the **capacity to hold standards**. Ethical Capabilities Capital appears here as buffers, contingency budgets, escalation paths, and independent checks that keep pace aligned to feasibility.
Innovation	Use of technology, process, or practice to deliver socially beneficial change.	Typically begins as Micro-Transformative Innovations (MTIs)—small, values-led moves that advance only once they pass EGID gates.	**MTI** orchestrated via **OA**; widened through **EGID**.	Uses **Micro-Transformative Innovation** as the unit of change and routes releases through **EGID**. 'quality-checks' and feedback measurement becomes default: MTIs advance only when gate criteria are met.
Ownership	Moral responsibility and personal accountability to mission, stakeholders, and outcomes.	Combines obligation to realise impact with the ethical, reputational, and emotional weight of leadership.	Enacts **Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC)** (capacity to hold standards under misalignment).	Grounds **moral agency and accountability**. Acceptance/refusal criteria, partnership on ethical grounds, and recorded rationales, evidencing stewardship beyond compliance.
Navigation	Reflective, adaptive, strategic decision-making under uncertainty.	Continuous recalibration of scope, pace, and safeguards; consults stakeholders; realigns domains as contexts shift.	Operational core integrating **OA with ECC**, routing **MTI towards EGID**.	**Navigation:** Institutionalises **Osmotic Alignment** as a review cadence (feedback → decision → safeguard update) and integrates **gate outcomes** (e.g., go/no go' criteria) so scope and pace stay in step within limits.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

iii) How VISION organises the pursuit of ethicality

In the findings, the pursuit of ethicality appears as a continuing effort rather than a settled position. The model builds on the working use of *ethicality* developed in Chapters 1 and 2, but locates it within the six domains of VISION. Ethicality is not treated here as a status conferred by social purpose, technological innovation or compliance. It is treated as something founders pursue through practice. In **Values**, ethicality is expressed through the commitments and limits that founders use to judge what should or should not be done. In **Impact**, it is tested against intended and unintended consequences for users, stakeholders and wider systems. In **Sustainability**, it is shaped by what the venture can responsibly continue to do with the resources, capacity and safeguards available. In **Innovation**, it is worked through design, data, release and diffusion choices, rather than assumed from the novelty or public-interest purpose of the technology. In **Ownership**, ethicality becomes a matter of founder accountability: who accepts responsibility for ethical commitments, trade-offs, omissions and revisions. In **Navigation**, it becomes adaptive judgement under changing conditions, where founders reassess pace, scope, safeguards and priorities as new pressures or risks emerge.

This framing draws on ethical decision-making literature, which treats ethical conduct as something recognised, judged and enacted through intention, action and organisational context, rather than as an assumed quality of the actor or organisation (Rest, 1986; Treviño, 1986; Reidenbach and Robin, 1990; Jones, 1991). It also reflects business ethics work that distinguishes lawful conduct from ethical conduct and locates ethical practice in judgement, integrity and responsibility (Paine, 1994; Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes, 2007; Crane and Matten, 2016). The VISION model therefore shows where the pursuit of ethicality is carried: through values that set direction, impact concerns that test consequences, sustainability constraints that shape feasibility, innovation choices that embed or weaken safeguards, ownership practices that hold responsibility, and navigation work that keeps ethical commitments under review.

The *VISION model* treats ethical leadership as both **practice** and **strategy**, enacted through the continuous pursuit of ethicality and questioning of what it means. It is

practice because ethical commitments have to be recognised, tested, revised and enacted in everyday decisions. It is strategy because those commitments shape what the venture builds, how it grows, what it refuses, which risks it accepts, and what it treats as non-negotiable. Founders' sense of purpose gave direction to their ventures, but it did not remove uncertainty about what behaving ethically required. Ethicality had to be worked through in decisions about product design, data use, access, safeguards, partners, revenue, resourcing, release timing and growth.

This interpretation also connects with small-business responsibility literature. In micro-to-small ventures, responsibility is often less formalised than in larger firms and may depend heavily on founder judgement, stakeholder proximity, relational accountability and emerging routines (Jenkins, 2004; Murillo and Lozano, 2006; Spence, 2016). The findings extend this insight into technology-based ESVs by showing how founder responsibility is not only relational or organisational, but also socio-technical. Decisions about data, design, access, automation, visibility and diffusion become part of how ethicality is pursued. Responsible innovation literature supports this reading because it treats anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion and responsiveness as practical requirements for aligning innovation with social values and public consequences (Owen, Macnaghten and Stilgoe, 2012; Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten, 2013).

Rather than restating DEN, **VISION** shows **where** the work happens and **how** to organise the pursuit of ethicality across six domains, as seen in the figure below.

Figure 43: VISION domains and their role in the pursuit of ethicality



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The table also clarifies why Ownership is particularly important to the pursuit of ethicality. Values may establish commitments, but Ownership shows whether those commitments

are carried into decisions, resources, safeguards and accountability. In the findings, founders did not only describe what mattered to them; they also described the burden of deciding what to prioritise, delay, refuse or redesign. Ownership and Navigation are the domains through which ethical purpose becomes a responsibility to act, explain and adjust.

The *VISION model* therefore contributes by showing how DEN can be read at the level of founder practice. DEN explains ethical navigation as dynamic, constrained and adaptive. VISION identifies the domains in which that navigation is carried out. SMAG then gives the work a practical cadence. Read together, they show that ethicality in technology-based ESVs is not secured by mission statements, social-purpose claims or the use of technology for beneficial ends. It has to be pursued through repeated judgement, resource choices, safeguards, refusals, revisions and forms of accountability that allow ethical commitments to survive contact with uncertainty, constraint and growth.

5.3.4 The SMAG Cadence: Scan, Measure, Anticipate, Gate

While VISION clarifies the domains through which ethical navigation is organised, the analysis also indicated a recurrent cadence in how founders moved through those domains. The **SMAG cadence** has **four elements** — Scan, Measure, Anticipate and Gate — which run across VISION's domains and provide the routine through which DEN's mechanisms are enacted. They give founders a practical rhythm for noticing change, testing assumptions, bringing affected perspectives into decisions and acting proportionately. Together, these elements show how SMAG converts DEN's mechanisms into **prompts**, **artefacts** and **routines**, making ethical navigation more visible, reviewable and transferable.

Table 27 summarises this cadence and shows how each element links VISION to DEN.

Table 27: SMAG Cadence: Purpose, Routines (expected behaviours) and Output

Element	Description	Purpose	Routines	Outputs/ indicators
Scan	Scan asks founders to search for and identify emerging challenges, opportunities and possible courses of action. This clarifies what is at stake and where early attention is needed.	In VISION terms, Scan chiefly engages Values, Impact, Sustainability and Navigation; in DEN, it sharpens Bounded Ethics (what can responsibly be done now), shapes EGID gate criteria and may surface early OBD signals. Responsible-innovation and foresight work support this anticipatory start (Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013; Owen, Bessant & Heintz, 2013; Ramírez & Wilkinson, 2016).	**Practical routines** include horizon scanning, reviewing background information and policies; mapping stakeholders and affected groups (including at-risk users); collecting quick feedback and soundings from users and partners to check assumptions; listing practical options.	**Outputs** are visible through a short scan summary of challenges, opportunities, and options, with ethical hypotheses and success metrics; a simple stakeholder map with roles; notes on who may be affected and how, including initial user protection and accessibility considerations.
Measure	Measure requires individuals to examine the scale and importance of the issues and opportunities found in the scan, and to decide how much should—or should not—be done in response.	In VISION, this links to Impact, Sustainability, and Ownership; in DEN, it builds Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC) by tying choices to traceable evidence and preparing MTIs where small changes are warranted (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schön, 1983; Owen, Bessant & Heintz, 2013).	**Routines** include setting clear success and limit criteria; running small pilots or trials; linking decisions to evidence in decision logs; holding short review meetings to check progress. Where feasible, pilots include the main user types so that measures capture relevant experience as well as performance (cf. W3C, 2018).	**Outputs** include a measurement plan (indicators, thresholds, data sources) showing what will be monitored and how; completed reviews at agreed intervals; records of adjustments made in response to findings; shorter delays between an issue being noted and an action being taken; evidence that key results, such as comprehension or accessibility, can be judged sufficiently stable across intended user groups, based on selected indicators, thresholds or quality-assurance checks.

Element	Description	Purpose	Routines	Outputs/ indicators
Anticipate	Anticipate brings affected people into defining aims, methods, and checks. It invites individuals to look ahead and assess the plausible risks and likely effects of the available options for everyone involved or affected—organisation, users, partners, funders, regulators, and others indirectly influenced.	In VISION, this sits mainly in Values, Navigation, Sustainability, and Ownership; in DEN, it supports Osmotic Alignment (OA) and helps set EGID criteria so that widening depends on acceptable safeguards (Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, 2013; Ramírez & Wilkinson, 2016).	Typical routines involve running "what if" scenarios; pre-mortems; simple fairness and distribution checks; describing how benefits and burdens may fall across groups; noting conditions for pause or reversal.	**Outputs / indicators** include short risk notes or scenarios per option, updating assumptions from previous stages (e.g., ethical hypotheses and success metrics developed in Scan); evidence that testing or review took place before major releases; documentation of how user or partner feedback informed scope or pacing; clear plans and contingencies for pause or reversal where risks exceed limits.
Gate	Gate involves disciplined, proportionate response in light of the evidence and options identified in the earlier SMAG stages. This is the decision point stage when individuals review, decide, and act on the chosen option using clear success criteria. Gate also shapes the speed and depth of implementation.	In VISION, Gate is most visible in Impact, Innovation, Navigation, and Sustainability; in DEN, it gives effect to Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion (EGID), often advancing through well-scoped MTIs (Cooper, 1990; Raji et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019).	Useful routines involve collating evidence and impact assessments against criteria; recording the outcome (pass, hold, or rollback) and the reasons; planning follow-up work such as refinements, budget changes, or further testing; arranging independent checks where risk warrants.	**Outputs** are indicated through documented gate decisions showing why an option was approved or delayed; how risks were addressed; what safeguards apply; time taken to correct failed tests; and the share of projects with a clear plan for safe reversal or improvement.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

SMAG provides the practical cadence for the pursuit of ethicality. Scanning supports awareness of changing risks, user needs, stakeholder concerns and ecosystem pressures. Measuring links ethical claims to evidence, feedback and indicators. Anticipating keeps delayed, indirect and unintended consequences visible. Gating creates points at which founders can pause, narrow, redesign, delay or refuse action where ethical commitments are at risk. Through SMAG, the pursuit of ethicality becomes less dependent on personal conviction alone and more connected to repeatable practices of review and decision-making.The ETIS Model: Ethics-Technology Integration Spectrum and EthOS Archetypes **Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) is best described as:** the spectrum, expressed through **three Modes (1–3)**—corresponding to the three Research Themes—that reflect different *ways of operating* as ethical–technological integration deepens. The **ETIS Model** consolidates the case material into a single view of how ethical intent and technological work come together in practice.

ETIS is **not a moral ladder**. It describes variation in expression, not superiority. Mode boundaries are porous, movement is not strictly linear, and ventures can display adjacent features at the same time. Further, the spectrum is **non-hierarchical**: positions on ETIS do not indicate that some ventures are more or less ethical than others, but that ethical commitments are embedded and operationalised through different combinations of technological and organisational means.

Two distinctions follow:

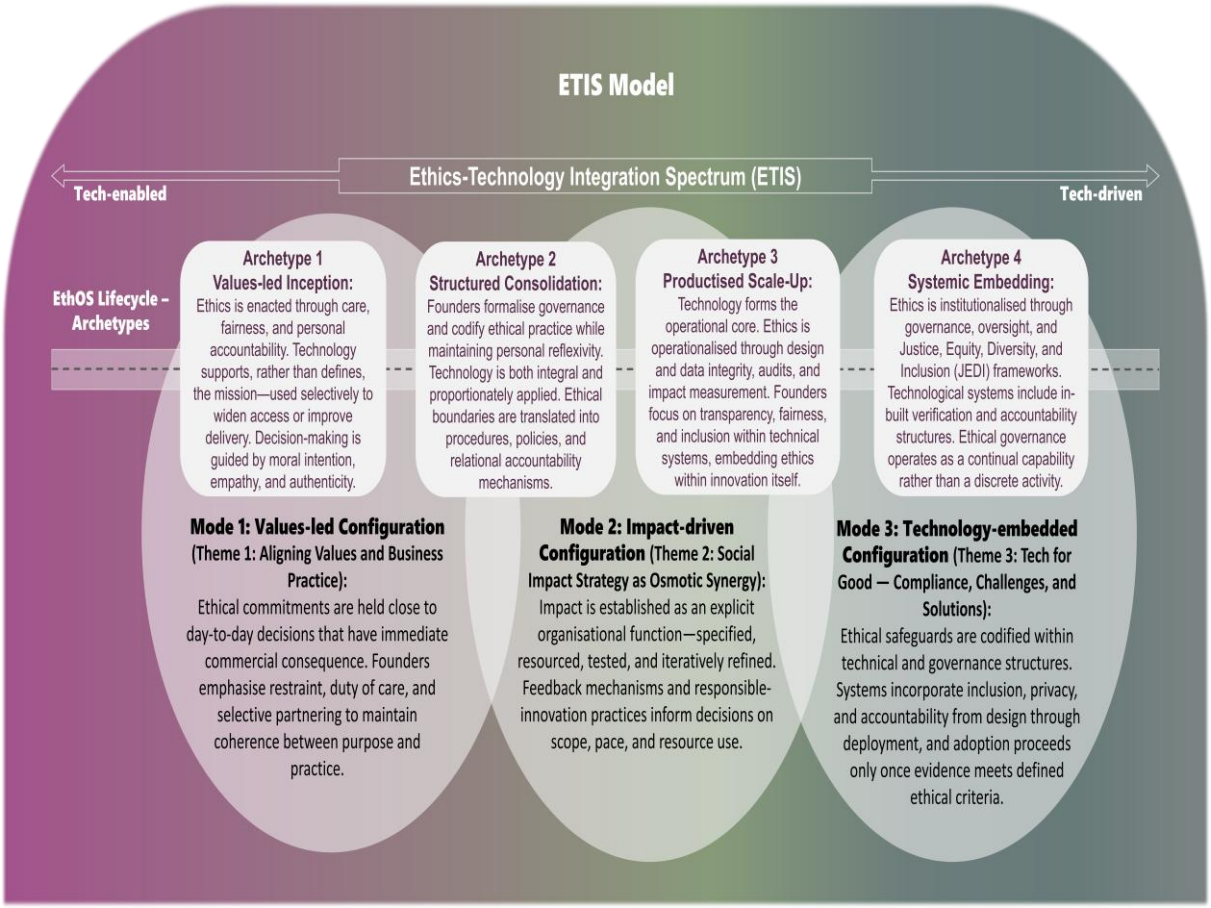
ETIS is an assessment model developed in this study to characterise the extent and manner in which ethical intent is integrated into technological design and organisational practice in early-stage ventures. It is used to structure analytic judgement about integration across cases by focusing on how ethics is translated into decisions, controls, and routines, rather than treating ethicality as an abstract intention or a static attribute.

EthOS Lifecycle Archetypes derived from the application of ETIS across the dataset. While ETIS provides an assessment logic (how integration is identified and compared), EthOS names patterned configurations observed over time, capturing how ethics–technology integration tends to develop or stall as ventures mature. EthOS is therefore

not a separate measurement tool; it is the interpretive categorisation that emerged from applying ETIS comparatively.

Figure 44 is read as a structured summary of the ETIS-based assessment and the resulting EthOS categorisation for each case; it is interpreted alongside the narrative explanation that sets out the evidential basis for each classification. The figure refers to the within-study application of ETIS (and the resulting EthOS categorisation) to this sample. It is presented as an analytic output that supports cross-case comparison and explanation in this thesis, rather than as a claim of generalisable prevalence beyond the dataset; and it is intended as a consolidation of how each archetypal cohort frame (analytic) and thematic structure were read through ETIS and how this informed the EthOS categorisation.

Figure 44: Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (Modes 1–3) and Ethics–Technology Organisational Signatures (EthOS) Lifecycle— Archetypes A1–A4



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

As **Figure 44** shows, the Spectrum (ETIS) is read across from left to right as a change in *mode*, not a rise in virtue. While ethical intensity remains high in each Mode, the form it takes changes as a result of the technological solutions adopted:

- In **Mode 1**, ethics is embedded in everyday decisions through care, restraint and authenticity, ensuring that purpose and practice remain coherent.
- In **Mode 2**, ethical intent becomes an explicit organisational function of impact management, shaped by structured feedback, testing and adaptive governance.
- In **Mode 3**, ethics is built into the technology itself, expressed through coded safeguards, verification, accountability and pace mechanisms.

To make positions on the spectrum usable, this study introduces **Ethical–Technological–Organisational Signatures (EthOS)**—four **archetypes (A1–A4)** that translate the empirical cohorts (C1–C4) into diagnostic profiles; though ventures may display adjacent features at once:

- **A1** (≈C1) carries ethics through proximity and stewardship;
- **A2** (≈C2) codifies restraint with lightweight checks;
- **A3** (≈C3) builds safeguards into design systems and pipelines;
- **A4** (≈C4) anchors accountability with enterprise controls and external assurance. Situating cases on the map

"Situating" a case involves three steps:

- identifying the **dominant Mode** using observable artefacts (decision logs, release/change notes, inclusion/accessibility records, assurance arrangements);

- assigning the **nearest Archetype** by matching signatures (proximity vs codified checks; gate criteria; architectural safeguards; external assurance);

- noting **trajectory** (e.g., Modes 1-3 with mixed A1/A2 features). This provides a shared, non-hierarchical language for comparison and support.

a) How the ETIS Model and EthOS sit with DEN, VISION, and SMAG

The ETIS Model is designed to be read alongside the thesis' other contributions. DEN supplies the mechanisms and conditions—**Bounded Ethics** sets what is responsible now; Omission-based Dissonance prioritises unrealised good; Osmotic Alignment keeps scope and pace in step; Ethical Capabilities Capital holds standards; Micro-Transformative Innovation supplies small, values-led changes; and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion governs widening. VISION names where this work sits day to day (Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership, Navigation). **SMAG provides the cadence—Scan–Measure–Anticipate–Gate**—that turns signals and evidence into pass/hold/rollback decisions within those domains. The implications for support and governance are as follows:

- **In earlier signatures (A1–A2)**, protect authenticity and capacity. Use proportionate governance and lightweight data practices; plan for responsible adoption rather than premature scale. Ring-fence remediation to build ECC and establish simple EGID gates. Brief limitation statements and reversible Mode-based approvals help maintain trust while learning.

- **In later signatures (A3–A4)**, institutionalise without ossifying. Calibrate audits to risk; adopt inclusion and accessibility baselines; keep reflective spaces (design critiques, after-action reviews) so rules do not displace judgement. Kee– EGID reversible and evidence-led with public change notes where appropriate; align funding and procurement to reward credible, auditable widening rather than raw growth.

Table 28: EthOS - Archetypes (A1-A4) – expected Organisational Signatures (observable indicators)

Expected Stage Signatures	Indicators
A1 — People–practice ethics (manual safeguards; narrow scope)	
Early ventures work within tight limits: **Bounded Ethics** is explicit; **OBD** is common; **OA** happens through frequent, informal engagement. Change proceeds via safe-to-try **MTIs** with **human-in-the-loop** for high-stakes steps (cf. bounded rationality and prudent staging: Simon, 1957; Cooper, 1990). Basic artefacts—clear consent text, short checklists, refusal scripts, brief decision notes—mirror checklist evidence from safety-critical fields (Gawande, 2009). **EGID** is present but light (simple pause/hold criteria); widening is rare.	Decision-making (rationale) documented; presence/use of red-line documents; MTIs trialled with human oversight; share of releases preceded by a risk pre-mortem.
A2 — Procedures (concise policies; stop/go points)	
As routines stabilise, ECC grows through codified safeguards and OA moves onto a light review cadence (dynamic capabilities sensu Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). MTIs target known gaps (accessibility, consent clarity) supported by feature flags/hold-backs consistent with continuous-delivery practice (Humble & Farley, 2010; Beyer et al., 2016). EGID is formalised for pilot→ limited release with brief change notes and escalation paths. The main risk is paper compliance; tying gate criteria to user evidence and publishing short limitation statements improves substance (Mitchell et al., 2019; W3C WCAG 2.1, 2018).	Cadence of alignment reviews; % gate decisions citing user evidence; accessibility check pass-rates; time-to-escalate on ethical concerns.
A3 — Architecture (embedded checks; sequenced releases)	
Ethics becomes part of the delivery system. ECC now includes independent checks and remediation budgets; OA is formalised across stakeholders. MTIs are instrumented with ethical success metrics; pre-release accessibility and interpretability checks are standard (WCAG 2.1; Doshi-Velez & Kim, 2017). EGID operates across cohorts/regions with auditable pass/hold/rollback decisions; automated test suites enforce data proportionality and rollback pathways (Raji et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019). The key risk is procedural drift; pairing metrics with short narrative rationales and design critiques preserves judgement (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schön, 1983).	Automated check coverage; gate outcomes (pass/hold/rollback); time-to-fix for gate failures; proportion of releases with narrative rationale attached to metrics.
A4 — Ecosystem oversight (governance + external assurance)	
Ethical practice is anchored in governance and outside assurance. Bounded Ethics and OA stabilise at ecosystem level; ECC is replenished by reputation, learning and independent review. MTIs inform standards/benchmarks; remediation-before-features is institutionalised. EGID integrates with external scrutiny (audits, advisory boards), and widening remains reversible. Transparency artefacts—public change summaries, audit reports, advisory terms of reference or public statements—align with emerging assurance tooling (NIST AI RMF 1.0, 2023; Model Cards; Datasheets) and participatory governance (OECD AI Principles, 2019). The key risk is over-bureaucratisation; periodic values refits, sunset clauses and user-led challenge mechanisms protect agility.	Third-party review cadence; reversal safety (rollback success rate); publication rate of change notes/ limitations; uptake of standards informed by internal MTIs.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) SMAG across the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum

The SMAG Cadence can also be read through the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum. In Mode 1, associated most closely with A1 and elements of A2, Scan is grounded in founders' direct knowledge of context and stakeholder relationships; Measure relies on qualitative feedback and simple, often manually collated indicators; Anticipate is expressed through narrative judgements about users, partners and foreseeable risk; and Gate decisions are taken through informal stop/go judgements, narrow scope and sustained human oversight in more sensitive flows. This pattern is evident in early-stage cases where automation was deliberately limited, pilots remained small and founders retained close control over high-stakes steps.

In Mode 2, aligned with consolidation signatures (A2 and early A3), scanning becomes more structured, with explicit attention to regulatory cues, inclusion risks and partner capacity; measurement is systematised via dashboards, basic impact reports and documented review points; anticipation is translated into simple thresholds and conditions for widening; and gates are instantiated as recorded checkpoints, role-based sign-offs and lightweight release criteria. The co-design workshops, emerging policy packs and scheduled reviews reported in the Findings sit within this pattern.

In Mode 3, associated with more fully technology-embedded signatures (A3–A4), SMAG is embedded in product architecture and enterprise governance. Scan draws on telemetry, structured risk assessments and external assurance; Measure combines internal metrics, accessibility and comprehension testing, and formal audits; Anticipate is articulated through non-functional requirements and quantitative thresholds for inclusion, consent, transparency and safety; and Gate is implemented through integrated pipelines, feature flags, staged roll-outs, pause points, rollback options and board or committee oversight. Documentary materials—release and change logs, accessibility documentation, governance packs and audit references—show how these mechanisms were used to justify pace and scope decisions in later-stage cases.

On this reading, SMAG provides the practice rhythm through which ventures occupy different positions on ETIS. The cadence is common; what varies is its level of codification, the evidential base for scanning and measurement, and the institutional form taken by gate decisions. This interpretation is consistent with the empirical arc from proximity-led ethics in C1 through procedural consolidation in C2 and architected integration in C3 to system-level embedding in C4, and supports the view of SMAG as a cross-cutting practice architecture rather than a Theme-3 device only.

c) Why ETIS is classed as an assessment model

ETIS is best classed as an **assessment model** because it formalises how evidence about a venture's ethical–technical practices is translated into a diagnostic output through explicit rules. In contrast to a framework, which organises concepts, an assessment model specifies (i) defined constructs and indicators, (ii) decision rules that combine those indicators, and (iii) a reproducible procedure that yields a score, level or classificatory profile usable for comparison and improvement.

An assessment model is a rules-based specification that maps observed evidence to a diagnostic judgement. It comprises (a) constructs and their indicators; (b) thresholds, weights or gating logic that determine how indicators combine; and (c) an output scale that supports classification, tracking and decision-making.

How ETIS meets this definition.

- **Constructs and indicators:** ETIS specifies discrete dimensions of ethics–technology integration (e.g., data protection assurance, inclusion and accessibility practices, verification and release discipline, environmental externalities), each with observable indicators to anchor coding and review.
- **Decision rules:** ETIS uses explicit rules for combining indicators (e.g., minimum safeguards as gates; calibrated thresholds for "meets/partially meets/does not meet"; optional weighting where trade-offs are material). These rules constrain discretion and make the assessment auditable.

- **Diagnostic output:** ETIS returns a structured result (e.g., level, profile, or traffic-light status by dimension with an aggregate classification). The output is intended for within-case feedback and cross-case comparison, rather than for prediction.
- **Distinct from a framework or checklist:** A framework would list relevant areas to consider; ETIS goes further by prescribing how evidence is scored and combined and by defining what counts as sufficiency on each dimension. This shifts ETIS from an organising schema to a model that produces a replicable judgement.
- **Intended use and limits:** ETIS is proposed as a **conceptual assessment model** describing how ethical intent and technological development co-evolve in early-stage ventures. These frameworks draw together cohort patterns and documentary evidence rather than claiming exhaustive coverage of all possible configurations. It is designed to support structured judgement, transparency and comparability in an interpretive study. It does not claim psychometric validation or predictive accuracy; inter-rater reliability, sensitivity to change and cross-context stability are identified as avenues for future testing. ETIS does not quantify "moral goodness"; it operationalises the presence and integration of warranted practices and safeguards.
- **Positioning within the contribution set:** ETIS operationalises the Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) by turning its core constructs into an assessable profile of ethical–technical integration. It complements the VISION ethical leadership model (process) by providing diagnostic inputs that can guide where in the cycle attention is needed. It can be read alongside the EthOS Lifecycle Archetypes as a means to locate a venture's current state and to plan staged improvement.

On this basis—explicit constructs, indicator design, decision rules and a reproducible diagnostic output—ETIS is appropriately classed as an assessment model.

5.3.5 Linking the research outcomes to the Literature

The analysis developed in this chapter is anchored in, and deliberately responsive to, the bodies of work reviewed in **Chapter 2: Literature review,** Section **2.7** concluded the literature review with a sunburst diagram (**Figure 8**) that mapped the main theoretical domains—foundations of ethical thought, ethical leadership and entrepreneurship, identity/culture/CSR and social context, ethical decision-making, and technology and innovation frameworks—and located key theories and models within each domain. That diagram provided a descriptive overview of where prior research has concentrated and where evidence remains thin.

Figure 45 revisits this structure from the vantage point of the empirical study. Using the same five domains as its inner ring, the diagram maps how the findings reported in **Chapter 4**: **Findings** and interpreted in Sections 5.2.1–5.2.3 speak back to each part of the literature. In each segment, the figure highlights two elements: first, the clusters of findings that can be read alongside existing theories; and secondly, the new or refined constructs that respond to the gaps identified in **Table 6** (such as omission-focused forms of ethical tension, practice-based ethical capability, and stage-gated diffusion of impact).

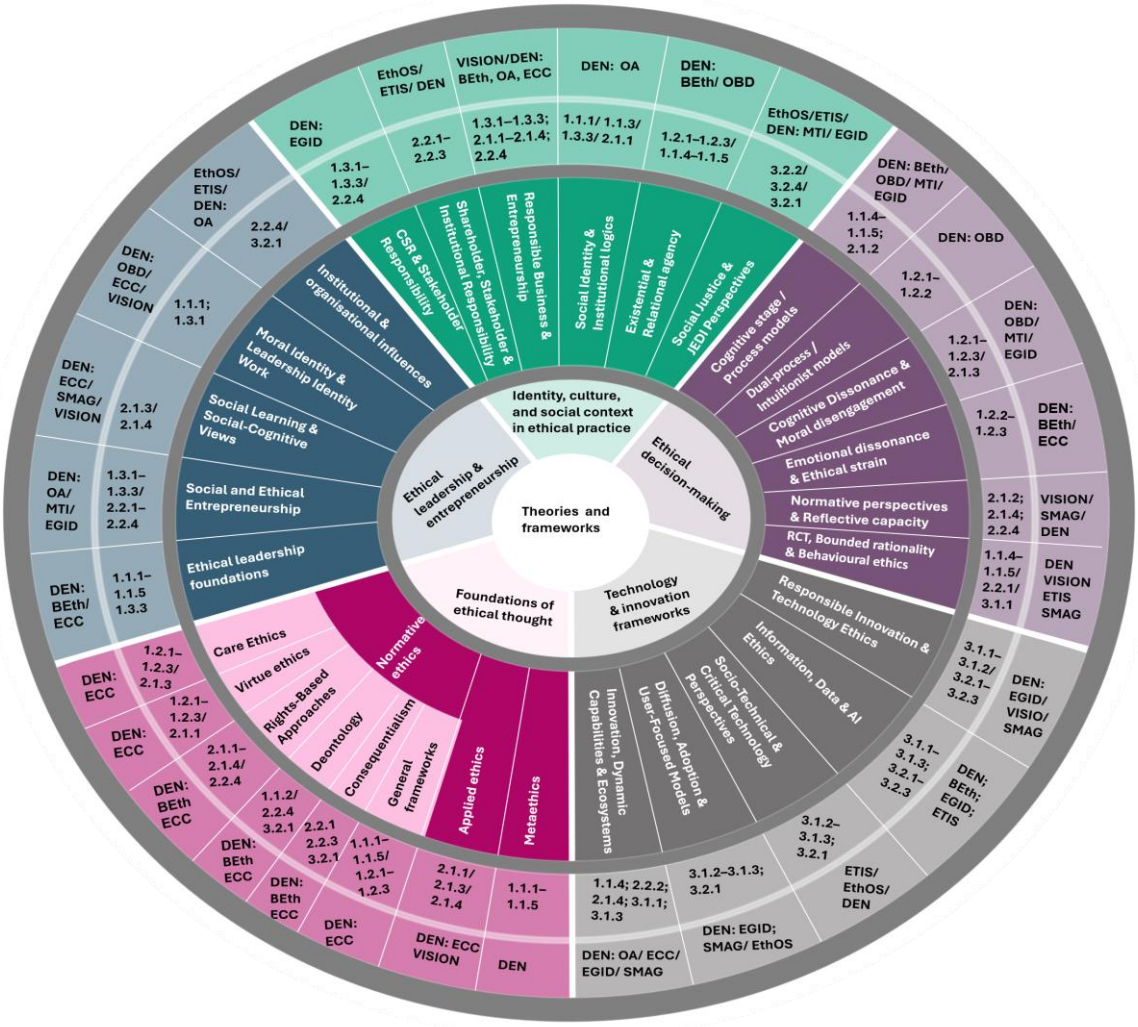
Read against the earlier sunburst in **Chapter 2: Literature review**, the diagram makes three linkages explicit. For the foundations of ethical thought, the findings suggest a plural, practice-based form of ethical reasoning in which outcome, duty, virtue and care considerations are held together in situated judgement rather than applied in isolation. In the domains of ethical leadership, culture, and identity, the study reinforces the importance of moral identity and role-modelling, but reframes leadership in early-stage ventures as the ongoing work of holding ethical lines through pacing, boundary-setting and coalition-building in conditions of misalignment. Within ethical decision-making and moral psychology, the findings connect cognitive, affective and contextual accounts by showing how internal tension around unrealised good interacts with capability and context to shape sequences of decisions, rather than single moments of choice. Finally, in the technology and innovation domain, the cases illustrate how Responsible

Innovation principles, information-ethics concerns and diffusion logics are translated into concrete design requirements, verification routines and release gates under resource and institutional constraint.

Figure 45 also signals where the study's contribution is most concentrated: at the intersections between ethical decision-making, leadership and governance, CSR/social innovation, and technological practice. These are the areas where the empirical material most clearly supplements prior work—by specifying how ethical limits are set and revised in practice, how discomfort around deferred safeguards is handled, how ethical capability is built and maintained, and how adoption is paced through explicit ethical criteria. In doing so, the diagram provides a visual bridge between the descriptive synthesis of the literature in **Chapter 2: Literature review** and the conceptual consolidation that follows.

The integrated schematic presented in **Figure 30** builds directly on this mapping. Whereas **Figure 8** (**Chapter 2**: **Literature review**) catalogues the underpinning theories and frameworks, and **Figure 45** locates the study's findings and emergent constructs within that map, **Figure 30** draws these strands together into a single conceptual configuration. It shows how the mechanisms and practice domains identified in this chapter can be organised into a coherent account of ethical navigation in socially innovative, technology-based ventures, grounded in but distinct from the literatures summarised in the two sunburst diagrams.

*Figure 45: Sunburst diagram mapping the research findings and contributions against the literature synthesis in **Chapter 2: Literature review**, **Figure 8**.*



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

5.3.6 Summary of Contribution to knowledge

Overall, ethical decision-making is positioned within the Contribution to knowledge as navigation rather than as character or compliance. **DEN** explains how founders hold direction while adjusting scope, pace, and safeguards under misalignment and finite capacity. Bounded Ethics names the principled limits of what is responsible now; Omission-based Dissonance signals unrealised good; Osmotic Alignment recalibrates scope and pace with stakeholders; Ethical Capabilities Capital sustains standards; Micro-Transformative Innovation advances change in small, testable steps; Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion widens adoption only when ethical criteria are evidenced.

DEN reframes several literatures: it turns phase-based models of ethical choice into continuous navigation; specifies ethical responsiveness as a capability; and treats Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion (EGID) as an alternative emphasis that reorients diffusion towards defensibility rather than speed in the cases studied, while recasting dissonance as prospective and prosocial. This invites measurement: credibility is produced through evidence-generating loops—MTIs trialled and gated; decisions logged; limitations stated; rollbacks made safe—supported by artefacts such as red-line criteria, gate checklists, change logs, and audit trails.

The claims are mid-range. They travel best where social purpose is explicit, user risk is non-trivial, and institutions are still catching up. Expected patterns follow: stronger misalignment yields stronger OBD signals; higher ECC produces guardrailed recalibration; active OA increases targeted MTIs; well-run EGID reduces reversals and stabilises accessibility and comprehension results. Indicators are proposed for ECC (red-line use, escalation rights, remediation budgets, independent checks, time-to-escalate), for OBD (signal-to-action intervals), and for EGID (pass/hold/rollback rates, time-to-fix, post-widening reversals).

Finally, the components fit together: **DEN** supplies the mechanisms; **VISION** locates the work; **ETIS** sets the route (Modes 1–3); **EthOS** offers archetypes (A1–A4) that make positions on that route legible; and the **SMAG Cadence** provides the routines that adjust stance. The result is a tractable, testable account of ethical entrepreneurship that is sensitive to context and oriented to evidence.

By mapping ethical adaptation alongside technological deepening, the EthOS lifecycle shows that the sustainability of "tech for good" depends less on static codes and more on **evolving ethical literacy, reflexive governance, and continuous calibration between purpose and process**:

- **Within DEN:** EthOS is the **contextual extension** of navigation: it shows **how** Bounded Ethics, OBD, ECC, OA, MTI, and **EGID** manifest **as organisational maturity and technological embeddedness increase**. Gate outcomes (EGID) feedback to reset limits (Bounded Ethics) and routines (ECC).

- **Within VISION:** EthOS traces the **longitudinal alignment** of the six domains—Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership, Navigation—showing how **Navigation** orchestrates **OA with ECC**, routes **MTIs** through **EGID**, and maintains coherence as the venture scales.

DEN theorises **how** ethical navigation works; **VISION** organises **what** must be aligned; **EthOS** shows **how that alignment deepens over time** as technology becomes more central.

The cohort signatures and the SMAG Cadence show how the thesis's contributions fit as a whole: DEN supplies the mechanisms, VISION locates the work, and EthOS explains how salience shifts as ventures mature. The picture is of ethical leadership as navigation made visible—through artefacts, cadences and evidence—rather than aspiration alone. With that synthesis in place, the chapter conclusion distils the implications for theory, practice and policy, and sets out the recommendations that follow.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has interpreted the findings in relation to the research objectives and the literature reviewed in **Chapter 2: Literature review**. The three themes were read as connected domains of ethical practice rather than as separate stages. Theme 1, Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance, showed how founders described values, identity, boundaries and dissonance under constraint. Theme 2, Social impact strategy, showed how ethical commitments moved into stakeholder engagement, learning, evidence, reinvestment and organisational routines. Theme 3, Tech for good, showed how those commitments were embedded, tested and strained through design, data and technology practice.

Across the three themes, ethical decision-making appeared situated, iterative and relational. Founders worked with incomplete information, limited resources, shifting stakeholder expectations, technological uncertainty and market pressure. Ethical practice in this setting was not reducible to personal values, compliance, impact measurement or responsible design. It was sustained through repeated acts of judgement: interpreting

signals, setting boundaries, pacing action, revising decisions and keeping commitments under review as circumstances changed.

The chapter developed this interpretation into the Theory of Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN). DEN explains how founders seek to preserve ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and safeguards under constraint. It captures ethical decision-making as a continuing practice of navigation, where direction is held not by avoiding compromise altogether, but by judging which compromises remain defensible, which require redesign, and which should be refused.

The six DEN mechanisms specify this account. Bounded Ethics describes principled limitation: the judgement that responsible action may require narrowing, sequencing, delaying or refusing action where resources, evidence or safeguards are insufficient. Omission-based Dissonance describes the strain associated with unrealised good, where founders recognise that the venture has not yet delivered the public-interest contribution it was created to pursue. Osmotic Alignment captures the reciprocal adjustment between founders and stakeholders, as expectations, evidence and constraints are continuously interpreted, tested and recalibrated through dialogue and review.

Ethical Capabilities Capital refers to reusable capacity built through values-in-practice, safeguards, routines, trust, assurance and resource buffers. Micro-Transformative Innovation describes small values-led adjustments through which ethical commitments are translated into practice. Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion explains how adoption may be widened cautiously where ethical criteria are made explicit, evidenced and revisited.

Read together, these mechanisms show how ethical responsibility was carried through ordinary venture work: in what founders chose to build, pause, evidence, redesign, refuse or release. They also show why ethical entrepreneurship in technology-based ventures cannot be understood only through intention, innovation or impact. The central issue is how ethical commitments survive contact with constraint, and how founders keep those commitments active while the venture, its technology and its surrounding environment continue to change.

Artefacts mattered in this process, but not because they proved ethicality on their own. Across the findings, ethical credibility was often linked to evidence-generating routines: decisions logged, limits stated, releases staged, feedback reviewed, checks repeated and changes recorded. Red lines, gate checklists, change logs, audit trails and accessibility or data materials made judgement more inspectable. They helped connect normative intent with organisational and technical practice, particularly where founders were working without ideal resources or settled external guidance.

The concepts developed in this chapter speak to ethical decision-making, stakeholder, social innovation, responsible innovation, Resource-Based View (RBV), dynamic capabilities and diffusion literatures. Their contribution lies in making visible the founder-level practices through which values, resources, stakeholder expectations and technology choices are brought into relation over time. DEN therefore provides a bounded, empirically grounded account of ethical navigation in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures.

The chapter also clarified how DEN connects with the VISION model, the SMAG cadence, the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) and the EthOS Lifecycle. Together, these elements show how ethical direction may be organised through domains of practice, reviewed through a recurring decision cadence, and examined through ethics–technology integration patterns and lifecycle archetypes. These tools are intended to support explanation, reflection and comparison, not to assign moral worth or prescribe a universal development path.

The contribution is grounded in the study's empirical setting. It travels most directly to contexts where social, environmental, health or public-interest commitments are explicit, where technology shapes delivery and risk, and where founders must act before resources, evidence, markets or institutions are fully aligned. **Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations** now draws these strands together by summarising the study's answer to the research aim, setting out implications for theory, practice and policy, and addressing limitations and future research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview

The chapter draws together the study's three layers of contribution. Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) provides the central explanatory account. The VISION model and SMAG cadence translate that account into domains of practice and a recurring review routine. The Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) and the EthOS Lifecycle provide descriptive tools for examining how ethics–technology integration appeared across the cases. These tools support explanation, reflection and comparison; they do not classify ventures definitively, assign moral worth or prescribe a universal development pathway. In this thesis, "archetype" means a within-study interpretive profile: a recurring configuration identified across the dataset and used to support comparison and explanation, rather than to classify ventures definitively.

The analysis also used three supporting comparison lenses: industry clustering, technology orientation and the C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame. Industry clustering provided sectoral context. Technology orientation distinguished tech-enabled and tech-driven ventures. The C1–C4 archetypal cohort frame supported descriptive comparison of implementation depth and technology-related ethical focus. These lenses were used to clarify variation across the dataset; they do not replace the thematic findings or operate as fixed typologies, maturity scores, causal categories or moral rankings. The rest of this chapter summarises what the study found, explains how the research objectives were met, sets out implications for theory, practice and policy, and closes with the study's limitations, critical evaluation, recommendations for future research and concluding reflections.

Figure 46: Structure of Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.2 What the study found	Summarises the main findings and contribution of the study.
6.3 Meeting the objectives of the research	Explains how the research addressed each objective.
6.4 Implications of the Contributions	Sets out implications for theory, practice and policy.
6.5 Limitations, critical evaluation and recommendations for future research	Identifies the study's boundaries and sets out directions for further research.
6.6 Concluding note	Provides a concise conclusion of the Thesis.

6.2 What the study found

The study was guided by one research aim and six objectives. Taken together, the findings suggest that ethical decision-making in socially innovative, technology-based ESVs was described as situated, relational and adaptive.

First, ethical decision-making appeared navigational. Founders described holding ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and safeguards in response to risk, evidence, stakeholder expectations and resource constraint. DEN names and links the six mechanisms through which this navigation was interpreted in the study: Bounded Ethics, Omission-based Dissonance, Osmotic Alignment, Ethical Capabilities Capital, Micro-Transformative Innovation and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion.

Secondly, ethics–technology integration appeared in different organisational forms across the dataset. In some cases, ethical commitments were held mainly through founder judgement, relational accountability and informal restraint. In others, they were more visible through requirements, checks, logs, governance routines, audit signals or external alignment. These differences are described through the EthOS lifecycle

Archetypes, which provide within-study profiles of ethics–technology integration rather than moral rankings.

Thirdly, the themes remained the primary analytic structure. Theme 1 showed how founders worked through values, identity, boundaries and dissonance. Theme 2 showed how ethical commitments were carried into stakeholder engagement, evidence, reinvestment and organisational routines. Theme 3 showed how those commitments were embedded, tested or strained through design, data and technology practice.

Fourthly, ETIS and the EthOS Lifecycle provide language for examining ethics–technology configuration. ETIS supports assessment of how ethical and technological work are configured at a point in time. EthOS expresses the associated lifecycle archetypes through which that integration may appear, deepen, stall or fragment over time. These tools do not assign moral worth or claim that every venture follows the same pathway.

6.3 Meeting the objectives of the research

Objective 1: Determine how founders of socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures define ethicality, and how those definitions shape the identification, assessment and handling of moral issues.

The study found that founders tended to describe ethicality as practical conduct rather than as abstract doctrine. Ethicality was associated with access, inclusion, transparency, care, safeguarding, fairness and sustainability, but these commitments became analytically significant where they shaped decisions, limits, practices or claims. In this sense, ethicality was interpreted as the work of translating moral purpose into proportionate and evidence-sensitive practice across product, data, operations and stakeholder relationships under constraint.

Across the C1–C4 comparison, ethicality appeared in different forms. In C1–C2 cases, it was more often expressed through founder judgement, plain-language limits, signposting, direct relationships and informal restraint. In C3–C4 cases, similar concerns were more likely to appear through requirements, checks, logs, accessibility materials,

release routines or assurance signals. This does not imply that later profiles were ethically superior. It indicates that ethical commitments became more traceable in some cases as organisational and technical routines developed.

Founders described recognising moral issues through dialogue with users, clients, practitioners and partners, as well as through discomfort about proceeding where safeguards were thin. Appraisal involved judging whether consent routes were clear, data practices proportionate, interfaces accessible, claims defensible and governance sufficient for the risks carried. Action then followed through redesign, staged release, pause or rollback decisions, or refusal of misaligned partnerships. Ethicality therefore appeared as situated navigation from principle to practice, rather than as static belief.

Objective 2: Examine the challenges and opportunities founders encounter when integrating ethical considerations into early-stage decision-making.

The study identified three recurring pressures: limited capacity for accessibility and verification work, pressure to deploy or grow quickly, and uncertainty around regulation, standards or partner expectations. These pressures did not remove ethical responsibility, but they shaped what founders considered feasible, defensible or premature.

Founders responded through pilots, staged release, explicit pause or hold points, human oversight and practical limits on claims or functionality. In more formalised cases, these responses were supported by release gates, checklists, review routines or rollback plans. The same constraints also created opportunities for ethical learning. Co-design surfaced overlooked needs; clearer communication about methods, limits and data use supported trust; proportionate data practices reduced burden; and paced development helped manage risk without treating speed as the sole measure of progress.

This objective is therefore met by showing how challenge and opportunity were intertwined. The findings do not present ethical integration as smooth implementation. They show founders navigating constraint through practical judgement, stakeholder engagement and staged adjustment.

Objective 3: Describe how founders use organisational, institutional and technological resources when making decisions and pursuing socially innovative aims.

The findings suggest that technology was treated as a means through which fairness, access, evidence or coordination could be pursued, rather than as an end in itself. At the same time, technology introduced its own ethical demands, particularly around data use, consent, accessibility, reliability, safeguarding and dependence on digital infrastructure.

Founders drew on organisational resources such as routines, role clarity, decision records, review points and internal challenge. They also drew on technological resources, including data practices, access controls, release routines, dashboards, privacy materials and design choices. Institutional resources appeared through sector codes, advisory input, practitioner guidance, standards, funder expectations or regulatory awareness.

The form of these resources varied across the C1–C4 comparison. In less formalised cases, resources were often held through founder judgement, templates, informal checks or direct stakeholder dialogue. In more formalised cases, they were more visible through documented requirements, access controls, scheduled reviews, assurance materials or release gates. The significance of these resources lay in how they supported judgement, traceability and proportionate action, not in their presence alone.

VISION and SMAG help organise this finding. VISION identifies the domains through which ethical commitments were revisited, while SMAG describes the recurring rhythm through which founders scanned signals, measured evidence, anticipated consequences and gated decisions.

Objective 4: Establish how founders select, justify and adapt socially innovative approaches under early-stage conditions.

The findings suggest that founders selected socially innovative approaches by considering purpose alignment, stakeholder need, feasibility, evidence and readiness to govern risk. Novelty alone was not treated as sufficient. Founders described co-

production with intended users, dialogue with domain experts, small-scale testing and targeted evidence-gathering before committing to wider delivery.

In less formalised cases, the emphasis often fell on proportionality: addressing a recognised problem without adding unnecessary complexity or making claims that could not yet be supported. In more formalised cases, co-design and stakeholder input were more likely to be paired with verification, performance thresholds, data governance, rollback routes or release controls. Progress was often paced through pilots or limited releases, with features narrowed, deferred or revised where uncertainty remained high.

Read through DEN, these patterns reflect the six mechanisms in practice. Bounded Ethics influenced what could responsibly be attempted at a given time. Omission-based Dissonance captured discomfort where important work remained unfinished. Osmotic Alignment described adjustment with stakeholders. Ethical Capabilities Capital explained the capacity to hold standards over time. Micro-Transformative Innovation captured small, values-led changes. Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion explained how adoption was paced through explicit ethical criteria.

ETIS and the EthOS Lifecycle then provide a way to describe these adoption patterns as ethics–technology configurations and within-study lifecycle archetypes. They do not imply that adoption should always move along one route, or that wider diffusion is ethically preferable in itself.

Objective 5: Identify the principles, anticipated returns and outcome claims that inform operational decisions in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures.

Founders described operational decisions as guided by principles such as justice, transparency, inclusion, care, safeguarding, sustainability and proportionality. These principles were translated into practice through design choices, consent and data practices, paced delivery, stakeholder engagement and decisions about what should not yet be offered.

Three outcome families were especially visible: capability, access and evidence. Capability concerned whether users gained knowledge, confidence or practical ability. Access concerned whether previously excluded or underserved groups could participate. Evidence concerned whether claims about benefit were supported by indicators, feedback, testing or other forms of traceability. These outcome claims were important, but they were not treated as proof of ethicality. They still required judgement about exclusion, harm, proportionality, evidence quality and sustainability.

Financial sustainability was described as necessary for continuity and independence, but not as sufficient evidence of success. Some founders described declining revenue, narrowing offers or slowing delivery where growth would compromise fairness, privacy, care or mission credibility. Across the C1–C4 comparison, less formalised cases tended to emphasise plain-language explanation and proportionate choices, while more formalised cases more often added monitoring, audit references, dashboards or verification routines. These patterns were shaped by DEN's mechanisms and organised through the VISION domains and SMAG cadence.

Objective 6: Develop an empirically grounded conceptual account of how ethical considerations are integrated into founders' decision-making in early-stage, socially innovative, technology-based ventures.

The study develops Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) as the central theoretical contribution and links it to four applied specifications: the VISION model, the SMAG cadence, the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) and the Ethics–Technology Organisational Signatures (EthOS) Lifecycle.

- **Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN)** explains ethical decision-making as navigation under constraint. It sets out six mechanisms through which founders preserve ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and safeguards: Bounded Ethics, Omission-based Dissonance, Osmotic Alignment, Ethical Capabilities Capital, Micro-Transformative Innovation and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion.

- **The VISION model** describes the practical route through which these mechanisms are enacted, structuring ethical navigation across six interdependent domains: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation.
- **The SMAG cadence** provides a cross-cutting routine — **Scan, Measure, Anticipate and Gate** — through which founders move across these domains, turning signals and evidence into proceed, hold, redesign or rollback decisions.
- **ETIS/EthOS** locates ethics–technology integration along a single, non-hierarchical spectrum.
    - The **Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum** is used as an assessment model that maps how ethical and technological work are configured in venture routines, artefacts and governance arrangements.
    - The **EthOS Lifecycle** gives the associated lifecycle archetypes, from people–practice through procedural integration to architecture- and ecosystem-level embedding, making those positions legible without treating them as fixed classifications or moral rankings.

Together, these elements provide a conceptual and applied account of ethical integration in the setting examined. They do not classify ventures definitively, assign moral worth or prescribe a universal pathway. Their purpose is to support reflection, comparison and staged implementation in contexts where ethical commitments, resources, stakeholder expectations and technology choices develop together.

6.4 Implications of the Contributions

Read together, the findings carry three kinds of implications. Theoretically, they clarify how ethical intent becomes operation under constraint. Practically, they specify what founders, teams and boards can do next. For policy, they indicate how depth can be enabled without stalling delivery. No new claims are introduced here.

6.4.1 Theory

Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) explains ethical decision-making as navigation under constraint: founders seek to hold ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and

safeguards in response to changing resources, evidence, stakeholder expectations and technological conditions. It names six recurrent mechanisms—Bounded Ethics, Omission-based Dissonance, Osmotic Alignment, Ethical Capabilities Capital, Micro-Transformative Innovation and Ethically Gated Impact Diffusion—and locates them within the early-stage, technology-mediated setting examined in this thesis.

The study contributes to ethical decision-making, social innovation, responsible innovation and technology-governance scholarship by providing a founder-level account of ethical navigation in early-stage, technology-based ventures. Researcher reflexivity was documented through phase- and stage-based memos included in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps**. These memos present how methodological judgement, sampling boundaries, interview conduct, data preparation, coding, theme development, member-checking, cohort comparison, documentary reading and claim calibration were handled across the study. They are not treated as participant data or findings, but as audit-trail material showing how the research process was monitored and bounded.

Resource-Based View (RBV), dynamic capabilities and diffusion literatures remain relevant as supporting lenses, especially for interpreting resources, routines, adaptation and adoption. The contribution lies in showing how ethical judgement, resource constraint, stakeholder engagement and technology practice develop together in this empirical setting.

The VISION model translates DEN into organised reflection across six domains: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation. The SMAG cadence specifies a recurring rhythm for review through Scan, Measure, Anticipate and Gate. ETIS provides a non-hierarchical way of examining ethics–technology configuration at a point in time. The EthOS Lifecycle describes organisational signatures through which ethics–technology integration may appear, deepen, stall or fragment over time. These tools support comparison and reflection, but they do not certify maturity or assign moral worth.

a) Clarifying terms: ETIS and EthOS

ETIS is the assessment model used in this thesis. It sets out the dimensions, indicators and decision rules used to interpret evidence of ethics–technology integration. It is applied as a structured, non-hierarchical assessment model for comparison within the study, not as an external benchmark or measure of moral worth.

EthOS is the associated lifecycle lens. It expresses within-study archetypes that describe how ethics–technology integration appeared across the dataset. The archetypes support comparison and explanation, but they are not fixed classifications, universal stages or moral rankings.

b) Positioning within responsible innovation

Observed practices align with familiar strands of responsible innovation, expressed in this thesis through the SMAG Cadence—Scan, Measure, Anticipate, Gate—typically operationalised through paced development and proportionate controls. Pilots and "hold/rollback" criteria express anticipation; decision logs and change histories express reflexivity; co-design, accessible flows and value-aligned partnerships express inclusion; and corrective updates, consent refreshes and refusal of misaligned revenue express responsiveness. These practices are the operational face of DEN's mechanisms and mark movement along the EthOS lifecycle as ventures deepen ethics–technology integration.

6.4.2 Practice

For founders, teams and boards, the implications are immediate. Ethics becomes operational when purpose is tied to a small set of living artefacts—non-functional requirements, gated release criteria, short change logs—kept proportionate to risk and stage. Deliberate pacing is central where uncertainty is material: pilot, stage, and agree pause/rollback criteria in advance for sensitive releases. Recording the route with a brief audit trail (decision, rationale, check, outcome) supports learning, accountability and trust with partners and commissioners.

Governance for alignment involves scheduling values–data–product checks and testing alignment against the roadmap and data practices, not only commercial targets;

escalating gaps early; and resourcing the weakest control first—often verification, consent pathways or access control—before adding complexity elsewhere. Ethical perseverance carries emotional and relational load, so time-bounded recovery and collegial challenge need to be part of routine practice. VISION and SMAG provide practical structures for this work; EthOS and ETIS help teams situate their current position and identify proportionate next steps.

6.4.3 Policy

For funders, regulators and ecosystem actors, the study suggests that responsible digital innovation should not be supported only at the point of scale. Ethical commitments often become embedded, strained or deferred much earlier, when product design, data practices, stakeholder relationships and governance routines are still forming.

Support may therefore be most useful where it helps ventures translate public-interest aims into proportionate safeguards. This could include guidance on accessibility, data governance, staged release, impact evidence, user involvement, environmental effects and escalation routes. Such support should recognise early-stage constraint. The aim is not to impose mature corporate systems prematurely, but to help ventures make risk-sensitive decisions visible, revisable and accountable.

Paced innovation can be supported by accepting deliberate staging—pilots and holds—where risk or uncertainty is high, and by avoiding incentives that push immature releases. Founder well-being warrants attention, given the costs of ethical perseverance; targeted support can improve durability. Interoperability of proof—accepting common artefacts such as change logs and data-handling notes across programmes—can reduce duplicate burden while improving transparency. In each case, DEN provides the underlying logic, while VISION, SMAG and ETIS/EthOS offer practical levers for policy design.

6.4.4 Summary of significance and implications

The significance of the study lies in its founder-level account of ethical decision-making under constraint. Dynamic Ethical Navigation explains how ethical direction is maintained

through repeated judgement rather than through fixed codes or single decision points. VISION, SMAG, ETIS and EthOS then translate that account into domains, cadence and diagnostic comparison.

In practical terms, the study identifies points of attention for founders, investors, funders, regulators and ecosystem actors: paced release, proportionate safeguards, reinvestment, accessibility, evidence routines, stakeholder review and defensible diffusion. These are not presented as universal prescriptions. They are practical sites where ethical commitments may be made more visible, revisable and accountable in early-stage technology-based ventures.

Figure 47 summarises the practice-oriented steps derived from the analysis, and should be read as empirically grounded and comparative, aligned to the scope of the study and the limitations set out in Section **6.5**.

Researcher reflexivity was documented through phase- and stage-based memos, included in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps**. These memos record how methodological judgement, sampling boundaries, interview conduct, data preparation, coding, theme development, member-checking, cohort comparison, documentary reading and claim calibration were handled across the study.

They helped preserve the distinction between participant evidence, researcher interpretation and contribution claims, particularly as the analysis moved from thematic description towards Dynamic Ethical Navigation, VISION, SMAG, ETIS and the EthOS Lifecycle Archetypes. They are not treated as participant data or findings, but as audit-trail material showing how the research process was monitored, bounded and recalibrated.

This reflexive record was particularly important as the analysis moved from thematic description towards Dynamic Ethical Navigation, the VISION model, the SMAG cadence, the Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum and the EthOS Lifecycle. It helped preserve the distinction between participant evidence, researcher interpretation and contribution claims.

Figure 47: Practical steps – supported by this research

i) Cross-context testing.

Examine DEN, VISION, SMAG and the EthOS/ETIS architecture in other sectors and jurisdictions to see how legal regimes, commissioning models and data cultures alter pacing, safeguards and governance choices. Compare for-profit and non-profit forms, and software-only versus data-intensive or hardware-linked ventures.

ii) Longitudinal and process tracing.

Follow ventures across releases to observe movement along the EthOS continuum, identify triggers for pausing, narrowing or advancing, and document the costs and recoveries associated with maintaining standards over time. Track how Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC) accumulates or depletes as teams confront constraints.

iii) Multi-stakeholder triangulation.

Add employees, users (including those most affected), investors and commissioners. Analyse convergence/divergence on risk, readiness and impact; incorporate outcome measures that match the study's capability–access–evidence focus.

iv) Mechanisms and measures.

Further specify and test Bounded Ethics, Omission-Based Dissonance (OBD), ECC and Osmotic Alignment. Refine the ETI read-out (sensitivity checks, inter-rater procedures) and develop light-weight instruments for proportionate assurance—for example, short decision-log schemas, change-log patterns, consent-refresh prompts and ECC proxies (red-line/kill-criteria, escalation rights, remediation budgets, independent checks).

v) Responsible-innovation pathways.

Map how anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion and responsiveness are realised through pacing and artefacts, and test whether specific practices (e.g., pre-agreed hold/rollback criteria, role-based access) mediate improvements in capability, access or evidence.

vi) Policy and ecosystem experiments.

Evaluate staged compliance and "interoperability of proof" (accepting common artefacts across programmes). Assess whether such adjustments reduce burden while improving accountability and inclusion.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

6.5 Limitations, critical evaluation and recommendations for future research

The study has several boundary conditions. It is situated in the UK and shaped by the institutional, legal and regulatory context in which the sampled ventures operated. The findings may be transferable to adjacent settings, but they should not be assumed to apply directly to jurisdictions with different company forms, regulatory expectations or venture-support ecosystems.

The sample is limited to UK-registered entities recorded with the Companies House company-type designation "Private Limited Company". Entities designated "Company Limited by Guarantee", charities, community interest companies and comparable purpose-constrained forms were outside scope. The findings should therefore be read as concerning founder-led, shareholder-owned, for-profit ventures with explicit social, environmental, health or public-interest aims.

The study also focuses on early-stage ventures incorporated less than five years before 31 March 2024. This supports analysis of formative ethical decision-making, but it limits what can be said about later organisational development, investor influence, governance formalisation or long-term impact.

Organisation size is a further boundary condition. Founder accounts indicated team sizes ranging from one person to around 15 people, so the sample is described on a headcount basis as comprising micro-to-small early-stage ventures. Organisation size was not used as an inclusion criterion, sampling variable, cohort-allocation criterion or analytic category. Case-level team sizes are not reported because, when combined with sector, technology focus, location, company age and verbatim extracts, they could increase the risk of participant or venture identification. Turnover and balance-sheet data were not collected or used; the size description is therefore limited to reported headcount.

c) Limitations and scope conditions

First, the sample and associated documentary corpus were bounded by an explicit cut-off date and by the availability of public materials. As a result, some organisational practices may have been less visible where they were undocumented, inaccessible, or not publicly articulated at the time of capture. Second, the analysis reflects meaning co-produced within the interview encounter and is consequently shaped by how participants framed events, constraints, and trade-offs at the time of reporting. Third, while documentary materials were used to contextualise accounts, they were not treated as confirmatory evidence; this supports interpretive coherence, but it also limits the extent to which the thesis can adjudicate between interview narratives and externally observable practice.

d) Researcher reflexivity and claim calibration

The interpretation presented in this thesis was shaped by a sustained reflexive process rather than by a single end-point reflection. The phase- and stage-based memos in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps** record how methodological judgement was exercised across the study, including sampling boundaries, interview conduct, data preparation, coding, theme development, member-checking, cohort comparison, documentary reading and final claim calibration. These records were used to make visible how decisions were made, where uncertainty remained and how interpretive claims were kept within the limits of the evidence.

Several reflexive issues were particularly significant. Recruitment required a balance between purposive variation and confidentiality, especially because the study focused on identifiable founders of early-stage ventures. Interviewing required attention to how participants narrated ethical decisions in ways shaped by memory, professional identity and the interview encounter itself. Analysis required repeated checks against over-systematising the data, particularly when developing the cohort frame, implementation indicators and later conceptual outputs. The memos therefore acted as a constraint on overclaiming: they supported the move from rich founder accounts to thematic interpretation, while preserving the distinction between empirical findings, interpretive synthesis and contribution to knowledge.

This reflexive process also shaped how the thesis reports its limitations. The findings are not presented as exhaustive, statistically representative or externally verified accounts of all ethical practice in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures. They are presented as an interpretive account of how the participating founders described, justified and adjusted ethical decision-making under constraint. The reflexive record in **Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps** therefore remains part of the study's audit trail, while this chapter draws out its significance for evaluating the scope, transferability and credibility of the claims made.

e) Critical evaluation of interpretive claims

These limitations do not negate the analytic contribution, but they specify the conditions under which transferability may be considered. In practice, the most defensible use of the findings is as a set of theoretically informed mechanisms and sensitising concepts that can guide inquiry in comparable settings, rather than as claims of prevalence or causal effect.

f) Recommendations for future research

Future work could: (i) extend the analysis longitudinally to examine how ethical decision-making stabilises or shifts as ventures scale; (ii) include additional perspectives (for example, employees, delivery partners, users, or funders) to test whether the same ethical tensions are described similarly across stakeholder positions; (iii) broaden sector and geography coverage to examine contextual conditions more explicitly; and (iv) evaluate the practical utility of the thesis outputs (for example, the decision-support artefacts) through applied or intervention-oriented studies.

6.6 Concluding note

This study began with a single aim: to understand how founders building socially innovative, technology-based ventures define and apply ethicality. The founders in this study are working under constraint, and in conditions where rules may be evolving, resources are limited, evidence is still forming and expectations are often in tension. Across the cases, ethics moved into practice not through statements of intent alone, but

through pacing, judgement, proportionate safeguards and decisions that could be revisited.

Founders held ethical direction by narrowing scope, staging release, retaining human judgement where risks were significant, recording why decisions were paused, and identifying the conditions under which they could resume. In some cases, they refused revenue, partnerships or routes to growth where these appeared to compromise care, fairness, privacy, inclusion or mission credibility.

Dynamic Ethical Navigation (DEN) gives a name to this route. It explains how founders seek to preserve ethical direction while adjusting scope, pace and safeguards under constraint. The VISION model organises this work across six domains: Values, Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Ownership and Navigation. The SMAG cadence makes the rhythm of ethical adjustment explicit through Scan, Measure, Anticipate and Gate. The Ethics–Technology Integration Spectrum (ETIS) and the EthOS Lifecycle provide language for examining how ethics–technology integration appears across venture routines, artefacts and organisational signatures.

Within this account, Ethical Capabilities Capital (ECC) is central. It refers to the reusable, practice-anchored capacity built through values-in-practice, codified safeguards, reflexive routines, relational credibility, assurance and escalation paths, and resource buffers. ECC helps explain how founders and teams seek to hold standards where surrounding systems, markets or institutions do not yet fully support the ethical work being attempted.

The contribution of the thesis is therefore both conceptual and practical. It offers an account of how principled intent is translated, tested and recalibrated under constraint, and a vocabulary — DEN, VISION, SMAG, ETIS and EthOS — for making that work more visible, discussable and reviewable. These tools do not certify maturity, assign moral worth or prescribe a universal path. They help show how ethical commitments may be kept active while ventures, technologies and surrounding conditions continue to change.

The appendices provide supporting materials for transparency and traceability, including the research roadmap, reflexive memo map, implementation-indicator guidance, coding

materials, theme-development records and documentary reading materials. Together, these materials support the thesis' central claim: in socially innovative, technology-based early-stage ventures, ethical responsibility is not held in intention alone. It is worked through judgement, restraint, evidence, relationships, design and repeated recalibration over time.

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS AND MODELS

Table 29: Abbreviations used in the thesis

abbreviation	meaning in this thesis
B2B	business-to-business
CSR	corporate social responsibility
DEN	theory of dynamic ethical navigation
ECC	ethical capabilities capital
EGID	ethically gated impact diffusion
ESV	early-stage venture
ETIS	ethics–technology integration spectrum, a non-hierarchical assessment model of how ethical and technological work are configured in ventures
EthOS	ethics–technology organisational signatures (lifecycle archetypes)
ICs	industry clusters (contextual grouping used in one section only)
I1–I10	implementation indicators used to evidence and compare ethics-in-practice across cases
JEDI	justice, equity, diversity and inclusion
MTI	micro-transformative innovation
OA	osmotic alignment
OBD	omission-based dissonance
Ofcom	office of communications (UK regulator)
OSA 2023	online safety act 2023
SMAG	scan, measure, anticipate, gate cadence
UK	united kingdom
VISION	values, impact, sustainability, innovation, ownership, navigation recalibration process model for ethical alignment

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Table 30: Glossary of key concepts and models used in the thesis

concept	working meaning in this thesis
a priori	categories or criteria specified in advance of analysis and applied consistently to cases (for example, a pre-defined classification rule used before or during coding).
bounded ethics	principled constraints on what a venture will and will not do, given its values, capabilities and context, even when opportunities exist to relax or bypass safeguards.
business-to-business (B2B) services	services delivered primarily to organisational clients (public, private, or third sector) rather than directly to consumers.
cohort (C1–C4)	an inductive technology-depth cohort lens derived from the implementation indicators (I1–I10), used as a descriptive aid to compare how deeply ethics is embedded in governance and technical practice; later abstracted into archetypes (A1–A4).
C1–C4 Archetypal cohort frame (analytic)	a light cross-case comparison aid used to structure descriptive comparison during analysis; it supports pattern-checking without fixing case types or implying representativeness.
companies house verification	verification of incorporation dates and officer appointments using the UK corporate register (Companies House), with website corroboration where applicable.
conflict-of-interest screen	an exclusion step applied to reduce perceived or actual role conflict, including exclusion of firms regulated by Ofcom under the Online Safety Act 2023.
documentary materials (parallel capture)	publicly available venture materials (for example, mission/impact pages, governance or policy statements, privacy notices, and filings) archived alongside interview data, with capture metadata recorded for traceability.
dynamic ethical navigation (DEN)	a mid-range theory explaining how founders of socially innovative, technology-based ESVs make and justify ethical choices under constraint, while holding direction on values and impact.
early-stage venture (ESV)	a UK-registered venture less than five years old.
emergent	categories, concepts developed inductively through engagement with the dataset during analysis (for example, a patterning frame derived during theme refinement rather than set beforehand).
ethical capabilities capital (ECC)	the accumulated skills, relationships and routines that enable a venture to detect, deliberate on and respond to ethical issues over time.
ethical governance and organisational integrity	the structures, routines and accountability practices through which ethical intent is stabilised (for example, decision rights,

concept	working meaning in this thesis
	documentation, review points, and auditability), particularly as the venture scales.
ethical navigation / ethical decision-making	the ongoing work of recognising, weighing and responding to ethical considerations in the design, governance and scaling of the venture.
ethicality	the capacity and commitment to convert moral purpose (for example, access, inclusion, transparency and care) into proportionate, defensible and increasingly verifiable practice across product, data and operations under constraint, sustained through ongoing ethical review and governance that shapes pace, scope and accountability.
ethically gated impact diffusion (EGID)	the practice of pacing and gating the diffusion of impact so that new harms are not introduced faster than safeguards can be designed and tested.
ethics–technology integration spectrum (ETIS)	a descriptive, non-hierarchical assessment model that maps how ethical considerations and technological components are combined in venture routines and artefacts. It distinguishes configurations that are more "tech-enabled" from those that are more "tech-driven", without implying moral superiority.
EthOS lifecycle	a set of four venture archetypes that characterise how ethical intent and technological development co-evolve over time, linked to ETIS modes.
founder operational definition	in this study, "founder" is operationalised as an officer (director or company secretary) Appointed on or within 60 days of incorporation and recorded as active at sampling.
gender (self-disclosed)	participant-reported gender information provided voluntarily; reported only in aggregate where included.
implementation indicators (I1–I10)	a defined set of indicators used to evidence and compare ethics-in-practice across cases (for example, governance artefacts, technical controls, verification routines, and traceable decision records), supporting allocation to cohorts C1–C4.
inclusion and representation (sampling aim)	an approach to recruitment and sampling that seeks breadth of perspectives and contexts (including attention to representation), within the limits of purposive sampling and participant availability.
incorporation timeframe	the boundary condition that eligible ventures were incorporated less than five years prior to the planned close of data-gathering (31 March 2024).
industry clusters (ICs)	a descriptive, contextual grouping used to indicate sectoral range in one section only; not treated as analytic cohorts and not used to imply sector representativeness.
information power	a qualitative sampling principle in which sufficiency is judged by the expected richness and relevance of information in relation to the study aim, sample specificity, theory use,

concept	working meaning in this thesis
	analytic strategy, and quality of dialogue, rather than by a fixed numerical target.
interview mode	how the interview was conducted (for example, remote/online video or remote audio); used as a transparency descriptor rather than as an analytic variable.
purposive sampling	a sampling approach in which cases are selected because they are expected to be information-rich and relevant to the study aim, rather than selected for statistical representativeness.
remote semi-structured interview	an interview conducted remotely using a guiding schedule with flexibility to probe, clarify, and follow relevant lines of inquiry; used here to elicit decisions, trade-offs, and justifications.
secure retention and planned deletion	a data management approach involving secure storage with controlled access and a planned deletion schedule, with completion recorded in an audit trail.
technology orientation	a descriptive classification distinguishing tech-enabled and tech-driven ventures for comparison purposes; not treated as a maturity ladder or proxy for impact.
tech-enabled	a descriptive classification where technology primarily supports delivery of a socially innovative service, and key ethical safeguards are carried mainly through people-, practice- and procedure-led controls rather than product architecture.
tech-driven	a descriptive classification where the digital product/service is central to value creation and delivery, and ethical safeguards are increasingly implemented through technical specifications, verification routines and release controls.
traceability (capture metadata)	recorded contextual details about when and how public materials were captured (for example, date/time and source page), used to support auditability and verification.
transcription accuracy checks	procedures used to confirm the accuracy of lightly denaturalised transcripts (for example, review against recordings and correction of errors) prior to analysis.
VISION model	a conceptual recalibration process model comprising six domains (values, impact, sustainability, innovation, ownership and navigation) that structures how ethical navigation is periodically reviewed and realigned. It captures recurring work through which founders adjust priorities in response to ethical, technical or contextual shifts, rather than treating decisions as isolated events.
SMAG Cadence	a recurrent pattern of scanning, measuring, anticipating and gating that structures how founders move through the VISiON domains over time.

concept	working meaning in this thesis
micro-transformative innovation (MTI)	incremental, cumulative innovation that produces public-interest benefit through small, repeated improvements rather than singular breakthrough change.
osmotic alignment (OA)	gradual alignment of people, practices and artefacts around ethical commitments through repeated, small adjustments rather than single decisions.
omission-based dissonance (OBD)	unease that arises not from wrongful acts but from perceiving that important ethical work is being left undone or delayed.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

APPENDICES

Appendix A1: Research roadmap, analytic stages, and replication steps

A1.1 Overview of the roadmap

This appendix collates the procedural checklists used to implement, document, and evidence the study's end-to-end research process. The material is presented as a replication roadmap in the sense of procedural traceability: it shows the steps taken, the sequencing logic, and the records retained to support transparency, confirmability, and method-sensitive comparison in future studies.

Qualitative research is not typically replicated as "same inputs, same outputs". However, procedural replication is feasible, supports transparency and robustness. It is intended to be a useful reference for research studies where the objective is to make implementation consistent across cases, maintain a coherent audit trail, and report methodological decisions, amendments, and deviations in a way that readers can follow.

Sections A5.3.1–A5.3.6 set out the study as six implementation phases (ethics approval through to deletion and close-out). Phase 5 contains the analysis and validation procedures. Within Phase 5, reflexive thematic analysis is presented as stages aligned to the **Chapter 3: Research methodology** analysis diagram, with member-checking included as Stage 4A (rather than treated as a standalone phase).

For researchers adapting the roadmap, the expectation is not strict duplication of each step, but explicit documentation of changes and the rationale for them. In practice, this is typically evidenced through version-controlled records such as recruitment logs, consent trackers, anonymisation logs, reflexive memos, codebooks, member-checking logs, and change logs documenting analytic decisions.

The following sections set out each implementation phase. Each phase ends with a reflexive memo so that the researcher's practical reasoning is captured consistently. To support replication, each phase below includes:

a) a short **transition**, signalling how the workflow moves into the next phase,

b) a **researcher reflexive memo entry**, recording lessons learned and methodological judgement at the end of that phase. The following sections set out each implementation phase**,** and where relevant and available,

c) an example created to complete the phase.

A1.2 Research implementation phases – Replication steps

A1.21 Phase 1: Ethics approval and readiness to recruit

Phase 1 consolidates the study design into an ethics-ready protocol, confirms that research instruments are fit for purpose, and documents the conditions under which participant contact can begin. The checklist and research process map are intended to be read as a sequence, with the final step marking the point at which recruitment can proceed.

Figure 48: Phase 1 checklist - Ethics approval and readiness to recruit

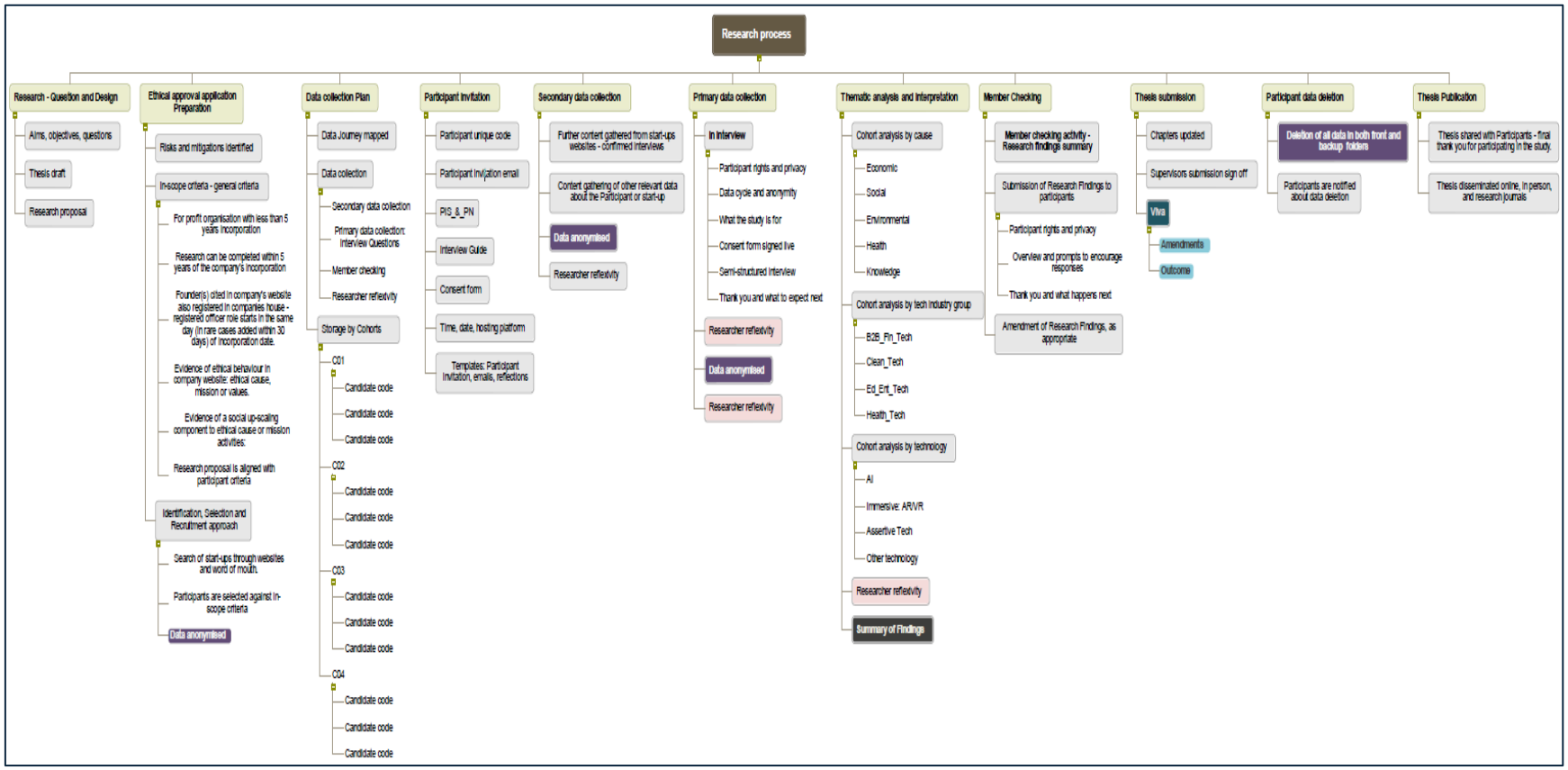
Phase 1 Checklist (as referenced in Section 3.4)

1. **Draft the ethics application (core protocol and rationale):** Prepare the ethics submission as a coherent package that specifies: the study aim; interpretivist–phenomenological stance; inclusion criteria; recruitment pathway; remote interview protocol; the intended documentary corpus (if used); a risk register; and a data-protection plan clarifying lawful basis, data storage, access controls, and deletion.
2. **Prepare participant materials (version-controlled):** Produce and version-control the participant-facing documents: Participant Information Sheet (PIS), Privacy Notice, Consent Form (with explicit consent options), and a short verbal reconfirmation script for use at the start of each interview.
3. **Add governance artefacts that evidence operational controls:** Create supporting governance documents, including: a Data Management Plan setting out the end-to-end data journey in a data-flow map; a retention/deletion schedule (including the D + 60 rule where applicable); and a conflict-of-interest screening step (e.g., excluding firms regulated by Ofcom under the Online Safety Act 2023).
4. **Submit to the University Research Ethics Committee and manage amendments clearly:**
   Log approval date, reference number, and conditions; record any clarifications and amendments requested and made.
5. **Configure secure storage and role-based access before recruitment begins:** Separate raw and processed areas; apply access restrictions; document folder structure and permissions.
6. **Record the consent workflow as an operational procedure:** Written consent pre-scheduling; verbal reconfirmation at interview start; debrief note at close.
7. **Implement GDPR safeguards and document edge-case handling:** Specify handling for incidental special-category disclosure and redaction; confirm no international transfers; record exceptions.
8. **File phase 1 outputs to the appendices and audit trail:** Store final participant materials, scripts, approval letter, risk register, COI screen, retention/deletion schedule, and data-flow map, with a short index.
9. **When to move to the next stage:** Once ethics approval and operational controls are in place, recruitment proceeds using verification-led sampling to ensure that each participant is demonstrably within scope.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.211 Research process map (example)

Figure 49: Research process map



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.212 Researcher reflexive memo (end of phase 1)

Figure 50: Phase 1 reflexive note - Ethics constraints, anticipated risks, and procedural commitments

When I think back to how the project began, I do not recall carrying a fixed picture of what 'ethicality' would look like in early-stage ventures. I held back from forming expectations on purpose, because I wanted the inquiry to stay genuinely inductive. What I did notice, though, was the gap between public-facing business narratives and lived reality: organisations that read as "strong on ethics" are still organisations trying to survive, persuade customers, and operate as businesses rather than charities. That tension, alongside the contrast between how many ventures fall away and how some persevere into viability, kept pulling me towards a simple curiosity: what does behaving ethically actually mean when survival is not guaranteed, and how do founders steer themselves towards a safety threshold where the venture can keep going.

So, at the outset, I treated Phase 1 as the point where a loose curiosity had to become a study with research integrity: clear enough to be examinable, but open enough to let founders show me what their ethicality looked like in practice. That starting position shaped what research excellence and integrity had to look like in practice. For me, it meant avoiding grand claims and building a method that made it easier for founders to speak in ordinary, experience-near terms, rather than performing a polished identity. It also meant putting discipline somewhere more concrete than intention: designing questions that were values-facing but not leading, keeping participation bounded and respectful for busy founders, and setting up an audit trail early so later explanations could be evidenced rather than narrated into coherence after the fact. The university courses helped impose that discipline in a constructive way, because they pushed me to translate curiosity into a defined aim, align questions with objectives, and treat traceability as part of integrity. My supervisors strengthened that early scaffolding too, especially through encouragement and first-year review of the literature work, which helped narrow the aim without narrowing the space for discovery.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.22 Phase 2: Participant recruitment and verification

Phase 2 operationalises sampling and recruitment in a transparent, auditable way. It makes explicit how the target population is defined, how candidates are identified and verified, and how eligibility decisions are documented. In practice, this phase functions as a quality–control step—from the sources of data to the build-up of the dataset— to safeguard traceable inclusion decisions and consistent conflict-of-interest screening.

Figure 51: Phase 2 checklist - Participant recruitment and verification

Phase 2 Checklist (as referenced in Section 3.4)

1. **Build sampling frame from traceable sources**: Companies House, company websites, social-enterprise/tech-for-good directories, sector newsletters, professional introductions.
2. **Apply inclusion criteria before contact**: UK-registered for-profit ≤5 years (as of 31 Mar 2024); digital-technology-based; explicit public-interest aim in public materials; founder = Companies House Officer appointed ≤60 days from incorporation and Active.
3. Run the Conflict of Interest (COI) screen (exclude firms regulated by Ofcom under the Online Safety Act 2023).
4. **Verify each candidate**: Companies House (dates, status, officer appointments) + website corroboration (name/number alignment); archive screenshots/PDFs with timestamps.
5. **Send personalised invitations with PIS/Consent Form**; state time (60–90 mins), confidentiality, and withdrawal rights; track dispositions in a contact log.
6. **Use initial, eligibility-checked snowballing** to widen reach if needed; record that post-interview referrals did **not** yield additional participants.
7. **Schedule interviews only after written consent**; maintain screening and verification checklists per case.
8. Make sample-adequacy judgements using information power, considering fit with the study aim, specificity of the participant group, and quality of dialogue within the bounded recruitment window, rather than treating data saturation as the governing stopping rule.
9. **File artefacts**: inclusion/verification checklist, Companies House lookup sheet, contact log with disposition codes, invitation template, note on initial snowballing, COI screen.
10. **When to move to the next stage**: After eligibility is verified and consent is secured, the workflow shifts from participant management to data generation, with corresponding changes in documentation and file handling.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.221 Data sources

An exhaustive search was undertaken to, first, identify ESV companies and second, check the displayed details against the research in-scope criteria for a 'socially innovative technology-based ESV company'. This section provides the screening source register and **the recorded counts of candidate ventures screened from each source**. Where a source presented an on-screen total (as part of the platform interface), this figure was recorded; where it did not, counts were generated by manual tally of the listed entries. Screening procedures and eligibility checks (including website and Companies House verification) are described in Phase 2 (**Chapter 3: Research methodology**).

Table 31 presents the data sources used to construct the initial screening pool of early-stage ventures (ESVs) and to verify eligibility against the study's in-scope criteria for socially innovative, technology-based ESVs. In this appendix, "screened" refers to a structured eligibility check conducted for each candidate venture using two sources: (i) publicly available venture website materials (for example, mission/impact pages, product or service descriptions, and relevant policy statements) and (ii) Companies House records (incorporation date, legal status, and officer appointments). Screening therefore involved confirming that the entity met the organisational criteria (UK registration; early-stage window; for-profit status), that the founder operational definition was met (officer appointed at or within 60 days of incorporation and active at sampling), and that the venture's publicly available language and service framing were consistent with a plausible ethical or social-innovation endeavour as set out in **Chapter 3: Research methodology**.

To widen geographic coverage at the screening stage, the source set combined city-anchored lists (for example, Aberdeen, Birmingham, Belfast, Bristol, Brighton, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford and Reading) with national and thematic directories and award or programme lists. This approach was intended to reduce reliance on any single ecosystem or directory and to increase the likelihood that eligible ventures operating across UK regions and public-interest domains entered the screening pool. The counts reported in **Table 31** indicate the number of candidate ventures screened from each source; they do not imply regional

representativeness in the final interview sample, as participation depended on eligibility confirmation and voluntary recruitment.

Table 31: Sources of information about companies in the early stage screened against the criteria of the study

Sources of information: Weblinks	Companies screened (n)
https://www.failory.com/startups/aberdeen	51
https://www.failory.com/startups/birmingham	80
https://www.failory.com/startups/brighton	74
https://www.failory.com/startups/bristol	92
https://www.failory.com/startups/edinburgh	91
https://www.failory.com/startups/glasgow	82
https://www.failory.com/startups/leeds	85
https://www.failory.com/startups/liverpool	67
https://www.failory.com/startups/london	300
https://www.failory.com/startups/manchester	95
https://www.failory.com/startups/newcastle	22
https://www.failory.com/startups/reading	73
https://bcorporation.uk/	382
https://startupstash.com/uk-startups/:~:text=Top%20UK%20Startups%20To%20Watch%20in%202023%201,8.%20Arweave%20Year%20Founded%3A%202017%20...%20More%20items	21
https://startups.co.uk/startups-100/2021/startups-100-2021/	100
https://startups.co.uk/startups-100/2023/full-list/	122
https://www.beauhurst.com/blog/top-tech-startups/	15
https://www.wired.co.uk/article/hottest-startups-oxford	4
https://techround.co.uk/sustainable-tech/top-sustainable-companies-startups/	38
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-london	1953
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-bristol	69
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-belfast	51
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-newcastle	21
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-cambridge	195
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-oxford	55
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-birmingham	43
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-manchester	160
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-leeds	51
https://www.seedtable.com/startups-brighton	22
https://www.seedtable.com/european-startup-rankings	54
https://www.seedtable.com/edtech-startups-uk	69
https://explodingtopics.com/blog/edtech-startups	8

Sources of information: Weblinks	Companies screened (n)
https://startupsoflondon.com/the-top-sustainability-startups-in-the-uk/elementor-toc__heading-anchor-0	16
https://www.tech4goodawards.com/uncategorized/finalists-announced-for-tech4good-awards-2023/:~:text=Finalists%20for%20the%202023%20AbilityNet%20Tech4Good%20Awards%201,...%208%20Digital%20Volunteer%20Award%20...%20More%20items	55
https://businesscloud.co.uk/edtech-50-vote-for-the-most-innovative-uk-education-technology-firms/	98
https://rio.websummit.com/startups/impact-startups/filters/country:United%20Kingdom/	7
https://www.jobsforgood.io/blog/top-10-mental-health-startups-in-the-uk	10
https://www.heytempo.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Tempo-Super-Startups-List-2023.pdf?	100
https://www.foundersforgood.io/	75
https://www.uktech.news/news/founder-interviews	313
https://betterbusinessact.org/supporters/	2198
https://digileaders100.com/	100
https://www.digicatapult.org.uk/expertise/blogs/post/11-deeptech-startups-to-watch-in-2023/ (digicatapult.org.uk)	11
https://grantify.io/testimonials/	22
https://watfordchamber.co.uk/members-directory/	196
https://blackequityorg.com/work-with-us/	15
https://peopleofcolorintech.com/articles/meet-the-black-led-uk-startups-joining-google-black-founders-fund-2023/	10
https://www.analyticsinsight.net/top-100-artificial-companies-in-the-world/	100
https://setsquared-bristol.co.uk/about/enterprising-women/	80
https://taxcare.org.uk/black-history-month-top-10-black-entrepreneurs-uk/	10
https://www.eu-startups.–om/directory/?dosrch=1&q=&wpbdp_view=search&listingfields%5B1%5D=&listingfi–lds%5B2%5D=900&listingfields%5B7%5D=&listingfields%5B6%5D=&listingfields%5B4%5D=-1	2381
Total	10342

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.222 Researcher reflexive memo - End of Phase 2

Figure 52: Phase 2 reflexive note - sampling judgements, recruitment barriers, and information power rationale.

Phase 2 was the point where sampling stopped being a plan on paper and became an ethical responsibility: deciding who to approach, being able to justify why, and being able to show my workings later without leaning on memory. When I look back on recruitment and verification, it is the phase I remember as the most effortful, and also the one where I felt the weight of integrity most directly. I wanted traceability in a very literal sense: I wanted to know exactly why a person or venture was on the candidate list, and to be able to reconstruct that logic cleanly. This is also where my own strengths were unmistakable. I can work through long lists, check details carefully, and keep going until the picture feels complete. I reviewed over 10,000 companies, using Companies House to confirm incorporation and founder information and then checking websites to understand what they claimed to do and why.

That approach shaped how I handled both representation and recruitment boundaries. I aimed for parity between women and men, and I looked deliberately for diversity of background and perspective, including disability and neurodiversity, as well as breadth across sectors that do not always sit in “mainstream” categories, such as biodiversity, particular tech functionalities and processes, arts and creative practice, and personal development and health, often where people were doing what felt like old things in new ways. I had hoped to reach 26 participants, but I stopped at 25 because the balance and spread were largely there (13 women and 12 men, alongside wider diversity), and because there was a firm practical boundary that mattered more than a neat target: interviews had to be completed by 31/03/2024. I did not set a “magic” number that would have required me to turn away willing participants on principle; if 40 founders had agreed within the timeframe, I would have interviewed 40. Time was the (set) constraint, not a quota.

My approach to the initial contact followed the same discipline. I kept invitations clear and bounded: confidentiality, withdrawal rights, and the reassurance that I would share a summary of the study’s findings for comment so participants could flag anything they felt was inaccurate or unfair. I also tried to make contact feel specific rather than generic, by telling people where I had found them and what I considered distinctive about their perspective. I sent an initial invitation and then one final message, explicitly framed as the last contact, partly out of respect for inbox boundaries and partly so it could not reasonably be read as ongoing processing of personal data. When prospective participants said they did not have the time or resources to take part, I accepted that without pressure or persuasion, because I did not want recruitment persistence to become part of what the study asked of them.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.23 Phase 3: Data collection

Phase 3 specifies how the interview dataset and case-matched documentary corpus were produced, alongside the supporting documentation that evidences when, how, and under what conditions the data were generated. The checklist is structured around preparation, conduct, immediate post-interview documentation, transcription, and case-level linkage.

Figure 53: Phase 3 checklist - Data collection

Phase 3 Checklist (as referenced in Section 3.4)

1. Interview schedule and session materials: Create an interview planner and prepare an interview script with timings and transitions: welcome, research overview, questions grouped by topic, prompts and close to ensure good time management and adherence to a semi-structured dialog.
2. Pre interview operational steps to ensure adequate data collection: prepare to record using a secure platform, open the interview script, once ready, follow the script: introductions, note recording will start (before executing), confirm purpose and structure of interview, recording permissions (pre-session and at session start), participant right to withdraw, confidentiality and data protections; request a verbal consent
3. Interview: **(typically 60–90 minutes): follow** a consistent session structure, announcing transition points to a new topic/group of questions; manage expectations and give reassurances: "this is a safe space", "If I ask a question that you feel you already answered, please bear with me as I am simply trying to extract a greater perspective", "there are no wrong answers".
4. Dos and don'ts:

a) **Do: listen silently until the participant has finished speaking** (adding a few seconds of silence), give clarifications when asked, and ensure an attentive, non-judgemental gaze; navigate the script with prompts to unearth greater substance.
b) **Do: use the first two interviews as 'sounding' interviews** and document any refinements; maintaining the principle that changes are refinements to delivery rather than substantive shifts in the research focus.
c) **Do not:** make a blank stare, interrupt, finish participants' points, give advice, use offensive language, ask questions more intrusive than scripted, digress too much from the script.

5. Post interview: Save the recording and complete immediate post-interview documentation, including field notes.
6. Update the participant and case logs (administrative traceability) to reflect interview completion and any agreed follow-up actions.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.231 Researcher (semi-structured) interview schedule and prompts (final version)

Study title: Understanding how socially innovative technology-based start-ups define and apply ethicality to their decision-making.

Opening and consent (standardised start)

1. Thank you for joining the study and for sharing your perspective.

2. Before we start: do you have any questions about the study? Was everything I sent to you clear?

3. Thank you for providing me with your written consent to participate in the study. If you do not have any other questions, could you also provide me with your verbal consent here and now before we start? *(Prepared prompt if needed, typically not required: "You can simply say 'I give consent to participate in the study' or 'I am happy to participate in the study'.")*

4. Just to note: there may be questions that feel like you have already answered them. The reason I may ask again is that I want to cover a specific area, but I do not want to influence your answer or your thought process.

5. This interview is structured into four parts, as you will have seen from your interview guide. I will go through each part and ask questions that relate to the research objectives. Some questions may sound obvious or overlapping; if so, it is because they allow another opportunity to add detail from a different angle. Thank you for bearing with me.

6. To start with a question outside the four parts: could you tell me about yourself, your organisation, and your aims within it?

Transition to Part 1 (signposted in-session): Thank you. We will begin the main interview. The first part is the biggest one and it may overlap with the other parts. That's

to be expected. Once we complete this set of questions I note we ready to transition to the next Part of our discussion and so on, until the fourth and last set of Questions.

Part 1: defining ethicality and how it shapes moral issue identification and action

Aim: explore how socially innovative technology-based start-ups define ethicality, and how that definition affects how moral issues are identified, assessed, and acted upon.

7. How do you define ethicality: the quality or state of being ethical in the context of your company's mission?

8. What does behaving ethically mean to you?

9. What does being ethical mean to you?

10. Prompts (if helpful): do you have a defined criterion for being ethical? What does behaving ethically entail to you?

11. Why have you adopted this notion of ethicality?

12. Prompt: did you arrive at it organically or as a conscious decision?

13. What was your process to arrive at your notion of being ethical?

14. Follow-up: has this changed over time? If so, was the change organic or deliberate?

15. What ethical endeavours do you consider within your definition of ethicality, and why?

Prompts: which endeavours have greatest weight in decisions? Which ones are deliberately prioritised?

16. How does being ethical (as you define it) affect how you assess ethical endeavours?

Follow-up: how does this affect your final decision-making?

17. Prompt: what elements of your ethicality are considered in the decision process?

18. Are the ethical endeavours you focus on fulfilling your notion of being ethical? Follow-up: are there other endeavours you would like to pay greater attention to? Can you give an example?

19. How does your adopted concept of ethicality influence your decision-making process in practice?

20. Prompt: how does your idea of being ethical affect how you make decisions and act on them?

21. How do you know your definition of ethicality is right (or "good enough")?

22. Does your notion of ethicality permeate the entire decision-making process, or are there times when the final decision does not fully align with your defined ethical ideal?
    Prompt: do you apply your notion of ethicality to the final decision?

23. Does your notion of ethicality affect how you act upon decisions?

24. Follow-up: are there times when outcomes are misaligned with your definition of ethicality?

Transition to Part 2 (signposted in-session): Thank you. Let's into the next part now, which focuses on how ethicality is applied in relation to technology and socially innovative endeavours.

Part 2: applying ethicality through technology and socially innovative endeavours

Aim: understand how the definition of ethicality is applied in relation to technology use for decision-making and socially innovative practice.

25. Do you have all the resources to process decisions in line with your defined notion of ethicality?

26. Follow-up: if not, how does that affect your decision-making and actions?

27. How do you decide which technological resources to adopt?

Follow-up: how does adopted technology affect delivery of socially innovative endeavours?

Follow-up: how does adopted technology affect decision-making?

28. What are the positive aspects and challenges of using technology to deliver socially innovative endeavours?

29. Follow-up: what are the positives and challenges in the context of your mission?

Transition to Part 3: Thank you. I am going to move into the next part, which is about how you decide what socially innovative approach to adopt.

Part 3: selecting a socially innovative approach

Aim: establish how the organisation decides which socially innovative approach to adopt.

30. Is there a particular socially innovative approach that you apply towards decision-making?

Follow-up: can you describe it and how you arrived at it?

31. How do you decide which socially innovative approach to adopt?

32. Transition to Part 4: Thank you. We will now move into the final part, which focuses on what principles, returns, or outcomes drive decisions.

Part 4: decision drivers, principles, returns, and perceived obligations

Aim: ascertain what principles, returns, or outcomes drive decisions in socially innovative technology-based start-ups.

33. What principles, returns, or outcomes drive your decisions?

Prompt (if needed): what drives your decisions in practice?

34. Do you consider your personal principles differ from your professional principles? If so, how?

35. What do you consider your personal and organisational roles to be within society? Prompt: what do you believe you owe society, as individuals and as a business?

Closing (announced final questions):

36. We are coming to the last two questions now.

37. The first may feel quite direct and could be triggering: what do you believe you owe society?

38. **Final question:** if you have a message for the world, for those in your community, or for anyone accessing the information around this study—however you would like that to apply—what might that message be?

Close: An opportunity to thank the participant for taking part in the study; ask if there's anything else they would like to add or need clarification over, note the next stage of the study – Member-Checking – and give brief description and remind them of their right to withdraw from the study within 14 days of the interview, and note that if they know of anyone else that might be interested and benefit from taking part in the study, to please reach out as the study is designed so as to gather as much diverse and representative data as possible.

A1.232 Researcher reflexive memo - End of Phase 3

Figure 54: Phase 3 reflexive note - interview encounter conditions, rapport, and early interpretive sensitivities

Phase 3, as I understood and experienced it, was the point where the study became an interaction: creating the conditions for a careful conversation while staying alert to the fact that an interview is never neutral, and that my presence, pacing, and wording could shape what was possible to say. When I think back to the interviews, I remember I wanted the space to be truly semi-structured, safe, and worth the effort for founders who were already busy, often stretched, and not obliged to give me their time. I kept the tone steady and the questions values-facing, but I worked hard to avoid steering people towards a polished moral narrative or the vocabulary they might assume I wanted.

I also remember noticing how often meaning sat in the way people arrived at an answer, not only in the answer itself. There were pauses, careful restarts, small recalibrations, and moments where someone seemed to decide how frank to be about constraint, trade-offs, or limits. I did not treat that as evidence in its own right. I kept it as reflexive context, because I wanted to remain honest about interview dynamics without sliding into inference as if it were data. That distinction mattered to me. It shaped how I behaved in the room: I stayed consistent in pacing, I did not fill silences too quickly, and I stayed bounded when someone seemed tired or time-pressed. My final questions were designed to invite synthesis rather than extraction, and I held them lightly: what do you believe you owe society, and what message would you send to your world. Those prompts could shift the energy and carry weight, so I treated them as an opening, not a demand. If someone met them with brevity, that was enough; the point was to make space for reflection, not to push for disclosure.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.24 Phase 4: Data protection and processing

Phase 4 documents how recordings and associated materials were converted into an anonymised dataset under a controlled workflow. The phase addresses confidentiality, traceability, file integrity, and time-bound retention, with each action evidenced through logs and structured artefacts.

Figure 55: Phase 4 checklist – Data Protection and Processing

Phase 4 Checklist (as referenced in Section 3.4)

1. Transcribe audio using assistive technology and denaturalised conventions (verbatim wording; minimal filler notation); apply the transcript header.
2. Run a line-by-line accuracy check against audio; flag any residual uncertainties in margin notes.
3. Anonymise: replace direct identifiers (names, companies, exact locations/URLs/registration numbers) with stable pseudonyms; generalise indirect identifiers (rare roles, distinctive sectors, precise revenues/dates) to safer ranges/categories; record all transformations in an anonymisation log.
4. Store the linkage key separately on encrypted media with researcher-only access.
5. Segregate storage: Raw (audio, raw transcripts, linkage key) vs Processed (anonymised transcripts, documentary pack); apply role-based access controls.
6. Generate checksums (e.g., SHA-256) to prove file integrity and support an audit trait for finalised files; set read-only flags after verification; maintain a checksum register.
7. **Maintain a data map** linking raw inputs, anonymised outputs and their locations to preserve traceability without exposing identities.
8. Back up both stores on institution-managed encrypted systems; implement the retention timetable (deletion at D + 60).
9. **File artefacts**: anonymisation rules with worked examples, anonymisation log + linkage-key note, transcript header template, data map, checksum register, retention/deletion schedule aligned to UK/EU GDPR.
10. **When to move to the next stage**: With an analysis-ready dataset secured, phase 5 describes how analysis, validation, and supplementary comparative procedures were conducted. Within phase 5, the reflexive thematic analysis is presented as staged work, not phases (aligned to **Chapter 3: Research methodology)**.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.241 Researcher reflexive memo - End of Phase 4

Figure 56: Phase 4 reflexive note - Data protection and processing

In Phase 4, analysis marked the transition from organising interview material to sustained, systematic engagement with the full dataset. This phase did not operate as a single, linear step. It unfolded through repeated passes across all transcripts, returns to earlier coding decisions, cross-case checks, incremental revisions.

This sat *before* coding because it captured the practical conditions that made the later analytic claims defensible (for example, transcript completeness, consistent file naming/anonymisation, and a traceable link between extracts, codes, and source materials).

Braun and Clarke's published Reflexive Thematic Analysis begin with familiarisation. However, in practice, Phase 4 often overlapped with the Familiarisation Stage in Phase 5 (data analysis) so it was important to remain aware of the requirement to execute tasks explicitly aimed at securing the "readiness" stage; to ensure the dataset and workspace were stable and auditable before analysis could begin in earnest.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.25 Phase 5: Data Analysis, Member-checking and Finalisation

Phase 5 describes how the study moved from an analysis-ready corpus (secured and anonymised in Phase 4) into a structured analytic workspace and a traceable interpretive workflow. It is written as a clear, stepwise account aligned with the **Chapter 3: Research methodology** outline, while recognising that reflexive thematic analysis involves revisiting earlier decisions and refining interpretations over repeated engagement with the dataset. The analytic backbone follows Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis principles, with additional distinct procedural components—memo-writing, member feedback as a bounded resonance check, cohort framing, and parallel documentary reading—built into this Phase to accommodate context-specific practices, and to make the operationalisation transparent and auditable. The objective is to support interpretive depth while maintaining procedural transparency through version control, a documented audit trail, and explicit links between extracts, codes, developing themes, and final claims (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Table 32 presents a summary of Braun and Clarke's (2019,2021) thematic analysis Stages, with an illustrative example and a project-specific application. It is included to show the progression logic from immersion through coding to definition and reporting.

Table 32: Overview of Thematic Analysis process and progression based in Braun & Clarke's (2019, 2021) Model (reflecting Figure 13 *in Section* ***3.4****).*

Stage	Objective	Description	Example from the Research Project
1. Familiarisation with the data	Gain a close, situated understanding of each case before coding.	Repeatedly read all interview transcripts to gain a triangulated understanding of the data. Note recurring words, phrases, and initial impressions regarding ethical considerations and business strategies.	Repeatedly reviewing interview transcripts to understand how founders described ethical values, boundary decisions, social impact aims and technology integration; developing an understanding of recurring tensions and contextual variation across cases.
2. Initial coding **(semantic and latent)**	Generate descriptive and interpretive codes at semantic and latent levels.	Systematically identify noteworthy patterns and features within the data. Assign short, descriptive codes to segments of text reflecting specific concepts and ideas.	Assigning codes such as "ethical collaboration", "profit maximisation", "sustainable practices", "impact measurement", "user-centric design", and "technological integration" to relevant sections of the interview transcripts.
2A — Memo-writing and constant comparison	Record analytic moves and test developing ideas.	Write memos to document why codes were created/ merged/ split; compare within and across cases to test whether a pattern holds beyond a small subset; use memos to surface alternative readings and to note where evidence is thin or ambiguous.	Writing memos alongside coding (e.g., why a code boundary was tightened, where two codes overlapped, what counted as disconfirming evidence), and using constant comparison to check whether early interpretations held across cohorts rather than reflecting a single sector or participant.
3. Generating candidate **themes and sub-**themes	Cluster related codes into coherent patterns of meaning.	Identify recurring patterns and connections across the codes; group similar codes based on relationships, creating potential overarching themes; clearly define each theme, providing concise and descriptive names that capture the essence of each category; after theme naming and boundary finalisation, a non-exclusive thematic density read-out (participant distribution by sub-sub-theme) was produced as a reporting aid to indicate spread across cases, without treating prevalence as a proxy for importance (Braun and Clarke, 2022)	Grouping codes related to ethical alignment, social impact practice and responsible technology use; identifying patterns around responsibility, evidence, stakeholder engagement, user-centred design and JEDI principles. This led to the development of three main themes.

Stage	Objective	Description	Example from the Research Project
3A – Parallel cohort analysis **(cross case frame)**	Create a cross-case frame to support comparison.	Construct a cohort matrix or frame to compare how themes concentrate, vary, or present differently across cohorts; treat this as exploratory and contextual, not as fixing typologies prematurely.	Building a cross-case cohort table linking participants to cohort categories and tracking where candidate themes were denser or more diffuse, to support careful comparison without treating cohort differences as deterministic.
4. Reviewing and refining themes	Test fit, distinctiveness and coverage; refine boundaries.	Re-examine the entire dataset in light of the identified themes; ensure that themes accurately represent the data, refining definitions and boundaries as necessary; check for coherence, completeness, and the absence of significant overlooked patterns.	Revising theme definitions, sub-themes, and code groupings to ensure alignment with the data; adding, removing, or adjusting codes to refine the themes based on their relationships and accuracy in representing the findings.
4A — Member feedback (resonance check)	Share findings with the participants and integrate clarifications.	Share a bounded summary of the interpretation for comment; record clarifications and corrections; treat feedback as contextual input rather than automatic "validation"; document what changed and what did not.	Sending participants a findings summary for comment; logging where wording was clarified for accuracy/fairness; recording any requested corrections; retaining a note of decisions where no change was made (and why), to keep the process transparent.
4B — Cohort comparisons (exploratory)	Examine contextual patterning without fixing types.	Revisit cohort patterning after theme review to see whether differences persist once boundaries are refined; record pattern statements cautiously and note alternative explanations (sector, regulation, maturity, product type).	Checking whether theme emphasis varied by cohort after refinements (e.g., where governance and verification practices appeared more prominent, or where care/protection language was more concentrated), while recording that these comparisons were exploratory and not definitive typologies.
4C—Parallel documentary reading	Locate interview accounts within organisational context and public record	Review relevant organisational and public documents (e.g., mission statements, governance/privacy texts, Companies House filings) to contextualise interview claims; use documents to situate or corroborate context, not to replace interview evidence.	Reading public materials and corporate records alongside interviews to understand how founders presented purpose, governance and technology choices externally; using this to support contextual interpretation and to strengthen traceability of sampling and organisational framing.

Stage	Objective	Description	Example from the Research Project
5. Completing the thematic structure (Define and name themes)	Finalise analytic focus and define each concept, inc. sub-sub-themes.	Clearly define each theme, providing concise and descriptive names that capture the essence of each category. This involves ensuring that themes are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive.	Finalising the three main themes: “Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance”, “Social impact strategy”, and “Tech for good: compliance, challenges and solutions”. Theme names, sub-themes and sub-sub-themes were refined to improve clarity while preserving the meanings generated through the analysis.
6. Producing the final narrative	Integrate themes and evidence into a transparent narrative.	Construct a coherent narrative that integrates the identified themes and sub-themes. Illustrate each theme with supporting quotes and examples from the data, ensuring transparency and maintain methodological rigour.	Writing a report that presents the three main themes, supported by detailed descriptions of the sub-themes, key findings, codes, and relevant quotations from the interviews. This report clearly articulates the relationship between the data, the analysis, and the conclusions.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

The next section sets out the replication-oriented steps used in the study, organised Stage-by-Stage to match the overview sequence.

A1.251 Phase 5: Stage-by-Stage replication steps

Stage 1: Familiarisation with the data

a) Objective: Gain a close understanding of each case prior to formal coding

Figure 57: Stage 1 Checklist – Familiarisation with the data

Stage 1: Familiarisation with the data

1. Re-read each anonymised transcript in full, alongside its associated field notes.
2. When conducting the documentary analysis, where items form part of the case context, use these to support situational understanding (without treating them as confirmatory evidence).
3. Write a one-sentence attribution note to paraphrase salient passages, capturing what the passage appears to be doing in the account.
4. Assign a short provisional label (typically two or three words) to those paraphrased passages to support later code development
5. Record brief reflexive notes (for example, uncertainties, interpretive questions, and early hunches), separating observation from inference.
6. Replication outputs: Dated familiarisation notes per case; paraphrase-and-label annotations; early reflexive note entries.
7. Transition to Stage 2: Once a case-level grasp of meaning and context is established, initial coding proceeds with greater interpretive sensitivity.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo – Stage 1

Figure 58: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 1: familiarisation with the data

This stage required repeated reading of each transcript as a whole case, so that later coding did not strip statements from their context. Here, familiarisation was used to build a grounded sense of each founder's venture conditions, constraints, and decision contexts before any attempt was made to classify or compare them.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 2: Initial coding (semantic and latent)

a) Objective: Conduct inductive initial coding, attending to both explicit content and underlying organising logics

Figure 59: Stage 2 Checklist - Initial coding (semantic and latent)

Stage 2: Initial coding (as referenced in Section 3.4)

1. Group the labels gathered in Stage 1, read the narrative again and identify both saturated ideas and outliers.
2. Code each case systematically at:
   a) semantic level (what is explicitly stated, described, or claimed) and
   b) latent level (implied assumptions, tensions, omissions, and organising logics)
3. Maintain a living codebook that records, for each code:
   a) a short definition, inclusion and exclusion notes, and a brief example (paraphrased where necessary to minimise re-identification risk)
   b) date each codebook revision and log substantive changes (new codes introduced; codes merged, renamed, or retired) with a short rationale
   c) note code distribution descriptively (which cases and which decision incidents a code appears in), without presenting this as a statistical claim
4. Replication outputs: Versioned codebook; coded working transcripts; dated change log for codebook revisions.
5. Transition to Stage 2A: As the code set develops, memo-writing and constant comparison are used to test interpretations and document boundary and negative instances.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Table 33 exemplifies how codes were clustered into themes and grouped themes in the study. It should be read as a consolidation artefact representing a mid-stage rather than final architecture.

Table 33: Thematic analysis (example): codes, themes and grouped themes identified

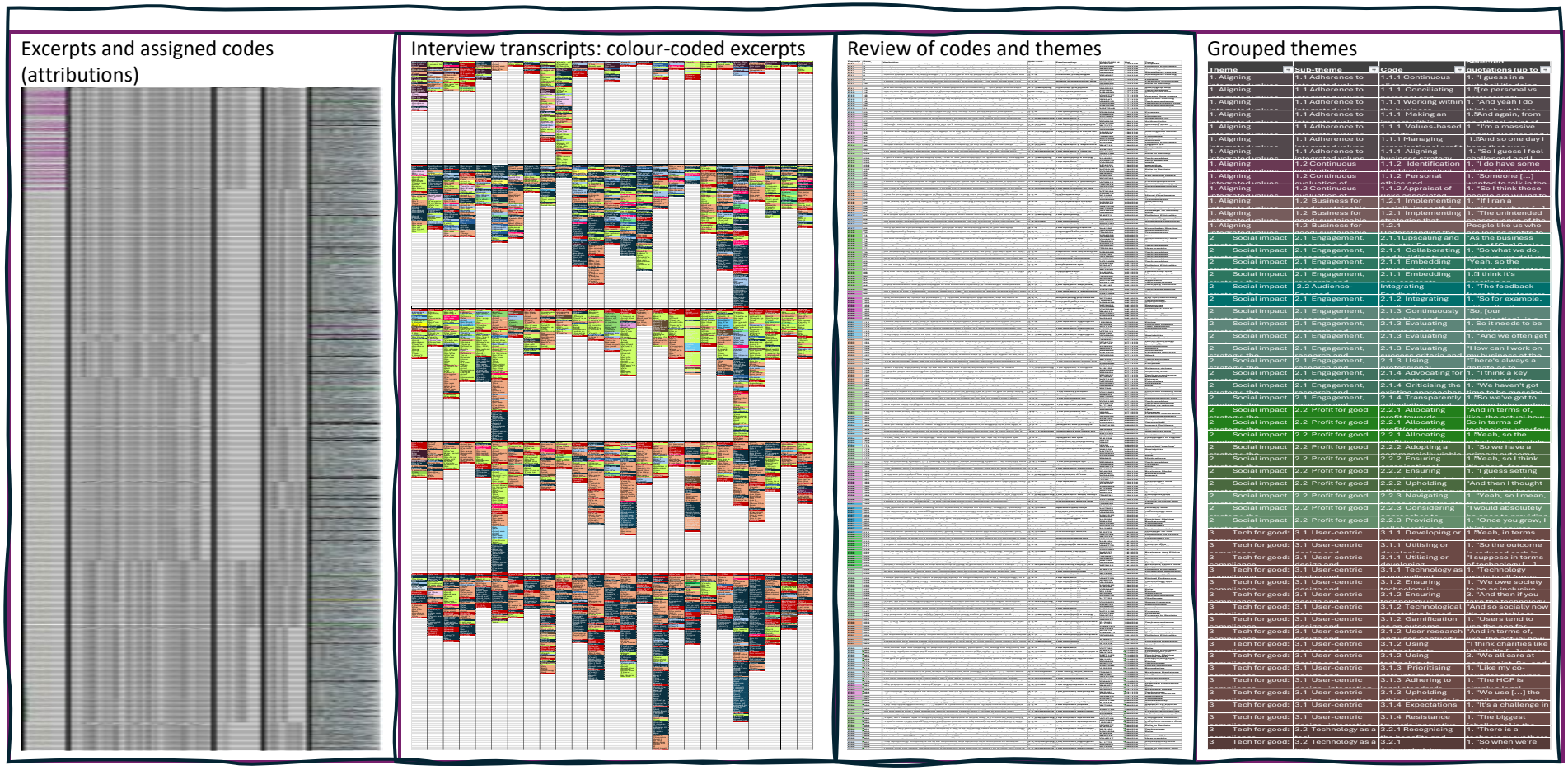
Codes	**Themes identified**	**Grouped themes**
Alignment with core values, alignment of business goals and ethical values, business-ethics alignment, strategic alignment, alignment with business strategy, ethical collaboration and conduct boundary setting, continuous assessment/evaluation and (re) definition or (re) integration of values.	Core values: adherence, alignment, boundaries, assessment, values (re) integration.	Business for good: values, mission and decision-making approaches
Networking, collaborating, upscaling, awareness raising, teaching/advocating/socially embedding new concepts, audience engagement, audience focus, audience interest, audience well-being, audience consideration, client evaluation/feedback, impact measurement, client relationship building, knowledge sharing.	Approaches to delivering the mission.	Socially innovative approaches: social osmosis
Communication of ethical values, truthfulness, advocacy, communication of values, communication strategy, transparent communication, articulation of ethical stances, transparency about decisions, open communication practices, clear communication, transparency in communication, ethical messaging about world view, humanity, future, people, planet, change, improvement, challenges, obstacles, lessons learned.	Ethical messaging and truth-telling.	Socially innovative approaches: social osmosis
Balancing ethical considerations and business goals, balance in decision-making, decision support, principles for ethical decision-making, framework for decision-making, regulatory alignment/compliance, continuous assessment/evaluation.	Decision-making framework, tools, legal and regulatory compliance.	Business for good: values, mission and decision-making approaches
Corporate social responsibility, actions and initiatives, engagement in community and social issues, social impact strategies. Environmental considerations in business, sustainable business practices, reducing environmental impact. Business goals, business goals alignment, business model, business models, business structure, business-ethics alignment, business integrity, business boundaries. Sustainability alignment, sustainability goals, sustainability objectives, sustainable business, sustainable practices, social responsibility, social impact, social impact criteria, social impact funding, social impact outcomes, social impact principle, social impact projects, social impact provision, social impact water provision, long-term benefits of ethical practices, ethical business impact, benefits of social responsibility.	Mission orientation: business principles, strategy and model.	Business for good: values, mission and decision making approaches

Codes	Themes identified	Grouped themes
Financial constraints, financial impact, financial sustainability, financial viability, profit allocation, profit balance, profit balancing, profit for good, profit over ethics, profit utilisation, profitability balance, profit-social balance, profit-social impact balance, revenue allocation.	Revenue (re) allocation, resourcing and financial limitations.	Socially innovative approaches: social osmosis
Research and verification, user research, innovation, social innovation, social innovation criteria, social innovation drive, social innovation goals, continuous evaluation, evaluation criteria, evaluation of ethical integration success, success evaluation, success measurement.	Research, evaluation and impact measurement.	Socially innovative approaches: social osmosis
Accuracy assurance, accuracy verification, compliance, compliance obstacles, confidentiality, confidentiality prioritisation, GDPR compliance, data protection and privacy.	Technological legal and regulatory compliance, information accuracy and verification methods.	Tech for good: purpose, challenges, integration and compliance.
Advantages/potential of tech, tech applications for humanity/sustainability, balancing technology and ethical values, technology ethics framework, ethical technology use; ethical considerations in AI, AI verification, being the interface between people and science/tech, closing the tech gap.	Technology and ethics	Tech for good: purpose, challenges, integration and compliance.
Technology as tool, resource issues, Technology access, acceptance/uptake, technology gap, knowledge gap, early-stage/undeveloped tech, avoiding problematic AI applications, AI fallibility, avoiding blind trust, blind trust in technology, AI advantages, AI integration, AI usage, AI utilisation, AI verification.	Technological limitations, reliability, acceptance and access.	Tech for good: purpose, challenges, integration and compliance.
User research, user-centricity, usability, accessibility, inclusion topic gamification, and technological adaptation based on feedback/research, transparency, data, trustworthiness, reliability and user empowerment, tech integration process, tech value/purpose.	User-centric approaches	Tech for good: purpose, challenges, integration and compliance.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Figure 60 collates (semi-blurred) examples of intermediate analytic exercises retained as evidence of interpretive development (for example, excerpt attribution, colour-coded transcript working, and code/theme review).

Figure 60: Thematic analysis Gallery of figures exemplifying different analytical Stages (exercises)



Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo - Stage 2

Figure 61: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 2: coding decisions and boundary issues

This stage involved systematic coding across the dataset, capturing both what participants explicitly said (semantic) and the underlying assumptions or logics that were consistently implied (latent), while keeping the two analytically distinct. In this study, coding was applied across the full dataset rather than selectively, to reduce the risk that early "interesting" accounts over-shaped the frame.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 2A: Memo-writing and constant comparison

a) Objective: Record analytic moves and test developing interpretations against variation within the dataset.

Figure 62: Stage 2A Checklist - Memo-writing and constant comparison

Stage 2A: Memo-writing and constant comparison - Checklist

1. **Write short structured memos during coding to capture**: emerging claims, alternative explanations, interpretive questions, and boundary decisions (each memo time-stamped)
2. **Use constant comparison to record:**

a) confirming instances (strong fit with an emerging interpretation)
b) boundary instances (partial or conditional fit) and
c) negative instances (tensions, contradictions, or apparent absences)

3. **Document whether negative or boundary instances suggest:** (i) refining a code, (ii) adjusting theme boundaries, or (iii) treating the issue as a contextual condition to be examined later through supplementary procedures
4. **Replication outputs:** Memo log with timestamps; comparison notes keyed to case IDs and transcript locations; boundary/negative instance records.
5. **Transition to Stage 3:** Once codes are sufficiently developed and memo evidence is accumulating, codes are clustered into candidate themes.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo - Stage 2A

Figure 63: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 2A: interpretive testing and uncertainty

> This stage required writing alongside coding: noting why a code was applied, what it seemed to capture, and where it did not travel well across cases. Memos were used as a running test of emerging interpretations, with constant comparison applied to check whether apparent patterns were genuinely recurrent or context-bound.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 3: Generating candidate themes and sub-themes

a) Objective: Develop candidate themes through repeated clustering and boundary-setting exercises.

Figure 64: Stage 3 Checklist - Generating candidate themes and sub-themes

Stage 3: Generating candidate themes and sub-themes

1. **Group related codes into candidate themes** and, where necessary, candidate sub-themes
2. **Draft a short working definition for each candidate theme describing**:
   - the central organising concept
   - the analytic claim the theme supports and
   - what is in scope versus out of scope
3. **Produce explicit inclusion and exclusion rules for candidate themes** to reduce drift
4. **Begin and maintain a theme-evolution table** recording candidate names, constituent codes, boundary rules, and the rationale for changes (splits, merges, renames, re-scoping)
5. **Repeat the clustering exercise using an alternative arrangement approach** (for example, re-clustering by decision type, by constraint type, or by mechanism) and compare outputs to confirm whether the emerging thematic structure remains stable

2. Replication outputs: Candidate theme briefs; inclusion/exclusion rules; theme-evolution table.

3. Transition to Stage 3A: A structured cross-case lens is then applied as a parallel procedure to support comparison and contextual interpretation.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo - Stage 3

Figure 65: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 3: theme candidates and boundary logic

This stage involved moving from code lists to provisional theme clusters, treating themes as tentative explanations of patterned meaning rather than as labels applied for convenience. In this project, candidate themes were drafted, revised, and re-drafted with reference back to coded extracts to ensure they were earned by the data rather than imposed by familiar theory language.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 3A: Parallel cohort analysis (cross-case frame)

a) Objective: Create a cross-case frame that supports comparison without treating the analysis as typological classification

Figure 66: Stage 3A Checklist - Parallel cohort analysis (cross-case frame)

1. **Define the cohort frame purpose** (contextual comparison and pattern-checking, not statistical inference)
2. **Specify the comparative indicators and anchor descriptions** (what constitutes low/medium/high evidence for each indicator)
3. **Populate a cohort worksheet using evidence** pointers (transcript locations and/or documentary artefacts)
4. **Run side-by-side comparisons** to examine distributional patterning and boundary cases
5. **Record interpretive implications as memos** (for example, whether a pattern appears cohort-specific, technology-depth-specific, or cross-cutting)
6. **Replication outputs:** Cohort worksheet; evidence anchors; comparison grids; cohort analysis memo notes.
7. **Transition to Stage 4**: Candidate themes are returned to the full dataset and tested for fit, distinctiveness, and evidential adequacy.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo - Stage 3A

Figure 67: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 3A: cohort lens interpretation limits

This stage required constructing a structured comparison frame so that similarities and differences could be examined without collapsing cases into types too early. Here, the cohort frame was used to map where patterns concentrated or diverged across different venture contexts and degrees of technology integration, while keeping interpretation exploratory.

Stage 4: Reviewing and refining potential themes

a) Objective: Test candidate themes as analytic constructs across the dataset and refine boundaries where overlap or weakness is identified.

Figure 68: Stage 4: Reviewing and refining potential themes

1. Test each candidate theme against the full dataset, checking:
   a) evidential adequacy across relevant cases
   b) internal coherence (does the theme hold together as a pattern of meaning?)
   c) distinctiveness (does it add something analytically non-redundant?)

2. Refine theme boundaries where overlap or ambiguity is identified

3. Collapse weak themes that do not sustain an analytic claim and/or split themes that have become overly broad

4. Explicitly revisit boundary and negative instances to confirm whether: they delimit the theme, indicate a sub-theme, or suggest an alternative organising concept.

5. Record all refinements in the theme-evolution table with concise rationales

6. Replication outputs: Revised theme definitions; updated theme-evolution table; boundary/negative case notes linked to refined definitions.

7. Transition to Stage 4A: Once themes are stable enough to be communicated responsibly, participant feedback is used as a resonance and accuracy check.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo - Stage 4

Figure 69: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 4: refinements and trade-offs

This stage involved stress-testing candidate themes against the full dataset: checking coverage, trimming overlap, and refining boundaries so that themes remained distinct and defensible. In this study, the first major model shift began to crystallise here: an initial VIS framing (values, impact, sustainability) was treated as useful but incomplete, and the review work made it increasingly clear that additional meso/micro elements were required to reflect what founders were describing.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 4A: Member feedback (resonance check)

a) Objective: share findings with the participants and integrate clarifications

Figure 70: Stage 4A checklist - Member-checking (resonance check)

1. Confirm the purpose, scope, and safeguards of member-checking
2. Prepare the participant member-checking pack, including anonymised and replication-ready reports and email covers; and complete a confidentiality and risk review before sending the emails.
3. **Stage 1 member-checking:** prepare an email cover using a consistent communication workflow and email the pack reiterating confidentiality, voluntary participation, and scope of feedback sought; allow a defined response window (e.g. 14 days). Provide accessible response options that preserve auditability.
   (a) Monitor returns and manage follow-ups.
   (b) Record responses systematically and map analytic implications.
   (c) Review feedback, verify factual accuracy and identify the changes in meaning and interpretation
   (d) Amend analysis where corrections are evidenced and applicable (without treating feedback as a vote) Incorporate clarifications that strengthen accuracy Where feedback conflicts, record the tension and explain how it was handled.
   (e) For each feedback item, record an outcome status (accept / modify / decline) and rationale tied to evidence and safeguards.
4. **Stage 2 member-checking:** Amend and send the anonymised summary, noting what changed and why.
5. **Replication outputs:** Member-checking packs; feedback log; secure-circulation note.
6. **Transition to Stage 4B:** After member feedback is handled, exploratory cohort comparisons are used to check contextual patterning without fixing types.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo - Stage 4A

Figure 71: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 4A: handling feedback and representation

This stage involved returning a structured summary of the emerging thematic account to participants and recording any clarifications that were offered. In this project, member feedback operated as a bounded accuracy and resonance check, with any adjustments documented as part of the audit trail rather than presented as a separate "data source".

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 4B: Cohort comparisons (exploratory)

a) Objective: Examine contextual patterning across cohorts as an interpretive support, without presenting cohorts as deterministic explanatory categories.

Figure 72: Stage 4B checklist - Cohort analysis (comparative layer)

1. **Confirm the comparative purpose and limits:** State that cohort comparison is used to support contextual interpretation and pattern-checking, not to infer causality or generalise statistically.
2. **Specify the cohort frame and evidence anchors**: Define cohorts and the comparative indicators in operational terms, including what counts as evidence and where it is located (transcript pointers and/or documentary artefacts).
3. **Populate the cohort worksheet**: Enter scores/markers only where evidence is present and record the pointer for each entry. Distinguish "absence of evidence" from "evidence of absence".
4. **Run structured comparisons**: Use side-by-side grids to examine concentrations, boundary cases, and cross-cutting patterns.
5. **Record interpretive notes and alternative explanations**: Log plausible interpretations and competing explanations (for example, stage effects; domain constraints; technology depth).
6. **Feed implications back into theme refinement cautiously**: Use cohort notes to qualify claims, clarify where patterns appear context-conditioned, and identify where further checking against the dataset is needed.
7. **Archive comparative artefacts**: File the cohort worksheet, evidence anchors, grids, and interpretive memos as part of the audit trail.
8. **Replication outputs**: Cohort worksheet; evidence anchors; comparison grids; cohort memos.
9. **Transition to Stage 4C:** In parallel, documentary reading is used to situate interview accounts within organisational context and public record.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo

Figure 73: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 4B: comparison boundaries and over-claim risk

> This stage required looking across cohorts for contextual patterning while deliberately avoiding premature typologising. Here, comparisons were used to explore whether certain ethical–technological issues appeared to cluster by venture conditions, without treating those clusters as fixed categories at that point.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Implementation indicator matrix: analytical basis, scoring manual and interpretive use

i. Purpose and analytical status

This appendix explains the analytical basis, scoring logic and interpretive use of the implementation indicator matrix that supported the descriptive C1–C4 cohort frame used in the thesis.

The matrix was developed after the primary thematic analysis, once the thematic structure had stabilised. It was not used as a fixed coding frame, pre-validated instrument, psychometric scale or maturity model. The thematic analysis remained the primary analytic procedure and the principal basis of the findings. The matrix was introduced later to support a narrower cross-case question arising from the findings: not only what founders said about ethics, responsibility and technology, but how far those commitments appeared to be translated into operational practice across cases.

This distinction mattered analytically. Across the dataset, founders frequently spoke in normatively rich terms about purpose, responsibility, safeguarding, privacy, fairness, inclusion, stewardship and public benefit. However, those commitments did not take the same practical form in every case. In some ventures, ethics remained largely at the level of founder intent, professional judgement or informal restraint. In others, it

appeared to have been translated into requirements, checks, release controls, governance routines, documentary artefacts or externally aligned assurance practices.

The matrix should therefore be read as a secondary, evidence-led comparison aid. It supported descriptive cross-case comparison after the thematic framework had settled. It did not replace the thematic findings, and it was not intended to generate a formal typology in advance of the analysis. The cohort labels derived from it, C1–C4, are descriptive anchors abstracted from recurring score-and-evidence patterns within this dataset. They should not be read as universal stages, fixed organisational types or predictive classifications.

ii. Analytical derivation

The implementation indicators were derived from a post-thematic reading of the case material. They respond to a recurring issue visible across the findings: the difference between founders stating that something mattered, translating that concern into practical expectations or constraints, and sustaining those expectations through more stable organisational or technical arrangements.

For that reason, the matrix was structured in two steps.

Step 1 addressed the threshold question of whether a case showed an identifiable ethical or public-interest orientation and whether that orientation had begun to take operational form.

Step 2 then examined whether that orientation had been carried through into wider implementation practices.

This two-step structure preserved an important analytical distinction: ethical orientation is not the same as operational translation, and operational translation is not the same as broader implementation depth.

iii. Evidence base and scoring logic

Scores were assigned using interview transcripts as the primary source, supplemented by case-matched documentary materials. The study was interpretivist, so the scoring did not rest on documentary evidence alone. Interviews remained central because the study examined how founders interpreted and enacted ethical responsibility. Documentary materials were used to corroborate, qualify or challenge whether a claimed practice was visible in organisational context. Public-facing texts were therefore treated as contextual and evidentially useful, but not as independent adjudicators of truth.

Depending on the case, documentary materials included public webpages, governance or privacy materials, captured policy texts, release notes, checklists, logs, changelogs, audit-related summaries and other retained artefacts. These materials helped situate interview accounts, note convergence or divergence, and strengthen interpretive transparency.

Each indicator was scored on a three-point basis:

Table 34: Three-point scoring scale for implementation indicators

Score	Meaning
0	No clear evidence of the relevant practice in the available material.
1	Partial, emerging, informal, uneven or weakly documented evidence.
2	Clearer, more consistent, more formalised or more traceable evidence.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

These scores were not measures of moral worth, organisational virtue or maturity. They were structured judgements of evidenced practice used to support transparent comparison across cases.

A score of 2 was reserved for cases in which the relevant practice was supported with reasonable clarity in the interview material and/or documentary record. Where a founder described a practice but the evidence suggested it remained tentative, founder-dependent, informal or weakly embedded, a score of 1 was used. A score of 0 was applied where no clear evidence could be identified in the material reviewed.

A separate confidence rating was also recorded for each case. This did not measure the quality of the organisation, but the strength and convergence of the available evidence.

Table 35: Confidence rating scale for case-level evidence

Confidence rating	Meaning
Low	Heavier reliance on interview material and limited corroborative documentation.
Medium	More than one source supported the judgement, but evidence remained partial or uneven.
High	Stronger convergence between interview and documentary material, with a clearer evidential trail.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Step 1: from ethical orientation to operational translation

The first two indicators, I1 Ethical Intent and I2 Non-functional Requirements, were treated as analytically prior because they captured two different but related levels of practice.

Ethical Intent recorded whether the case showed an articulated ethical or public-interest orientation that appeared to matter in decision-making. This was not scored on generic mission language alone. Stronger evidence included accounts of refusing or narrowing opportunities, delaying a launch, introducing a safeguard, changing design direction, or otherwise allowing ethical concerns to shape a concrete decision. Weaker evidence included broad statements about wanting to help, do good or act responsibly where the commitment remained largely aspirational or personal.

Non-functional Requirements recorded whether that ethical orientation had been translated into operational expectations, constraints or criteria. This marked the move from value statement to practical specification. In this matrix, non-functional requirements were understood broadly. They included requirements or constraints relating to privacy, accessibility, safeguarding, transparency, fairness, safety, inclusion, comprehensibility, integrity or trust.

Because all ventures included in the study met the scope requirement of showing an explicit public-interest orientation, I1 functioned partly as a baseline qualifying condition. It was retained analytically but excluded from the comparative totals. The summary counts therefore compare implementation practices beyond baseline ethical intent.

Table 36: Step 1 indicators: ethical orientation and operational translation

Indicator	What it captures	Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Typical evidence
I1 Ethical Intent	Whether the venture articulates an ethical or public-interest orientation that appears to matter in decision-making.	No clear ethical or public-interest orientation beyond generic business language.	Ethical or public-interest intent is present, but broad, aspirational, personal or weakly linked to decisions.	Ethical or public-interest intent is clearly linked to concrete choices, refusals, safeguards or boundaries.	Mission or impact page; values statements; founder accounts of refusal, delay, redesign, safeguards or ethical limits.
I2 Non-functional Requirements	Whether ethical intent has been translated into operational criteria, constraints or requirements.	No clear sign that values have become requirements, thresholds or constraints.	Some emerging or partial operational expectations, but uneven, informal or weakly tracked.	Clearer evidence that ethical concerns have been translated into requirements, thresholds, design constraints or acceptance criteria.	Product requirements; accessibility targets; safeguarding criteria; privacy constraints; testing or release criteria; policy packs.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Step 2: from operational translation to implementation depth

Once Step 1 established the presence and practical translation of ethical orientation, Step 2 examined whether those commitments had become visible in broader implementation practices. Indicators I3–I10 were selected because they captured the main implementation-facing features that recurred across the thematic material and supporting documents.

Taken together, these indicators were not intended to measure "ethicality" in the abstract. Rather, they captured the main observable sites at which ethical commitments appeared to become operational, traceable and sustained across the cases.

Table 37: Step 2 indicators: implementation, control and alignment

Indicator	What it captures	Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Typical evidence
I3 Verification	Whether ethical or operational expectations were actively checked.	No clear evidence of checking, testing, review or audit.	Informal, ad hoc, founder-led or uneven checking.	Structured testing, checklist-based review, audit, sign-off or documented checking.	QA checklists; test logs; audit summaries; review notes; sign-off records.
I4 Release Discipline	Whether deployment was paced or controlled in light of ethical or operational risk.	No evidence of pause, hold, pilot, rollback or staged release.	Some release restraint, but informal or inconsistent.	Structured release control, pilot-first logic, staged rollout, hold criteria or rollback options.	Release notes; rollout plans; gate records; deployment checklists; changelogs.
I5 Data Governance	Whether data handling was actively governed.	No clear evidence beyond generic compliance language.	Basic privacy or stewardship awareness, but partial or uneven.	Clearer evidence of data integrity, access control, retention, privacy-by-design, stewardship or handling rules.	Privacy policies; retention schedules; data maps; access-control notes; data-handling procedures.

Indicator	What it captures	Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Typical evidence
I6 Stakeholder Engagement	Whether stakeholders shaped ethical or operational decisions.	No clear consultation or meaningful input.	Limited or informal feedback from users, clients, advisors, communities or partners.	Recurrent, structured or demonstrably influential engagement that affected decisions.	Feedback logs; consultation notes; advisory records; workshop notes; user research summaries.
I7 Organisational Governance	Whether oversight or accountability structures supported ethics-related decisions.	No clear governance beyond founder intuition.	Some routines, informal challenge, advisor input or emerging oversight.	Clearer oversight arrangements, review points, decision rights, accountability mechanisms or board/advisory challenge.	Governance packs; meeting notes; role descriptions; decision logs; review schedules.
I8 Artefacts	Whether tangible records or tools stabilised ethics-related practice.	No artefacts beyond narrative claim.	One or two simple tools or draft documents.	Multiple stable artefacts used in practice.	Manuals; templates; registers; checklists; logs; policy indexes; governance packs.
I9 Change Management	Whether refinement and change were managed in a structured way.	No clear evidence of managed change, versioning or issue handling.	Some informal or partial adjustment.	Clearer change control, version history, issue tracking, refinement logs or rollback planning.	Changelogs; version histories; issue trackers; refinement logs; post-incident notes.
I10 External Alignment	Whether the venture aligned proactively with standards, regulation, audit or external expectations.	No clear outward-facing alignment beyond internal aspiration.	Some reactive or emerging awareness of standards or external expectations.	Clearer proactive alignment with external norms, standards, audit, assurance or regulation.	Audit summaries; standards mapping; compliance notes; assurance records; benchmark material.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

iv. Interpretation manual

The matrix should be read through six interpretive rules.

First, the matrix is secondary to the thematic analysis. It is not an alternative findings structure. Its role is to support transparent comparison after the themes have already been identified and interpreted.

Secondly, the matrix is evidence-led but interpretive. Scores were not assigned mechanically from keywords. They were based on a reading of interview and documentary material together, with interviews remaining primary and documentary materials used to corroborate, qualify or challenge the presence of particular practices.

Thirdly, Step 1 and Step 2 should not be conflated. Step 1 establishes whether ethical purpose is visible and whether it has begun to take operational form. Step 2 examines whether that purpose has been carried through into broader implementation practices. A case may therefore show ethical intent without showing strong implementation depth. Equally, a case may show ethical intent and some operational translation, but only weak or uneven evidence of verification, governance, documentation, managed change or external alignment.

Fourthly, I1 is interpretively important but not part of the comparative totals. The count columns summarise I2–I10 only. This means that the totals compare operational and implementation features beyond baseline ethical intent.

Fifthly, the count totals are a guide, not a classifier. They help make patterning visible, but they do not determine cohort allocation on their own. Cohort allocation depends on the overall score profile, the confidence rating and the short evidence notes recorded for each case.

Sixthly, the cohort labels are descriptive anchors, not universal stages. They summarise recurring implementation profiles observed in this dataset and should not be read as exhaustive, predictive or rank-ordered categories.

v. From score profiles to cohorts

Cohort allocation was not performed mechanically and was not based on one score alone. Each case was read holistically through its score profile across I1–I10, the comparative totals across I2–I10, the confidence rating and the short evidence notes recorded alongside the matrix.

The cohort labels C1–C4 were then used to describe recurring implementation profiles observed across the dataset.

C1 captured cases in which ethical purpose was present, and some practical restraint or stakeholder sensitivity could be seen, but broader implementation remained largely informal. These cases tended to show ethical intent without much evidence of formalised verification, governance, artefact-based traceability, change control or external alignment.

C2 captured cases in which implementation was broader but still developing. Ethical concerns had moved beyond aspiration and were visible across several dimensions, but the practices remained partial, uneven or only lightly formalised.

C3 captured cases in which stronger operational discipline was evident across most dimensions, including requirements, verification, release control, data governance, organisational governance, artefacts and managed change, but where one or more areas remained only partly consolidated.

C4 captured cases in which implementation was consistently strong across the comparative indicators, with clearer traceability from values to requirements, checking, documentation, governance and external alignment.

The cohort descriptions were not fixed types specified in advance. They were post-analytic summaries of recurring score-and-evidence patterns within this dataset. Their role was descriptive. They supported cross-case comparison and showed how ethics-related commitments appeared to be operationalised to different degrees across the twenty-five ventures.

Table 38: Cohort allocation overview: illustrative decision-rule summary

Cohort	Typical score profile	Interpretation
C1	I1 = 1, I2 = 0; typically 0 twos, 2 ones and 7 zeros across I2–I10.	Ethical intent present, but implementation largely informal.
C2	I1 = 1, I2 = 1; typically 0 twos, 8 ones and 1 zero across I2–I10.	Broader but still developing implementation.
C3	I1 = 2, I2 = 2; typically 7 twos, 2 ones and 0 zeros across I2–I10.	Stronger operational discipline, but not yet fully consolidated across all dimensions.
C4	I1 = 2, I2 = 2; typically 9 twos, 0 ones and 0 zeros across I2–I10.	Consistently stronger implementation across the comparative indicators.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Note. These profiles are included as descriptive anchors and worked examples of the recurrent score-and-evidence patterns observed in this dataset. They should not be read as universal stages, fixed organisational types or automated classification rules.

vi. Note on count totals

Count_2s, Count_1s and Count_0s summarise I2–I10 only. I1 Ethical Intent is reported separately because it functioned partly as a baseline qualifying condition rather than part of the comparative nine-indicator total.

vii. Interpretation and limits

The matrix and cohort frame should be read cautiously. They do not provide a causal explanation of how cases moved from one profile to another. Nor do they imply universal stages, exhaustive organisational categories or predictive pathways. Their value lies in making visible, in a compact and inspectable way, how ethics-related commitments appeared to be translated into organisational and technological routines across the cases.

The thematic findings remain the main analytic account. The matrix and the cohort frame are secondary devices used to support transparency and cross-case comparison, not to displace interpretation.

Stage 4C: Parallel documentary reading

a) Objective: Locate interview accounts within organisational documents and public-facing materials.

Figure 74: Stage 4C Checklist – Documentary analysis

1. **Define the purpose of documentary material and its relationship to the research objectives**: specify whether text is used for contextualisation, corroboration, triangulation, or contestation of interview accounts, and how they will be integrated into theme refinement and reporting.
2. **Specify the document identification approach (traceable and repeatable)**: document how sources are located (participant links; websites; Companies House; sector directories).
3. **Set inclusion/exclusion criteria and log exclusions**: define what counts as eligible documentary material and why; record exclusions with brief rationales.
4. **Capture the corpus with metadata and integrity controls**: record capture date/time, and source identifiers.
5. **Store documents in structured case folders**: including a master list, location, metadata, and notes.
6. **Anonymise and prepare documents for analysis** and apply structural coding aligned to objectives: including mission framing; governance; privacy; impact claims; compliance posture.
7. **Extract data into a reading grid per case**: record factual anchors precisely and paraphrase interpretive content cautiously, noting audience effects (marketing/legal/investor orientation) as interpretive considerations rather than as disqualifiers.
8. **Integrate documentary insights** into thematic outputs and write-up, including:
   - **a)** A within-case synthesis against interview material: identifying areas where narratives converge with, extend, or diverge from interview accounts.
   - **b)** Conduct cross-case aggregation across documentary domains: identify commonalities and boundary cases.
9. **File replication artefacts and maintain traceability**: archive inventories, capture logs, reading grids, integrity markers (if used).
10. **Replication outputs:** case inventories; capture logs; reading and comparison grids; convergence/divergence notes
11. **Transition to Stage 5:** With thematic, participant, cohort, and documentary inputs documented, the thematic structure is consolidated for reporting.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo - Stage 4C

Figure 75: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 4C: documentary positioning and interpretive limits

This stage involved reading relevant public materials, notably website content, alongside the interview accounts to situate claims within organisational context (for example, how ventures described mission, governance, or technology in public-facing documentation). In this study, documentary reading was used to contextualise and triangulate, not to "verify" subjective experience, and it later became one of the strands that helped patterns in ethical–technology maturation become clearer.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 5: Completing the thematic structure

a) Objective: Finalise theme and sub-theme definitions, boundaries, and documentation

Figure 76: Stage 5 Checklist - Completing the thematic structure

1. **Finalise theme and sub-theme names** so they are conceptually accurate, non-overlapping, and intelligible
2. **Produce final definitions specifying:** scope, boundary rules, and the analytic claim advanced
3. **Create or update the thematic map** to reflect the final structure and relationships
4. **Identify candidate illustrative excerpts**, ensuring anonymisation and avoiding re-introduction of identifying detail
5. **Replication outputs: f**inal theme definitions; thematic map; excerpt shortlist with anonymisation check
6. **Transition to Stage 6:** Once the thematic structure is finalised, the write-up integrates themes into a coherent narrative linked to the research question and literature.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo

Figure 77: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 5: final boundary decisions

This stage involved updating the thematic architecture for write-up: naming themes, specifying sub-themes and sub-sub-themes, and making definitions stable enough to apply consistently. Here, the model development became clearer: VIS was re-specified into VISION to better capture the evidence, namely Innovation, Navigation and Ownership; the latter of which reflects perfectly the notion of personal responsibility for moral problems as a core starting point.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Stage 6: Producing the final narrative

a) Objective: Integrate themes, evidence, and interpretive claims into a transparent narrative aligned to the research aims and objectives

Figure 78: Stage 6 replication steps: Producing the final narrative

1. Draft theme narratives that: articulate the central organising concept and the mechanism or logic of action evidenced across cases.
2. Integrate cohort and documentary insights as contextual qualifiers (rather than as determinative explanations).
3. select and present excerpts consistently (where used), ensuring traceability to EN references and anonymisation safeguards
4. Ensure claims are proportionate to the evidence base and reflect boundary and negative instances where analytically relevant
5. Complete final audit-trail indexing so links between data, coding, theme evolution, and reporting are recoverable
6. Replication outputs: final narrative sections; excerpt tables/appendices; finalised audit-trail index; change-log entries associated with reporting.
7. Transition to Appendix A6: Appendix A6 extends beyond analysis to provide an end-to-end implementation roadmap, from ethics approval to deletion. It collates the procedural checklists used to implement, document and evidence the wider research process.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

b) End-of-Stage researcher reflexive memo

Figure 79: Researcher reflexive memo – Stage 6: reporting choices and claim calibration

This stage involved writing the findings and discussion in a way that made the link between evidence, interpretation, and contribution visible, including returning to earlier stages where gaps in justification were identified. In this study, the theory and supporting models consolidated during write-up: the move from model articulation to theory articulation (DEN) was developed through repeated checks against the dataset and against the conditions for claiming a theory, and supervisor feedback prompted further strengthening of the evidential narrative, including revisiting cohort and documentary analysis and delineating the emergent spectrum/lifecycle patterning reflected through the ETIS Model and the EthOS lifecycle (with the explicit recognition that additional archetypes may exist beyond what this dataset could confirm).

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.252 Researcher reflexive memo - End of Phase 5

Figure 80: Phase 5 reflexive note – Consolidation and reporting implications from Stages 0-6

Phase 5 involved consolidating the analytic work into a defensible thematic account, while documenting how interpretive decisions were made, tested, and bounded. It was the point at which the workflow moved from "working with materials" to "accounting for how meanings were developed", so that readers could see the logic of the analysis without requiring access to identifiable data. This phase also formalised where reflexivity sat in the study: as a record of methodological judgement and interview dynamics, kept separate from findings unless participants had explicitly articulated the relevant meaning in words. Look below for the fuller Phase 5 memos by stage (Stage 0 to Stage 6), which set out what each step involved, why it mattered, and what it meant for how the analysis and write-up were handled.

This phase required an ongoing testing of whether an interpretation continued to align with the words participants had used. An analytic claim remained in the account only if it continued to hold across the dataset, rather than because it produced a neat or theoretically familiar explanation. In that sense, analysis was treated as disciplined proximity to the verbal data, while allowing patterns, relationships, and explanatory connections to surface over time, without imposing an early frame.

Phase 5 also required a specific kind of control: control of interpretive drift. Founders sometimes used broad moral language that could plausibly support multiple readings, which increased the risk of moving too quickly from evidence to mechanism. To mitigate this, the entire dataset was analysed multiple times. This was resource intensive, but it strengthened internal consistency and reduced the likelihood that an early interpretation would be treated as settled despite only partial fit. Themes were required to earn their place through recurrence and clarity in the verbal data across cases, not through elegance, plausibility, or alignment with familiar vocabulary. A further boundary was held deliberately: impressions arising from interview dynamics (pauses, tone, hesitation, posture) were retained as reflexive context, but were not treated as findings unless the meaning was explicitly articulated in words and supported across cases. This boundary functioned as a practical safeguard against sliding from "what was said" to inferred participant experience.

What followed from this approach was an iterative analytic rhythm that allowed the dataset's structure to become clearer over time. Across repeated engagement, the material appeared to cohere not only into themes but into a more integrated logic that held across cases and offered a way of explaining how founders described ethical decision-making under constraint. At that point, the work was treated as potentially extending beyond thematic description towards a theory and supporting models. This was raised with supervisors as an emergent interpretation grounded in repeated cross-case analysis, rather than as an a priori target. The proposal was positioned alongside the VISION ethical decision-making model, with the view that the empirical patterns would remain valid even if the "theory" label were debated. Supervisor review supported the framing, and their detailed feedback was used to tighten boundaries between data-supported description, interpretive inference, and contribution claims, ensuring that claims remained warranted by the verbal evidence.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.26 Phase 6: Data deletion and project closure

This phase sets out the controlled deletion workflow used to meet the study's retention commitments and to demonstrate end-to-end data stewardship. The steps are designed to be auditable and replicable, with deletion actions evidenced through a manifest-led approach and a signed log.

Figure 81: Phase 6: data deletion and project closure

Phase 6 checklist – Data deletion and project closure

1. **Confirm the trigger event and calculate the deletion date (D + 60),** as defined in the ethics-approved retention schedule) and record the trigger date.
2. **Confirm parameters for data deletion and retention,** consistent with the ethics approval and data minimisation principles.
   a) Identify and freeze the dataset by applying read-only settings files and storing them in folders clearly marked for deletion: raw audio, raw transcripts, linkage keys, and any identifiers.
   b) Confirm that all required analytic outputs have been finalised and that only approved non-identifiable scholarly materials will be retained.
3. **Generate the final file manifest** (for posterior deletion completeness checks) and integrity record listing each file scheduled for deletion, including: file name, path/location, storage system, file type, and a SHA-256 hash (or equivalent) for final integrity checking.
4. **Confirm that no outstanding participant matters remain unresolved:** enquiries, withdrawal requests, or data-rights requests; resolve any outstanding issues, record the outcome and date of resolution in the audit trail (ICO, 2021).
5. **Execute planned deletion** using the method appropriate to the storage medium and risk profile, documenting the approach used for each location:
   a) crypto-erase where encryption is in place and key destruction is the approved method
   b) secure erase where supported and appropriate; remove files from institution-managed systems in line with policy, and clear recycle bins and "deleted items" areas (including cloud storage bins)
   c) revoke any access tokens, shared links, or synchronisation permissions that could maintain access or residual copies and destroy anonymisation linkage keys
6. **Execute post-deletion spot-checks and documentation across all locations against the manifest: a**ttempt to locate a sample of files scheduled for deletion by path and name. For platform receipts or system confirmations, capture and archive them as evidence.
7. **Confirm that only non-identifiable scholarly materials are retained**: final thesis text, non-identifiable analytic summaries, templates, and blank instruments; and that retained materials cannot reasonably be used to re-identify participants or organisations; and record the final retained set in the project closure note for audit readiness.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

A1.261 Researcher reflexive memo - End of Phase 6

Figure 82: Phase 6 reflexive note - Data deletion and project closure

Phase 6, for me, meant confirming that the close-out preparations were complete and evidenced, rather than treating "closure" as the deletion event itself. The work in this phase focused on responsible close-out: secure retention, controlled access, and planned deletion, with the deletion action remaining scheduled for D + 60 from the agreed trigger (a positive examination outcome/award recommendation). Completion was recorded through a manifest-led log that showed, item by item, that each preparatory activity had been executed fully and correctly, and that the dataset was held in a stable, exam-ready state without drifting beyond what had been disclosed and approved.

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Appendix A2: Member-checking template letters

A2.1 Member-checking stage 1 – Template letter

Placeholder file name: ECS22230024-R_Member-checking_Summary of research findings - CO8E_Stage 1

Member-checking stage: Summary of research findings

Dear [Participant's Name],

I hope this letter finds you well.

Following the interview you graciously attended as part of my PhD research study, I am contacting you for an essential step in the research process: **Member-Checking**. As noted in the Participant Information Sheet and Privacy Notice (p. 4), this is considered best practice in qualitative research as it gives participants *"the opportunity (over 14 days) to read the research findings and confirm, correct, challenge, and make additions or amendments."* It ensures research credibility, transparency, trustworthiness, and validation.

The study aims to " understand *how socially innovative technology-based [ESV] founders define and apply ethicality to decision-making"* (and received ethical approval—ECS22230024-R). I kindly request that you:

1. Consider how well the Summary of Findings resonates with your experience and perspective.
2. Identify the findings that resonate the most and the least with your experience and/or share insights about anything surprising or validating.
3. Respond to my email providing your thoughts, observations, or reflections to [email] **by Wednesday, 24 July 2024.** Please use the same email if you need clarification or wish to receive a copy of the Thesis after the examination.

Following the member-checking process, I will contact you to confirm its conclusion and note any significant updates. Rest assured that your participation remains anonymous, and your data is treated with utmost confidentiality. Our commitment to ethical research ensures that your insights are respected and acknowledged appropriately. If you have any ethical concerns about the research project or questions about your rights as a participant, please get in touch with […] Secretary – HS and ECS Research Ethics Panels, via [contact]. Information regarding Research Integrity at the University of Worcester is also available on the university's website.

Once again, thank you for participating and sharing your unique perspective and valuable insights on addressing social and environmental sustainability matters. Your involvement significantly advances our understanding of business ethical practices. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Signed

Gisela Anthony, BA Hons, MSc

PhD Researcher, University of Worcester

Summary of research findings

Introduction

To *"understand how socially innovative technology-based [ESV] founders define and apply ethicality to their decision-making,"* an in-depth study has been conducted on the nexus between technology and ethics. In it, 25 founders leading socially innovative, technology-based startups were interviewed. The aim was to explore their motivations, challenges, strategies, and the societal impacts of their ventures across sectors such as healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, and financial inclusion.

The research findings outlined in this thesis result from a thorough thematic analysis, supported by ample data to draw meaningful conclusions and contribute theoretically to knowledge. In this context, the term "founders" encapsulates the entire research population, whose contribution has been so comprehensive and rich that it fully illustrates each finding.

The study reveals a multidisciplinary and diverse range of [ESVs] where founders adopt a business model that balances ethical commitments with commercial imperatives. [ESV] founders leverage technology, research, knowledge sharing, and networking to bridge disparities and other resources—all driven by their core values.

Drawing inspiration from individual experiences and identified market gaps, founders emphasised their moral obligation to harness their unique specialisms, technological capabilities, and tools to create significant social impacts. These qualitative data findings uncover several vital aspects regarding the role of integrated values and ethical business practices in navigating the complex intersection of technology, ethics, and business management, particularly the personal conflict emerging from dealing with moral dilemmas and commercial trade-offs.

Themes and subthemes identified

Theme 1: Aligning integrated values and ethical foundations with business impact strategy

1.1 Agile adherence to and evaluation of values, boundaries, capabilities, and legal requirements.

[ESV] founders placed significant importance on adhering to their foundational ethical values in decision-making and business practices. This adherence is dynamic, as they continuously evaluate and re-evaluate their values and boundaries, realigning business practices to ensure they reflect the organisation's core values, mission, and vision. This dynamic approach helps them remain operationally responsive to evolving stakeholder needs while ensuring safeguarding and ethical standards. The establishment of moral boundaries is reflected in a selective approach towards engagement with internal and external stakeholders, chosen based on their alignment with the [ESV's] values and mission. This is articulated as ensuring awareness and preservation of the ethical standards of existing or prospective stakeholders they may employ, serve, or collaborate with. They also shared their frustration with public sector bodies and other businesses that claim to prioritise sustainability but fail to follow through on their commitments, support, or adopt research evidence.

1.2 Values-based cognitive dissonance

The research provides significant insight into the presence of cognitive dissonance and moral conflicts among founders arising from the continuous alignment, evaluation, and reintegration of their personal and organisational values into business practices. Founders noted that their ethical obligation to contribute to society is driven by their awareness and recognition of their professional capabilities and core values. However, founders express awareness and acceptance that prioritising their core values may lead to reduced profit and, therefore, reduced ability to realise their mission-oriented impact, which leads them to experience personal discomfort, given that they reinvest their profit to further mission-oriented ventures. Founders articulated the moral dilemma between prioritising mission-oriented business continuity and adherence to core values. They explain this internal conflict by emphasising that sticking to their values is *"the right thing to do, " even if it means taking longer* to achieve their goals. This suggests that founders draw on the psychological strength gained from pursuing their ethical endeavours and upholding their “ethical” social contract to alleviate internal conflict while rationalising and prioritising core values over financial returns.

The study further suggests that although founders believe in their ability to maintain high ethical standards while achieving financial success without sacrificing either, they think achieving complete ethical purity is unrealistic. Profit is considered paramount for the sustainability of an organisation and its capability to effect positive change through its services. Faced with intense competition or economic downturns, they navigate ethical dilemmas flexibly, taking mitigating actions to alleviate psychological discomfort. They may experience varying degrees of cognitive dissonance due to a misalignment between their personal and organisational values, leading to psychological discomfort. This challenge mainly arises during the assessment and reconciliation of values, the establishment or redefinition of boundaries, and the review of capabilities and resource gaps.

A deeper exploration of personal ethics and business sustainability reveals that founders are aware of the moral dilemmas that can arise when their services are accessible only to those who can afford them, potentially perpetuating systemic inequalities. Despite grappling with the ethical implications of affordability-based services, founders justify their self-sustaining model as a more viable and sustainable approach to achieving social or environmental goals, as it reduces reliance and burden on charitable funds. They justify their position while expressing both frustration and recognition towards the need for their business (or elements thereof) to exist. While this is indicated to varying degrees depending on the moral dilemma, founders articulated a commitment to eliminating the necessity of their business, or elements thereof, by employing various measures such as offering free services, making donations, and collaborating with charities, local government, and other organisations within their network. This reflects a complex interplay between personal ethics, capabilities, and business viability.

1.3 Business for good: sustainable and impactful business strategies

Founders indicated the importance of implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies that positively impact society and the environment. They conveyed their effort and perseverance to develop practices that reduce environmental damage while recognising the long-term advantages of maintaining ethical standards, such as enhanced reputation, securing a competitive edge as an ethical business, and fostering customer loyalty. They endorsed adopting sustainable business models that balance ethical commitment with potential profit losses.

Founders also underlined the continuous effort required to identify and promote ethical behaviours within their organisations, constantly reassessing ethical practices to ensure compliance with the law and robust CSR foundations. They emphasised their dedication to, proactively and reactively, scan emerging challenges and assess the impacts of corporate policies and practices to remain aligned with their core values.

Theme 2: Social impact strategy: the osmotic innovation synergy

2.1 Engagement, research, and growth synergies

Founders emphasised the need to cultivate substantial, trust-based relationships within the industry to promote and integrate ethical practices into business operations and industry standards. They expressed their commitment to fostering improvement and systemic change through honest communication of moral and ethical issues and creative solutions to enhance shared learning and accountability.

They also noted that they regularly evaluate the effectiveness and influence of ethical integration and technology-based strategies by leveraging professional expertise, networking, and collaboration. These strategies, they explained, are instrumental in driving R&D (research and development), sharing pioneering ideas, and applying audience feedback to refine the accuracy and effectiveness of future feedback and innovative mechanisms. This approach forms a synergistic cycle aimed at enhancing knowledge towards improving social impact, investing in technological enhancements, and championing progressive ethical practices.

2.2 Sector-specific and tech-focused strategic planning and profit reinvestment

The study indicates the employment of strategic planning and operations beyond foundational CSR commitments, shaped on the one hand by sector-specific ethical priorities and technology-focused capabilities, and on the other hand, the re-deployment of profit towards the mission's strategy. Founders believe in aligning business goals with values that prioritise the well-being of humanity and the planet based on sector-specific ethical concerns. For instance, MedTech startup founders focus on data privacy, accuracy, patient confidentiality, and overall integrity. Those in the arts and education emphasised upholding information and service integrity, protecting and safeguarding customers and employees equally. Founders striving for environmental sustainability and social responsibility noted that their strategic decisions and daily operations prioritise reducing carbon footprint, eliminating waste, promoting renewable energy, and adhering to ethical sourcing. Relatedly, founders stressed the importance of ensuring that the technological tools and solutions they utilise align with their ethical framework, both internally and externally.

However, they also acknowledge the challenges and moral dilemmas associated with using technology to address social and environmental issues, including its carbon footprint, digital literacy barriers, and social resistance. They caution against maintaining counterproductive approaches to addressing social and ecological concerns, comparing these to, for instance, *"building houses in floodplains."*

Further, the study shows that founders strategically reinvest profits into the business to develop mission-oriented ventures, research projects, and service improvements. They prioritise technological upgrades based on research, feedback, and learning. They stressed that adopting commercially viable strategies is vital for financial survival while upholding ethical values above short-term profit gains. They also highlighted their efforts to mitigate their tech carbon footprint through monetary contributions and partnerships with organisations focused on socially responsible, regenerative environmental or biodiversity projects. This indicates the build-up of resilience in navigating financial constraints and resourcing gaps while striving for long-lasting, sustainable social impact. It also suggests that adherence to ethical principles may not only contribute positively to societal welfare but also confer a competitive edge upon organisations.

Distinct from traditional models that aim to address social and environmental issues, this research highlights the role of socially innovative technology-based startup founders in propelling technological advancements to address societal challenges through developing, co-designing, or stimulating demand for novel solutions.

Theme 3: Tech for good: compliance, challenges, and solutions

3.1 Technological integration: advantages and limitations of technology

Founders articulated the need to ensure that technology is used for beneficial ends and is ethically integrated, recognising its importance in fostering ethical business practices. They indicate that in the digital age, moral issues and risks can be addressed through the use and development of technology, continuous access to technological solutions, management of

resource limitations, and upholding personal responsibility in exploiting technology for the collective good. They further highlight how technology is pivotal for innovation and achieving mission goals, focusing on sustainability and social impact.

However, founders cautioned against *"blind trust in technology,"* emphasising that *"technology is just a tool"* with inherent limitations and potential for both positive impact and misuse. Concurrently, they explained that profits are strategically reinvested to support technological advancements and mission-focused projects, fostering a cycle of innovation and positive societal transformation.

3.2 User-centric design and integration

Founders noted their efforts in championing the application of technology to empower both B2B and B2C users, with an emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility to break down barriers. Placing user needs and experiences at the forefront of their technology and R&D efforts, they aim to transform user-focused technologies through gamification and interactive learning, incorporating advanced technologies such as AI and VR, and in the process, refining business operations and enhancing their understanding of user engagement with the topic and technological solution.

They also highlighted the significance of maintaining data integrity and verification, abiding by laws and regulations related to technology use, and upholding ethical principles throughout technological processes. They noted they provide guidance and actively collaborate with others to ensure compliance with legal standards, user safeguarding, and ethical practices in technological developments and applications and non-technical operational due diligence.

3.3 Conclusion

The study underscores the essential role that integrated values play in guiding ethical business practices within technology-based [ESVs], balancing profit generation with positively impacting society and the environment. This detailed qualitative analysis illuminates the complex relationship between ethical values, business sustainability, and societal impact, highlighting the crucial importance of core values and ethical practices in managing the intricate convergence of technology, ethics, and business.

The narrative uncovers the personal trials and moral dilemmas that founders must navigate to maintain ethical integrity, achieve commercial success, and realise their ethical endeavours. It reveals that founders are driven not only by commercial success but also by a deep-seated moral compass. Their testimonies indicate an emerging movement of startup founders keen to align their business operations with ethical principles and legal standards. They employ technology, research, collaboration, and scientific comprehension to achieve financial viability and sustainable impact while acknowledging the limitations inherent in technological solutions.

Through this lens, the study amplifies the voices of leaders advancing socially innovative entrepreneurship through tech solutions. It sheds light on the need to cultivate an ecosystem where ethical considerations and innovation converge towards a more equitable future.

A2.2 Member-checking stage 2 – Template letter

Placeholder file name: ECS22230024-R_Member-checking_Concluded_Summary of Research Findings_CO8E_Stage 2

Member-checking stage: Summary of research findings

Dear [Participant's Name]

I hope this letter finds you well.

I am writing to thank you for your participation in the member-checking process of my PhD research study, "Understanding how socially innovative technology-based [ESV] founders define and apply ethicality to decision-making" (ethical approval—ECS22230024-R).

Your engagement in this crucial step of the research process has been invaluable. As outlined in the Participant Information Sheet and Privacy Notice, this member-checking stage was designed to ensure credibility, transparency, trustworthiness, and validation of the research findings.

I am pleased to inform you that the member-checking process has now concluded. The feedback received from participants, including yourself, has been carefully reviewed and incorporated into the final analysis. Your insights have significantly contributed to refining and validating the research conclusions.

Key updates resulting from the member-checking process include:

1. A more nuanced understanding of the interplay between cognitive and emotional dissonance in ethical decision-making.
2. Enhanced emphasis on the importance of impact measurement in socially innovative businesses.
3. Greater recognition of the connection between user-centric design and principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI).
4. Refined perspectives on the role of technology in addressing ethical challenges and fostering positive societal impact.

These updates have enriched the research findings and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how socially innovative technology-based [ESV] founders navigate ethical considerations in their decision-making processes. Also, Rest assured that, unless you say otherwise, your participation remains anonymous, and all data continues to be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Our commitment to ethical research practices ensures that your insights are respected and acknowledged appropriately.

If you have any questions about the concluded member-checking process or wish to receive a copy of the final Thesis after examination, please contact me at [email] For any ethical concerns about the research project or questions about your rights as a participant, please contact […] HS and ECS Research Ethics Panels, via [contact details].

Once again, thank you for your valuable contribution to this research. Your involvement has significantly advanced our understanding of business ethics and the role of socially innovative [ESVs] in addressing unmet human needs and shaping ethical decision-making practices.

Yours sincerely,

Signed

Gisela Anthony, BA Hons, MSc

PhD Researcher, University of Worcester

Summary of research findings

Introduction

To *"understand how socially innovative technology-based [ESV] founders define and apply ethicality to their decision-making,"* an in-depth study has been conducted on the nexus between technology and ethics. In it, 25 founders leading socially innovative, technology-based startups were interviewed. The aim was to explore their motivations, challenges, strategies, and the societal impacts of their ventures across sectors such as healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, and financial inclusion.

The research findings are the outcome of reflexive thematic analysis within a bounded qualitative design, supported by ample data to draw meaningful conclusions and contribute theoretically to knowledge. In this context, the term "founders" encapsulates the entire research population, whose contribution has been so comprehensive and rich that it fully illustrates each finding.

The study reveals a multidisciplinary and diverse range of [ESVs] where founders adopt a business model that balances ethical commitments with commercial imperatives. [ESV] founders leverage technology, research, knowledge sharing, and networking to bridge disparities and other resources—all driven by their core values.

Drawing inspiration from individual experiences and identified market gaps, founders emphasised their moral obligation to harness their unique specialisms, technological capabilities, and tools to create significant social impacts. These qualitative data findings uncover several vital aspects regarding the role of integrated values and ethical business practices in navigating the complex intersection of technology, ethics, and business management, particularly the personal conflict emerging from dealing with moral dilemmas and commercial trade-offs.

Themes and subthemes identified

Theme 1: Aligning integrated values and ethical foundations with business impact strategy

1.4 Dynamic adherence to and evaluation of values, boundaries, capabilities, and legal requirements.

[ESV] founders place significant importance on adhering to their foundational ethical values in decision-making and business practices. This adherence is not static, as they engage in a continuous process of evaluating and re-evaluating their values and boundaries, realigning business practices to ensure they reflect the organisation's core values, mission, and vision. This dynamic approach helps them remain operationally responsive to evolving stakeholder needs while ensuring safeguarding and ethical standards. The establishment of moral boundaries is reflected in a selective approach towards engagement with internal and external stakeholders, chosen based on their alignment with the [ESV's] values and mission. This is articulated as ensuring awareness and preservation of ethical standards of existing or prospective stakeholders whom they may employ, serve, or collaborate with. They also shared their frustration with public sector bodies and other businesses that claim to prioritise sustainability but fail to follow through on their commitments, support or adopt research evidence.

1.5 Values-based cognitive and emotional dissonance

The research provides significant insight into the presence of both cognitive and emotional dissonance among founders arising from the continuous alignment, evaluation, and reintegration of their personal and organisational values into business practices. Cognitive dissonance manifests as mental conflicts between business goals and ethical values, while emotional dissonance occurs when founders must project confidence or optimism while privately feeling conflicted about ethical trade-offs.

Founders note that their moral obligation to contribute to society is driven by their awareness and recognition of their professional capabilities and core values. However, they express awareness and acceptance that prioritising their core values may lead to reduced profit and, therefore, reduced ability to realise their mission-oriented impact. This leads them to experience personal discomfort, both mentally and emotionally, given that they reinvest their profit to further mission-oriented ventures.

Founders articulate the moral dilemma in the trade-off between prioritising mission-oriented business continuity and adherence to core values. They explain this internal conflict by emphasising that sticking to their values is "the right thing to do" even if it means taking the longer path to achieve their goals. This suggests that founders draw on the psychological strength gained from pursuing their ethical endeavours and upholding their "ethical" social contract to alleviate internal conflict while rationalising and prioritising core values over financial returns.

Importantly, founders stress that this process involves not only cognitive reasoning but also emotional and intuitive factors - the "heart and stomach" as well as the "head." This holistic approach to ethical decision-making acknowledges the complex, human-led nature of running a business and the importance of considering both rational and emotional aspects when navigating ethical dilemmas.

The study further suggests that although founders believe in their ability to maintain high ethical standards while achieving financial success without sacrificing either, they do not believe that achieving complete ethical purity is realistic. Profit is considered paramount for the sustainability of an organisation and its capability to effect positive change through its services. Faced with intense competition or economic downturns, they endeavour to navigate ethical dilemmas with flexibility, taking mitigating actions to alleviate psychological and emotional discomfort. They may experience varying degrees of cognitive and emotional dissonance due to a misalignment between their personal and organisational values, leading to psychological and emotional discomfort. This challenge particularly arises during the assessment and reconciliation of values, the establishment or redefinition of boundaries, and the review of capabilities and resource gaps.

A deeper exploration of personal ethics and business sustainability reveals that founders are aware of the moral dilemmas that can arise when their services are accessible only to those who can afford them, potentially perpetuating systemic inequalities. Despite grappling with the ethical implications of affordability-based services, founders justify their self-sustaining model as a more viable and sustainable approach to achieving social or environmental goals, as it reduces reliance and burden on charitable funds. They justify their position while expressing both frustration and recognition towards the need for their business (or elements thereof) to exist. While this is indicated to varying degrees depending on the moral dilemma, founders clearly indicate a commitment to eliminating the necessity of their business, or elements thereof, by employing various measures such as offering free services, making donations, and collaborating with charities, local government, and other organisations within their network. This reflects a complex interplay between personal ethics, emotional responses, capabilities, and business viability.

1.6 Business for good: sustainable and impactful business strategies

Founders stress the importance of adhering to their values and implementing strategies of social responsibility that have positive impacts on society and the environment. They aim to develop practices that reduce environmental damage while recognising the long-term advantages of maintaining ethical standards. These advantages include an enhanced reputation, securing a competitive edge as an ethical business, and fostering customer loyalty. They underscore the need to adopt sustainable business models that balance ethical commitment with potential losses in profit.

Moreover, founders highlight the continuous effort required to identify, encourage, and promote ethical behaviours within their organisations, constantly reassessing ethical practices to ensure compliance with the law and robust corporate social responsibility (CSR)

foundations. They emphasise their dedication to, proactively and reactively, scan emerging challenges, assess their impacts, and revise their corporate policies and practices to remain aligned with their core values.

Founders increasingly emphasise the importance of good governance in running a well-managed, ethical business. This includes robust stakeholder engagement practices, such as the notion of "putting nature on the board" to ensure environmental considerations are integrated into decision-making processes. There's also a growing recognition of the nuances between "doing less bad," "doing more good," and striving for truly sustainable or even regenerative business practices. Founders believe unashamedly that a well-run business can be a force for good, and are increasingly thinking about these distinctions in their strategic planning and operations.

Theme 2: Social impact strategy: the osmotic innovation synergy

2.3 Engagement, research, and growth synergies

Founders emphasise the need to build strong, trust-based relationships within the industry to promote ethical practices, integrating ethical practices into business operations and industry standards. They spread innovative ideas through networking and collaboration, using audience feedback to refine and improve innovative ideas and continuously improving practices based on societal feedback.

Founders engage in ongoing research to identify crucial areas for ethical and social innovation, ensuring the accuracy and effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. They assess the success and impact of ethical integration and tech-based strategies, leveraging professional expertise to drive research and innovation. They also emphasised their dedication to truth-telling for systemic change, promoting innovative methods to address global issues, providing constructive criticism of current practices to drive improvement, and clearly communicating moral and ethical issues to foster transparency and accountability.

Founders stress the importance of measuring impact, recognising that this differs from merely tracking deliverables or outcomes. As one participant noted, "you can't manage what you don't measure." This focus on impact measurement aligns with the broader trend of orienting businesses towards creating positive societal and environmental impacts. It reflects a growing understanding that true social innovation requires not just good intentions, but also rigorous assessment of the actual effects of their initiatives. This approach enables founders to continually refine their strategies, ensure accountability, and demonstrate the value of their socially innovative efforts to stakeholders and the broader community.

2.4 Sector-specific and tech-focused strategic planning and profit reinvestment

The study indicates the employment of strategic planning and operations, beyond foundational CSR commitments, shaped by sector-specific ethical priorities and technology-focused capabilities, and the re-deployment of profit towards their mission's strategy. Founders believe in aligning business goals with values that prioritise the well-being of

humanity and the planet based on sector-specific ethical concerns. For instance, MedTech companies focus on data privacy, accuracy, patient confidentiality, and overall integrity. Those in the arts and education emphasise protecting and safeguarding customers and employees equally. Founders striving for environmental sustainability and social responsibility noted that their strategic decisions and daily operations are made with consideration for reducing carbon footprint, eliminating waste, promoting renewable energy, and adhering to ethical sourcing.

Founders consider strategic planning essential for creating sustainable business models. They emphasise the importance of ensuring that the technological tools and solutions they utilise align with their ethical framework, both internally and externally. However, they also acknowledge the challenges and moral dilemmas associated with using technology to address social and environmental issues, including its carbon footprint, digital literacy barriers, and social resistance. They caution against maintaining counterproductive approaches to addressing social and environmental concerns, comparing these to, for instance, *"building houses in floodplains."*

Further, the founders strategically reinvest profits into the business to develop mission-oriented ventures, research projects, and service improvements. They prioritise technological upgrades based on research, feedback, and learning. They stressed that adopting commercially viable strategies is vital for financial survival while upholding ethical values above short-term profit gains. This indicates the build-up of resilience in navigating financial constraints and resourcing gaps while striving for long-lasting, sustainable social impact.

The study suggests that adherence to ethical principles may not only contribute positively to societal welfare but also confer a competitive edge upon organisations. Distinct from traditional models that aim to address social and environmental issues, this research highlights the role of socially innovative technology-based startups. These entities propel technological advancements with the objective of addressing societal challenges through the development, co-design, or stimulation of demand for novel solutions.

Additionally, founders noted their efforts to mitigate their tech carbon footprint through financial contributions and partnerships with organisations focused on socially responsible, regenerative environmental or biodiversity projects. They conduct research to measure and enhance social impact and allocate resources towards technological upgrades that support ethical practices and the organisational ethical and social mission.

Theme 3: Tech for good: compliance, challenges, and solutions

3.4 Technological integration: advantages and limitations of technology

Founders articulated the need to ensure that technology is used for beneficial ends and is ethically integrated, recognising its importance in fostering ethical business practices. They indicate that in the digital age, ethical issues and risks can be addressed through the use and development of technology, continuous access to technological solutions, management of resource limitations, and upholding personal responsibility in exploiting technology for the

collective good. They further highlight how technology is pivotal for innovation and achieving mission goals, focusing on sustainability and social impact. They also caution against *"blind trust in technology,"* emphasising that *"technology is just a tool"* with inherent limitations and potential for both positive impact and misuse. Concurrently, they explained that profits are strategically reinvested to support technological advancements and mission-focused projects, fostering a cycle of innovation and positive societal transformation.

Founders articulated the need to ensure that technology is used for beneficial ends and is ethically integrated, recognising its importance in fostering ethical business practices. They indicate that in the digital age, ethical issues and risks can be addressed through the use and development of technology, continuous access to technological solutions, management of resource limitations, and upholding personal responsibility in exploiting technology for the collective good. They further highlight how technology is pivotal for innovation and achieving mission goals, focusing on sustainability and social impact.

However, founders also caution against "blind trust in technology," emphasising that "technology is just a tool" with inherent limitations and potential for both positive impact and misuse. This nuanced perspective acknowledges the dual nature of technological solutions - their capacity to drive positive change and their potential to create new challenges if not implemented thoughtfully.

Concurrently, founders explained that profits are strategically reinvested to support technological advancements and mission-focused projects, fostering a cycle of innovation and positive societal transformation. This approach demonstrates a commitment to leveraging technology responsibly and sustainably to achieve their ethical and social goals.

Founders also noted their efforts to mitigate their tech carbon footprint through financial contributions and partnerships with organisations focused on socially responsible, regenerative environmental or biodiversity projects. This reflects an awareness of the environmental impact of technology and a proactive stance in addressing these concerns.

Overall, this theme underscores the complex relationship between technology, ethics, and social innovation in the context of startup ventures. It highlights the founders' commitment to harnessing technology's potential while remaining vigilant about its limitations and potential negative impacts, striving for a balanced and responsible approach to technological integration in their businesses.

3.5 User-centric design and integration

The founders champion the application of technology to empower both B2B and B2C users, with an emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility by removing barriers. They are committed to placing user needs and experiences at the heart of technology and R&D (research and development) efforts to enable transformation. This entails the creation of user-focused technologies, incorporating advanced technologies such as AI and VR, and refining business

operations and user engagement through gamification and interactive learning experiences. The aim is to contribute towards a wider ethical impact and enhanced operational efficiency.

They also emphasise the significance of maintaining data integrity and verification, abiding by laws and regulations related to technology use, and upholding ethical principles throughout technological processes. They provide guidance and actively collaborate with others to ensure compliance with legal standards, user safeguarding and ethical practices in both technological developments and applications, as well as in non-technical operational due diligence.

Founders recognise the strong connection between user-centric design and the principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI). They emphasise that creating truly inclusive technology requires significant stakeholder engagement and an inclusive organisational culture. As one participant noted, "How can you code for inclusivity without being an inclusive business?" This perspective highlights the integral relationship between a company's internal culture and values and its ability to create genuinely inclusive and equitable technological solutions.

Conclusion

The study underscores the essential role that integrated values play in guiding ethical business practices within technology-driven [ESVs], balancing profit generation with making a positive impact on society and the environment. This detailed qualitative analysis illuminates the complex relationship between ethical values, business sustainability, and societal impact, highlighting the crucial importance of core values and ethical practices in managing the intricate convergence of technology, ethics, and business.

The narrative uncovers the personal trials and moral dilemmas that founders must navigate to maintain ethical integrity, achieve commercial success, and realise their ethical endeavour, revealing that founders are driven not only by commercial success but also by a deep-seated moral compass. Their testimonies indicate an emerging movement of startup founders keen to align their business operations with ethical principles and legal standards. They employ technology, research, collaboration, and scientific comprehension to achieve financial viability and sustainable impact while acknowledging the limitations inherent in technological solutions.

Through this lens, the study not only amplifies the voices of those leading the charge in socially innovative entrepreneurship but also stresses the urgency of fostering an ecosystem where ethical considerations and innovation converge towards a more equitable future.

Appendix A3: Mapping of domains to thematic findings and member-checking stages

Table 39 identifies the domains (sub-sub-themes) in narrative form presented in the initial member-checking summary. In the conclusion document, they were reformatted and made explicit for clarity and accessibility. No new findings were introduced; rather, the presentation was refined to highlight dimensions already embedded in participants' accounts.

Table 39: Domains mapped against findings and stage of sharing with Participants

Theme	Sub-theme	Domain (sub-sub-theme)	Illustrative extract	Stage Document
Theme 1: Ethical alignment: values, boundary realignment and dissonance	1.1 Dynamic Values Adherence	Self-awareness of personal ethics and professional capabilities	"Founders noted their moral obligation to contribute to society is driven by their awareness and recognition of their professional capabilities and core values."	Initial (narrative), Conclusion (explicit)
		Adherence to legal and regulatory rules and standards	"They emphasised their dedication to… ensure compliance with the law and robust CSR foundations."	Initial & Conclusion
		Adherence to ethical norms and standards	"Continuously evaluate and re-evaluate their values and boundaries, realigning business practices to ensure they reflect the organisation's core values."	Initial & Conclusion
		Systematic scanning and boundary adjustment	"Proactively and reactively scan emerging challenges and assess the impacts of corporate policies and practices."	Initial & Conclusion
		Post-decision boundary rebalancing	"Dynamic approach helps them remain operationally responsive… while ensuring safeguarding and ethical standards."	Initial & Conclusion

Theme	Sub-theme	Domain (sub-sub-theme)	Illustrative extract	Stage Document
	1.2 Cognitive & Emotional Dissonance	Recognising cognitive dissonance	"Founders articulate the moral dilemma… emphasising that sticking to their values is 'the right thing to do.'"	Initial (cognitive only), Conclusion (expanded)
		Recognising emotional dissonance	"Emotional dissonance occurs when founders must project confidence or optimism while privately feeling conflicted."	Conclusion
		Alleviating conflict through psychological capital	"Founders draw on the psychological strength gained from pursuing their ethical endeavours."	Conclusion
	1.3 Sustainable & Impact-Driven Strategies	CSR initiatives	"Offering free services, making donations, and collaborating with charities, local government, and other organisations."	Initial & Conclusion
		Carbon offsetting	"Efforts to mitigate their tech carbon footprint through monetary contributions and partnerships."	Initial & Conclusion
		Modelling ethical behaviour	"Continuous effort required to identify and promote ethical behaviours within their organisations."	Initial & Conclusion
Theme 2: Social Impact Strategy	2.1 Engagement, Research, & Growth Synergies	Building relationships	"Cultivate substantial, trust-based relationships within the industry to promote and integrate ethical practices."	Initial & Conclusion
		Evidence through research & impact measurement	"You can't manage what you don't measure."	Conclusion (explicit emphasis)
		Truth-telling and transparency	"Dedication to truth-telling for systemic change, promoting innovative methods to address global issues."	Initial & Conclusion
		Knowledge sharing	"Sharing pioneering ideas, applying audience feedback to refine accuracy and effectiveness."	Initial & Conclusion

Theme	Sub-theme	Domain (sub-sub-theme)	Illustrative extract	Stage Document
	2.2 Sector-Specific Planning & Reinvestment	Financial sustainability	"Profit is considered paramount for the sustainability of an organisation and its capability to effect positive change."	Initial & Conclusion
		Purpose-driven operations	"Strategic planning shaped by sector-specific ethical priorities and technology-focused capabilities."	Initial & Conclusion
		Profit reinvestment	"Profits are strategically reinvested to support technological advancements and mission-focused projects."	Initial & Conclusion
		Ethical governance	"Growing recognition of the nuances between 'doing less bad,' 'doing more good,' and striving for regenerative practices."	Conclusion
Theme 3: Tech for Good	3.1 Technological Integration	Navigating limitations	"Caution against 'blind trust in technology,' emphasising that 'technology is just a tool.'"	Initial & Conclusion
		Knowledge sharing & integration	"Leveraging professional expertise, networking, and collaboration… instrumental in driving R&D."	Initial & Conclusion
		Systemic change & future directions	"Propelling technological advancements to address societal challenges through developing, co-designing, or stimulating demand for novel solutions."	Conclusion
	3.2 User-Centric Design & JEDI	Data integrity & compliance	"Maintaining data integrity and verification, abiding by laws and regulations related to technology use."	Initial & Conclusion
		Inclusive and accessible design	"Placing user needs and experiences at the forefront… with an emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility."	Initial & Conclusion
		Advanced technologies & engagement	"Transform user-focused technologies through gamification and interactive learning, incorporating AI and VR."	Initial & Conclusion
		Embedding JEDI principles	"How can you code for inclusivity without being an inclusive business?"	Conclusion

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

Appendix A4: Coded transcript excerpts by Sub-Sub-Theme

All excerpts in this appendix are drawn from lightly denaturalised and anonymised transcripts. Denaturalisation retains participants' substantive wording and meaning but does not reproduce every pause, filler, repetition, false start or paralinguistic feature unless relevant to interpretation. This approach was used because the analysis focused on ethical reasoning, decision accounts and meaning, rather than conversational performance (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005).

All excerpts are anonymised to protect participants and ventures. Direct identifiers have been removed or replaced with ellipses ([…]) and neutral placeholders, such as [health condition] or [organisation name]. Indirect identifiers, including distinctive roles, locations, organisational details or commercially sensitive information, have been generalised where needed. Placeholders were chosen to keep analytic meaning clear while reducing re-identification risk (Kaiser, 2009; Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015).

This approach supports:

- **Replicability:** each excerpt is linked to its code and source interview in the audit trail, so the route from data to interpretation can be followed.
- **Confidential handling:** anonymisation is applied consistently across names, roles, locations, organisations and distinctive contextual details.
- **Context retention:** narrative flow and key terms are retained where safe to do so, so the analytic point remains visible.
- **Transparent method:** excerpts are presented in short analytic segments and mapped to the relevant sub-sub-themes, making the connection between coded material and theme development easier to inspect.

Table 40: Participant narrative splits by sub-sub-theme and corresponding attribution note

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
1.1.1 Self-awareness of personal ethics and professional capabilities as a catalyst for moral action.			
001	1.1.1	"It's about how we go about building our business... what we try to do is every aspect of the business is to be done in a way that is like moral and correct and to code."	Personal moral intention and ethical identity in business-building.
002	1.1.1	"But I'm not sure how I design it how I've defined ethicality and generally but in terms of [Org] about doing things to code and in a way that's like morally upright as well."	Reflective grappling with ethical identity and moral standards.
003	1.1.1	"My personal and professional principles are the same. I don't really know how any other way to answer that. My morals and ethics personally are in the business, they're symbiotic, they're the same. Be a good human, be kind, help however, whoever you can."	Personal moral identity and ethical intentionality in business.
004	1.1.1	"If you have the means, whether it's financially or time, help someone or some cause in any way that you possibly can, whether it's [...] whether it's other good causes, other people trying to help others, if you can, please do and help them. If you can't, then that's also okay."	Operationalisation of ethical generosity and inclusive moral framing.
005	1.1.1	"I do see a lot of new companies moving into this space and growing very quickly. I so far have there's just me and I have someone who supports me with admin and so far that's my decision because I don't want to become a manager and an employer at this stage in my life."	Personal ethical boundaries and intentional business design.
006	1.1.1	"I think [my personal and professional principles] are the same. The only thing that I do professionally that I don't like and wouldn't do personally, and I've even been trying to move away from it professionally, is I hate academic talk, in that I hate using big words for the sake of using big words..."	Personal discomfort with professional norms and desire to align practice with personal values.
007	1.1.1	"My purpose is to use my ability, skills, talents to bring about positive impact that improves people's quality of life." [...] "I would definitely say that's my purpose and to be always contributing to society and not just taking away from it."	Purpose statement emphasises quality-of-life improvement; civic duty framing (prosocial intent).

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
008	1.1.1	“For me it's organic. It has been I've built on my own personal beliefs really throughout my career just in every role that I've had.”	Personal ethical development as a consistent career driver.
009	1.1.1	"The values part of what I do and what I did at Business in the Community is incredibly important to me and the thought of working in a company that makes widgets or, you know, does something that doesn't matter to me, I just couldn't bring myself to do it."	Personal values as central to professional identity.
010	1.1.1	"I have to do something where I feel I am or at least have the opportunity to make a bit of a difference. And that's why I work really. That's why I do what I do.”	Purpose-driven motivation and ethical commitment to impact.
011	1.1.1	"I'm always kind and try to be kind and patient with people to sort of say, well, I don't know what's always going on in our life so I will take what they say on face value." [...] "Just be kind to everyone and consider it. You really do not know what's going on in other people's lives."	Personal moral orientation and empathetic behaviour.
012	1.1.1	“[We] had a software background, […] and a background in business and a bit of startup business before going into it. [When] we identified this issue that we have, and likely the market likely have as well, obviously it was going to be a difficult thing to try and get off the ground from paper. But one of the big drivers for us is we almost felt obliged, like compelled to do it, because we just felt we must be quite unique pairing within our market. […] It would be so unlikely to get two people running a [this kind of business] that had our backgrounds before and also like the desire and ambition to go on and make a difference and the belief that that was possible as well. […] We had choices available to us at the time in terms of how we grow the business.”	Self-recognised unique founder capability pairing with moral fit
013	1.1.1	“So, where I came from before was very toxic. So, it was very important to me that the business grew on honesty and integrity.”	Personal ethical motivation shaped by prior negative experience.
014	1.1.1	"You're always more capable than you think. That you're capable of achieving a lot more than you may perceive you are capable of. And being in the right environment and around the right people can seriously influence that as well in good and in bad ways just to be wary of that but we're capable of capable of so much. I think there are so many boxes and	Personal belief in purpose, capability, and moral design.

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
		limitations we put on ourselves that are just completely unnecessary and untrue, but yeah, we're capable of so much. And there's purpose in everyone's life, definitely. So, much purpose. I think lots of people think that they're here for no reason but I don't believe that's true. I think everyone has been designed on purpose for good reason. Again, influenced by my faith in God, I feel like he's created everybody for on purpose for a purpose. So, it's just about discovering what that purpose is."	
015	1.1.1	"For us, being ethical is all about creating a space that is welcoming for everyone and that is reflective of a diverse society." […] "Everything that we do has to be reflective of the way that we want the world that we're building to be." […] "It came fairly organically from me being a young woman in tech and kind of seeing the problems that existed there." […] "It also comes from working with people who are also I guess somewhat marginalised in whatever field they're in." […] "It's from my experience of working in, I guess, more traditional technology spaces and seeing what is wrong with them and then having the opportunity once I have my own sort of venture to address those."	Personal experience and ethical motivation rooted in lived marginalisation and inclusive intent.
016	1.1.1	"I don't think I can forfeit my own personal morals for the benefit of the company if that makes sense." […] "I think no, I don't think they [personal and organizational principles] differ. I think I very much, very much about inclusion and I would say everyone is welcome in my space as long as they aren't harmful to anybody else."	Personal moral boundaries and inclusive values as inseparable from professional practice.
017	1.1.1	"I think ethical is if you kind of start with the assumption that you want everyone on the planet to have a good life, like that's my start. Like that there's nothing more basic than that." […] "Business comes down to how you value business and make the business. There is something around how much new value future people and animals live as well versus public life."	Ethical worldview grounded in universal wellbeing and moral starting point.
018	1.1.1	"We are dog owners and we are meat eaters but we have what we describe as an environmental conscience." […] "So, we don't want to change our lifestyles dramatically but if we can substitute more sustainable and ethical ways of living our lifestyles, then we will look for them."	Ethical lifestyle adaptation and environmental conscience.
019	1.1.1	"The path that you take, so if you've got your eyes open and I teach, actually I'm judging now for a young enterprise so I was in the classroom after I sold the last company. I spent a	Ethical responsiveness and career-long engagement

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
		few years in the classroom every Tuesday as a volunteer donating time [to…] students doing young enterprise and it was invaluable thinking if you're listening to what's going on around you then you model yourself so the basic foundations are childbirth yes then you go into the career of agriculture which then leads me into the waste industry. The waste industry, I'm looking at thinking, holy moly, this is just a mess. And then you're trying to work your way through your career, your business, trying to improve certain elements of that business."	with systemic environmental challenges.
020	1.1.1	"So, you're always striving for perfection, and I think that perfection definitely comes from your upbringing and your desire to change."	Personal ethical drive rooted in upbringing and moral aspiration.
021	1.1.1	"If I can use my knowledge and my passion in this area to positively influence companies to do better business and make better business decisions, not just for them, but for wider society, then that's my driver. For many years, before I left business in the community, where as I say I had been for […] years."	Personal ethical motivation and values-driven intent to influence business for societal good.
022	1.1.1	"My purpose in society is to use my ability, skills, talents to bring about positive impact that improves people's quality of life. I would definitely say that's my purpose and to be always contributing to the society and not just taking away from it, I always want to give back whatever I can like I want to I always tell people that I want to die empty like I want to die having exhausted all the potential that I've got that sounds a bit grim but like I wanted to die having exhausted all of the potential that I have and making sure that I was used really well while I'm alive. […] What do I owe society? I think good management of my time, resources and abilities I would say. And yeah, I would, yeah, I feel like now I owe them a lot. I generally feel like I owe these people because they've bought so much so many people from all over the world have just pulled so much into it like through interviews like this that we've done with our users and stuff so I'd definitely block out other products at least that they can use on themselves and yeah absolutely any contributions I can be making."	Ethical purpose framed through societal contribution, personal legacy, and reciprocal responsibility.
023	1.1.1	"I think I owe society simply that I do my best as an individual and also to influence others to do their best to protect what we've got." […] "Can I steal a quote from someone else? […] 'The biggest threat facing our planet is the thought that somebody else is going to save it.' […] Nobody's going to save anything. We all have to do our bit as individuals and that's it."	Ethical responsibility framed through collective action and personal accountability.

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
024	1.1.1	“The reason why I personally began my former business, which has led to this business, is about wanting to be able to reflect on my working life with some pride and knowing that I've made a contribution, I've used the skills that I have and what's available to me to do something that's good and it sounds easy and I'm fairly pragmatic. I'm not an extreme tree hugger by any stretch of the imagination. So, we are trying to find a balance between, a pragmatic balance between, what is commercially sustainable but has a purpose.”	Personal motivation framed through pragmatic values and desire for meaningful contribution.
025	1.1.1	"Principles, I think it's really about my personal values as an individual. They're very aligned closely with my professional." [...] " But at the same time, as a business, we're always wanting to ensure that our mission is at the heart of our decision making. And it's part of our principles again so our focus will be very much on the social impact that we're trying to achieve, the sustainability and also you know even just the collaboration and the ethics behind it all you know as they've found our starting up my personal principles are very much aligned with that."	Self-awareness of personal ethics and professional alignment.
026	1.1.1	“I believe that I wasted... For about 15 years [...] it was take-take-take. And then I became [a parent] and I completely changed. I completely went 180. And I found I've learned through life to really value and appreciate people that do, that contribute to the good." […] "I believe that we all have that duty so I've got to make up for the [...] years that I didn't do anything.”	Self-awareness of personal transformation and ethical responsibility; reframes past conflict into principled action.
027	1.1.1	"I think if we can if we have the means we have the ideas we have the means and the drive or whatever, then that does give us a sort of responsibility to go through with it so that other people can use it for good as well."	Ethical self-awareness and moral agency; reflects internalised responsibility to act for collective benefit.
028	1.1.1	“[Org] is a kind of wellbeing consultancy specialising in small and medium-sized businesses. We work well, I work worldwide, but most of my clients are in the UK, although I've got some [overseas] clients as well and basically the work is around setting well-being strategy around kind of educating employees around mental health topics. And yeah, I would say those are the two main things that I get involved in." […] "I teach mindfulness, [... training to become a registered professional], [...] in a clinical [setting]”	Self-awareness of ethical purpose and professional capability; reflects principled integration of personal values into wellbeing practice.

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
029	1.1.1	In some respects, and I'm using the skills and experience that I've gathered to do the best that I can do within the context that I'm best pleased to do it.”	Self-awareness of ethical positioning and purposeful contribution within chosen professional context.
030	1.1.1	"I think you can't work in the sustainability space if you are, you're not living your purpose." […] "Because your work is, our work is our purpose..." […] "You can't work in this space and just not be personally attached to it..." […] "I think that's been a big moral kind of, I realised I had morals and values."	Self-awareness of ethical identity and purpose-led professional alignment.
031	1.1.1	"Fortunately, we're big community lovers. So, therefore our green page, I shouldn't really call it our green page, our ESG page, is something that's very dear to us." […] "We are very much, very much ahead of a lot of companies that we talk to because that's the soul of our business and we are here to help pay bills and have holidays and love our grandchildren and dog but we're also here to help those less fortunate."	Self-awareness of ethical identity and values-led business purpose; reflects principled integration of personal and professional ethics.
032	1.1.1	"You have to have your values and these, these are not values that corporate organisations come out with and talk about, you know, how good they are to their customers and not all that nonsense. This is by your own personal values and how they wrap into your company, because that makes all your decision making a lot easier." […] "If you, if you've got your core values, this is what this is, what I'm trying to do. This is how I'm going to do it. And you stick with that, and, as I said earlier, you can defend that."	Expresses personal ethical identity as a foundation for decision-making.
033	1.1.1	"I think in life we all have triggers. And I think that the basis and the foundation of any business, if it is to grow organically or to develop and have processes." […] "So, where I came from before was very toxic. So, it was very important to me that the business grew on honesty and integrity."	Personal ethical motivation shaped by prior experience.
034	1.1.1	"For me ethics in business, ethics in our business is very much about having that our reason for existence and the core of why we exist our DNA and that trickles into everything we do in every single way." […] "Our primary ethical values have never changed but we've had to change some things along the way to make sure that that primary objective hasn't been affected in any way."	Frames ethicality as core identity and purpose.

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
1.1.2 Adherence to legal and regulatory rules and standards.			
035	1.1.2	"So, I work in the, I suppose, clinical research R&D, so preclinical safety testing all the way up to clinical trials. I've been working in that industry as a space quality assurance so we're the gatekeepers of making sure everything is done to the regulations for [time]. I've worked for various organisations, I've worked for universities, big pharma, big mega medical device companies down to really small contract organisations."	Regulatory compliance and quality assurance.
036	1.1.2	"Being this ethical organisation and aligning our vision is about also ensuring that we are compliant with the regulation and the law. We talk about GDPR and stuff like that."	Legal compliance as part of ethical practice.
037	1.1.2	"So, as a I'm a [registered professional." [...] "So, because we're mental health care and because we are qualified practitioners we're part of a wider ethical code which gives us a framework to apply to our work with clients and with people directly which kind of helps and that makes it clear I suppose where our some parameters at least lie and gives us a guide that we can sort of go within and operate within."	Formal ethical codes and professional conduct frameworks.
038	1.1.2	"Because [Technology] is a medical device it does have to comply with medical regulations... there's a level of ethics that goes into building it in a way that it's not going to be of harm to people's health and that it's enabling people to look after their health safely and properly and in a way that's medically sound."	Regulatory adherence framed as ethical responsibility in product design.
039	1.1.2	"Whether that is through choice or whether that is through legislation, that every company should in one way or another give back to their stakeholders, not just their shareholders."	Legal and ethical framing of stakeholder responsibility.
040	1.1.2	“I think it is increasingly scalable because, again, going back to legislation and requirements, the introduction of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive in Europe in the last year, the imminent introduction of the sustainability disclosure standards in the UK and all of the international requirements around ESG reporting mean that increasingly companies are going to have to account for the impact that they have within their value chains and increasingly they are going to pass on they're going to have to pass on a lot of those questions and requirements within their supply chain in order for them to make the standards that they have to meet."	ESG legislation and supply chain compliance pressures.

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
041	1.1.2	"Things that we've generally done is GDPR, making sure we're compliant, working with clinical trials, we're always conscious about as an auditor what access we do have of personal information."	Legal compliance and data protection in clinical settings.
042	1.1.2	"We're considering B2C because, well, for commercial reasons, because we have quite like an additional revenue stream, that's a bit more predictable."	Commercial strategy shaped by regulatory and market pressures.
043	1.1.2	"[I] work with companies who need help and support in understanding how to be sustainable and responsible in how they operate their business and increasingly because there is a lot of legislative requirements on companies now when it comes to sustainability and the ESG to help them to understand and manage that process."	Ethical support framed in response to legislative ESG requirements.
044	1.1.2	"We are not a school so we don't legally have to follow it... but it just makes sense." [...] "I'm looking at what our liability is lawfully... what's a reasonable suggestion? So, a big part of our decision making is, well, what would a reasonable person expect?"	Ethical reasoning through legal and practical judgement; reflects anticipatory governance.
045	1.1.2	"The big thing we need to look into next as a business is filters." [...] "Because again the 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' [KCSE] document has had a massive focus recently on filters and blocking things that are bad on the internet." [...] "We're having to model all the time how to be safe online." [...] "So, when we're working with children one-to-one we need to ensure that what they're seeing us do online is very safe." [...] "Watching before showing is quite telling in terms of the safeguarding that you're prepared to do."	Ethical impact through safeguarding compliance; reflects principled digital governance.
046	1.1.2	"The biggest one is the fact that the legislation in the UK is still very vague and not really in place." [...] "So, it's a big risk." [...] "We've discovered a lot of support so we feel that our business and our aims and goals are really well received by the public and by government and you know we've had grants, we've had a lot of support with." [...]	Regulatory uncertainty acknowledged; risk framing offset by legitimacy from grants and state/public endorsement (compliance horizon scanning).
047	1.1.2	"How do we read that information? How do we ensure [...], we have we have like the legal framework in place so that you know we don't end up getting sued or something for [health	Legal risk anticipation and mentor-informed policy

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
		condition] that's not caught on time so all of these considerations yeah." [...] "Now there's a lot more in place that we have because we've discussed with business mentors and how we should be going about doing that."	building; formalising safeguards to avoid harm/liability (compliance institutionalisation).
048	1.1.2	"We work with [...], which is a company that helps support businesses to make their charity pledges legal and clear so that people know that 10% of every print sale goes to a specific charity so [...] goes to [...] Trust etc"	Earmarked revenue → social good.
049	1.1.2	"So, for me personally, I'm a [registered professional]. I belong to an engineering institution, a professional institution. I'm also bound by everything that I signed on the day that I signed up to be a professional engineer." [...] "So, there's an ethical and moral model of my activities as an individual [...]."	Professional ethical codes and institutional standards as a moral framework.
1.1.3 Adherence to ethical norms and standards			
050	1.1.3	"What I'll say it being ethical, I think really it's about how we go about building our business. So, for example, what we're creating is very socially driven. It's tech-driven as well, but also socially driven. It's very important that we enforce that kind of human aspect in what we are building. And so what we try to do is every aspect of the business is to be done in a way that is like moral and correct and to code. I think just day-to-day general business, we try to do or try to implement in a way that is ethical too.	Operationalisation of ethical values across business functions and stakeholder interactions.
051	1.1.3	"I hope that we can prove that a business with ethics, morals, values that's trying to do good, can prosper. And so one day I hope that every business, every business has clearly got the values that we have and doesn't just give back and do good and have ethics as a corporate social responsibility or ESG tick box exercise but actually it's in."	Ethical ambition and critique of superficial CSR.
052	1.1.3	"Some people don't care about our ethics and our mission and our values, but they might still purchase from us, okay? Which means that we're still getting support even if you don't particularly care about what we're trying to do, which I think is a beautiful thing."	Ethical resilience and acceptance of diverse motivations.
053	1.1.3	"I suppose ethics in regards to [Org] or ethicality is, I suppose I see it as a process of taking care and being conscious of the potential implications I can have on others and myself in the influence that [Org] has on different organisations, different people, and information	Reflects conscious evaluation of organisational

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		spreading, that kind of thing. And trying to have a positive influence in that regard, whatever we define as positive."	influence and ethical implications.
054	1.1.3	"We interpret decisions as being ethical that are in line with our understanding of the theory of justice that we think, which is basically that we really think that disabled people are owed an equity of access and so to that extent the goal is to be able to provide disabled people with the tools they need to be able to tackle the obstacles that exist in the world around them and those tools should be provided for free that don't need to be earned or paid for, computed for, they're owed to them because we think that's fair and just."	Justice-based ethical framework and normative commitments to equity and access.
055	1.1.3	"It's a mental health thing. It obviously has a lot of behavioural aspects to it. But the key part of it is the psychological underpinning as to why someone is behaving in that way. That's the key to it. And it's the same with eating disorders because it's really closely linked with eating disorders. You don't have to look a certain way to have an eating disorder. It's the behaviour you're doing and specifically the reason why you're doing those behaviours that that makes it the disorder."	Ethical understanding through psychological and behavioural insight.
056	1.1.3	"We believe that local food systems are part of the standard of a resilient future." [...] "If we think about our food systems, here in the UK because ours is a UK-focused business. We have a problem with food waste, which is systemic. 30% of all of our food gets wasted somewhere in its supply chain." [...] "We have a value chain problem that means that it appears on the face of it that the final stage in the process of retailing manages to hold on to most of the money in the value chain, whereas producers and manufacturers receive less." [...] "I would say that's a highlight. And if then you look to what models of doing business might support that, I guess you come to those that are broader in their, we might call it measurement set or you know I guess an old-fashioned phrase would be a more balanced scorecard of how you do business."	Systemic ethical issues in food systems, value chain imbalance, and alternative business models.
057	1.1.3	"I think we should leave them [the younger generation] in charge because I think they would succeed. I think they should be given the tools and the resources and the support that they deserve." [...] "I think it would help the confidence and the courage of your convictions."	Ethical belief in youth empowerment and intergenerational responsibility.

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058	1.1.3	"So, our premise I suppose in the drivers of like everyone who works in the industry is getting those treatments, improving people's lives."	Ethical purpose through collective impact orientation; improving lives is positioned as a shared moral driver.
059	1.1.3	"We owe society to be, to be, you know, as inclusive and diverse and reflective of, you know, the people around us as possible."	Normative commitment to inclusion/diversity as social obligation; crafts justice-oriented ethical stance (values stewardship).
060	1.1.3	"I think that every small choice is a really important choice. Every small decision is a really important one. All choices are important. They need to be carefully considered, and if the option is there, to do the better out of the two then do the better."	Ethical prioritisation through careful decision-making; reflects normative commitment to doing good.
061	1.1.3	"I would want to have contracts in place around the nature of that work, some kind of framework that within it would have ethical or like values-based guidelines for how I would want work to happen."	Ethical prioritisation through values-based contracting and principled governance.
062	1.1.3	"The principles around that are the more [...] the more transparent open honest. We are loud and proud we're getting there. [Some] things have gone wrong, things have gone right." [...]	Radical transparency and fallibility ("things went wrong/right"); ethic of open process over image management (truth-telling).
063	1.1.3	"We could have changed our substrate [...]. We could have changed that for an organic [...], which means it would be much more available and we'd struggling with guaranteed, it would be much more guaranteed, it would be cheaper, so it would help us with our cash flow a lot. But we are adamant we're going to stay organic and we do believe that we'll pay off in the future financially. But also, there are other benefits to remaining organic, lots actually."	Refusal to compromise organic standards despite cost; integrity over short-term liquidity.

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064	1.1.3	"I guess in a nutshell it's doing the right thing and doing the decent thing. It's often a question when we interview people for our podcast series, it's like organizations ask themselves, what's the right thing to do? And we think the question is, what's the decent thing to do? Because it kind of, it puts a different slant on that question. Are we doing the right thing? It feels more box ticking and you can just sort of talk yourself into the fact you're doing that, but for us it's about doing the decent thing and measuring that and being able to explain how you do the right thing as a business. And we bring that into a lot of what we do and the other parts of what we support as a business. So, it's not just about making profit, you know, that's not that's not a sole priority of ours. But it's how do we share what we do both as an organisation, product wise, but then the financial gain that we make from it, how do we give back to society and to the planet. And we do that through a number of different initiatives that we support. And that's kind of where we base our business on. We want to practice what we teach effectively." […] "I think the word decent is more of an emotional term, it makes you think more about the realities of what you're doing. So, is what we're doing as a business decent, do others benefit from it more broadly than just the people that we educate? What's the broader, I guess, benefits and positive impact on society and planet whereas I think doing the right thing I think it's quite that's quite a narrow lens on what you should and shouldn't be doing. […] I think from a perspective of if you said what's the right thing to do in how you treat your employees, you could just say oh will we pay the minimum wage and that's fine, what's the decent thing to do? I think that broadens that out to say you know you're paying them the bare minimum you can get away with legally paying them and I think it just puts a different lens over things which I somebody posed that question to us once and we were like that does for me personally it changed it changed how I thought about things. […] So, when we were building up the business, we were doing, it was a real journey getting, I didn't plan to be where I am today […]. It was a pure accident and then it just took over my life and I just completely immersed myself in it for the last four years until we and we officially built the business up last year."	"Decent thing" reframes ethics from rule-following to wider social good; pricing/access decisions encode distributive justice.

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065	1.1.3	"So, for me personally, I'm a chartered engineer. I belong to an engineering institution, a professional institution. I'm also bound by everything that I signed on the day that I signed up to be a professional engineer." [...] "So, there's an ethical and moral model of my activities as an individual [...].	Anchored in professional ethical codes and institutional standards.
1.1.4 Systematic scanning, identification and assessment of moral issues and boundaries adjustment			
066	1.1.4	"Companies within those supply chains, many of whom maybe just have no idea what they should be doing or how to start or where to start or you know just how to even scope it all out are increasingly kind of coming through and looking for help and support because they are being asked, like I mentioned earlier, they have investors, those investors now want to know what are you doing in this space. If they're tendering for public contracts, they have to provide their sustainability plan, their climate mitigation efforts, etc."	Ethical scanning and boundary adjustment in response to investor and public contract pressures.
067	1.1.4	"The vast majority of my working life has been working in this space. It started in corporate responsibility and that has organically, if you like, grown and developed into a broader appreciation of the need for us to operate in a sustainable way that doesn't negatively impact future generations. The sustainable development goals here [...] are a useful framework for communicating and working with companies to kind of help them to grasp the concept and give them a starting point to begin from and explore where they may have the greatest potential to have impact on those universal goals."	Ethical scanning and use of SDGs as a boundary-setting framework.
068	1.1.4	"I think transparency plays a huge role in whether an organisation is truly ethical." [...] "It's the people that come and talk to us and how open and transparent they are about what their views are and what their organisations are trying to do."	Transparency and openness as indicators of ethical organisational behaviour.
069	1.1.4	"At its core, it's taking a broader view of consequence and impact than a narrow one just on yourself or your own interests." [...] "It's the need and the want to practically just check back and ask ourselves what impact are we having and who might this impact be for?"	Ethical reflection through impact assessment and broader consequence scanning.
070	1.1.4	"It's like considering like the companies that work with the companies, the company that you're working directly with may be ethical, they might be doing something for like climate change or they might be doing something in terms of medical technology. Supply chain then	Ethical complexity in supply chain relationships and indirect accountability.

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		are they working with people that we think are ethically but the people that they are working with may not align it as you follow this chain that's usually somewhere down it where it kind of misaligns."	
071	1.1.4	"For example, the loaded green technology organizations which are doing really good work, they are there for a real purpose to kind of help the planet. But like for example [Org], they have their renewable energy investment fund. [Org] is like one of the worst companies in terms of like police and underworld, like the amount of profit they're making from it as well. But they also have this weird kind of greenwashed fund to make it look like they're funding renewables and say, okay, the companies directly are doing good, but they're getting invested on via oil and gas."	Greenwashing contradictions and ethical misalignment in investment structures.
072	1.1.4	"It had been an environmental issue for many years and so we had a lot of support from the local authority, [...] to get this site cleaned up and we won a long-term contract with them. So, the processing plant would process about [quantity] material providing really good quality [...]. There was a lot more information came out of that that really made me think that we needed to come out this whole waste from a different perspective. And the plastics was probably one of the along with the garden waste I described earlier. The plastic situation was just becoming it's untenable."	Ethical reassessment of waste and plastics through environmental engagement.
073	1.1.4	"Yeah, I suppose a lot of it sits into the business part of things so we'll look at what's happening, what our clients' needs are, so we'll consider what that is and see whether we're in the best position or we've got the knowledge internally to support that. The training is taking a lot of work to do, so we're learning, and the speed of technology and improvements and updates to the software is making our life more and more easier so we definitely use like a simple approach."	Ethical adaptation and learning in response to client needs and technological change.
074	1.1.4	"I guess setting aside the need to create an income for myself, which you know that's why most people work. Setting that aside, I think I've developed a lot of experience and expertise in this space. I'm here within [...]. It's a small business market, if you like, and there are not many other people with the breadth of expertise and experience that I have here really."	Ethical adaptation and boundary-setting through accumulated expertise and market positioning.
075	1.1.4	"So, today, how do we find out how much tax company pays? And then we put a few other measures into it about gender pay and about CO two emissions. [...], OK, well, we've got this	Values-anchored productisation (ratings app);

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		rating system emerging rating system. How do we share that with people? […] it was a natural landing place for us to develop an app to make it simple for people to, whilst they're walking down high street, be able to have a look and see how much tax the […] versus […] or […] versus […] or whatever it may be. So, it was just a natural place to put it." […] "In my view, the key is you have to have your values and these, these are not values that corporate organisations come out with and talk about, you know, how good they are to their customers and not all that nonsense. This is by your own personal values and how they wrap into your company, because that makes all your decision making a lot easier. If you, if you've got your core values, this is what this is, what I'm trying to do. This is how I'm going to do it. And you stick with that. And as I said earlier, you can defend that. So, people, they may not like it, but as long as you're happy and you can defend it, that's, that's where you need to be. That makes all your decision making a lot simpler."	personal values operationalised as decision rubric and defence (boundary setting).
076	1.1.4	"Within the business part of things so we'll look at what's happening, what our clients' needs are, so we'll consider what that is and see whether we're in the best position or we've got the knowledge internally to support that." [...] "I do have a lot of contacts with other consultants in the industry and perhaps what we get a request for, you know, we are quite honest with them and we will say, you know, this isn't our area of expertise. Are you happy to carry on with this? […] We do have to have integrity in our world." [...] "My role as a quality assurance consultant, the key underlying principle is independence. So, we've got to be very independent of what we're auditing. And that's where it drives the transparency to clients to sort of say you know how independent am I." [...] "I do have to be transparent and say to the client you know I do work with this organization or anything like that. That's the key one with people asking requests." [...] "I get requests for areas that aren't in my expertise or in the organization at the current time and then we'll work with the client on trying to find solutions with them. So, it's not like I just say no, it's my own case, okay, let's try and find a solution for you that is workable."	Scope vigilance and independence; honest capability limits; client redirection; integrity through transparency (boundary discipline).
077	1.1.4	"I think some of the reason I work in […], the business I started, there's a big ethical consideration to that." [...] "My business has focused on helping, using the skills I've learned, I've been learning the science… […] I think the climate scientists are extremely concerned that	Ethical motivation rooted in climate urgency and scientific awareness; reflects

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		we are kind of in the last chance to live like we are in that really in this which is a really big problem and it's not being solved as quickly as it should and I would say 90% of the people I speak to don't really have any concept of how serious a situation is."	boundary-setting through moral concern.
078	1.1.4	"Everything we do has to be considered, and we consider it through the focus of what we're doing is it good value, is it kind to people, to the environment, to others." […] "If those things are negative, then we won't do it." […] "I've had to make some quite difficult business decisions recently where I realized that just to put out an offer on new products wouldn't have aligned with my values, so we were not putting it out there."	Values-led decision-making and ethical restraint in product development.
079	1.1.4	"I want it to be something that possibly could be handed down in my family and if they don't want to continue it that's absolutely fine but then that they would be able to hopefully sell that business and profit from it, not some investor." […] "I think sometimes you get offered something and on face value it looks like it's the perfect thing at that point. But then when you look into the future and you think actually what's going to be like in two years' time, five years' time and it's sometimes better to go slower and steadier and be in control."	Anti-capture stance on finance/ownership; paced growth to preserve mission control (values-protective strategy).
080	1.1.4	"I believe that we all have that duty so I've got to make up for the […] years that I didn't come to anything and more you know and I think if we can if we have the means we have the ideas we have the means and the drive or whatever, then that does give us a sort of responsibility to go through with it so that other people can use it for good as well." [...] "Every small choice is a really important choice." [...] "All choices are important." [...] "They need to be carefully considered, and if the option is there, to do the better out of the two then do the better."	Ethical responsibility and decision-making framed through cumulative impact and personal accountability.
081	1.1.4	"I think transport would be a huge compliment to what we're doing because it would both help people be able to know where to go and then know how to get there, which I, you know, just sort of closed a loop on my mind."	Ethical systems thinking and practical expansion of access through transport integration.
082	1.1.4	"I think it's a combination of the two because how I got into the sector to begin with was actually probably through a personal belief." [...] "To address a problem that I saw as being a problem and I suppose that comes from my personal opinion that we should eat more local produce, we should support our local farmers, we should eat more of what we produce, we should eat healthier, more seasonal product, we should probably eat more plants and	Personal ethos drives sustainability priority; embeds ethics as non-negotiable criterion in

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		less meat than we currently do on balance." [...] "We will always, whatever choices we are presented with, we will take sustainability and ethicality into the decision making."	choices (mission congruence).
083	1.1.4	"I've had to kind of go a lot slower than I probably anticipated." [...] "I thought actually you know what that's not the reason why I set up this business. If it takes another two years and I do it on my own terms you're going to be so much stronger for it because I will then be looking over my shoulder going am I making the stuff that's going to make a huge profit for me and more importantly for the people who have invested in this company and..."	Strategic pacing and long-term ethical alignment.
084	1.1.4	"So, I think it's about, for me, it's, you know, is this gonna make a profit? Is this gonna work for the people that we're supposedly serving in terms of customers? And then it's coming back to that planet. So, a lot of people call it three P's don't they? And All of those things are kind of tangled together for [...] in terms of like business decisions." [...] "But at the end of the day we are a business, so we always come back to profit like any other business. You know, am I making the right decision to work with the supplier, are they cost effective?"	Ethical leadership through values integration.
085	1.1.4	"So, the piece that I was speaking about and the reason why I chose to show it was because it was narrating the black trans experience. And I felt that was far too important for me not to give that space." [...] "Because on the flip side, how they said no, we would have had hundreds of people that never saw what I can see is quite an important, albeit divisive, and piece of work."	Platforming contested art for representation; prioritises civic value over controversy risk (ethical curation).
086	1.1.4	"I think over the years, based on my experience and the line of work I'm in now, my role is really just to advocate for social change." [...] "So, it's about being a good person, being a respectful person. Simply not simply because society has been good to me, but I just think, you know, you do good, you receive good, that type of theory, that's in how I try to live life basically."	Personal ethical identity and motivation through advocacy.
087	1.1.4	"You kind of have to weigh that up and go, well, from a business perspective." [...] "From an education standpoint, we know what we're doing is blooming good and works for these children." [...] "I'm deeply, deeply, passionate about everybody having the educational opportunities that everyone else has." [...] "It's a right and as a business, I want to provide every child... with that opportunity." [But] If I say yes [to giving away services for free] and I	Equity of access vs. business viability tension; refuses unsustainable pro-bono that harms staff (pragmatic justice).

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		say to my staff, well, actually, I've given so much tutoring away for free, I can't pay you, my staff have got a big problem because they can't just go and find more money somewhere."	
088	1.1.4	"My decision-making is primarily on my gut, likeability factor… if I feel that there is, you know, there's a bit of honesty there to get paid." […] "The decisions that we make are, in my opinion, at my age, not decisions I would make when I was a kid. They're decisions I've made on years of entrepreneurial business decisions because this is my second business."	Ethical prioritisation through experience-based judgement and intuitive moral reasoning.
089	1.1.4	"At the moment they [personal and organisational principles], are the same because I'm so I am the only person involved in the business and I have total control over like what gets sent out and it's just me." [...] "General principles, I think, that come to mind are like fairness. Is this a fair thing? Is this a fair exchange? Is this a fair agreement? Can I reasonably actually achieve this? Does this company ethically align with my company? Pricing definitely comes into it. What's a fair price to charge?" […] "I think I reflect a lot on not just financially what was the outcome but did I enjoy that work? Was it challenging? Was it too much in terms of challenging or was it like healthy challenge? What did I take from working with them?"	Ethical boundary scanning through reflective assessment of challenge, enjoyment, and workload.
090	1.1.4	"I'm very kind of wary of people who claim expert status on anything to do with mental health." […] "I'm a lot more kind of, I try and think a lot more critically about, you know, I always say my clients are the experts."	Ethical boundary scanning and critical reflection on authority and expertise in mental health.
091	1.1.4	"So, the kind of things that have been organic tend to be things that we haven't really thought about until it's been a problem." […] "So, I don't know if the, it kind of does come under ethics because it's protecting children..." […] "So, because that problem has arisen organically we've said right well we need to put a policy in place..."	Ethical boundary scanning triggered by emergent safeguarding dilemmas; reflects responsive governance.
092	1.1.4	"I'm very kind of wary of people who claim expert status on anything to do with mental health. And I'm a lot more kind of, I try and think a lot more critically about… my clients are the experts in them and their experience. I don't even think I'm an expert in mental health, but I have a variety of different theories… sometimes they're helpful and sometimes they're not… there are too many people in this field saying this is what's wrong with you… I just don't think that's how I practice or want to practice."	Ethical boundary scanning around authority and expertise; reflects principled humility.

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093	1.1.4	“Well, we determined what the overall objective of the company was the purpose of the company. And as I said, the missions kept large and said, OK, well, and then we kind of work back from that. What's the steps we need to take in order to get to that point? So, um, we, we, we kind of haven't, we haven't kind of used any criteria for that. It's just been, What's the thing we can do to maximize that, to maximize the likelihood of us getting to that point.	Purpose-backcasting approach; maximisation of mission likelihood over fixed criteria (teleological planning).
094	1.1.4	"I want it to be something that possibly could be handed down in my family and if they don't want to continue it that's absolutely fine but then that they would be able to hopefully sell that business and profit from it, not some investor."	Ethical foresight and values-led legacy planning; prioritises control and long-term alignment over short-term gain.
095	1.1.4	“You can't please everybody all the time. So, you have to take a position that you're comfortable with as an individual and a company, and you can defend if you need to defend it, but at least back up and, and say the why you are taking that position and there will be some noise, there always will be."	Reflects ethical boundary-setting and justification of moral stance.
096	1.1.4	"I've been kind of forced to consider that because of that position by being sat in a room of doctors and being the only who isn't a doctor, teaching them all about doctor stuff, could feel odd at times." [...] "There's a risk that you know I'm especially through the media things that I do, where people are seeing it for the first time, who've never heard a bit or anything. There's a risk that I could give false information quite easily because I'm normally the expert there."	Authority risk awareness in public expertise; safeguards against misinformation (role reflexivity).
1.1.5 Dynamic post-decision-making implementation of boundary adjustments, rebalancing and reconciling core business values, capabilities and social impact			
097	1.1.5	“For me being ethical means in the context of the business, it's really about embedding the idea of sustainability within the business so that you're not only focused on making profits but you're focused on the impact that you have on the wider environment and on people within your value chain and that you try where possible to have a positive impact on people and planet while making profits so it's not about deciding what you do with the profits you make from your business but it's about running your business in a way that you and your employees can be proud of while you're making those profits.”	Embedded sustainability practices and values-driven business operations.

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098	1.1.5	"It has to be it can be done organically but it is primarily done the way we've done it is it's more like a mindset we have like a written kind of areas that we kind of in terms of application is very purpose like. We want to be doing things in the right reason because that's what gets us out of that every day But by focusing on that purpose, it just leads to that spreading within every decision making we're doing as well." […] "Even if something internally we're considering is this definitely the right decision? Anly we're considering is this ever the right decision and is this going to benefit again the line for those two values and the way we've done it's a very simple process it's just like this is all values does it feel right and like just to make sure that everyone is feeling like it is aligned, think."	Values-led decision-making and purpose-driven organisational culture.
099	1.1.5	"So, the example I can give you is all about palm oil, which is a good example. So, we, we have a view that people in the business, the manufacturers are not just going to stop using palm oil. So, what you've got to do is you've got to use the most sustainable palm oil that you can […]."	Pragmatic ethical approach to sustainability in supply chains.
100	1.1.5	"[Org] is a growth consultancy setting out to help independent local underrepresented food and drink businesses that ideally are purpose led themselves and loosely our interest is around mending what's broken about our food systems And broken means in lots of different ways." [...] "It might mean that the products they make aren't nutritionally or health beneficial to the people that eat them and it might mean that for instance the way that companies go about their business is damaging to our planet or ecosystems." [...] "I think there are real practical marks, let's be clear. We are a small business, We have our own commercial challenges." [...] I think in the end is that point about how do those things test us? They simply test us as humans, saying we are doing the best we can it might be, I guess, trite, but that simple check of, so what are we doing well? Are we doing right? Are we doing good? Is perhaps enough at its simplest."	Values-led practice under operational constraints.
101	1.1.5	"I try and make the right one [choice]." [...] "I don't I don't judge other people by the same standards in any way."	Values-led organisational purpose and ethical enablement.

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102	1.1.5	"In the beginning, we were still very deliberate, but because we had just started, we weren't sure about how we were supposed to do certain things." [...] "The intentionality behind doing things ethically has always been there from the beginning... we take our business very seriously, and we don't want in the future for us to be kind of called out on poor behaviour or poor management or data leagues or anything like that."	Intentional ethical practice and future-oriented safeguards.
103	1.1.5	"One thing that could be unethical, that has come up before is giving people the impression that we have enough funds to keep them on the team for like indefinitely when we actually don't have enough money at all. That's yeah that's a that's been quite an interesting thing so, of course you want to hire people you want to give them the confidence that you've got enough to pay them, but in reality sometimes that is just not the case at all. But I think we have seen that if you kind of give people this false assurance that they will be funded for a long time when that's not actually the case, it really comes back to bite you. It hasn't actually happened to us, but we've definitely seen it in other businesses where they kind of give this impression that they're well funded but they're not." [...] "We're kind of hoping that we're able to raise more money". [...] "So, yeah I will say that's the biggest example because we can't slow the hiring process down but we need to keep developing. We also need to have people on board but we also try to be as honest as we can about how much money we do have and what we can pay them."	Ethical tensions in hiring transparency and financial disclosure
104	1.1.5	"So, based on the means to the end and the obvious collaboration and support and all of it and differences of opinions. How do you get to that end result in a way that is true to you?" [...] "It needs to be there, it has to be there for you and the plan has to be transparent to everyone who sees it." [...] "If you start to hide and start to make people get confused and don't understand, if you see any human being, when they don't understand something, they stop doing it."	Transparency and values-led collaboration in decision-making.
105	1.1.5	"There's a huge transparency factor here. So, what we decided to do was communicate regularly with our customers and be talking about how we're getting on with that mission." [...] "I think when that isn't done the consumer can be a little bit skeptical. So, what I found is our ethics and our values are one thing, but a failure to communicate that and show transparency in the steps you are taking is really detrimental."	Values-led communication and stakeholder engagement.

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106	1.1.5	"I try and think specifically... [...] make a conscious choice to try and hire different types of people." [...] "I have a team that is mostly non-cis-gender, which is a conscious choice as well." [...] "I try to implement as much diversity as possible. And that's a very conscious choice in everything I do."	Deliberate implementation of inclusive hiring and diversity practices.
107	1.1.5	"To organically make decisions needs to come by listening to other people, sticking by your morals."	Values-led decision-making and inclusive process.
108	1.1.5	"We use the byproducts, named [...] at the moment that's the [...] which is the excrement as a plant fertilizer and the chitin which we're developing through an R&D grant at the moment."	Ethical innovation and sustainable use of byproducts.
109	1.1.5	"We [...] for the purposes of alternative protein predominantly." [...] "We decided to produce a protein that could make a dent in the excessive use of meat, and also human food." [...] "We wanted one that naturally thrived in that farming environment." [...] "So, as a business model it would work better because we wouldn't have to adapt it, but ethically we weren't asking the creature to live in an environment it wasn't happy with." [...] "I'm very selective, [...] so, if the animal [...] is free range and it has all the mythic ethic careers." [...] "If the supply chain is all left of the column, the whole process, then I'm happy to eat it." [...] "We weren't happy with looking for excuses by which we could have our lifestyles and just say, oh, well, no one's providing a proper option." [...] "We're much happier to create that option ourselves."	Species welfare and supply-chain ethics drive design; creates alternatives to avoid convenient rationalisations (ethical innovation).
110	1.1.5	"People are going from one extreme to people who don't care at the other end. So, and there is such a spectrum. You can't please everybody all the time. So, you have to take position that you're comfortable with as an individual and a company, and you can defend if you need to defend it, but at least back up and, and say the why you are taking that position and there will be some noise, there always will be. And, and you could say that about every different type of version because people are passionate. Some people are very passionate about certain elements to it. Yeah. Again, we would add animal welfare, animal testing to the extreme being veganism of people that, you know, don't want to touch anything to do with animals and therefore don't like the fact. That we're, you know, we, we measure different	Ethical prioritisation and values-led positioning amid polarised views.

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		sorts of meat as they, you know, don't have beef chicken, but it's not quite that, but they're sort of totally against anybody eating any animals.”	
111	1.1.5	“Yeah, the concept for [Org] came about having run a local online home delivery business, which was you would categorize as an organic [food] business having established that and grown it over six, seven years.” [...] “The premise of that business was that food is bought, purchased online, delivered to the doorstep and food is delivered in the same area that it's produced.” [...] “It was about short supply chains, you know, local seasonal produce, local economies as well.” [...] “They're the biggest, very active charitable campaign led organization, but they are sort of commercial as well in terms of, they certify the majority of organic growers, they certify brands, they certify products. They are our major voice in the organic sector. They have really strongly backed what got behind, what we are doing.”	Values-led business model grounded in localism and sustainability.
112	1.1.5	"I think it's really important to be clear about where the boundaries are because otherwise they might be thinking we're policing it, we're thinking they're policing it and actually nobody is." [...] "I think we are very mindful of what is important to us ethically." [...]	Post-decision boundary adjustment and ethical role clarification.
113	1.1.5	"So, the first thing that I do in making a decision is to think about the child's best interests, and then I think about the parents' wishes, and then I think about our own policies and procedures, and then I think about the law, and then I think about our own kind of moral compass, and then I think about the research, and then I think about the evidence, and then I think about the potential consequences of our actions.”	Systematic scanning and ethical triaging and reasoning;
114	1.1.5	“I [now] try to be more conscious with my words when I'm speaking for something that's being listened to.” [...] "I will tend to, I will do the caveat of, or I'll decide not to listen or not to say... If they're just asking me about me, then I decide just to speak about me. Whereas if they then ask me questions where I think the academic side and the research side can come in, then I tend to add more caveats, but the way I tend to do it to be more waffle friendly is I add the caveats at the start and then just say everything afterwards." [...] "Just to be clear at the start, I just want to say that most of the research has been done on like why cis-gendered men. So, most of my understanding and most of the, everyone's understanding as far as researchers go is on that particular group."	Applying ethical boundaries and explicit informational caveats in public communication.

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115	1.1.5	“Yeah, so from the beginning we knew that women would be our main target audience. We had it in mind that, at the back of our minds, that yes, even though women are the target, men can use this solution too, but we never made it explicit that, okay, this is a tool that can be used for men or by men as well. And […] we were called out on this once. In fact, not once, quite a few times, like why you've completely excluded a huge group of people, not a huge group, but you've excluded a group of people here, have you considered that men had this issue too and this talk could help them actually keep themselves well as well. And then at that point we were thinking, okay, we know that we need to have some sort of strategy that's targeted towards men as well but we can't, how do I say this, we can't implement that at the moment because we haven't engaged with men the way we've engaged with women, we don't know what marketing strategies work for them So, even though it's not like number one priority in terms of the marketing strategy that we've got at the moment, it is higher than where it was before because it has been called out so often. But because of course we're at a start-up, we have limited resources, we have to focus on the main target and getting it to them ASAP, but then also ensuring that we're not leaving people out. So, now in our pictures, we don't say, oh, [Org] is a tool that's designed for women. We'll say [Org] is a tool that's designed for people who want to [learn more about their health] or things like that. So, we don't streamline who it's made for. And we call people like users, customers, buyers, I suppose, not being like, it's just women. It's just moms and daughters, which is what we were saying before.”	Exclusion feedback; broadens language/target to avoid gender bias within resource limits (corrective inclusion).
116	1.1.5	"Our societal role is to provide people the tools and it's to enable the market not to own it." […] "I strongly feel our role within societies about enablement rather than ownership."	Ethical framing of societal role as enablement rather than control.
117	1.1.5	"In terms of wider society, I used to try and do more stuff, like politically, I've cut back on all that now because we've just got focused so I've learned that the growing my business."	Shift from politics to core venture; concentrates impact via business growth (strategic restraint).
118	1.1.5	"The employees within the company get more literate about climate change as well and things that have its at home. So, that's how we influence it, going through the company […]	Internal diffusion of climate literacy; future-intent CSR

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		and then [...] society is the future. When we're a larger company we might have more capacity to help out but at the moment we just don't so we don't really do that much."	deferred to capacity (sequenced responsibility).
1.2.1 Recognising and accepting cognitive dissonance			
119	1.2.1	"So, sometimes I can be approached by clients, potential clients, and maybe I don't want to work with a business in that sector because I think that sector is damaging and maybe they are doing the box ticking and trying to get some marketing that will make them look better. But I also have to think is there an opportunity to influence positively this company as part of this work? So, that's probably where my biggest ethical dilemma comes in."	Core ethical dilemma: balancing personal values with potential for influence.
120	1.2.1	"I'm able to bring my personal principles into my professional work for the most part. However, where I do have those conflicts of conscience, if you like, perhaps working with companies and sectors that I am not keen on and who I know have a negative impact in the world."	Ethical tension and conscientious boundary-setting in sectoral engagement.
121	1.2.1	"I think part of the reason we've not [expanded abroad] is because I'm not passionate about it." [...] "I think I would see doing things like accessing [other markets] or whatever that would just kind of be a bit of a money-making scheme." [...] "It doesn't fall within what I'm passionate about you know and the things that I think we enjoy about what we're doing is having that relationship with the child."	Internal conflict over opportunities rejected based on personal ethical motivations and boundaries.
122	1.2.1	"Actually, no, my whole business is unethical actually." [...] "I think everybody should have access to whatever education they need, nobody should have to pay extra for education." [...] "And it really grinds me that some people are able to afford to pay for my services, you know, to get a better education and somebody who can't afford to pay for it."	Cognitive dissonance around fairness and access in educational services.
123	1.2.1	"I've had to pull a plug on a product and on a project that I really want to do because it just wouldn't have laid right with me." [...] "I didn't feel comfortable with [using ... augmented reality tools] because of some of their policies and the way that they share certain things over others." [...] "I also felt like I'm tying myself into [...] and as a small business that is not a good idea anywhere."[...] [...] "So, it does impact everything in the sense of it's probably impacted how much money my business will earn, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively." [...] "You know, so it takes up a lot of time and a lot of research to make sure	Value conflict with AR value; avoidance of lock-in risk (values-based exit).

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		that everything's in alignment, but I actually quite enjoy it as well, I think, and knowing that we've done our due diligence to make sure that who we're working with aligns with the core values of the company. So, for me, it's kind of fundamental. It's embedding everything to the way that we hire people, the way we answer emails, the way we market to people, the way we manage customer service, everything."	
124	1.2.1	"I feel like I don't have the choice at this particular moment in time to not have some engagement with platforms that ethically and personally I don't want anything to do with, really." […] "There's a bit of a push and pull between what I would prefer personally, what I prefer professionally."	Platform dependence vs. ethical discomfort; navigates necessary compromise (managed dissonance).
125	1.2.1	"I think personally, yes, I have a personal sense of responsibility to lead [Technology] in a way that is ethical and that is right." […] "I think sometimes I can be a bit too, like guys, we need to be really, we can't do this like this because that's wrong, we can't do this like this, that's wrong, but it's all with good intentions."	Personal moral salience in team decisions; risk of over-correction recognised (ethical zeal tempered).
126	1.2.1	"One principle is that we do not like wasting money." […] "We have an investor so we want to have a good return on their investment" […] "Another principle is that we are people first." […] " I feel like [my personal and organisational principles] are different. They're intertwined, but they're different." […] "I'm a bit more harsh on myself than I would be on myself within the company or my teammates."	Cognitive dissonance between personal and organisational principles; reflects internal ethical tension.
127	1.2.1	"So, obviously we're working with children and we're working with particularly vulnerable children all the time because they are autistic." […] "We also have the kind of I guess ethical dilemma that probably have a responsibility to provide the best education and be very honest with parents about these children. But the better these children do, the sooner they go off to either a mainstream setting or some other setting other than us." […] "So, it's very important to us that we're keeping records, that we're able to demonstrate that we're being ethical, not just act ethically, but we've got the paperwork to back that up."	Cognitive dissonance in balancing ethical responsibility with business continuity; reflects tension between impact and retention.
128	1.2.1	"I grew up in a family environment where actually ethics were never, not regarded whatsoever. Okay, it wasn't important. What was important was success and being… Building value and wealth for yourself, not for others." […] "I count myself quite lucky that whilst I was	Self-awareness of ethical development and conscious rejection of inherited values.

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		very much consumed by that in my environment, I decided not to live my life that way and actually have done a lot of work individually as a person to do quite the opposite to what I grew up seeing and hearing and behaviours."	
129	1.2.1	"I'm able to bring my personal principles into my professional work for the most part. However, where I do have those conflicts of conscience, if you like, perhaps working with companies and sectors that I am not keen on and who I know have a negative impact in the world.	Cognitive dissonance between personal ethics and professional engagement; reflects strategic compromise for potential influence.
130	1.2.1	"Well, the challenges you face always when you love to work with giving back into a community and you're doing a website for someone is the financial gain isn't going to be as much as if you go to somebody corporately. So, if we do someone corporate, someone's website or recruitment, you're going to gain more financially, therefore the obstacles of cash flow come into it because you're not gaining so much."	Cognitive dissonance between values-led work and financial viability; reflects ethical tension in client selection.
131	1.2.1	"Other obstacles come about where there's red tape. It can take a period of time before a piece of work is signed off, which can slow down the process to the ultimate aim of earning money. So, sadly, we're all governed by money, and you can be a philanthropist and be lovely and giving of your time. I'm not in that position to be like that."	Cognitive dissonance in navigating bureaucratic delay and financial constraint; reflects ethical frustration.
132	1.2.1	"The obstacles I face are reducing our fees to win the business which is less gain for the business, the slowness of the process because it takes a lot more people to make a decision whereas somebody sitting there with the rights and the budget in a bigger company that's corporate, they don't care, they say, yeah, let's go ahead."	Financial sustainability pressures in pricing and procurement dynamics.
133	1.2.1	"It's time, money, and pressure to win business like in any business is more of an obstacle when your heart is set in that beautiful green side of the business. […] It's the dominoes that fall. The side of the business we love, they don't fall so quickly."	Cognitive dissonance between ethical passion and commercial momentum; reflects emotional investment in slower-impact work.

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134	1.2.1	"We wanted everything to stay in the UK so our supply chain, wherever possible is UK and we've got the Made in Britain logo to show the consumer that and our other suppliers that it's all UK. But we are contemplating pushing some of our products into Europe. And to be honest, we are trying to justify that, effectively. Even though it goes against our initial principles. Because of the slow returns. Yeah. So, yeah. So, the slow returns are preventing your further establishment in Europe or are there any other policies and decisions that you would have to make along the way. I think half of the projects would be more readily accepted in Europe, so we could get some, you know, start earning better revenue. […] But it's the, it's the whole, the air miles […] of the exports that go against our ethics reading."	Domestic sourcing ethos challenged by export opportunity; weighs air-miles vs. viability (principled trade-off).
135	1.2.1	"If people come back to me I can sort of say well I haven't used anything particular words that I'm not comfortable with and this is what we can do." […] "It's been good already having this interview because I think I need to think more on what could be the trade-offs and potential trade-offs going forward." [...] "I just thought that the short term pain if you like was far better than the longer term sort of pain in the sense that, you know, I thought if I'm going to demonstrate ethics and social and environmental and nature responsibility and spout on about it, it would be better not to get this contract?"	Language/contract choice to maintain integrity; accepts near-term loss to avoid value drift (sacrifice for consistency).
1.2.2 Recognising and accepting emotional dissonance.			
136	1.2.2	"So, reasonable adjustments have to be reasonable both for the person who has the disability but also for the person doing accommodation. […] We generally say, and it really hurts to say it, but we would generally say that those children aren't ready for our service because our service is although it is holistic and we try to understand needs of things like autism, anxiety, whatnot, primarily we're a [student support venture] and there have been a few students where we've kind of almost been dragged into getting involved far more deeply with their mental health than we are trained and able and willing to do. And we've had to take that step back, because actually that's not what we do. And it wouldn't be ethical for us to start doubling [our service] in areas that we're not trained for. You know, we're all attachment trained, we've all got trauma training, but that doesn't mean that we're counsellors and therapists, it just means that we can deliver our [service] in a way that hopefully won't cause damage to these children."	Principled decision-making across multiple moral domains.

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137	1.2.2	"However, I also believe, and this is maybe where the dichotomy comes in, but I also believe that it doesn't really matter what the motivation is if ultimately you end up running your business in a more sustainable, more perhaps ethical way that does less damage to people and the environment."	Pragmatic view on ethical outcomes regardless of initial intent.
138	1.2.2	"I think that's the challenge, and I'm seeing already that ESG reporting becomes very much a tick box exercise where the company's heart and soul and their purpose is not invested in it but perhaps they have investors or you know financiers who are requiring them to think about ESG and the only reason they're doing it is because that's needed in order for them to get an investment or perhaps legislatively it's required."	Ethical tension between genuine purpose and compliance-driven ESG activity.
139	1.2.2	"I also have a little bit of a challenge I guess that there are companies in certain sectors that clearly have a bigger impact on, let's say climate change, for example, than some others. And I am working with some of those companies. And again, where sustainability or ESG considerations are seen as perhaps a marketing benefit, then again where their kind of heart and soul is not in doing the right thing for the right reasons."	Discomfort with superficial sustainability framing and sector-specific ethical dilemmas.
140	1.2.2	"We need to make it a really good thing to do as well, because it's a great product that tastes better, that's fresher, that makes you healthier, that's great value." [...] "Our only real competitor in the market uses [...] a cheaper alternative. It's much inferior." [...] "It's been an issue for us trying to deal with the fact that we are trying to justify the choice of this big [high-tech company] high growth slightly more expensive option that the level of the capability, the additional capability that that business provides to us and how we can integrate with them, and the amount of time we can then save our users through using it, the return on investment of that is significant."	Emotional dissonance in reconciling ethical discomfort with strategic tech procurement.
141	1.2.2	"I feel like [my personal and your professional principles] they're different. They're intertwined , but they're different. So, for example, my personal ethics are very, like I mentioned in the beginning, are very based on like my faith. [...] I'm a bit more harsh on myself than I would be on myself within the company or my teammates because not that I hold myself to a higher standard, but I hold myself to a very, very, I want to be as, as, like, moral as, as possible, but then I understand that that's not always achievable within a business context where you're working with other people. So, that I think there are more	Emotional dissonance between personal moral standards and professional ethical obligations; reconciling faith-based ethics with inclusive hiring.

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		compromises that I make with the business than I would make in my personal life, if that makes sense. So, I guess I'm allowed to be a bit more, not judgemental, but I don't have to do things by the book, per se, personally, but I do have to do that when it comes to business. For example if I'm interviewing for my own personal benefit there are lots of people I would not consider at all because I don't want to work with you personally but within a business context I have to consider you because it would be unethical to do so. But personally, I'm a bit like my personality, I don't really feel like I could work with you, but within a wider business you have to consider a wider range of personalities because it's not just you, you're carrying a whole business. So, I think it is a bit different."	
142	1.2.2	"What did I take from working with them?" [...] "valuing myself appropriately in the work that I do and accepting that sometimes that's not going to price me out of the work." [...] "the trade-off is, you know, maybe I don't get the work, but actually the benefit to that is that I'm not then resenting the client or feeling that I'm giving more than I should be"	Emotional dissonance in pricing and self-worth; reconciles trade-offs to preserve integrity and avoid resentment.
143	1.2.2	I suppose that's where I sometimes put my personal views to the side in order to have the hope of having some positive influence and changing those companies." [...] "So, I think just sometimes my personal views might be a little stronger and I have to harness those a little bit and temper them in the professional context because if I wanted to completely embrace my personal views I would probably be working for an NGO [...], and that's not the path I've gone down. I think it's too late to change."	Emotional dissonance in tempering personal views for pragmatic influence; Self-awareness of ethical positioning and professional trajectory.
144	1.2.2	"I don't like to fail at things and I've given it a really good try..." [...] "Really, really good try..." [...] "So, I'm expecting hurdles, I'm expecting to fail here and there, but I also really failure teaches a lot." [...] "Of course, I would like to make a lot of money." [...] "And I would like to make other people a lot of money." [...] "I love the ideal of having a booming business company with people working in it that are passionate, that get paid a lot of money because it's going really well."	Emotional dissonance in confronting failure and reflecting on financial ambition.
145	1.2.2	"I think from a person, so what I do professionally now, absolutely impacts my life personally, which is incredibly frustrating..."	Emotional dissonance in blurred boundaries between

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			personal and professional purpose.
146	1.2.2	“Always doing what's in the best interest of people in the even if it might have harmful effect on the business? It's a, it's a delicate balance because we have to do things that sometimes we have to make decisions where it's like, OK, do we do just the what's best for the, the people? But if we do that, it might sit in some ways significantly on the business. I mean, look, an example would be we could just give the app out the free, but then we wouldn't, we wouldn't make any money, and we couldn't reinvest that money into making it better. So, it's always a balance. But I think ethicality is kind of for us making sure that we. Or was aware of that balance. And, you know, what are optimizing for the best outcomes for people? This, and, you know, the other day, if we grade a business, if we made a business a success, then it's going to have a positive impact on pretends because I'll have better access to help, better access the better help.”	Emotional dissonance in weighing people-first ethics against business impact; reflects conscious ethical balancing.
147	1.2.2	“I think about, because sometimes things do organically take off in a way, you know, think both businesses can suddenly kind of be in a position like, oh, actually, I probably do need to expand this some way." […] "My ambition for it is for it to not grow much more than me. Maybe one or two people that I bring in as associates to help me run sessions or to kind of be part of the way it's run." […] "I think I would stick to an associate model where I bring people in freelance, haven't thought about it in huge depth."	Emotional dissonance in resisting growth pressure; reflects ethical caution and scale restraint.
148	1.2.2	“In terms of the use of the resources towards creating an impact, or the resources that you use today change over time or making a conscious decision that this is the next stage… a conscious decision and it's all based on what our budget can afford. So, it's not ideal and it might take us longer to move forward because it's going to have to be broken down into smaller stages as we can afford it.”	Emotional dissonance in reconciling ethical ambition with financial constraint; reflects frustration and adaptive pacing.
149	1.2.2	“I have said to clients before, I don't think we're the right business for you. And they've said to me, why aren't you bartering me on price? You're hammering me down, you're manipulating me. That's not the way I work. I'm transparent.”	Emotional dissonance in defending ethical boundaries against transactional expectations;

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			reflects principled discomfort.
150	1.2.2	I have learned actually to be very boundaryed about what I share publicly about my life online, about the way I speak about it, and actually the way I speak about specific issues. [In] children's mental health week and I posted [...] a tip for parents and I felt the need to actually add some detail in that post [...] to put your mental health as a priority alongside all the other priorities that come with caring. And I felt the need to caveat that with not everyone is going to be able to do that all of the time, it depends on your financial situation, your work situation, etc."	Affective caution and discomfort in public self-disclosure; emotionally aware caveating.
151	1.2.2	"I feel that we all have a responsibility... to act as good citizens... stand up for what I believe in and to speak out if I feel that there's ignorance... You do think about the impact... on future generations..."	Emotionally charged moral motivation (concern, responsibility, future-oriented care).
152	1.2.2	"I don't feel we've got the energy to do everything so, I guess the technology is kind of tempting us into money-making and we could access all these other revenue streams and things but actually the passion is for helping the children out here. So, I guess that's an ethical thing and like well do you follow your passion and do what you really believe in or do you chase the money and it'd be easy money."	Accepting resource and mission-based limitations; recognising mission vs profit trade-offs.
1.2.3 Alleviating personal conflict through psychological capital			
153	1.2.3	"One company that I started working with nearly about three and a half years ago is in the [...] sector. And initially seemed to be, they brought me in because they lost a large contract with a retailer and on the basis of not having enough sustainability considerations and not have no plan in place, but over the last four years. So, their motivation maybe wasn't where I would have liked it to have been to start with, but over those four years the engagement that some of their senior team have had who were very disengaged to start with and the innovations that they have come up with and invested in are really encouraging to me. So, I think even if the motivation isn't right in my eyes to start with, somewhere along the journey, a light bulb can switch on and I think it's worth working with companies who maybe are not	Ethical evolution and the potential for positive transformation.

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		you know the most ethical if you like to start with because you have a chance to influence them and do something better."	
154	1.2.3	"So, sometimes I can be approached by clients, potential clients, and maybe I don't want to work with a business in that sector because I think that sector is damaging and maybe they are doing the box ticking and trying to get some marketing that will make them look better. But I also have to think is there an opportunity to influence positively this company as part of this work?"	Core ethical dilemma of deciding to believe in ethical evolution when balancing personal values with potential for influence.
155	1.2.3	"I'm trying to put back what was taken up society in the environment I grew up in."	Ethical motivation rooted in social repair and legacy.
156	1.2.3	"Doing good absolutely come into that. And we are mindful of it. It just still feels a bit like I'm green-washing myself when I talk about doing good."	Ethical discomfort and self-reflection on branding and authenticity.
157	1.2.3	"I think my personal and professional roles in society would differ, but I think at [Org], you know, we feel like we have an important role in helping to remove or reduce the barriers that the seven people face in accessing opportunities in the world around them, particularly in social context, but more increasingly also in economic and labour context, so there's the access to work." [...] "We feel like we have an important role in helping to remove or reduce the barriers that the seven people face in accessing opportunities in the world around them..." [...] "We feel like we owe it to the community to do our best to materialise things."	Ethical commitment to barrier removal and inclusive opportunity; reflects organisational moral purpose.
158	1.2.3	"I think that during the pandemic a new form of citizenship began to emerge. Our awareness of the needs of our neighbours was heightened in a way that in the UK I think we'd lost over many years. There's a sense of mutuality. We get things from each other and we also get things from the social and ethical system and we need to give back in return."	Ethical reflection on mutuality and civic responsibility; pandemic as a catalyst for moral recalibration.
159	1.2.3	"I don't think there's much difference between personal and professional principles, as the business grew out of a genuine passion for education and has followed personal interests and passions."	Self-awareness of ethical alignment between personal values and professional purpose;

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			reflects principled continuity.
160	1.2.3	“So, when we make a decision to organically grow a division or make a decision that we like a certain part but we want to then we've just done for example an animation of our business. That animation came from places we weren't happy with, decisions we'd made some right some wrong, being transparent in what we do to allow us to organically grow the business based on things that didn't work for us before. Or people that we didn't feel We were working towards a sector that was maybe a financial game, but wasn't making us happy. Now that's not good for well-being. So, that wasn't a tick box for me. That was a sense of, tick it off your box. So, we had... I think everybody in life grows... [...] everybody in life grows and develops, but to grow a business, we won't have made our final mistake. We will go on and make more. But I think to organically make decisions needs to come by listening to other people, sticking by your morals. And I'm very super keen, as I say, we can't like everybody, but to develop the business, it needs to have the core strength of the courage of your own convictions to say, that doesn't work, we're going to go in this direction. And then if it doesn't work, sometimes you can throw balls up and something sticks and then you think that's the next stage for us because it's worked well or it could have stuck and you thought stupid mistake, I'm not doing that again. ”	Psychological capital through reflective growth and ethical realignment; reframes past missteps into purposeful evolution.
161	1.2.3	"I've got to protect my staff as well as the students that we work with... We had to take that step back, because actually that's not what we do." [...] "It wouldn't be ethical for us to start doubling in areas that we're not trained for."	Clear emotional strain and boundary-setting; reflects principled protection of staff and service remit.
162	1.2.3	“So, my background has been the waste industry for over 30 years, set up what was believed to be [one of the early UK recycling ventures], which was formed by accident actually.” [...] “When I left college, I set up a business producing animal bedding for racial courses, shredded newspaper so the racehorse wouldn't eat the paper so the racehorse trainer could control the diet much more closely And as a result of the success of that business, I couldn't actually get enough newspaper, so I started going around people's houses, collecting it, and then we were bringing it back and trying to get this away, way, way before anyone was	Psychological capital through ethical ambition and personal growth; reflects principled entrepreneurship.

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		recycling commercially from people's homes." […] "So, you're always striving for perfection, and I think that perfection definitely comes from your upbringing and your desire to change."	
163	1.2.3	"Caring. It matters to me that people are excited to hear about [Org], know us well. We have over […] reviews, five-star […] reviews and that matters to me." […] "My role in society is to give back, to be honest and for people to want to work with [Org] because we aren't just money grabbing competitive people." […] "I owe society to be a good part of it. [...] I think I owe society to give back because it helps me mentally and to see if I can help in any way, make someone smile, have a laugh along the way."	Psychological capital through social contribution and emotional fulfilment; reflects ethical motivation and relational purpose.
164	1.2.3	"What about all these people who don't [have the privileges to access education]?" […] "We can advocate for these children and we can provide these children with what they need." […] "Education can be made accessible for every child and I think you have to be imaginative." […] "I think technology comes into it."	Psychological capital through imaginative advocacy and inclusive ambition; reflects ethical drive to expand access.
165	1.2.3	"I spent a few years in the classroom […] as a volunteer donating time... doing young enterprise and it was invaluable... if you're listening to what's going on around you then you model yourself..."	Psychological capital through experiential learning and ethical modelling; reflects principled engagement and social responsiveness.
166	1.2.3	"Being ethical is all about delivering well within the confines of [Org]... operating in a way that is not detrimental to individuals or other communities and the planet that we live on." [...] "Companies, regardless of their size, should be operating with these sorts of words and definitions as a core part of their overall strategy."	Psychological capital through normative advocacy; reflects ethical ambition and belief in systemic change.
167	1.2.3	"We're interconnected. I think there's technology that I'm missing out on. There's the sort of green eco investments that I'm not tapping into at the moment."	Psychological capital through reflective ambition and ethical regret; reflects desire for deeper engagement.

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168	1.2.3	“The social side of things is very important. I think what I would like to see [Org] doing is plugging into organisations where they're directly involved.”	Psychological capital through relational ethics and social ambition; reflects desire for embedded impact.
169	1.2.3	"Like the same reason we want to help each generation, etc. It's making sure people are not adversely affected by other behaviours around us."	Psychological capital through intergenerational ethics and harm reduction; reflects emotional investment in societal wellbeing.
170	1.2.3	"I feel somehow, particularly in the therapy space, I have like a debt to pay... I feel like there's some kind of... sense of owing something."	Psychological capital through moral indebtedness and emotional motivation.
171	1.2.3	“From a personal point of view, [my personal and professional principles] are probably very similar, but I like to do as much as possible because I’m a passionate nature conservationist and… climate advocate.” […] “I’m just passionate about nature and protecting planet Earth and I don’t like inequalities… social injustice…” […] “I think it’s incumbent on all of us… I want to be able to believe the world in a better place than it currently is… I want to be able to, in my lifetime, see the global warming trend going the other way…” […] “If you’ve got a passion, like wildlife and conservation or certain aspects of social justice, keep to your convictions.”	Psychological capital through moral conviction and emotional drive.
172	1.2.3	“It's the prospect of no waste arises and the prospect of reducing the amount of people in fuel poverty in the process, the prospect of reducing global warming gases. So, the overall approach to what you're trying to deliver as a business and as a technology is driven by the overall outcomes to what. Because a vision is just about just being able to, I work on what they call the staircase strategy. So, you've got to dare to stand on the top step. So, if we're down here now, then the top step is what utopia looks like. And utopia is that the only thing we're collecting from people's houses or businesses is glass and metal, which are very sustainably recyclable, and which stand up on its own financially for those to be collected.	Policy-based integrity.

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		And everything else is processed and produced into energy because it's all very well saying we're going to recycle material but if the recycling is causing more harm to the environment than it is just to pop it into the here and it's all renewable sources of energy in any event why wouldn't you just choose the better option? It's like we just keep putting the house in the flood zone all the time. We're going to take the house out of the flood zone. And the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result. So, we've got to make a fundamental change. So, that's what drives me, drives me mad and drives me forward."	
1.3.1 CSR: Getting involved in socially responsible and charitable initiatives			
173	1.3.1	"We ask about how much pro bono work we do and measure it. We ask about how much advocacy and outreach we do and how many people we've reached." […] "I see my role as to mend, my role to problem solve and from a from a pro bono point of view..."	Ethical impact measurement and governance; reflects principled stewardship and commitment to social value.
174	1.3.1	"I think the way that you're brought up probably has some huge influence in the way that you want to treat people and treat the planet." […] "the socially innovative approach that you've adopted is really the culmination of your upbringing and the elements that you've been exposed to as you grow up."	Ethical impact as a product of formative experience; reflects values-based innovation and social modelling.
175	1.3.1	"Our mission and goal is to "make therapy easy, accessible, affordable and modern, [and…] to improve people's mental health and relationships""	Mission explicitly social (access/affordability/modernity); frames therapy as public-good orientation (CSR intent).
176	1.3.1	"We sort of have at the moment quite sort of broad remit. We work with a number of different clients, a variety of clients, from charities to social enterprises on everything from writing nature solutions, sustainability plans and strategies, or with charities, environmental charities, that require some kind of fundraising plan or strategy, or looking at their corporate, how to develop corporate partnerships or how to generate income through charity trusts and foundations or the financial side of things."	Financial strategy aligned with ethical purpose; reflects values-led structuring and multi-sector engagement.

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177	1.3.1	"The 12 [Org] priority actions aim to help support our partnership with its operations and to demonstrate that a company of any size... can operate naturally, if that makes sense, as part of the organisation's sort of overall operations. These actions include sustainability, social justice, gender equity, women's education, climate mitigation, and minimizing carbon footprint. [Our aim is to] build a leadership team of directors to help run these consultancies and give opportunities and bring the whole source of... the green blue economy, nature solutions and social justice issues all under one key thing."	Ethical impact through structured priorities; reflects governance and social accountability.
178	1.3.1	"I think the best way to start building the momentum is maybe to sort of look at what funding depends on our profits."	Ethical impact through strategic pacing and financial realism; reflects principled growth planning.
179	1.3.1	"We have a mission to help companies to de-carbonise and be more widely considered and that's our mission and that's good for society, it's good for our customers, so our companies are good for us, So, that's like gold, gold and like it's fine."	Ethical impact through decarbonisation and mutual benefit; reflects values-led mission and social contribution.
180	1.3.1	[Our objectives...] "Adopt sustainable practices both at home and in the workplace to minimise environmental impact." [...] "Advocate for significant policy changes at a local level to address larger political issues." [...] "Openly communicate about personal efforts to instigate change in the world and actively participate in those changes." [...] "Respond to criticisms of not adhering to personal principles by demonstrating commitment through actions." [...] "Engage in political activities to advocate for improved climate policies. [And] Share personal experiences and learnings to educate and inspire others to make a positive impact."	Ethical impact through personal and organisational sustainability; reflects values-led consistency.
181	1.3.1	"We are engaged in conversations... how our products can help address public procurement of more local, healthy products into institutions." [...] "[These] schemes address climate change, biodiversity, water systems, public health... it doesn't really matter which issue you care about." [...] "We see [this] as a starting point... huge opportunity for our product to grow... serious impact in what our local food systems look like."	Ethical impact through institutional engagement; reflects systemic ambition for public health.

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182	1.3.1	"For me, it's very much about how you do business. So, somebody with good ethical values is somebody who is considerate of others, the planet, and the impact they have on it." […] "To be ethical is to care basically and to think about the impact both positive and negative that you have on other people."	Care ethics foregrounded; harm awareness beyond profit (relational ethics).
183	1.3.1	"I'm trying to think what else we've done. And then more recently we've been trying to do community projects, giving back locally, rewilding, doing flower seeds…" […] "I've been trying to get funding to do a sort of schools project… that would give kids an interest in technology in a positive way…" […] "I've been involved in talks trying to encourage other small businesses to think about their digital footprint… the footprint that has."	Ethical impact through sustained local engagement; reflects principled continuity.
184	1.3.1	"I guess that's what we're doing is we're taking children that people have given up on and saying they have so much potential…" […] "We can't possibly help all of the children… but we can change the world for one child." […] "And that's what I'm precious about."	Psychological capital through personal conviction and emotional investment.
185	1.3.1	"We are on a mission to […]." […] "Our aim and our dream is to basically rid the world of [this problem]. We want [this] across the globe but our focus is the UK to start with." […] "I'm building [Org] as a business that will fund and fuel our […] work." […] "I wanted it to be clear to the consumer that whilst you can donate, we've also put a lot of time, energy and risk into this." […] "I knew that later on when we were in a position to, we could start a foundation or a charity, CIC… that would deliver on our promise." […] "It will be through donations to existing charities and ultimately it will be the more [we do] the more we will grow and scale… through commerce."	Venture as engine for ethical work; commerce fuels cause (mission financing).
186	1.3.1	"One of the things that we wanted to do was support charities that were involved in wildlife conservation. So, immediately I looked at how we can do that at the point of sale	Point-of-sale giving mechanism; integrates conservation into transaction (embedded CSR).
1.3.2 CSR: Offsetting carbon footprint			

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187	1.3.2	"We use […] because that's like just the default... It's just platforms. And they're the kind of, it's the network effect. You don't really have much choice." […] "I've learned how to use those tools throughout my career working for companies... that's why there's no real conscious decision to use that versus something else." […] "I've had demos of probably about 15 different carbon foot-printing and net-zero type tools…" […] "Picked a couple that are good and at a good price point." […] "They're all in that industry and so they're all pretty similar."	Operational pragmatism in tool selection; reflects strategic neutrality.
188	1.3.2	"I'm making sure that if I sort of say that [Venture] is operating at the particular moment as a climate positive organisation or we've achieved net zero, when we achieve net zero, that we can demonstratively prove that that's what we're able to do."	Strategic intent through verifiable claims and ethical accountability; reflects principled transparency.
189	1.3.2	"The carbon footprint of technology is going past the carbon footprint of the aviation industry, right? So, we are very aware that we are adding to that… because you can't see it and because technology is something that's just a given these days." […] "Everything I've learned over the last four years is everything is about balance." […] "We sat down and said… how can we balance that off in a way that's meaningful?" […] "We didn't want to go down offsetting because it's essentially a license to pollute."	Ethical impact through digital awareness and environmental accountability; reflects principled recognition of invisible harms.
190	1.3.2	"This inter-life example we're running, we used to run off […] … it produces like 50 tons of carbon per year… well that's awful… So, then we had to make a switch… this is not aligning to our values… switched to new technologies…" […] "For example our whole server industry is going to be switching… we've had to go through all the suppliers… if their backup system is an oil generator… that's not 90% renewables… so we've had to switch." […] "We don't get anything printed now… we've kind of use bamboo laser-cut materials… to make sure everything we do follows through sustainably."	Ethical impact through infrastructure audit and principled transition; reflects values-led tech reform.
191	1.3.2	"my priority is helping people develop to be a better self." […] "Giving people the opportunity to learn new stuff or just of learning a bit deep and okay try this figure out and then once they've figured it out gonna be like progressing their own skills and stuff."	Human development focus; education/skills as ethical end (capability approach).
192	1.3.2	"I think we have to accept there's going to be change, we have to accept there needs to be change. We must accept scientific evidence because I think it's very difficult to ignore that. And I think that innovation is a sort of word that's banded around, but we can't make these	Environmentally protective decisions, science-based restraint.

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		knee-jerk reactions based on not having the scientific backing. So, for an example, if you have an electric car, so the government said, well, we need to drive diesel cars, then they changed it, said, no, no, no, no, it needs to be a petrol car and now it's no no no it needs to be an electric car and then the electric car you know we've still been importing coal into this country so, now we're running electric cars on coal partly and so, and then we're gonna have all this lithium batteries that we're going to have to try and resolve, and I don't even know how that's all going to be sorted out. But what we can't do is keep making these decisions, knee-jerk reactions that are causing more harm to the environment. And so, my message would be that we need to make, we haven't got time to be messing around, making bad decisions that are worse for the planet than we've got today. So, they must be based on some type of scientific evidence. We simply in a nutshell can't keep building our houses in the flood plain."	
193	1.3.2	"The local authorities would say to us we need the industry… This is not just to us as a company. We need you to take the pots, tubs and trays, and we would say there is no market in the world for pots, tubs and trays. So, the authorities would say well we told the public they can be recycled because it does say on them there's a recycling end and we said well they can be recycled in a laboratory but there's no sustainable market for those items globally. So, in order to win the contracts, the industry had to really [...] bail it all up with the pots, tubs and Trays and send it to Indonesia, Vietnam, Asia, China up until the Green Fence came into place, Turkey. And they would [...] use the river as a very cheap conveyor belt to get the rest to the ocean. So, the unintended consequence of the landfill directive was that we swapped the ocean for the landfill, or we swapped the landfill for the ocean. And that's of course what's going on today, and the reason why we're having one refuse vehicle per minute being tipped into the ocean. So, with that information and my [...] years in the waste industry I wanted to actually just create something that would just stop wasting. So, if you go to the top of the waste hierarchy, as it's known, if you go right to the top, it's to stop wasting. And that's basically how the [...] technology was born…"	System critique of recycling markets; designs to prevent waste arisings (upstream ethics).
194	1.3.2	"The technology that we've created and the whole vision behind the company so that the vision behind the company is that every home and every organisation globally has access to	Universal access vision to eliminate organics/plastics;

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		the [...] technology to eliminate organic waste. And so, organic waste includes plastics of course because it's made from an organic based material. So, uneaten food, garden trimmings, paper, cardboard, all renewable sources of energy. But the plastic element, the nappies, the diapers, the sanitary wear, all of that material to eliminate that material from the waste system."	systems-level reduction (preventive design).
195	1.3.2	"The ethics behind it are all about stopping waste arising. Whilst we're in the process of stopping waste arising, we are producing energy from predominantly renewable sources of energy, uneaten food, garden trimmings, paper, cardboard etc. Then we are also looking at how we can improve public health because at the moment we're contaminating our water courses with plastics which are being now found inside the human body". [...] "So, then we reduce fuel poverty because we've got eight to 900 pounds worth of energy locked up in resources which are being transported all around the world and using humongous amounts of carbon to reprocess repurpose."	Revenue/benefits channelled to community energy outcomes (social return).
196	1.3.2	"So, I live my personal life the same way I try and advise companies and people to decarbonise and effectively anyway." [...] "I'll make all just decisions not to do things... ...Like flying or... ...cycling ... instead of driving, pay public transport." [...] "I talk to other people about this." [...] "I don't think we can flip talk.	Personal carbon discipline mirrored in advice; coherence of life and counsel (modelling).
1.3.3 CSR: Modelling and promoting ethical behaviour			
197	1.3.3	"What I would like to think is that [Org] is going to give back more than it takes." [...] "I think it's really important that what we're actually putting out there has some real value to that family. They're going to get something out of it." [...] "I don't think we'll ever be perfect with this, so I think that's okay as well." [...] "I think it takes a little bit more time and effort to think about your ethics and your guiding values and to make sure that they are considered at every aspect of your business but I think it's worth it."	CSR-based ethical leadership and contribution framing.
198	1.3.3	"I think the most important thing is that we don't believe that people need to earn or buy the service that we provide. We think if they're owed to it and so, therefore our mission is to make it easy for them to have access to the tools."	Ethical framing of entitlement and access; reflects values-based service philosophy and social equity.

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199	1.3.3	“We chose early in our journey as a business that we would demonstrate our own approach through becoming a certified B-Corp. And that was a framework of operation that we chose in part because we embraced the idea of considering all stakeholders and our deeds.”	Operational decision to adopt ethical certification; reflects strategic alignment with values-based governance.
200	1.3.3	“Just be kind. Nobody sits comfortably being cruel. Just be kind because the kinder you are, the more love you get around you. People will see you in a different light because if somebody’s being horrible, it’s because they’re not happy. Nobody is horrible for that reason.”	Kindness ethic as behavioural norm; moral climate building (virtue framing).
201	1.3.3	"Would I necessarily want to go and act as a sustainability consultant for British Airways or for Ryanair or something like that? That, probably not." […] "I think it's more reasonable for a company like [Org in the industry] to get involved and support them and help them transition. I don't see anything wrong in that." [...] "If they're a company or an organisation that has come to [our Org] because they want to be more of the solution and do more things in a more positive way and they can prove it and demonstrate that they've already made a commitment, then yes, I'd be delighted." […] "If a company like [Org], and I know that they're doing quite a lot on the nature side of things, came back and got in touch with our [Org], I'd have no qualms about getting involved."	Conditional engagement with high-impact sectors; support only for genuine transition (guarded collaboration).
202	1.3.3	"What came first for me really is that the vast majority of my working life has been working in this space. It started in corporate responsibility and that has organically, if you like, grown and developed into a broader appreciation of the need for us to operate in a sustainable way that doesn't negatively impact future generations." […] "I think I've developed a lot of experience and expertise in this space. I'm here within [“within the UK region]. It's a small business market, if you like, and there are not many other people with the breadth of expertise and experience that I have here really. And if I can use my knowledge and my passion in this area to positively influence companies to do better business and make better business decisions, not just for them, but for wider society, then that's my driver." [...] "I have to do something where I feel I am or at least have the opportunity to make a bit of a difference. And that's why I work really. That's why I do what I do."	Professional identity as change lever; uses expertise to elevate societal outcomes (purpose professionalism).

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203	1.3.3	“Parameters are set around what type of impact we are hoping to make or what type of change businesses are willing to make." [...] "We predominantly focus on marketing communications, circularity, and sustainability." [...] "There are certain industries we will not work with, such as fossil fuel companies, due to their negative impacts.”	Red-lines fossil sectors; marketing/circularity focus to drive positive change (selective client policy).
204	1.3.3	"My message to society is “we need to start thinking more about what we do, you know, with a great, so basically break out of your bubble and start actually looking around you where you live and the impacts of what you do." [...] "You know, try and drive people, try and get business to change how they operate for the triple bottom line and start giving back to society as opposed to capitalism and taking everything." [...] "Educate yourself. Be mindful about where you buy products from because people in other countries... your purchase choices can make a huge difference somewhere else in the world and you can be part of the change, you can be part of the solution."	Consumer education for systemic effects; urges mindful purchasing (civic pedagogy).
205	1.3.3	"I'm doing it for two reasons, to help people, but also because I haven't done enough in the past." [...] "I'm the other side fifty, and I know it's our generation that's really bucked this up, including myself." [...] "So, I'm on a personal mission to try and do as much as I can personally. And the things that I can do. If I can push those back to other people who are probably in the same boat, then that's a good thing."	Intergenerational responsibility; reparative motivation post-realisation (moral accountability).
206	1.3.3	“[My business partner] is very idealistic. Wants to change the world. I came at it tired of being in a corporate life and tired. I don't mean, in a work sense, What I mean is tired of working from a corporate organization or organizations who talk about sustainability, but don't really do anything about sustainability. So, so those two different aspects actually channelled quite nicely into what we're trying to do. As I say, both influence consumers, but also organizations. [...] I'm doing it for two reasons, to help people, but also because I haven't done enough in the past. [...] I know it's our generation that's really bucked this up, including myself. So, I'm on a personal mission to try and do as much as I can personally. And the things that I can do. If I can push those back to other people who are probably in the same boat, then that's a good thing.”	Disillusion with CSR-washing → venture; dual motives align on societal change (mission synthesis).
207	1.3.3	"The outcome is reduced carbon in the atmosphere, which will then, I say carbon in the short-hand, really give you greenhouse gases." [...] "So, sometimes customers struggle to	Preference for patient influence over policing;

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		decarbonize and or struggle to do what they say they would do, even if they're trying to do their thing. " […] "One thing we could do, we just speed to say that you've not done what you said you were going to do last year, you've not really made any progress on your action plan, therefore we're going to start working a bit. And we don't really do that, what we find is that you influence the customer and help them longer term to make change happen."	empathetic persistence for decarbonisation (relational change).
208	1.3.3	"We are... a very small [Platform] for small vegetable schemes... best in class shopping experience... built to work for the […] model."	Ethical impact through tailored tech and principled service design.
209	1.3.3	"We can't chase growth at all costs. It has to be growth in a considered sustainable way, which someone that's only after a return on their money won't like." [...] "The challenge with anything that's not sold through a supermarket is that a lot of the marketing is around doing the right thing, shopping local because it's a nice thing to do, and being ethical because it's a nice thing to do." [...] "We need to make it a really good thing to do as well, because it's a great product that tastes better, that's fresher, that makes you healthier, that's great value."	Rejects "growth at all costs"; reframes value proposition beyond virtue signalling (ethical competitiveness).
210	1.3.3	"It's kind of apparent that mealworms are not good for all creatures, that eat omnivore or carnivores. So, for example, they can give hedgehogs, it can poison hedgehogs because they're very full of too much calcium, but hedgehogs are left at the taste. So, that has presented us with a bit of a dilemma over how we effortfully mark it, our project. We could just say, oh yeah, just chuck the mat, chuck loads of mats for the birds, doesn't matter what everybody else eats, but give us your money, have the money so you can sleep your wildlife. We can't actually do that because we know it's not true.	Truthful marketing over sales; avoids harmful feeding guidance (duty of care).
211	1.3.3	"I provide certified carbon literacy training… bring awareness… act as a catalyst for positive change… use my voice to educate where I can."	Ethical role-modelling (training/advocacy).
2.1.1 Building relationships with industry, clients and community			
212	2.1.1	"I think you can have those conversations [with smaller, independent companies] and work with them to look at their ethical practices around how they support their staff team, what their social and environmental responsibilities are and so on." […] "I've always tended to	Ethical collaboration and preference for adaptable, values-aligned partners.

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		prefer to work with people who are a little bit more independent because they tend to be, like you say, more willing to actually meet me halfway and adapt."	
213	2.1.1	"I would really like our partnership to have its share of how we can support and develop and work in conjunction with developing all these green innovations and providing green jobs."	Ethical impact through innovation and employment; reflects values-led ecosystem thinking.
214	2.1.1	"It's a combination of like some stuff has happened accidentally... and then some stuff I've purposefully kind of sought out groups because they were the charity I was speaking about before." […] "I'm trying to build these relationships with people because they're similar, they have a similar kind of ethos to what I'm trying to do." "In the academia it's definitely a growing area. I think in the UK it's still very small but in the US and in Australia it's growing. I'm working with my [PhD] supervisors to try and kind of make some kind of group or something in this country to get it more kind of going."	Purposeful relationship-building with aligned actors; field cultivation (ecosystem ethos).
215	2.1.1	"I'm always hopeful that, you know, and in fact, I'm not going to name them, but I've got one or two individuals, as I say, I'm building this advisory council, but there's a particular couple of individuals that have been doing the green economy master's degree. I can see the advantage and we're currently sort of talking that, you know, it's one thing because the advisory council with [Org] is not there to be involved in the day-to-day operations of the organisation." [...] "I can appoint at least two of the three or four on the leadership team that I need to start making things grow." […] "I think I've got to be prepared to do that if it delivers what we need to do and again I think technology alongside the financial side of things would facilitate it. I think I've got to have the confidence, which I think I've got, and B, take the risk that maybe up to 50% of the company I've got to give over to another individual or individuals."	Governance foresight (advisory/leadership dilution) to achieve mission; values-risk calculus (ownership ethics).
216	2.1.1	"Very often a company will want to help to identify a suitable piece of software to help them measure, monitor, and report on their sustainability. And I do have one or two kinds of preferred suppliers in that space that I will refer to for those companies."	Curated vendor referrals; independence in strategy; preferred ethical suppliers (guardrailed partnering).

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217	2.1.1	"It's more kind of the areas in which the people that were working within, so like anyone was in kind of betting anyone within my firearms weapons or something like that, like we wouldn't work with them ic do we feel like they're people we can trust or are they trying to hide something then obviously it's not going to work because there's a distrust between the two and that's kind of how we define it because one of our values is like building websites and applications for people on the planet."	Client/sector screening (weapons, distrust signals); alignment with "planet-positive" value (exclusion criteria).
218	2.1.1	"I think it's like pretty similar in a personal perspective as well, because it aligns my personal values of like helping others to grow and like personal development" […] "it gives them a lot more fulfilment knowing that it is benefiting society as a whole." […] "So, it is the right thing to try and offset that impact by doing the right thing, move away."	Personal growth/benefit to society as motive; prosocial fulfilment (values congruence).
219	2.1.1	"Reaching large companies requires massive amount of effort and focus and I can't be distracted by trying to do too many things and helping. […] Yeah, I like the ethical thing, that's interesting." [...] "The more I have a laser focus on helping big companies decarbonize and they have a ripple effect on their whole supply chain of those companies as well? So, that over time does have increasingly improved on society from an industry company point of view.	Large emitters for leverage; ripple-effect theory of change (strategic focus).
220	2.1.1	"A big theme for us centrally is trying to help our users and therefore the market put the customers at the centre of their business." [...] "The market in general, I'm making sweep of generalisations, but it has a tendency to think about how to make life easier on the farm and in the packing shed, and often at the cost of a customer shopping experience." [...] "So, it's an opportunity because now you have an extra four, well actually eight hours to employ, to put them to do something that's more productive, that's more profitable, that helps."	Customer-centred market correction; productivity reframed as user benefit (stakeholder orientation).
221	2.1.1	"When we were hiring... we wanted the people who joined the team to be from that university and be very similar to us... but then speaking with one of our advisors, they were saying, the last thing you want to do is just be hiring copycats of yourself.." [...] "We had to completely switch the way we went about hiring people... we need to have people with different temperaments, people with different backgrounds, people with different views, upbringings because it just helps to kind of create an environment that is one diverse inclusive and tolerant for people of different backgrounds too."	Anti-clone hiring for inclusion/performance; advisor-prompted correction (diversity governance).

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222	2.1.1	“I think resources, yeah, big one, If we can't get the capital to do it, that would be quite a challenge. I think a huge obstacle could be if medical professionals do not readily accept the introduction of our technology, that because if they are not in favour of it, then it can really damage our image in the market, how people perceive [Org/Device], how much trust people are willing to put into it as well. I think one obstacle that we definitely foresee is increasing the number of people who are going to their GP saying that I found something, I found something and then they, them having a lot more pressure on them to see more patients that they weren't, but they wouldn't have been seeing if the [Org/Device] was not alarming people. So, we really have to check that line so carefully and understand how can we be integrated within the healthcare system in a way that doesn't cause more burden to an already overburdened system.”	Anticipates clinical workflow risks; designs for non-maleficence (harm-avoidance integration).
223	2.1.1	“If you know what you're doing like these climate protestors, I don't agree necessarily with everything in the sense of what they do as in the way that they do it. But I understand and support why they're doing it and I think they should be allowed to do it and I don't think they should be criminalised over it."	Personal ethical stance and values-based reasoning in relation to social protest.
224	2.1.1	"Data is not just about using the conversation in the field of your heart, your heart and your statement, or what you're going to decide in the future." […] "Sometimes data can say something. Like you decided to need to sell the reals because data is full." […] "It's not just about data, it's about the feeling, the inducting."	Data; intuition balance; rejects datalism (practical wisdom).
225	2.1.1	"I think the real role that I'm having is bringing people together to have a chat about certain things that might be quite topical." […] "I definitely see the organisation, even my personal role as bringing people into a space. Whether that space is virtual, or whether it's physical, it seems to be that the role is to bring people together under the umbrella or the guise of a topic or an RPS that seems to be that."	Convening role for discourse; creates ethical public sphere (deliberative function).
226	2.1.1	“We basically hired the vehicles to the local authorities in order for them to do this recycling. But there's a couple of things that came out of that really. One was that the heaviest fraction to come out of the home was the garden waste and the garden waste is essentially 55% water and so, now we were running around with more vehicles doing three to four miles to the gallon, picking up essentially 55% water, taking it to composting facilities and processing	Tech remapping toward better materials recovery; critiques perverse incentives (system redesign).

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		it using a lot more fossil fuel. And then because the old nappy or the old plastic bag or the push-by-wheel was put into the composting container. The compost didn't meet the Paz 100 grade, which is a grade of compost to be able to sell the product. So, it was ending up on the landfill site anyway. And that goes on today to this day. So, that was one of the things that sort of started me thinking about stuff. I sold that company […] and then I set up pure recycling. So, the idea was that we were going to set up the most technologically advanced recycling facility in Europe and we used some Neo-infrared technology that could tell the difference between a perfectly roasted peanut and an over-roasted peanut using neo-infrared beams of light. We remapped it to tell the difference between different polymotypes. "	
227	2.1.1	"We don't want to lecture, we're not like, oh, you've got to use it, you've got to stop doing this and you've got to use it and you've got to use it." [...] "What we want to do is provide another option so that an educated society..." [...] "We would only develop the product if it was completely natural and safe, the environment, people, etc." [...] "We can't actually do that because we know it's not true." [...] "The hedgehogs, for example, with […]. So, that is the place that we are responsible for educating our consumers."	Option-provision; consumer education; rejects misleading claims (responsible communication).
228	2.1.1	"We engage with […] on the […] element, and… on the […] element. We worked really closely with […] authorities, […] companies… they are one of our early adopters."	Partnerships; early adopters validate trajectory (evidence alliances).
2.1.2 Building evidence through research, feedback and impact measurement			
229	2.1.2	"We do have lots of lots of user insights and quality feedback to suggest that the app, if people use it, it has a very, very positive impact on the lives of, especially better infinity can be, you know, life changing for them." [...] "We get messages, kind of, you know, five or six messages a week saying that this app, this been a game changer for me."	User outcomes evidence ("life-changing") as impact marker (qualitative proof).
230	2.1.2	"We decided very early on that we wanted to measure the positive impact of the product." [...] "We need to actually measure whether we're doing that." [...] "We do that using a number of different ways... quality feedback, but also some doing a big research study at the moment."	Early commitment to impact measurement; mixed-methods approach (evaluation discipline).

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231	2.1.2	"The whole kind of development of the technology is based on that direct user feedback and direct user interaction. So, then users telling us “this doesn't work for me”, “this isn't accurate”, “this isn't…” you know, “there's, there's kind of improvements needed here” and then telling us what they are." [...] "We're very much reliant on user feedback, sort of user-based quality assurance to help us to refine and develop the technology." [...] "we rely very much on technology that enables our customers to talk to us." [...] "we use quite a bit of technology, including […] and that sort of customer support type technology to facilitate like an ongoing conversation discussion with our users." [...] "we get a lot of feedback from them in terms of what's working well and what isn't working and how we need to improve the platform." [...] "A good example would be about 12 months ago we introduced a new feature whereby you could enhance the summary." […] "We use technology to see […the] anonymised data of how people are using the platform and which features are being used and which features aren't being used."	Continuous UX co-development; telemetry; dialogue to iterate (participatory improvement).
232	2.1.2	"Ultimately we're seeking to create impact and I think impact that can be measured quantitatively, for sure, but in particular qualitatively. So, it's basically how do people feel?" Do they feel like they have more confidence? Do they feel more welcome? Do they feel like it's easier to go out? Because really what we're trying to engender is a feeling of confidence or peace of mind."	Prioritises confidence/peace-of-mind outcomes; qualitative value lens (human-centred metrics).
233	2.1.2	"So, I guess at its most significant level, to bring around systemic change, it involves challenging the status quo." […] "And challenging the status quo in an industry dominated by large business means encouraging large businesses to change and encouraging small or challenger businesses perhaps to encourage that change itself by setting examples or by disrupting." […] "At its heart, we help smaller businesses. And practically, we vary the help that we offer in a way that best fits the needs of those businesses." […] "Our job is to solve problems for clients and problems manifest with symptoms." [...] "It's usual that there's confusion in that process, which is why consultants always like to do some diagnosis."	Status-quo challenge via tailored problem-solving; diagnosis-first consultancy (change agency).
234	2.1.2	“I guess the start point would be to say, and maybe this is simplistic, but all businesses are technological businesses. Technology exists in all forms and in all businesses. […] We certainly would subscribe to the idea that insight informs good decision making. And so,	Tech as decision infrastructure across functions; embraces

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		drawing on data into information, into insight and knowledge to lead to decisions and action is absolutely part of a technological cycle. And we're able to use that in several different ways, depending on the problem that we are working with a client to solve. So, that might be in accessing market data and information. It might be in understanding financial information about a business. It might be in looking at facts and data that we seek from the process and people internally in a business. If we then think about how we support that business in enacting solutions. Many of the solutions that we offer end up being presented in the technological space. […] But if we end up advising and counselling a business around their very presence and appearance perhaps as a brand or product in the marketplace… that's all manifested in the technological space. In my area of supply chain and operations, that could well be around the way in which we get information and data to flow through a supply chain from consumer all the way back to producer and for then the physical flow to move the other direction. […] It's hardly any surprise that in this fashionable word of generative AI, we turn to any technological tool that improves our own productivity and efficiency."	productivity tools responsibly (evidence-led practice).
235	2.1.2	"I do try to help them in getting that solution going okay we've confirmed that I can't do this work or our organisation can't do the work let's find a solution for you let's go and find someone who has the same principles as me, which is like sharing that knowledge, sharing that learning, it's not just about finding are they compliant or not, it's more to that." [...] "We ensure that we're working collaboratively with everyone there." [...] "We do take on feedback so, I've had feedback on sort of saying you look like it. People perceive us now as a training company rather than we've got other services we provide."	Collaborative redirection when out-of-scope; knowledge sharing beyond compliance (service ethics).
236	2.1.2	"An answer would be around how we secure how we ring fence data within the system and ensuring that we follow obviously customer data is incredibly important to what tools and to our users." [...] "We need to be very conscious of that because a big opportunity for us is to be able to use the data that we have available to us for the first time ever in the market to create insights to help have a real impact."	Data ring-fencing with social benefit aims; privacy; insight balance (data governance).
237	2.1.2	"I guess with technological resources we have to buy in the consultants that have that level of expertise if we don't have it in-house. So, we have some amazing engineers […] heading	Resource cadence to avoid over-engineering; "ship

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		up new product development and we got great mechanical engineers. […] "So, we engage with the resources that we require, the additional resources that we acquire. There's always a debate as to whether if you have more money, whether you could make things happen faster. I think there is some truth in that. It is actually quite a difficult balance because I think that if you've got so many engineers, engineers love to engineer and if you're not very careful, you just keep on engineering and you don't bring out products so, we describe as you know you've got to bring out the motor that mobile phone before you the iPhone if you like so, it might be a bit hair big and heavy and clumps and people make a phone call every time you pick it up. And then you can make it all nice and light and small and lovely in your pocket and look cool. But if you leave it to engineers, they'll just keep on engineering every day and they won't bring anything to market. So, the resources are a difficult balance for sure."	then refine" ethic (responsible resourcing).
238	2.1.2	"I don't think we have [used technology as a resource for decision-making processes]. We get feedback, we have an in-app survey, that helps with some of the broad general direction of where we're going." [...] "It might be because we're not asking for enough detailed feedback."	Acknowledges insufficient feedback depth; limits impact on decisions (research gap).
239	2.1.2	"We're part of an association in the UK of […] businesses and we are doing lots of individual research ourselves and that can look like going to farmers markets and not even selling, but offering people if they want to try […] and things like that." [...] "I think the main motivation in that regard for us and other businesses our colleagues are in the rest of the world it's almost a normal thing or it's a very normal thing. And the UK is quite alone in its acceptance of it [… from] the investors." [...] "It's going to take more of marketing, a lot of work to get it out right."	Grassroots research/market education; UK cultural acceptance lag recognised (context sensitivity).
240	2.1.2	"It's got to be driven by science because science, as in engineering, has this ability to be able to produce sensible results." […] "Only science can tell you for certain" […]"we had to invest […] before we could have a life cycle assessment carried out, an independent life cycle assessment"	LCA-driven environmental assurance; participatory governance.
241	2.1.2	"Well, we decided very early on that we wanted to measure the positive impact of the product. So, this a direct consumer product, we charge a subscription so the consumer will	Lived-experience oversight.

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		pay. And we decided very early on that we wanted them to measure the impact of what we were doing, because I think the, the mission of the company is to help people get their lives back from or forget, get people their lives back from [this health condition]. We need to actually measure whether we're doing that. And we do that using a number of different ways that we do that, but quality feedback, but also some, some doing a big research study at the moment. Yeah. We kind of want it and make sure that we were having an impact. And we've measured that impact right from almost right from day one."	
242	2.1.2	"So, the product that we launched was the product that we thought we were going to launch. The feedback from the customers. The users of the app think it's a good product. But, and now they've, they've given us the things that we need to do in order to make it a better product. So, we've had eighty thousand people download it, which is positive. We've, we've had surveys of those people. Eighty three percent of them said they've changed their mind about buying a product on the back of [using] our app. That's really positive."	Behaviour change evidence (83% shift); feedback directs roadmap (impact-to-iteration loop).
243	2.1.2	"We probably haven't done enough research around that. We haven't got enough feedback. We've got a lot of work to do on our platform as well. We want it to be so much more than it is. So, we're in a sort of, not beta, but first version of it. And it's just a lot of content. And it's not how we want it to be by any stretch. But it's all money and time to try and get it there. But it's a start and we've had some feedback that it's, when people have engaged with it, it's useful, it's affected them and they found it helpful. As an enabler to the therapy itself, yeah, it's an interface that's really easy, it's quite appealing, it's quite visually appealing, it's simple, it works technically, it's very easy and that's what we want to ease to come into the process, so yeah, it does the job in that sense." […] "We have an in-app survey, that helps with some of the broad general direction of where we're going, but on a high level, and it might be because we're not asking for enough detailed feedback, I wouldn't say it's really changed our decision-making process but I think that's more because of our lack of join-up between users of the platform and our process and that's for business reasons, it's lack of resource and money in the team to make that happen at the moment."	MVP honesty; utility affirmed but resource-led constraints on research feedback (capacity realism).
2.1.3 Building awareness and truth-telling			

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244	2.1.3	"It starts perhaps with truth telling. It continues through doing the right thing and perhaps it then ends with seeing things through." [...] "We have a no quibble guarantee where we promise a deliverable, we'll keep going until we deliver to a client satisfaction, even when the fee runs out."	Truth-telling → doing right → persistence; honouring guarantees beyond fees (ethical follow-through).
245	2.1.3	"The main focus of is to support with generating and disseminating knowledge about appearance concerns I would say for exercises, so disorder eating, disorder relationships exercise, body image issues, that kind of thing. I run a podcast where I talk to experts and I work on research projects and do media like things and talks at universities and healthcare services around these topics."	Knowledge production/dissemination on appearance concerns; civic pedagogy role (expert outreach).
246	2.1.3	"I feel that my role is attempting to generate and share information about the topic that I feel a lot of people experience without realizing or have a lot of people have realised they experience it but don't feel comfortable sharing it or don't know don't realize that other people do." [...] "I'm hoping that by [...] making people more aware of it and educating the people who care for people with these concerns I will have a positive influence."	Normalising hidden concerns via education; caregiver-facing influence (awareness building).
247	2.1.3	"I do TV documentaries, and I help with these different shows and stuff, and they get seen by a lot of people. So, I do, the things I do seem to have some kind of influence. And the influence that I've managed to have in the information that people get because of what I'm saying and what I'm sharing, I think I owe society honesty and integrity..."	Mass-reach media leveraged; integrity/ honesty pledged (public ethics).
248	2.1.3	"So, the outcome is reduced carbon in the atmosphere, which will then, I say carbon in the short-term, really give you greenhouse gases. Produce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere over between now and 2015, which will simplify the change. If we do that, that's a really good technical thing we've done. And then, the principles around the team, [...], the more transparent open honest. We are loud and proud we're getting there. [...] Things have gone wrong, things have gone right. With our customers, with how we report on things, the more credibility is, and the more people learn. So, that's the target, and then getting there and opening up to that way is important. For something about fairness, but it doesn't really impact us. So, there's an equity fit, there's a real equity equitable thing around climate change, or everyone has carbon budgets. In the UK, we smash through our carbon budgets. If you divide the carbon budget equally around 8 billion people around the planet, we use	Boundary clarity

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		way more than we should and there's a big extra problem there. But that's almost beyond our... Reading it, we can't... That's like a government global problem to solve and we can't really we don't really, have any levers to solve that so, it isn't really an issue for us internally to do many things because we just tell companies we can't really just quickly as they can so, while still staying in business so that's a that was quite a simple objective in a way but it doesn't unless I miss it doesn't seem to have any trade-offs most of the time. [This is] my epiphanic view." [...]	
249	2.1.3	"The plastic situation was just becoming... it's untenable. The local authorities would say to us we need the industry, this is not just to us as a company we need you to take the pots, tubs and trays and we would say there is no market in the world for pots, tubs and trays." [...] "So, the authorities would say well we told the public they can be recycled because it does say on them there's a recycling end and we said well they can be recycled in a laboratory but there's no sustainable market for those items globally." [...] "So, in order to win the contracts the industry had to really bail up everything, all of the [...], which can be recycled. So, [Tech] is like a water bottle and your [...] bottle and your [Tech], which is the opaque plastic for your milk bottle. Bail it all up with the pots, tubs and Trays and send it to Indonesia, Vietnam, Asia, China up until the Green Fence came into place, Turkey."	Exposes recycling myths; educates via narrative to spur reform (counter-spin).
250	2.1.3	"So, it's quite a big question and the [Technology] goes to the heart of so many social issues that we've got. So, ethically, I think that we're looking at providing a solution to an awful lot of problems." [...] "We had an example of it this. [...] So, the NHS have never awarded pyrolysis before. They use incineration. Incineration is very [...] carbon intensive and the waste industry which we are not part of anymore there's one leading publication called Let's Recycle and they published the NHS Award and because it's part of the framework agreement the NHS have publicised it as this huge innovation and how it's going to reduce their carbon emissions or global warming gases emissions and the industry the waste industry have completely stripped that headline and just announced it as the big waste management companies the well-known ones winning a contracts to incinerate waste. No mention of the company that's going to stop the waste businesses. So, it's a bit like Kodak, I guess. You know, they have someone comes into the board and said, I've got this great idea, we're going	Frames innovation vs. incumbent resistance; public misunderstanding as barrier (transition politics).

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		to digitize film. And the guys at the Kodak's board have said, no, no, no, that's never going to happen. We don't need to even think about that. And of course, Kodak disappear. So, the waste industry stand to lose the most from this new innovative technology and yet the very publication that leads in the UK refuses to accept. So, I think that the challenges we've got are people don't like change and people are very disbelieving, I think, as a rule. People definitely appreciate that waste is polluting our oceans and our water courses because they've seen it being evidenced on the television with David Attenborough and others regularly. So, it's a challenge." […] "The waste industry is saying to us you set up a company called […]. That's like setting yourself up for a fall because no one's doing that and we would be talking to the paper mills and talking to the people that wanted our material, saying, well, no one ever has come along and asked us to provide the specifications to the quality we want from you as the waste industry to provide our product. It's never, ever happened before."	
251	2.1.3	"We have a [communication channel] which we launched this year which has been really good and on the back of that we also, well that and some press coverage, we're also running around tables where we get folks together and we talk about the issues at hand and there's a bit of education and insight shared by us, by them, everyone brings ideas and thoughts together and then we create a report on the back of it, which is sort of a research driven approach informally but it's a let's explore this topic together and then let's think if we need to adapt our solution to your circumstances. But [the communication channel] started that process and that comes from us, that's from the heart. It's like what do we want to share? How do we represent ourselves out in the world? We wanted to go fairly in depth. You know, we don't do a lot of social media at the moment, and partly because we don't like the shallow format of it. So, we're trying to work out how we might get across content that's a little bit more considered, not just like flashy little sound bites. So, we kind of skipped that stage. It went straight to a [communication channel] which is much more in debt, in long, long form. And we share that amongst businesses. We put it out on social media. We put it out on [social media]. So, that's, yeah. But that came from really how do we talk about what matters to us and the mission. Like for example, in that [communication channel], we always have a	Long-form thought leadership and roundtables; mission-first content strategy (depth over virality).

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		parenting feature. We don't work in the parenting field, we're not working with parents, that's not the focus of the business, but it's the part of the overall mission because it's so important to mental health that it just felt right. It just felt like we want to be talking about parenting and how important it is for children, you know, get what they need. So, let's be part of that education process, even though it's not really specifically our mission."	
252	2.1.3	"I think part of what people need to have confidence is knowing that other disabled people trust the information or have had good experiences in a place." […] "So, I think for us who wanted to embed it in that idea that this is really accurate, granular, detailed information, but it was also information that other disabled people approved of." […] "So, we're really trying to think about, not just being able to answer the questions that our users have, but can we recommend things to them if we can learn from their past experience and behaviour?" […] "I think throughout the whole plan, you know, the goal is to be very engaged with the disabled community, really participatory, making sure they're listening at all points and learning from the feedback that we get."	Community validation as trust mechanism; participatory design for recommendations (co-creation).
253	2.1.3	"I think a large part of what we do is raising awareness around the fact that even though this is something which might not currently affect people, it's in their interests to want greater accessibility and inclusion because it's something which might apply to them in the future, but also as I said before, it's our kind of understanding if that's what justice should look like." […] "So, I think my one lesson or my one kind of piece of advice would be to think about acting in a way that creates the world which you would like to see, even if you might not individually or necessarily right now benefit from that world."	Justice-as-future-self logic; acts for inclusive world even without immediate self-benefit (civic virtue).
254	2.1.3	"Our objective, I guess, is to educate and raise awareness to the marketing profession primarily of the role that they need to play to drive a more sustainable future." […] "The goal is to educate and train approximately 10.6 million marketers in the world today to tell a different story and communicate more effectively on the common verbal challenge that is sustainability and climate change." […] "Essentially, we are trainers and educators; that is the primary function of our business, but we do consultancy and essentially share knowledge information content in all sorts of formats." […] "So, it's education in a number of different	Global upskilling mandate for marketers; behaviour-change communication as lever (capacity building).

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		ways to change how businesses approach what they do, to try and, I guess, break down traditional business processes that no longer serve planet and people, but only profit."	
255	2.1.3	"I think my personal and professional role in society is to educate, inform, raise awareness." […] "I can't force people to change how they act, but I'd like to hope that the work I do and how I do it has some impact and gets people thinking so they change their mindsets and their mindset leads to behaviour change."	Influence via mindset shift rather than coercion; education → behaviour chain (soft power ethics).
256	2.1.3	"My personal and professional role… educate, inform, raise awareness… I can't force people to change… hope the work… gets people thinking… mindset leads to behaviour change."	Public modelling through education and influence.
257	2.1.3	"Everything we do is designed to help a consumer and, and influence a brand. Mostly because individual actions are good for a consumer. It makes them feel better. And, and it helps. But multiplying those individual actions by millions is when you get is when you influence a brand or a retailer sufficiently for them to take action." [...] "Our focus is on that. And everything is about how do we influence brand? How do we get our rating system to the brand so that they can actually change something that's our focus."	Scale via consumer aggregation to pressure brands; systemic lever theory (market influence).
258	2.1.3	"Yeah, now if I ran a business where I was a baker, let's say, or I produced some sort of consumer product, you might have a department for social innovation, then head of sustainability, who needs to come up with big marketing themes around why you should buy our products over others." [...] "The more successful we are, the more social good we'll deliver and we don't need to... It's not a decision to take path A or B. It's about what we do need to do is stay true to our values."	Values consistency as growth engine; rejects instrumental "ethics for PR" (mission fidelity).
259	2.1.3	"It used to be very very intertwined because one of the reasons I set up the business was because of dissatisfaction as a lecturer. I felt that there was a creative itch that wasn't being scratched and I also could see that there were different ways of doing business would be better." […] "I've always been entrepreneurial anyways, it's not the first business I've had. Before this I, whilst teaching, I also had a […] business and I grew British flowers. And that again was probably the creative side of me feeling like it wasn't being fulfilled." […] "As the years have gone on, the last year especially, I've had to do things that maybe like TikTok for instance isn't something on a personal level that I want to get involved in. Partly as we've	Entrepreneurial purpose meets value tensions (social media); navigates alignment (identity coherence).

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		discussed it doesn't fit with my values around. I've got a very much a love-hate relationship with social media."	
260	2.1.3	"I could do better marketing and selling on social media than I am doing at the moment." […] "I'm not marketing to kids that anyway, my product, I made that conscious decision at the beginning that if parents didn't want to buy it for their child, then I was not going to market it in a way that was all about appealing to kids because that's not how I feel that this is not the right way to do it for this particular product and the products we're creating."	Child-directed marketing refusal; parent-mediated ethics (vulnerable user protection).
261	2.1.3	"My accounting system, […] mailing list system, white boarding system… all of these kind of small pieces of software all mashed together kind of mean that I can do the job if I didn't have them I wouldn't be able to do it. But I don't really use any of them to actually make decisions. Funnily enough the one thing that does come to mind is when I've used [AI] to outline like draft structures of sessions or like workshop plans you know how should I present this material and then I've kind of used [AI] to give me some ideas for that. […] And then I work with somebody who helps with my social media. And there's a lot of decision making that happens on that through that process, which again, she lives up North, we wouldn't be able to meet in person and do that. And then probably, you know, accessing the ethical guidance on the governing bodies' websites. Supervision is online, I do that online through […] I use a, lastly, I use a digital course platform […] I host a couple of digital courses on their mindfulness products, things that I've delivered either to just individual members of the public or to corporate clients and whilst I don't use that to make decisions, there have been lots of kind of lots of thinking has had to go into that in terms of what's the cyber security process like, what's the information security, where's the server, all of these things. And as a one person show that was quite stressful."	Tool stack enables work; visible stress on cyber/information security as sole operator (duty of care).
262	2.1.3	"I believe that you put it here for a purpose. I guess I believe you put here for a purpose and you have to define what that purpose is. And I think that when you've had a career that's spanned across the waste industry, and I know when I talk to different people and I was invited down to an event down in London, you know, where deaf are and everyone's sitting and I explain what's going on, it's almost like it sucks the air out of the room because people know it's happening but no one likes to hear it's happening and so, I think that I owe it to	Truth-telling; universal access aim; equity of affordability central (mission universality).

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		society to sprinkle some truth on what's happening today, but offering something that's going to be a better alternative. So, and then it's all about how you can build that team around you because I need people that are much cleverer than me to be able to deliver that vision. And then you need to be able to deliver that vision in a way that is affordable and accessible to everybody, regardless of their financial position. I don't want the [technology] to be just a device that is only for the wealthy or only for organisations with the SGD responsibilities that needs to be for everybody and so, we've got to go through that pain barrier as to how we produce the factories in order to do that. So, that's what I owe, I guess, society. I owe society or it a solution to this mammothite problem.	
263	2.1.3	"I upload my podcast… it puts it on [platforms]… for me. […] So, obviously the podcast […]. So, I use a website called […] which basically I upload my podcast and the description to and then it puts it on […] and all that kind of stuff for me."	Tech-enabled dissemination (podcast infra) to widen reach (scalable education).
2.1.4 Knowledge sharing and collective learning			
264	2.1.4	"I'm trying to kind of create knowledge and through research and through those kinds of things and also disseminate it. So, I feel that ethically, or you know, I feel like there's a responsibility to try and give truthful information and in a way that is hopefully positive on the world."	Ethical duty to truthful communication; research-to-public bridge (accuracy commitment).
265	2.1.4	"I use social media to kind of share the podcast or just share when [Org] does things and so, when they were involved in certain events or something comes out that we've been involved in, just to kind of share it and hopefully get more people watching it or sharing it or being involved in it or learning from it or whatever." […] "I think it would be better and maybe I would enjoy more kind of communication with the people who listen to the podcast and that kind of thing." […] "I think it would be great, because I think stuff like that is what I feel has the most impact." […] "There might be hundreds of people who have gone on massive changes because of what they listened to but just never told me, and I just don't know." […] "I think that probably the main thing is if I could get more communication, more feedback, that would be useful." […] "I'd like to do that, I've not been able to do it… maybe maybe like influencing policy more would be good."	Two-way dialogue and policy impact; feedback deficit constrains learning (engagement gap).

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266	2.1.4	"Social media wise it's really tough." [...] "You get a lot of people who just kind of take the mic and kind of claim that it's a made up thing that people often talk about how they use the word they a lot and they say loud here they are trying to stop us from exercising now or they are trying to stop you know as if I'm part of some kind of government's conspiracy and yeah so, in that regard it can be really difficult." [...] "Currently within healthcare, it's almost impossible to be kind of recognised and receive care for the issues that surround muscularity. There is the kind of clinically recognized condition, muscle dysmorphia, but there's so much confusion around it, and so many people who kind of half don't believe in it, that it's still, I'm deeply kind of ingrained in the world as we've spoken about so far during this interview and I think I've only ever heard of two people who have been diagnosed with it." [...] "So, partly, some people reject the notion, usually at least from the bits of research we've seen, and just from kind of anecdotally, from speaking to people and hearing stories, people reject the notion in the sense that they, if they, when they see someone come to a, and I've had this experience myself when I was really struggling with it."	Faces social media hostility; clinical ambiguity impedes recognition (contextual headwinds).
267	2.1.4	"One of my frustrations when we were in Covid and we started doing training online it was like… there's got to be better ways of doing this it was through that and so, I explored it and discovered that the area that I work in which is the research side and very early phase development things the training is not as available as it is for if you're manufacturing and the product's licensed and everything else. There's loads and loads of training and providers out there. So, I started [Venture] to provide that learning to people. So, we got an e-learning platform. I developed e-learning for our own clients. So, some clients come to us and say can you help us develop some of this. Some I do available in the public domain."	Public dissemination infrastructure.
268	2.1.4	"[It's important] to share knowledge because if you just learn something new or you develop something new but you're not sharing it to the wider society. Like what was really the point of developing it is just going to benefit you or like your organization." […] "You share that knowledge and another organisation or individuals can come in and develop that further and that's kind of what keeps progression going up and continues" […] "just continue sharing knowledge and making connections with people to progress society as a whole."	Pro-social modelling via knowledge sharing.

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269	2.1.4	"I am aware that some people can see what I'm doing as a negative influence, you know, people think we all should be exercising more and I'm telling people bad sides of it, but I've kind of justified in myself that people learning more about the negative doesn't stop people from doing it and hopefully we'll just kind of put safeguards in place for them to stop themselves from getting to a negative place." [...] "I used to talk a lot [...] a lot of the research on that has been done on men. So, there was a big period of time where I would, [...] I would kind of almost, it would be an assumption that it's men..."	Mitigates perceived "anti-exercise" risk via safeguards framing; gender-bias reflexivity (nuance management).
270	2.1.4	"It's a fine balance that I constantly have to deal with on multiple levels, but one of them is I could add an infinite number of caveats to everything I say, but then that's going to go on forever and people aren't going to want to listen to me say also this, also this, also this, so I have to choose some things that I'm going to ignore and potentially then miss out. So, that's, that's a struggle. And then on top of that, something I often have to deal with in the sense of choosing my words and how I say things is when I do media things because when I speak during training sessions or during academic things, I'm much more wordy like I am in this. I'm trying to kind of articulate myself a lot more. Whereas when I do media things, you know, the media don't like that. They want you to give them like little snippets of the truth."	Media brevity vs nuance tension; adopts "front-loaded caveat" strategy for accuracy (communication ethics).
271	2.1.4	"It became quite interesting to me, the problem with the kind of science technical point of view." [...] "I started out looking at the London works with climate services [...] and stuff." [...] "Quite an amazing line... We've got eight units, five to that, and we've got a lot of work to do, like for services and edge finance and stuff." [...] "So, it was now a good point that we knew each year that [technology] is the kind of what we normally use as [...], that's the area for funding. I used to be a scientist, I see things like that. For those applications, there was a climate scientist who was saying what the issue was, much more than generally, I would say."	Scientist-to-finance trajectory; applies technical framing to climate services (evidence orientation).
272	2.1.4	"It is challenge. We've done the majority of our, we've acquired the majority of our customers directly, so direct, you know, if we advertise it and then they find out about it and then they'll pay. It's a challenge in digital help, because in the UK, people are less willing to pay for health solutions. That's changing, as we, you know, as the NHS changes and things. But people are, people are less, people are less willing to pay for, like a different solution. And I thought the other thing is as well, like it's always just been from a computer from a financial perspective	Business model honesty (no quick fixes); UK willingness-to-pay challenge (market ethics).

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		and a commercial perspective. It's just expensive. Acquiring, acquiring new customers, marketing to new customers and acquiring new customers is just very expensive in digital health. And I think the reason for that would ask is because people want a quick fix. […] People want something that's just going to get rid of it [condition]. But […] we don't promise to do that, and we don't get rid of it. We help people. We hope people manage it. And for many people, that's just, oddly, that's, that's, that's not what they want. They want. They just want, they want something that's going to take it away. And, well, something as easy as well. And what we don't have is an easiest, you know, it's, it's gonna take, it's gonna take a few months. And, and, yeah, it will. It will take some time, some time investment from them as well."	
273	2.1.4	"In lots of ways, I feel like society has made my life much harder. And so, it's a complicated relationship [with society]. And you know, part of me wants to say, oh, society, nothing. And part of me wants to say, Yeah, I want to give back and I want to have a positive impact on society, on people, whatever that looks like. And it's all through kind of like the lens of my own outlook. Like I was at a very corporate company at the very start of my career and I really struggled with my mental health then and they were very supportive of me and I had a really positive experience. But even within the organization, within the same organization, I knew lots of people who had had similar experiences but not been supported at all. There was a lot of inconsistency in that and so, as I think about my business and what I want to do through it, I can't really divorce it from the experiences that I had and wanting to either give others access to the same positive experience I had or help kind of address or mitigate some of the more negative experiences that I know are happening all the time in workplaces all over the world. And I kind of do that with a sense of cautious... ...Cautiousness, because... ...I've become much more philosophical since actually when I started the company, one person's version of positive experience isn't necessarily another person's and I've become much more kind of appreciative of the grey in the middle of things. Things are not always black and white And there's a real ego in it as well. There can be a lot of ego and business in, you know, I'm the best and I can do this for you. And actually a lot of the work I've been	Ongoing emotional ambivalence, humility and tension with society/industry.

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		doing in the training in the last couple of years is around what do any of us really know about anything?"	
274	2.1.4	"The world is about balance. You cannot have just possibilities, things that have done so. So, what I think is, of course, the environment and together it's around you, around the company, but of course, the company. The market, the company, the company gets affected by almost everything. Sometimes when it hits the positive side is because you know, you can hit it lightly, you've got to push you into the right direction. The negative side is when you make mistakes, but then you learn from mistakes. So, sometimes if you made or made mistakes that means you learned big. If you never failed that means probably you never tried hard enough. So, there is always a crush for the two in everything we do and not being everything possible. Now, for example, with ethical science, what we have with ethical science is the research that we want to do to democratize and that's the only question. So, then we have one of the main factors to be a democratic phase in the team. Investors, anyone, global investors, investors cannot clear a certain percentage of the street side of perfectly because otherwise we are not only able to invest in one of these and we want to remember them from the life side of everything. So, those are the rules that get to the place that you should be placed, and then that ethical side of the human that will fix and say, actually you are created now and you are a star because sometimes you're stuck. So, if you're not familiar, I would be sure I did the rest of it, but how I do it, So, I'm creating now, and the hospitality and sometimes the shopping. So, I think that's a really healthy show, I did the recipe, and how I do it, and just follow the ethical side of that."	Learning-driven systemic outlook.

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275	2.1.4	"We do have an overall business strategy. We look at that document quite regularly so, we're looking at every quarter like what's our targets where we want to go […] It's all based around our core principles and our core service offerings." [...] "We want to know from our staff what have they seen, what do they come across, what do they think is going to be beneficial to our stakeholders"	Internal learning loops and staff knowledge capture.
2.2.1 Financial sustainability			
276	2.2.1	"Yes, we look at what a monetary return is likely to be but we are at an early stage within the business."	Moral courage in early-stage decision-making under commercial pressure.
277	2.2.1	"So, financial is an obstacle, timing is an obstacle. The drawback to having so many parts of your business, I mean 44% of our business use one or more of the services we offer across the four sections, the four divisions. So, it's trying to upsell and cross sell sometimes to clients, whereas it might take five wins of new business, whereas a bigger company will say, yeah, we'll use this and this."	Financial sustainability through strategic complexity and client acquisition.
278	2.2.1	"Our biggest challenge, what we're having sacrificed is a quick return on our business because the market isn't quite warmed up for it yet..." [...] "So, it's quite sporadic."	Short-term sporadic returns and uptake.
279	2.2.1	"Yeah, I know we've definitely liked more resource, but it's the time for everything. We can't invest in everything at once. But yeah, I would love a million pounds in six months to completely redevelop the platform. That would be great. The team of coders and the new ex designers, that would be wonderful. But we'll get there, but we do it iteratively and slowly because we're not externally funded. We're bootstrapped and we want to try and keep control for ethical reasons because if you get a VC involved all the ethics are, I would say, more challenged because the financial side becomes paramount rather than the ethical side. And sometimes they work. I believe actually they work hand in hand, but when you do the ethical thing, the profit follows, but I'm not sure that investors always see it that way. In the short term, they might choose the more obviously profitable route. […] So, you know, [investors] like say, lock people into a 10 session bundle up front and we're like no you can't lock people in it's that you're giving an agency the whole point is that it's their choice we	Bootstrapping to avoid investor ethics drift; protects agency/user choice (governance integrity).

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		don't want to lock people in we also want them to give them a pay as you go option and they might insist well that doesn't make sense to the commercial model you need to lock them in so, there's there could be a conflict for example right there. So, for that reason amongst others we haven't gone to the external investment group and for that reason resources slower and more iterative and we have to work more incrementally."	
280	2.2.1	"One of the biggest challenges is switching from doing free work to charging for some of what we've been doing for free." [...] "Another challenge is deciding who to work with, as an ethical organisation that wants to do the right thing." [...] "Working with big businesses that are not doing what they say they're going to do can be a moral challenge, but it may be necessary to drive real change and progress."	Monetisation pivot from free; principled client selection even when uncomfortable (boundary maintenance).
281	2.2.1	"Resource... yeah, you're all working on a bundle resource up into money because money is what allows you to have resource, whether that's internal or external resource." [...] "We're constrained by resource. You always will be unless you're [Org]." [...] "What we set out to do, what users have now told us it is actually, they want this to be a continuum, and we want it to be a continuum."	Resource constraints acknowledged; continuum vision co-shaped by users (adaptive ambition).
282	2.2.1	"We're at the stage now where I can't implement or I can't continue to design, develop and eventually implement all the plans and ideas and objectives that [Org] has got as well as work with various clients and so on." [...] "So, what's also key, the resources or lack of it. It's the financial side of things, because it gets to the stage where you, unless you can sort of fund it yourself and I have my own savings into [Org], we're at the stage now where I think without a cash injection if you like, I can't then take [Org} forward to resource the other things that we need to be able to do. Sadly it does come down to like, higher taxes and the money situation and so on. They're not insurmountable but I think also the other way of looking at it is the resource that I want to be able to take forward."	Founder capacity ceiling; values-driven growth contingent on ethical funding (scaling dilemma).
283	2.2.1	"I think the next stage forward, and again, it is the sort of resources and the financial resources, but I think I'm at the stage where, well, I've got the ambition, and I don't, well, I do know how to do it in the sense that, you know, if we had the financial resources."	Ambition blocked by finance; knows "how," lacks runway (pragmatic limit).
284	2.2.1	"Sustainability, and therefore ethics means different things to different people. Depending upon your own personal values, where you are in your journey, where you are in your	User autonomy central; transparency to support

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		lifestyle." [...] "We all care at some point. So, and we've been very careful to make sure that users can actually make their own choices based upon their own values, their own ethics, their own sustainability..."	plural values (anti-paternalism).
285	2.2.1	“The technology available […] the technology that we need, is there and it proves all the time. Resource. Yeah. You're all working on a bundle resource up into money because money is what allows you to have resource, whether that's internal or external resource. So, you need funds to be able to deliver what we want to deliver. Could it be better? Yeah, it can always. You can keep throwing money at things, but you have to. You have to have a product is viable and is working, then generates money somehow in order to do the other things that you need that you need to do. So, are we constrained by resource? Yeah. We're constrained by resource. You always will be unless you're […], of course.”	Tech is adequate; constraint is funding to realise vision (practical bottleneck).
286	2.2.1	"Outcomes, it depends whether we're looking at short, medium, long term... In the medium term, I would look at stakeholder engagement, like our engagement within the market, our presence and influence within the market." [...] "Longer term is what are the results of that. You look at market as a market, how many fetch boxes are being sold in the UK at the moment, what's the, you know, it could be short, medium or long term, it's one, but we track average spend, light for light spend with our users." [...] "Our first user that's just ticked over the 12-month mark, sales have increased 30% in a difficult market without any advertising spend, because, and that's for a mixture of increased basket spend and increased customer numbers, but it's very sustainable, profitable growth because it's both."	Multi-horizon KPIs; credible evidence of sustainable growth (outcome focus).
287	2.2.1	“So, we're developing something at the moment which is a project that could help with, I can't say much because we're under embargo, but it will provide a solution to society. There's many companies doing the same, well not many, but providing new packaging solutions that can be used globally. And That is an example of how we have wanted to keep the direction of our business so that every product that comes from our farming process is used in an ethical way and for good. So, when this product develops, we will maintain, it would go completely against our principles to incorporate any chemicals, for example, that were even slightly harmful. We would only develop the product if it was completely natural and safe, the environment, people, etc. So, I don't want to go too far off. Yeah, and essentially we don't	Product pipeline screened for natural/harmless inputs; educative “options not lectures” (safe-by-design).

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		want to lecture, we're not like, oh, you've got to use it, you've got to stop doing this and you've got to use it and you've got to use it. What we want to do is provide another option so that an educated society and that's not our remit to educate society but we can submit options into society. So, that's our driver really, that's what drives us and our decisions."	
288	2.2.1	"I think a lot can be achieved... in the centre ground from a political, economic, commercial perspective." [...] "We work in very, very short-term cycles... So, I would say we run things from the centre ground and we think in the longer term."	"Centre ground" pragmatism with long-termism; resists short-term cycles (tempered strategy).
2.2.2 Purpose-driven operational effectiveness			
289	2.2.2	"Very, very scalable, we're not. So, and I know that that's like a limitation of our business model. So, we have human interactiveness and we were scalable nearly as the number of consultants we can hire. We're a big consultancy company but [have] less scalability than a SaaS platform. [...] "So, you can't solve climate change with [org]. You can solve climate change with good technology, coupled with good human relationships. So, it's not scalable in terms of breadth, but it is depth, much deeper and much deeper impact." [...] "So, we work with bigger and bigger companies. So, some of these companies now have enormous carbon footprints, And the people in control of those carbon footprints, they're still only like, there's a few decision makers who can influence a very big carbon footprint for the normal isolation. And so, our human interaction with a few people can actually have a big impact on climate change as a problem over time. We should get into the right people, the key decision that we have in business years. So, that's how I have an impact,	Impact via depth over breadth; human; tech complementarity (scalability realism).
290	2.2.2	"I'm responsible for setting the strategy, managing, you know, the performance for a small team." [...] "Is this in line with our long-term? Is this in line with the company's mission? Will this decision help us get more people's lives back from [Health Condition]?"	Strategy gatekept by mission question; patient-outcome north star (purpose alignment).
291	2.2.2	"The business has been established to do the right thing to make a positive to have a positive impact. And so, we will we stay true to you know about central purpose and therefore we are being whether I am ethical or not isn't actually a question that I ask myself	Ethical leadership through pragmatic purpose alignment.

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		very often because of my starting point that makes sense so that maybe I should do maybe I will do more after this conversation.”	
292	2.2.2	"I don't think there should be a sustainability strategy on the left hand and the business plan... I think the two need to be married..."	Ethical leadership through strategic integration of sustainability and business planning.
293	2.2.2	"So, we have a primary outcome kind of in an edge, and that's the weak product market fit." [...] "We'll look at month break. So, have we got a month or month growth we need. How much does it cost us to acquire a customer versus how much revenue, How much gross profit do we generate from that customer?"	Commercial viability tracking and financial sustainability through performance metrics.
294	2.2.2	"We come into the heading of alternative [education] provision. So, during the daytime we provide one-to-one tuition to students who are unable to attend school for a variety of reasons...very anxious... autistic..." [...] "I'm working in the business with [Person, who] makes the strategic decisions."	Cognitive dissonance in navigating dual service models and ethical responsibility across public and private education contexts.
295	2.2.2	"I love the idea of having a booming business company with people working in it that are passionate, that get paid a lot of money because it's going really well. So, that's definitely, that's also, also a big driver, is success. But our success is only measured by producing these projects according to the ethics that they're built upon."	Ethical prioritisation as the benchmark for success.
296	2.2.2	"We've got huge plans for [Venture]." [...] “We're all about investing in nature and the environment. 'Delivering positive outcomes and change in the world' is a key aim of the organization.”	Ethical impact through environmental ambition and social contribution; reflects principled governance.
297	2.2.2	"It [impact criteria] was kind of organic, really. We just kind of said, well, we determined what the overall objective of the company was the purpose of the company." [...] "We kind of haven't used any criteria for that. It's just been, What's the thing we can do to maximize that, to maximize the likelihood of us getting to that point."	Impact criteria emergent; maximisation of purpose probability over rigid metrics (teleology).

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298	2.2.2	“We reduce fuel poverty because we've got eight to 900 pounds worth of energy locked up in resources which are being transported all around the world and using humongous amounts of carbon to reprocess, repurpose.”	Circularity framed as anti-fuel-poverty; connects waste to energy justice (co-benefit logic).
299	2.2.2	“I co-found [...Org] and at [Org] we're developing a tool that helps people to catch early signs of [health condition] from home. Our overall mission is to equip people to be able to keep on top of their [...] health, because at the moment it's very tricky for you to know what's happening within your [...], and to have a good log of that. There aren't really any tools that could be put to do that at the moment. I think our aim really is just to put this tool into people's hands for the purposes of improving the quality of life, especially for people with increased susceptibility to [health condition], or for people who have experienced [health condition]. [...] I want to make sure that their [...] health is good and is always in check. So, that's really the overall aim that we have. And my role within that, like I mentioned, is co-founder. So, I wear lots of different hats, but the main thing that we focus on is the product development and engaging with users to ensure that what we're creating is in line with their requirements. That's what my role usually in commerce is but there's lots to it. So, I cover things like IP, recruitment and sometimes dabbling in finance so it's all sorts but mostly just the broadening of the technology and getting that into people's hands as soon as possible.”	Mission clarity; user-engaged development; multi-hat leadership (purposeful productisation).
300	2.2.2	"I think really it's about empowering the student and it's about understanding what value they're getting from the tool and how we can kind of how we can optimize that as much as possible." [...] "So, you've got more control over the kind of the style and the format of the summary that you get... adapting to that and responding to that and being able to give people the option of tailoring or customising their summary is one thing that that's worth mentioning."	User control/customisation as value; empowers learning preferences (autonomy support).
301	2.2.2	"I think at the moment it is just a lack of resources and energy and time." [...] "And I think maybe I have sort of set ourselves boundaries and say I need to just concentrate on one thing and do it well, rather than kind of spread ourselves." [...] "I suppose it depends what kind of decisions it is." [...] "So, deciding to do the [...] and be a preferred provider meant that we had to go through quite a long tender process and we had to kind of come up with stuff	Governance via tender-driven policy development; focus discipline to avoid mission sprawl (proceduralisation).

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		that we hadn't really thought about and write those policies that we hadn't thought about like our policy on policies."	
302	2.2.2	"I'm very passionate that education isn't one size fits all." [...] "We can provide these children with what they need." [...] "And if that means that this child is in class and they're saying things like, I can only sit for 15 minutes before I get really anxious, or I need to find my mum in the middle, or I need to bring a soft toy in, or whatever it is." [...] "We go, okay, that's fine."	Individualised provision; rejects one-size-fits-all education (capability justice).
303	2.2.2	"Well I think ethicality has to be driven by the social element initially, in that I always think of things as being not overly complicated and perhaps you can simplify things but you know years and years ago when people built houses they never built them in floodplains and so, old houses if you go back to houses that were built in the 1500s, they just never flood. And they don't flood because they built them on higher land. And so, socially now it's acceptable to build houses on the floodplains, on the known floodplains, with all of the science that we have in front of us today. And we watch people regularly on television with brushes sweeping out their houses, and then fighting with insurance companies, and not being able to then insure their houses then the mortgage companies won't mortgage their houses. And it's so wrong on so, so many levels that if you were to go back to basic engineering, you just wouldn't build it there in the first place. And with the technology that we're looking at, there's a couple of fronts. One is that we must stop polluting our water. We must stop polluting our environment overall, whether it's water or whether it's air. And you've got to, so the social elements is important, but it's got to be driven by science because science, as in engineering, has this ability to be able to produce sensible results. I don't build a house in the flood plain, or for our point of view [...] after we sold our last business, we said that we wanted to put something back into society. So, we put aside [resources] to put into this [...] technology.	Social norms must be science-checked; upstream prevention ("don't build on floodplains") (engineering ethics).
304	2.2.2	"I think that every small choice is a really important choice. Every small decision is a really important one. All choices are important. They need to be carefully considered, and if the option is there, to do the better out of the two then do the better."	Everyday micro-choices matter; "choose the better" heuristic (moral minimalism).
305	2.2.2	"I really hold in [Org] the whole spectrum of people and the fact that everyone's going to have a different context and it can be very alienating and disillusioning to see content that	Communicative ethics for broad audiences; careful

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		kind of doesn't acknowledge that. So, I know it's, you know, none of this is ever perfect and I could craft something really carefully and still upset a bunch of people, but I really have it in [Org] that I guess there are ways of talking about things that feel more ethical than others when I'm kind of communicating publicly." [...] "Your needs matter. [...] Everyone's unique. And it's very hard to address every single person in blanket form. So, yeah, I would say those things with the caveat because I love a caveat and that it's okay to ask for help those would probably be the main things yeah".	language to avoid alienation (inclusive messaging).
306	2.2.2	"So, I'm the founder and my role is really at this stage of where we are basically currently in development of the care management software system slash the app which will be utilized within the health and social care sector. I'm responsible for all the necessary projects, in terms, from the design stage to the operational side of things."	Founder-led design-to-ops responsibility; builds sector-specific care tech (mission execution).
307	2.2.2	"The digital services side. So, we build websites, we do CRMs, blogs. [...], but we go out and help businesses, and that's a wonderful side. We've managed to niche ourselves within the charitable world.	Digital services niche in charity sector; civically aligned client base (mission adjacency).
2.2.3 Profit reinvestment			
308	2.2.3	"Now, we had to invest [so] we could have a life cycle assessment carried out, an independent life cycle assessment, and if we were going to have it done, we wanted to have it done by a recognised body."	Ethical boundary-setting through scientific validation and accountability.
309	2.2.3	"So, we invest that money, we don't know what the outcome is, we think we know, but only science can tell you for certain."	Ethical leadership through evidence-based decision-making and scientific accountability.
310	2.2.3	"The challenges you face always when you love to work with giving back into a community and you're doing a website for someone is the financial gain isn't going to be as much as if you go to somebody corporately." [...] "Other obstacles come about where there's red tape. It can take a period of time before a piece of work is signed off, which can slow down the process to the ultimate aim of earning money."	Ethical rebalancing between social impact and commercial viability; reflects post-decision boundary adjustment.

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311	2.2.3	"Yeah, so I mean, this is a really tricky one because in some way, if I could do everything for free and not make a profit and still have that impact, that would be great. But I can't, I can't run my business like that." […] "So, like in terms it is in some way a mix between profitability and also keeping that same mission alive." […] "Yeah, so the principles is mainly basically profitability and the reason why that is so I can invest that back into other things that I do for other people. So, it's, I like to call it like a Robin Hood model."	Profit reinvestment as a mechanism for social contribution.
312	2.2.3	"That's where we work with 1% for the Planet, which is we give 1% of all of our profits at the end of every year to the planet through the organisation 1% for the Planet."	Profit tithe (formal commitment).
313	2.2.3	It's not just about making profit, but about sharing what we do and giving back to society and the planet."	Norm-shaping rhetoric and equitable practice.
314	2.2.3	"Yeah, so I mean, the biggest challenge will be obviously making money. […] And it's about just finding that level of profitability in order to fund different programmes and in order to get people skilled and in order to get people working that's the biggest challenge." […] "I think there's a lot of... It's almost all there, everything's always in place, it's just about how to fund that really."	Surplus used to fund programmes/skills.
315	2.2.3	"I'm very keen to make sure that it's not just what it what feels right." [...] "I'll make sure that actually I know that there's research backing it up, which I do feel comes under how we're conducting ourselves ethically, because it means that when I'm talking to parents and saying, well, we're going to do things this way or that way, or no, we're not going to come out to your house, we want your child to come to us." [...] "It's not just because it suits us, I'm able to say well actually this is the reason why so I've got this theoretical background to say well actually evidence suggests that your child coming to us provides all of these benefits, it's not just us making it up as we go along."	Evidence based decision-making and procedures.
316	2.2.3	"In terms of, like, the actual how we measure the impact, we, we use something called what we do, a couple of things. We're doing a research study at the moment, which will use something called the […] which is a questionnaire that measures the impact of [condition], on your life. But in the app as well, we also do an assessment, a questionnaire that will help us to understand the impact of to some people's lives, called the […] assessment. And we use that to understand how we're making things better or not."	Mixed measures (clinical and in-app) for outcome tracking; credibility via standard tools (robust evaluation).

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317	2.2.3	"Where there's availability with money-wise, so with the research projects and things, if I can't get it funded, or if [organisation] doesn't have funding for a certain project that I want to do, then I can't do it, or at least it slows it down massively."	Research velocity is funding-constrained; impact delayed (capacity friction).
318	2.2.3	"The whole use of technology within the [Org] is always quite an ethical dilemma." [...] "I think that's an ethical thing and like well do you follow your passion and do what you really believe in or do you chase the money and it'd be easy money." [...] "I would absolutely be open to providing tuition for children who aren't able to access it." [...] "So, I'm a bit in danger of going stereotyping here but you know if we were looking at children in India who were living in slums, if we could somehow get the technology to them."	Tech-for-good vs revenue tension; equity aims (global access) noted (ethical ambition).
319	2.2.3	"Making sure that what we're doing is scalable at domain because we're very early on a lot of the work we're doing, a lot of the things we do are very manual, and that's fine because we haven't proved, you know, it's working at." [...] "From a technology perspective now, from a growth perspective, perhaps we're something we're looking into is kind of, you know, organic referrals and getting clinicians referrals."	Early manualism acceptable pre-proof; planning for clinician-led scaling (responsible growth).
320	2.2.3	"And we do that using a number of different ways that we do that, but quality feedback, but also some, some doing a big research study at the moment. We're doing a research study at the moment, which will use something called the [...], which is a questionnaire that measures the impact of [health condition] on your life." [...] " Lots of other digital stations have done research studies, but none on this scale really." [...] "It's actually [...], I think the biggest study that's ever been done looking at a digital health solution…"	Landmark study for digital health; field-level evidence contribution (knowledge leadership).
2.2.4 Ethical governance and organisational integrity			
321	2.2.4	"We consider both outputs or deliverables and outcomes. And in our governance model, we remind ourselves, even after an assignment or project is finished, to check back on and what were the subsequent outcomes."	Outputs vs outcomes governance; post-project follow-ups institutionalised (learning loop).
322	2.2.4	"And so, if we sort of come back to and say what does ethicality mean? At its core it's taking a broader view of consequence and impact than a narrow one just on yourself or your own interests and the way that manifests for us in our governance process both formally and	Ethical impact through stakeholder governance and reflective practice; reflects

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		informally it is the need in the want to practically just check back and ask ourselves what impact are we having and who might this impact be for?"	principled structuring and accountability.
323	2.2.4	"Fulfilment is a big challenge" […] "Fulfilment data, delivery route planning, driver app, finance dashboard." […] "Box schemes lack economies of scale... we plan to create a virtual fulfilment network of vans and drivers." […] "We're creating that on a micro, local level." [...] "We've tweaked the direction... [...] building a wholesale platform for seasonal fresh healthy produce wholesalers." [...] "The product has been received more positively than I could have budgeted for... greater opportunity for our product to make a difference."	Operational innovation to reduce barriers and costs; reflects ethical logistics design.
324	2.2.4	"The process of decision making in our business is based on honesty, integrity, morality..." […] "We value what we do, we know we're good at what we do, so we won't undermine what we do." […] "If there isn't a connection, you can't get on with everybody, but if there isn't a connection and you feel you're being squeezed or your integrity isn't going to be honoured because it's a financial gain..."	Integrity over revenue in client fit; decision ethos explicit (value guardrails).
325	2.2.4	"Our model, effectively our business model, is very much engineered. It was set in stone the day I ideated [Org]." […]	Pre-engineered business model; strong ex-ante design of governance (path dependency).
326	2.2.4	"We haven't had to use money. We chose the business model that … started it in the other room… [that] you can do with domestic appliances and monitors." […] "Now we are at a stage where we need to start relying on more industrial type technologies… outsourcing… next unit… more expertise." […] "Quite a lot of cost involved in our natural growth compared to where we started… naive to begin with… we only need to expand on the space and basic utilities, but that's not the case."	Operational scaling and strategic outsourcing; reflects ethical adaptation to growth.
327	2.2.4	"[Venture] was incorporated... we needed to be a tech business first and foremost."	Operational structuring for ethical scalability; reflects strategic clarity.
328	2.2.4	"Team reviews flags cases and makes final decisions."	Manual oversight beyond automation.

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329	2.2.4	“It’s not just about what’s legal — it’s about what’s right for our team and our users.”	Beyond-compliance framing; reflects principled decision-making and organisational integrity.
330	2.2.4	“I am trained as a B Leader to help companies towards the process of becoming certified as a B Corporation. So, there is the Business impact assessment website online which companies have got to complete and go through that process if they want to become certified as a B Corporation. It's a free tool to use in terms of answering all the questions, getting a score and understanding where your strengths and weaknesses are. So, I often will use that as a tool to do an initial audit with a company to see where they are when it comes to sustainability and you know, ethicality etc.” [...] "So, it helps to identify and also in the process of going through it with them often online like this or it might be face to face. Their response to the questions very often gives a good indicator of whether they've really thought this through at all or whether it's like, wow, seriously, we've never even considered half of these things or these all requirements, you know, so it's a good tool to assess their commitment in this area, how much they've already done and how much further they're prepared to go and might need to go, depending on what their goal is.”	Uses BIA as diagnostic; gauges client commitment and gaps (structured assessment).
331	2.2.4	"So, [our decision-making process] is not technological. This is human to human. It happens in two ways. So, internally from within our employees or from within the finders, we will actually simply challenge each other and that's the bulk of what we do. However, externally as part of our governance, we have an independent board advisor and so, as part of our governance and review process, we'll also have those discussions externally as a check-in balance."	Ethical leadership through internal challenge and external governance mechanisms.
332	2.2.4	“Walked away from a partnership…" [...] " [There's] clause in all contracts that protects our values.”	Contractual governance.
333	2.2.4	“Don’t want to scale in a way that compromises how we treat people or how decisions get made.”	Ethical scaling.

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334	2.2.4	"I think that kind of intentionality behind doing things ethically has always been there from the beginning. My co-founder and I were very serious about, we take our business very seriously and we don't want in the future for us to be kind of called out on poor behaviour or poor management or data leagues or anything like that. We just want to avoid that as much as much as possible. And we've also seen like the negative effects of leading businesses in a way that is unethical. And we would just rather stay away from that from the beginning. So, that's definitely been there from the start. But I'd say that the processes that we have now are a bit more structured. Yeah, our ethicality is a bit more structured now than it was in the beginning where we were like rookie start-up leaders I suppose."	From ethos to formalised governance.
3.1.1 Navigating technological and cultural limitations			
335	3.1.1	"A huge part of [Venture] is about increasing empathy for people that we don't tend to be empathetic towards because I think that the population that struggle with [this] stuff, they tend to be people that nobody feels sorry for because we assume that they have it good because of the way they look and we assume that oh well you know they've got this thing that society seems to idolise so, they must be fine..." [...] "but just because of the way someone looks that we assume that they must be fine." [...] "we need to be more empathetic for people who are struggling [with condition] and no one seems to be caring about." [...] "If you're struggling with [condition] we tend to just assume you'll be alright and we don't need to worry about reaching out to you or offering you any care."	Ethical boundary-setting through empathy and recognition of overlooked suffering; challenges societal assumptions.
336	3.1.1	"The technology is all marketing based. So, the technology that we chose, you start, don't you, with a website, then you develop and you get a business [online subscription] and then you do the social media platforms..." [...] "We chose platforms for a marketing point of view to promote the business, to win business."[...] "So, these small steps have been financial driven within our means and a slower process than if we had, if there hadn't been COVID, if there hadn't been a slowdown in the economy, perhaps we would have accelerated quicker."	Tech stack chosen for viability; paced, resource-aware digitisation (means-constrained adoption).
337	3.1.1	"I use [...], all the social media platforms that I'm on, it's just [...] and [...], all of these kind of small pieces of software all mashed together kind of mean that I can do the job if I didn't	Solo-practice risk management around

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		have them I wouldn't be able to do it." […] "I use a digital course platform called [… and] whilst I don't use that to make decisions, there have been lots of kind of lots of thinking has had to go into that in terms of what's the cyber security process like, what's the information security, where's the server, all of these things." […] "I will think about, for sure, what I do in terms of my clients' data if I keep notes digitally… am I taking notes on a portal? How secure is the portal? Who else has access to it, etc."	data/security; ethical diligence with tools (privacy vigilance).
338	3.1.1	"I would suggest that if I look at the problem set that the majority of small and medium enterprise challenges face in the food and drink sphere. Those problems are often a combination of people, processing procedure, equipment and technological solution and leadership and management. Some blend of those four areas and it is rare for us to find that there is a technological block that cannot be solved by that which is available. There may be a challenge around application or understanding and some of that comes from look. What's this simplest example? If you only use a spreadsheet once a year, you have to re-learn how to use it every time you go back to it. If you use a spreadsheet 365 days a year, the same task is easy. Both instances, people can cope, but one takes more overhead to achieve. For small and medium-sized businesses, that's often the problem. It's the fact that these tools are not used with frequency and skill and depth. Where do I think there are some challenges? If I contrast large business with small, large business would think nothing of paying 10,000 pounds for software license. To a small or medium-sized business 10,000 pounds for software license would be unheard of. So, you get this sort of sense of scale and access but it's not the tool itself, the tool is present."	Capability & affordability limits.
339	3.1.1	"I would say no, quite honestly like that, so there's gaps, it's like running any business. You know things, you want to do things, but it's triaging what is critical, what's important and then what's nice to have."	Triage and critical over "nice-to-haves" (resource ethics).
340	3.1.1	"I think there's still a 10-year [digital] gap. I think there's still a technology gap. So, one of the reasons we exist as consultants is to be the interface between the technology and the customer because the customer doesn't understand pilot change, doesn't understand carbon foot-printing, doesn't understand net zero and so, they rely on us to be to use the technology for them most of the time. They've allowed us to interpret, to play, to affirm,	User literacy & scalability limits.

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		correct. [...] "It's still very human. So, our business is built around human relationships with customers. And it's that human relationship which often means that they keep working with us year after year. So, in the future, there's a gap in the technology we catch up and get better at being more self-serve with customers and customers will also get more used to using it and being and being around and being subject to that for the moment and I think at the moment it doesn't really help that much."	
341	3.1.1	"So, the business is [...], so embryonic, but we've got over the hiccups. We started the business [...] deciding that we needed to back up and support businesses in every single way. You can't cover them all, but we thought what we would do was support businesses." [...] "For many years I was in recruitment logistics and I am an entrepreneur and I decided that I would [...] lead generation where I work at C-suite level with qualified, quantified leads, so making appointments and building relationships with people that have that fear factor, not about phone bashing as it were, but about getting intelligent information from directors. [...] Part of our business is remote support where we go into businesses and do workshops where there might be a sticky wicket with toxicity or there might be just a little bit of complacency as it were or there might be a reason that they want to filter down the staff. "We basically go out on the CEO side".	Capacity spread & early-stage limits.
342	3.1.1	"We're easy to pivot at [Org] I would say. So, for example, initially we were thinking we want to make this hardware completely in-house from scratch using our own sensors, this, this, that and the other." [...] "Our relationship with technology is very, very, it's a very, very open one. So, as we learn more, we pivot, as we gain more understanding, we pivot, we try not to get too stuck or committed to one way to do things, especially when that ends up proving to be long-winded or just unnecessarily confusing or, because our time to market is really crucial, we need to get there quickly."	Pivots to reduce complexity/time-to-market; openness to change (agile pragmatism).
343	3.1.1	"If we think about the growth stages or the business maturity of challenger businesses [...], there are a group of large businesses who we might want to encourage to change their ways. That might be called teaching an old dog new tricks. And there are a cadre of businesses that are new entrants or startups. And then perhaps there are some businesses in between on that journey. Businesses that the startup plays are engaged with some sort of daily miracle	Sectoral maturity constraints.

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		of just hanging on every day. There are classic discussions around How can I work on my business at the same time that I'm sucked into working in my business? Large businesses have resource aplenty perhaps and can dedicate resource to challenges. And somewhere in that growth and maturity journey, perhaps businesses turn their attention to efficiency or scaling and maybe look to technology as a solution […]. Technology is a solution. I'm not sure that many food and drink businesses start with technology. […] There are food and drink businesses that see themselves as technology businesses […] They know that they're data science and technology businesses. They are built on tech and It's always important to acknowledge there are different ways of approaching entry entering a market. Those businesses have come and have built themselves around technology, I only suggest that they are rarer than most businesses in the country.”	
344	3.1.1	[Our goal is] to understand more about what you would envisage in the future to be the relationship between the users and the information that you're trying to bring to them and how you feel the technology that you're providing them fulfils that and whether there are any aspects that you think fundamentally need to be put in place but at the moment it isn't something that exists in essence."	Futures inquiry into user–info relationship; anticipates needs beyond current capability (anticipatory ethics).
345	3.1.1	"It's still a bit of an uphill battle to get to exactly where we want to go with that technology and I think it is also because it is still somewhat of a novelty." […] "Just because of the technology, if it was on a 2D screen, absolutely fine. But with that added level of immersion, it became quite scary." [...] "There are so many things I have to think about in the context of using that technology and making sure that people are safe and that I'm not scaring people or that I'm not going to trigger a big emotional response because that tends to happen quite a lot." […] "So, yeah it's mostly around well-being and not hurting people basically."	Immersive tech safety first; mitigates triggers and emotional risk (non-maleficence).
346	3.1.1	"It's like, okay, well that bit of the admission was done quickly, quite you know, for us and it works and it ticks over fine, so it's now what else can the platform do to help educate and give people insight about themselves and their relationships.”	Expands from information to self-insight; value creation beyond features (meaningful use).
347	3.1.1	"So, it's like, this is great. But now that I've got this, can it actually do something slightly different? And, and that, and I guess that's a frustration of the user because they wanted to	User frustration from limited scope; clarifies

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		do more and it doesn't do more. So, OK, well, why do I bother? Why do I bother going back to it? It's not, it's, it's a, it's an information tool at the moment, rather than a lifestyle tool [...]	product identity to sustain engagement (expectation management).
348	3.1.1	"We've explored what software is available and which one best suits our organisation as in [...] e-learning."	Strategic adoption and capability building.
3.1.2 Emphasising knowledge sharing and tech integration			
349	3.1.2	"[Venture] is a small design and software development agency focused on building websites and applications for companies within [...] that are doing good in the world, with a particular emphasis on med tech." We're very tech-driven. We want to be producing tech for the right reasons."	Tech-driven agency with "for good" client filter; production ethic (mission tech).
350	3.1.2	"We use software [but] we have less scalability than pure face software companies." [...] "We're not scalable in terms of breadth, but it is depth, much deeper and much deeper impact." [...] "Our human interaction with a few people can actually have a big impact on climate change as a problem over time."	Human advisory depth complements tech; leverages few decision-makers for macro impact (strategic depth).
351	3.1.2	"We're doing it through companies really... each company we get on board there's a ripple effect then we get access to and offer access to the employees to us, a pool at a time."	Ethical scaling through organisational partnerships and ripple-effect influence.
352	3.1.2	"Technology has helped us achieve what we've achieved so far. What I would say is without it we probably never would have survived or got started in the first place." [...] "There is a technology out there for every need that we have. So, far it has existed, I've been able to source it." [...] "I think the benefit of using [technology] far outweighs detriment. And I know that people in technology are well paid, which means that there's more money going back into the economy, families are well looked after, etc." [...] "I think the barrier is human, the challenges are human. Our business specifically, self-funded, it's just me, literally just me." [...] "I have tried adopting technologies such as AI driven technologies..." For me it hasn't worked and it's probably my understanding of the tool as opposed to its capabilities."	Resource & adoption frictions.

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353	3.1.2	"I always say technology is a tool and don't see it as anything other than that. Technology is not a part of our lives, it's not an extension, it's a tool that we can use to create, to make our lives easier, but it's simply a set, it's just a tool."	Technology framed as neutral tool; avoids techno-fetishism (instrumentalism).
354	3.1.2	"Transparency is key… users choose by their values… granular data across 14 measures."	Value-driven integration.
355	3.1.2	"In terms of scaling the business for us it's really important that we're providing access to this technology to any student regardless of where they are in the world." [...] "we've implemented a regional pricing strategy." [...] "It's really important to us because we know the value of technology to students but it's important to us that wherever you are you've kind of got fair access to it as well." [...] "the technology does work best with English language because the way that it works is all around, well it's natural language processing so it's built around sentence structure"	Access equity via regional pricing; acknowledges NLP language constraints (inclusion and limits).
356	3.1.2	"We've experienced where there's been a lack of communication to clients, a part of a particular feature, or maybe the launching of it wasn't completely communicated or maybe how the training programme wasn't effectively communicated." [...] "The way in which we try to really minimize that is by ensuring that the user is at the forefront of our product."	Communication failure as ethical risk; centres user to prevent harm/confusion (UX governance).
357	3.1.2	"I think the social element is probably more important than the scientific element. Because if you break it down, how can it be right to sit there on the toilet, flush the toilet, and know that your poop is going to end up in the water system. So, that doesn't need any science to know that that's not right, that's just wrong. And is it right that when it does go through the sewage system, it gets processed at 37 degrees centigrade so that the same temperature is our blood? And then the poop through an anaerobic digester to recover the gas, and then the poop that's left or the cake as they call it, is spread on our farmland. And so, what you're wearing, what we all wear, like acrylics and a lot of our clothes are made out of plastic based materials now. And the washing machine puts all those microplastics into our syringe system and then that goes through the anaerobic digestion and then gets spread on our farmland so that microplastics will circulate through our soil. That's wrong. That doesn't need science to tell you that's wrong, it's just wrong. And so, the net and dumping our plastic bottles and all of our stuff, what the difference is that we're led to believe that the plastic bottles are getting into the ocean because of some naughty little scallywags in Indonesia that are	Pollution prevention; transparent evidence.

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		throwing their plastic out of their back door of their house. It's because the Western world's throwing their entire waste out of the back door into their rivers. [...] So, it's the way things are reported. So, it's the social element, the truthfulness of reporting, and then science, all combined. And then if you take the technology, the technology needs to be, again, using that simple approach, needs to be simple to use as a bin. So, from our point of view, open the lid, pop the material in, close the lid, press a button. The customer doesn't need to understand, or the user doesn't need to understand the science, they can understand if they want to, because we put our life cycle assessment front and centre on our website. I don't know of another technology that's done that because for me, I want the world to know that this is a piece of technology. That is better than the state of the art, which is the existing waste system. And if you choose to want to know about the technology, you can go onto the website and then we'll about it completely. But if you just want to use it, then you can."	
358	3.1.2	[...] "Users tend to use the app for about two to three months. [...] that's positive because they're, they're, they're building a relationship with the app for getting understanding. They're, they're, they're getting more education on the sustainability of products. So, it's doing all the things that we want to do, and they like using it.	Gamification for sustained engagement.
3.1.3 Systemic change and future directions for social innovation			
359	3.1.3	"For me, the ongoing future of humanity was very important. It would be a shame if we had great lives now but it wasn't sustainable in the students who generated this time and you can't live properly after what we've got and I'm still very concerned about that and I think it is all shown."	Future-oriented ethical concern and systemic reflection on sustainability and intergenerational impact.
360	3.1.3	"I think businesses that have a future are the ones that actually have a purpose, that do some good, that don't need to employ big brains to try and justify the profit that they, you know, with the future." [...] "If we genuinely avoided greenwashing and actually meant what we say, then I think those businesses would become more sustainable and have a happier, longer-term future."	Future-oriented ethical vision and critique of superficial justification; systemic change through purpose.

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361	3.1.3	"I see it [my role in society] being to challenge a little, to support change where there's an appetite for that and to educate where I can." [...] "I see my role being something of a catalyst in society, a catalyst for positive change. I would hope that's what it would be."	Ethical self-positioning as a catalyst for societal change and education.
362	3.1.3	"I want to be able to drive change, drive positive change within society that can make a lasting impact, but can also be, like, can make a difference for future generations to come and not just for myself."	Future-oriented ethical ambition and systemic change framing.
363	3.1.3	"So, it's a basic social need and something that we should be delivering to society and it's driven by science backed in for my information."	Systemic framing of ethical innovation as a social imperative.
364	3.1.3	"We set our business principles around what we are trying to achieve, the bigger picture around helping and whether you look at an example of moving, you know, increasing the size of the organic [food] market, we have commercial aims, let's say we want to move it from, help move it from 2.2% to 4.2% over five years, but you still drive the business in in similar ways to you would drive any other commercial for profit business, but ultimately it has a purpose. If we are successful we help improve our local food systems, we help improve public health and we that we need to balance that with commercial success because as I keep saying to our users if we are not focused on running a profitable, commercially successful business, we cannot deliver the long-term benefits to the environment or the climate of a local economy or to public health."	Future-oriented ethical ambition and systemic framing of impact.
365	3.1.3	"The whole purpose of the product is one that is will hopefully deliver social good in a number of ways... We're taking a slightly longer way to profit that we're going along an ethical path." [...] "We don't need to be creative with [marketing] because genuinely and everyone involved in what we're doing genuinely believes in it." [...] "The more successful we are, the more social good we'll deliver and we don't need to... It's not a decision to take PATH A or B. It's about what we do need to do is stay true to our values."	Future-oriented ethical pacing and systemic ambition.
366	3.1.3	"I'm not against growth, I'm very pro-growth... but what I want to be able to also do is use these opportunities... to put back into what people would call good corporate policies and so on [and] get to the day... where our partnership can say that as we operate with the profits and the financial income that we deliver, 30% of that profit is put directly back into	Ethical impact through reinvestment and redistribution; reflects

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		supporting and growing our 12 [Org] priorities. This includes supporting indigenous people, social issues, carbon and nature conservation, and being able to demonstrate that it's possible to run a successful business while giving back at a minimum of 30%."	principled growth and operational commitment.
367	3.1.3	"Why don't I try and build a business that helps fund [...] to meet this problem and tackle it head on? And I'll be ticking two boxes: one my burning desire to start my own business and secondly a business for good that does some good in the world that has ethics and values." […] "My dream is for us to have scaled so massively that actually, let's start in with the UK, no [...] is in [...]." […] "The primary two things… what does the consumer want us to provide them? And secondly, is it beneficial to [the mission]?"	Strategic intent through dual-purpose entrepreneurship; reflects ethical ambition and systemic scaling.
368	3.1.3	"Environment overall, whether it's water or whether it's air." […] "Stop the plastic pollution and we'll have the improvement on environmental health." […] "We won't have to go and recover all these plastics from the oceans that we're dumping."	Environmental health co-benefits; prevention emphasis (planetary health lens).
369	3.1.3	"I think sometimes you get offered something and on face value it looks like it's the perfect thing at that point. But then when you look into the future and you think actually what's going to be like in two years' time, five years' time and it's sometimes better to go slower and steadier and be in control."	Frames ethical decision-making through long-term strategic foresight and systemic responsibility.
370	3.1.3	"Yeah, I've had to kind of go a lot slower than I probably anticipated. I mean to say that most startups die within three years and we're out of third year, so we're in that crunch year and I'm feeling it. I have had people, I've had investors interested in supporting the business and I was so close to kind of going yes and all in on it and some of their practices I looked at and thought yeah I could see that would be a good fit and others there wasn't a fit at all. So, for about three months I kind of hummed and heard about whether or not I would you know because obviously cash injection into a small business is always going to be useful. And then I thought actually you know what that's not the reason why I set up this business. If it takes another two years and I do it on my own terms you're going to be so much stronger for it because I will then be looking over my shoulder going am I making the stuff that's going to make a huge profit for me and more importantly for the people who have invested in this company and I realised I didn't need that kind of pressure."	

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3.2.1 Upholding data integrity, regulatory compliance and ethical principles throughout technological processes			
371	3.2.1	"We deal with a lot of people's data. So, handling data correctly, we do some like user testing with people as well. So, just ensuring that everything we do is making people comfortable, that we're not manipulating people to come and get involved, it's always their choice. Our hiring is also very inclusive. It's just quite deliberate in the way that we go about making our business as, I always use the word moral, but yeah, as ethical as ethical as possible."	Data handling ethics; inclusive hiring; voluntariness in research (procedural ethics).
372	3.2.1	"So, something that is really important for us is how we develop this project... [...] Because it is a finance project, it's company and it's connected with blockchain, there are lots of red flags. It would be a company like ours, in a situation where we want to just make money, we don't care about nobody, and we will do everything it's possible to make as much money as possible" [...] "What we do and what we have in our mission statement is democratizing the investment in property." [...] "What that means is that the base of everything needs to be applied to everyone in the world. And no matter who we are talking to..." [...] "So, those that you hire are really the cracks of, they allow you to develop and deliver on your mission." [...] "We deliver our professional handbook [...], where inside with everything that is connected with the country and with how we're going to move forward with the company and the values that we have..." [...] "One of the things that we have is collaboration. So, the ethical aspect is connected with, first of all, it's not just about each person that will have to succeed in the company. It's more about the team succeeding at the end, as well as collaborating together towards the project." [...] "I was a developer and I was literally working on it because it's my passion that I wanted to do." [...] "I started to understand how different backgrounds can impact the present. And as well, based on DNA, DNA brings a bit of the importance of what happens usually in a person. Different generations before." [...] "So, the understanding of how the brain works and the impact of the background on each one of us, how to impact the present, that allow me to study even more how to communicate and how to rather than talk with the people, how to let the brain listen to what I was saying."	Governance caution; mission cohesion.
373	3.2.1	"I think the key one is [Org/Device] not being trained on a wide enough data set. And so, when certain users who we may have not, we may not have considered initially by the device, use the device, it's not reading [...] accurately, that's one of my biggest concerns that, oh, it's	Dataset breadth and false-negative risk prioritised;

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		flagging things aren't actually there, that's another one. But yeah, the collection of data is really, really important. And training it on a wide enough data set so that anyone who picks it up can be assured that what this device is reading is true and is accurate. And then, just like I kind of alluded to, a big ethical concern is [device] raising false alarm amongst people or false reassurance telling you that there's nothing there when there is or telling you that there is something there when there isn't. So, it's that line that we're trying to deal with too. So, I think warning people of something that could exist when it doesn't actually exist is not as detrimental as telling people that you know you haven't got a [symptom of the health condition] when you definitely do. So, that's a big ethical concern for us."	communicates alarm trade-offs (safety/accuracy).
374	3.2.1	"So, [Org] uses extractive summarisation rather than abstractive summarisation, so that means that anything you see in the contents of the summary [solution] is pulled directly from the original text." [...] " So, the argument from librarians that this is going to help students to write their essay, it just doesn't hold up because essentially the text that they're reading within the [solution] is taken directly from the original paper. So, if they were to copy and paste it into an essay it would just get picked up by a plagiarism detector."	Extractive summaries preserve academic integrity; design blocks plagiarism (integrity-by-design).
375	3.2.1	"I think how we conduct ourselves as a business, what our mission is, I think even if we look beyond just the academic space, the potential to make more evidence-based research more accessible to more people is something that I would say is very important to me both personally and professionally, [… as well as] combating misinformation and making sure that as many people as possible have got access to and understand evidence-based research." [...] "Whatever way you do it, however you do it and it doesn't have to be in a traditional way, to keep learning and keep educating yourself... as long as you are always learning and developing I think is the important thing."	Evidence accessibility objective.
376	3.2.1	"The goal of […] is to try and help people and businesses be more sustainable." [...] "We've created a rating system so that we can rate products and services provided by organizations and the organizations themselves as to how sustainable they are." [...] "We rate it across […] fourteen different areas... such as animals, animal welfare, animal testing, health and nutrition, CO2 carbon emissions of a product, and the packaging that it goes into." [...] "It's hard for people, for consumers, for shoppers, because there's a lot of noise around… For	Societal impact via tech scoring.

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		example, we will rate a can of beans and we will compare that with an alternative can of beans and look at ingredients." [...] "How would we find out? And how can we share that with other people? So, that was the start of the process."	
377	3.2.1	"Transparency is key." [...] "We've been very careful to make sure that users can actually make their own choices based upon their own values, their own ethics, their own sustainability by showing them being transparent on the data of across the fourteen measures that we have." [...] "Some retailers, some brands who've said the consumer isn't ready for that. What the consumer wants is simple simplification." [...] "Our consumers are users of our app... have said that's absolutely not what we want. We want the transparency to be able to make it a sufficient based upon what we care about, not what the retailer thinks we should care about."	Radical transparency vs retailer simplification; empowers user plurality (anti-paternalist data).
378	3.2.1	"We automate as much as possible [...] We use electronic signatures. We do have a challenge in our industry that we have additional regulation for using electronic signatures." [...] "We've got templates, we can just fill in the gaps to make it as easy as possible for everyone. So, anything from contracts through to doing audit plans, even the audit reports, and we produce a certificate at the end, that's all automated."	Compliance-by-design & auditability for precision.
379	3.2.1	"Anything that comes along that we can perceive will make our life easier. We sit down and have a look and say is this something we want to invest in." [...] "we use technology like [...] we use for audit notes taken. So, we can put all our notes in there, all our findings [...] We don't always get it right first time sometimes we have to come back. Sometimes using it and it's the same with the website now we're using it and it's up there we're like no let's look at other alternative providers and different ways of doing this."	Selective toolchain integration.
380	3.2.1	"First and foremost is to make this technology and this software as valuable to students or researchers as it possibly can be." [...] "it's not just about generating a summary of a paper. We do a lot in the application to point you to kind of areas that are going to help you to analyse that paper more easily and to maybe understand how it compares to other articles and to start to find connections and patterns in the research that you're looking at."	Value beyond summarisation
381	3.2.1	"I think children's privacy is really important and using emails to discuss children is really quite dodgy around, you know, it's end-to-end encrypted and all of that sort of thing." [...] "But there's always a balance between accessibility for the people who need to see it and	Privacy-by-design.

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		data protection and privacy." [...] "We use [...] The council use it." [...] "So, instead of sending you an email, they send an email to this sort of whizzy thing in the [Cloud] and then you get an alert, you log into the whizzy thing in the [Cloud] and you can see the email."	
382	3.2.1	"Ethicality is really about being upholding integrity and being transparent and it's about also being accountability so we want to ensure that our vision and our aim is reflected through being fair and even just..." [...] "It's about upholding data privacy, patient confidentiality throughout platform. And our ultimate goal is to ensure that we are aligning our vision through whatever decision we make."	Integrates privacy/confidentiality with fairness; aligns decisions to vision (governance ethics).
383	3.2.1	"I think there's going to be quite a lot that we discover is that technology is such a big subject and we're only just learning the specific bit at the moment. But we are, we're doing lots of courses, we're always learning, we're always reading, we're always networking, so that whatever we're telling our consumer, our stakeholders, is as accurate and as transparent and honest as possible."	Continuous learning to ensure accuracy; humility in expertise (professional diligence).
384	3.2.1	"We deliver our professional handbook [...], where inside with everything that is connected with the country and with how we're going to move forward with the company and the values that we have and one of the things that we have is collaboration."	Codified values as operational guardrails; reflects ethical framing of organisational practice.
3.2.2 Designing accessible, inclusive technologies grounded in justice, equity, and diverse user needs			
385	3.2.2	"So, we've got the GDPR aspects but also the trust of the information and knowledge we're giving out is factually true and accurate."	Data integrity and professional responsibility.
386	3.2.2	"And we're doing it through companies really. You know each company we get on board there's a ripple effect then we get access to and offer access to the employees to us, a pool at a time. So, it's like gathering ponds, I suppose. You know, little Ripples over here, ripples over there, with the B2B approach, that's what we're doing. We're considering B2C because, well, for commercial reasons, because we have quite like an additional revenue stream, that's a bit more predictable. And also because I think it's important to keep the user at the heart. And so that's a direct relationship between us with no employer in the middle. And I think it's really important to keep the user always forefront. Is this actually helpful? Is it working?	User-centred ethical prioritisation in decision-making.

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		Is it achieving the mission which is to improve people's mental health and relationships? Is it doing that? So that direct relationship will help. And yeah, but I mean, in terms of getting it out there, it will be the standard, you know, standard marketing ways, I suppose, and what's innovative about how we would market?"	
387	3.2.2	"We owe society a decent product, basically a product that people can use that is valuable. And makes their lives easier and improved."	Ethical leadership through product value and societal contribution.
388	3.2.2	"I've kind of taken this sort of no-code approach on most things. I have a little bit of tech ability but I don't consider myself, you know, I'm not a web developer, I'm more of a web designer for instance." […] "So, for me, the decision's been based on partially skill level and partially budget." […] "It's not actually about the tech. For a lot of people, it's more about the functionality of what you're providing that content on. Is it a good user experience?" […] "So, for instance with our nature activity boxes what we're trying to do is make sure that the interaction let's say with our online group that comes with it is frictionless as possible so that the app that people use if they want to can also be accessed just through a simple web interface for those who may be not wanting to add more apps to their smart device." […] "What I've realized is that there isn't actually a one size fits all that each of our customers comes at it in a very different way and we all have very different relationships with technology."	Designing inclusive and accessible technologies for non-technologically minded users.
389	3.2.2	"We haven't created any new technology. It's all kind of existing technology. The technology is actually very simple. It's just making, we've just, we need audio sessions, and we've made those sessions more accessible to. […] We've made CBT more accessible to people with [health condition] more accessible than it would otherwise be. But the technology is actually very simple. We've not, would not create any new technology here. You know, we've done some exploratory work and some research, and, […] clinical scientific work to make it make it effective but we've not no kind of new technology that we've created specifically for this."	Tech simplicity used to widen access; novelty not required for impact (appropriate tech).
390	3.2.2	"It's really about enabling them [students and academics] to do that and whether [...], if they're a new undergraduate or they're a PhD or a postdoc researcher that are just swamped [...] but they need to make sense of [what they are reading] to be able to produce you know	Knowledge translation for wider audiences.

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		good quality work themselves." [...] "I could use this application and I could get a better understanding in layman's terms of that subject without being an expert in the field."	
391	3.2.2	"We're on their [consumers] side by trying, trying to have it more transparent. So, they all depend on who you talk to. They all want to add something else or can you measure this? Can you show me this? And sometimes we can sometimes just can't get the data retailers? Yeah, probably also because they and brands within that. So, it's both the manufacturers of the product, but also the retailers of the product. They want to appear their best. So, when you are transparent and you show that, I don't know. It's got, it's got chemicals, it's got additives in there that are harmful. They don't want you to show that they would rather bundle that up into a broader picture to say, actually, we as a product or we, as a company went in. All right, don't go into the detail. We don't need the detail, just, we're OK. So, it's a, we've been very clear to all the retailers, all the brands. We're not, we're not going to do it your way. We're going to do it hard way. Play with us if you want to play with us, but if you don't, that's fine when we're out there doing it anyway."	Resists brand pressure to obscure harms; insists on unfavourable truths (independence).
392	3.2.2	"Our platform has two sides, It's the educational piece and it's the booking piece. The bookings are good for fine doing its job, which is kind of what I set up the company to do originally actually before COVID was make therapy easy, accessible, affordable and modern. And it's done all of that. But in part that's because COVID came along and did that for us. It brought everything online. Whereas back in [...] when I was conceiving the idea, I thought let's bring it all online and back then it wasn't really being done much. There were some American providers offering online therapy for ten years ahead of us over there but here it wasn't really a thing. So, it was quite innovative back then but Covid changed all of that and now everything's online as a matter of course. It's like, okay, well that bit of the admission was done quickly, quite you know, for us and it works and it ticks over fine, so it's now what else can the platform do to help educate and give people insight about themselves and their relationships."	Learning features embedded in product.
393	3.2.2	"My role in society, I suppose it is, I see it being to challenge a little, to support change where there's an appetite for that and to educate where I can. So, I provide certified carbon literacy training for example to companies and I find it very satisfying to be able to bring awareness	Sees self as catalyst; carbon literacy to action; civic

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		to people of the impact of their there and their companies everyday actions and hopefully use that to stimulate change so, I suppose. I see my role being something of a catalyst in society, a catalyst for positive change. I would hope that's what it would be. I feel that we all have a responsibility within society to act as good citizens and to take others into consideration and all the decisions and actions that we take and do the right thing. And I appreciate that's not necessarily one thing for everyone, but it's very important everyone but it's very important to me to stand up for what I believe in and to speak out if I feel that there's ignorance in terms of not being aware around some issues and to use my voice to educate where I can." [...] "You do think about the impact of climate change for one kind of and the nature crisis on future generations and what are we leaving behind.	responsibility (educative activism).
394	3.2.2	"Most of our team are disabled. I [have a disability] myself. I think it's born from a sense of frustration that in order to do things, there is this need for this information, which is so hard to find, and that creates a tangible barrier, which doesn't seem fair, based off of things which people don't choose."	Solution emerges from lived disability; frustration fuels inclusive design (insider ethics).
395	3.2.2	"So, I run a disability tech company. [...] Our mission is to help disabled people find accessible places, and in particular, it's to build a data platform for personalised accessibility information." [...] "We considered disability across the whole spectrum." [...] "One of the things that I wasn't aware of is that for people with visual impairment, so for blind users, the whole concept of a map is really challenging. And so, therefore, the application that we built, the mobile app is based around a map to help people find places. But obviously for someone who's visually impaired, a map is not a particularly useful tool." [...] "I think on our end, one of the challenges we have is that the reason for the outcome that we're trying to improve, which is that lots of disabled people are isolated or lonely or excluded from society, we know is or relate to the lack of accessibility and the lack of accessibility information." [...] "Yes, I mean, like everything we're doing is contrary to the ableist world, that's the sort of point that the world at the moment doesn't consider disability in the same way that we think it should. And so, we're filling a gap."	Personalised accessibility beyond maps; confronts ableist defaults (universal design).

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396	3.2.2	It's down to a lot of looking at in the marketplace so we've apart from our website and our actual e-learning, but again, that's not our software. That's buying something, you're having a license for something and using it off the shelf."	Off-the-shelf constraints/usability.
397	3.2.2	"We're trying to create a solution that is quite intuitive to use and the way we do that is to build on existing interactions that people have around them rather than trying to introduce something that's completely novel and is just too difficult it's too steep of a learning curve for them to be able to integrate into their lives." [...] "We give people that option, just so they can see that we're trying to be as transparent as possible with our dealings with them."	Builds on familiar interactions to lower barriers; transparency options for trust (usability ethics).
398	3.2.2	"We've become a tool that is useful, it's a useful assistive technology, it's a useful tool for neurodiverse students and that kind of segment of society [...] "it's breaking down barriers in that way in terms of, like, for example, language barriers, it's making that material easier for people who speak other languages to access." [...] "we do see an opportunity to improve the technology and make it more adaptable to other languages."	Assistive benefits (neurodiversity/language); roadmap for multilingual equity (barrier reduction).
399	3.2.2	"The best investment that you can do, is not into job-advice, is not into anything. The best asset is time and how you use that time." [...] "So, the best investment for yourself is the most, the most conscious one, you know, the most intelligent of the best." [...] "Find the work that we are passionate about. So, we cannot just move, but somebody else that we move to really keep this space and our space."	Time stewardship as ethical investment; purpose alignment (virtue of prudence).
400	3.2.2	"One way that technology is massively helping us is by making our services more accessible." [...] "So, we use a program called [...], which is, it's kind of video chat, but it's got an online whiteboard, you can upload worksheets, you can draw on the screen, so it's a shared screen I guess, but it's designed for tuition, it's got maths tools and all sorts, it's brilliant." [...] "There are ethical issues obviously around accessing the internet with a child." [...] "Even things that there's the obvious stuff about like what they're accessing when we're online, if you know viruses and unsuitable materials popping up and things like that."	Online tools expand access; child-safety risks actively managed (safeguarding).
401	3.2.2	"We are a online and in-person VR art gallery with a big focus on I guess more broadly digital fine art." [...] "Currently we run in-person exhibitions and events, so things like talks, but we're building like a VR app that we want to get on everyone's headsets so they can access the art they see in person on their own headsets."	Hybrid gallery with VR expansion; democratising access to digital fine art (cultural inclusion).

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402	3.2.2	"The technology empowers us to be innovative and develop new solutions to address such challenges, and we're continuously wanting to drive continuous improvements and to be different..." [...] "That's one of our key aims and mission, to ensure that our technology that we are setting to develop is as accessible and as exclusivity as possible, ensuring that we make our products and services more accessible and diverse to the whole population, regardless of your age, gender or your disability, for example." [...] "We've really wanted to ensure that we build a software system that is simple to use, even from the icons and the colours that are used, it's very simple and it can be very easily navigated from the user's perspective."	Simplicity and inclusivity by design; user-centric decision factors (accessible UX).
403	3.2.2	"We are huge, huge, massive fans of inclusivity. Discrimination repulses me completely." [...] "We believe our work is seeing people at face value, and making sure that people aren't just a tick box. People matter to us..."	Designing accessible, inclusive technologies grounded in justice, equity and diverse user needs
404	3.2.2	"I think it's hugely important. I think, you know, if we look at Web 2, which is kind of the internet that we look now we use now it was built by a tiny group of people and it reflects and represents them Yeah, we always which is why we have things that didn't work and everything that's kind of come off that sort of group of technology was built to reflect a very tiny group of people, and which is why we have technology that isn't for everyone." [...] "So, I think when we're at the precipice of, you know, I guess, Web 3, if you wanna call it, about the precipice of like a new technology, a new form, a new possibly way of living, more hybrid, I think it's vitally important to have people that are different represented, and people that are different building it." [...] "This is a huge thing. This will lead on to what I want to do. I think it's great to have people in gains or people in the artworks that are diverse, have women, have, you know, people from ethnic minorities, but I think it's also critically important that you have those people building it, people with those skills to say that I want to go work on meta and work on their meta better."	Future-oriented systemic inclusion.
405	3.2.2	"What would influence [our decision making] is probably a number of things, maybe customers, first and foremost, because we strive to ensure that our software system is at the heart of our customers, that it's user-centric, it's user-friendly." [...] "Research will definitely	Customer/stakeholder/research/budget as decision

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		influence how we may, you know, make a decision on something and also stakeholders as well budget as well..." [...] "While also maintaining our reputation as well, I think that's another factor."	inputs; reputation guarded (multi-criteria governance).
406	3.2.2	"So, in some way you want people to be engaged with the technology and also with the subject that we are talking about and with the artwork and with the artist."	Engagement with art/theme is the goal; tech as participation catalyst (meaningful interaction).
407	3.2.2	"It's kind of what I set up the company to do originally, actually before COVID, was make therapy easy, accessible, affordable and modern. And it's done all of that. Then COVID came along and [...] brought everything online. Whereas back in [date] when I was conceiving the idea, I thought let's bring it all online and back then it wasn't really being done much. There were some [...] providers offering online therapy for ten years ahead of us over [location] but here it wasn't really a thing. So, it was quite innovative back then but Covid changed all of that and now everything's online as a matter of course."	Pre-COVID online therapy vision; normalised by context shift (timely innovation).
408	3.2.2	"All technology that we're using, we've sort of written what we call a user requirement so we'll put down and go what do we want to use it for does it deliver what we need to our clients is it user friendly does it you know all the elements and we're looking for something, does this meet what we require? [...] We've got to make sure that we've got all the security settings around our Cloud."	Ensuring user requirements and tech functionalities are in place
3.2.3 Incorporating advanced technologies, gamification and interactive learning experiences to improve user engagement and satisfaction			
409	3.2.3	"So, things that we're adopting and I think everyone's still learning is AI. We are learning about it, and it is improving so quickly. So, we've done things like, yeah, we're using it to help us write documents. We're also looking at it now for training courses." [...] "If the testing of the AI for language translation is good, it does make sense to a native speaker, then that's gonna make a huge difference" [...] having to work in probably their non-native language of English makes it harder for them so, if we can really embrace this translation service then I think it will be so impactful."	Advanced AI for UX/learning benefits.

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410	3.2.3	"We use your mobile phone [...] it's going to guide you through the process, you just download the app [...] you can hold the phone in front of you the same way you would like unlock your phone using your face that helps you to build them up to your chest. So, we do it in a way that's very learnable from the user perspective. And we also give them options because we know that people's relationship with technology can be poor, can be good, depending on the experiences in the past."	On-device guidance; options for tech-comfort variability; reduces cognitive load (learnability).
411	3.2.3	"We've incorporated this speech text kind of thing and also kind of where from our app perspective where the users can be able to kind of just click on click on different icons and it generates that daily notes." [...] "So, things like, you know, a person that may not necessarily be so, I guess, confident and, you know, maybe writing English or maybe pretty difficult to type for whatever reason based on their abilities. It's much more simple for them and it's much more simplified from that perspective."	Speech-to-text/icons for accessibility; literacy/motor barriers reduced (inclusive interaction).
412	3.2.3	" I feel comfortable pushing boundaries for people that haven't been heard. If it was something that was just a horror film or something that wasn't made with the intention of speaking up or representing something a bit further then I'm not going to show it for shock value."	Ethical advocacy through awareness-raising and principled curation.
413	3.2.3	"The app doesn't, it's not a medical device. It's a health and awareness app. So, it doesn't treat, diagnose, manage, alleviate relieves, we just help people change their reactions to it [the Health Condition]."	Systemic innovation through behavioural adaptation and digital delivery.
414	3.2.3	"The vision behind the company is that every home and every organisation globally has access to the [...] technology to eliminate organic waste. And so, organic waste includes plastics of course because it's made from an organic based material." [...] "The ethics behind it are all about stopping waste risings. Whilst we're in the process of stopping waste risings, we are producing energy from predominantly renewable sources of energy, uneaten food, garden trimmings, paper, cardboard etc." [...] "So, ethically, I think that we're looking at providing a solution to an awful lot of problems."	Household/organisational access vision; links waste elimination to renewable energy (systems ethics).
415	3.2.3	"I think from the start of the project we were very much looking at the type of technology that's going to be used in terms of the coding languages and what that meant from our	Architectural choices for mission.

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		platform. Is it going to be can we then scale this platform in future? [...] We basically had a look at our options, what would be also cost effective and based on our resources at that specific time and moment, we then chose a specific code of language that will enable us to continue to be innovative and continue to scale so we can continuously add new features, we can continuously change things because of the type of technology that we've built.	
416	3.2.3	"I think it's definitely a weird mix. So, as a software engineer I definitely see tech as art anyway. So, that was my first thing." [...] "I think that a lot of what I was doing when, so I also used to work in arts before I became a software engineer and all the things I enjoyed were about immersion and I guess immersion doesn't have to be completely technology enabled but I found that when it was it was far more impactful, far more powerful that way." [...] "And I found that people were able to connect to the artist, to the art in a more, in a more authentic way if they were open to it. If they got past that novel to you of the technology."	Tech-as-art for authentic connection; immersion as ethical/aesthetic amplifier (experiential value).
417	3.2.3	"I guess I mean the first thing would be like the fact that I'm using VR headsets. That was a decision that I made because I loved immersion and I wanted to get people immersed in art in a different way." [...] "In terms of like how we pick that technology, that's an interesting one because it's a lot of that accessibility really." [...] "I have different layers of what we're trying to achieve."	Virtual Reality chosen for immersion; accessibility layers steer selection (inclusive curation).
418	3.2.3	"The issue we're finding is by doing a lot of virtual training that we were doing on [online meeting platforms] and stuff that we just can't be available all the time. And if we really want to get that information and that knowledge out there, we have got to find a way to scale that." [...] "Scalability, how do we get that knowledge to as many people as quickly as we possibly can was our absolute number one reason for going down an online learning platform." [...] "The technology gave us all of that as a positive." [...] "So, the engagement of the topic is quite deep and immersive. This technology allows us from an online learning experience for us to go in and update it at any point and we do update everything we do all the time."	Online learning to scale finite expertise; rapid update loop (knowledge democratisation).
419	3.2.3	Yeah, it's, it's kind of gamification. It's something that will keep them coming back. So, are you familiar with the [...] fitness apps? [...] This is how far I've run or have cycled or have done or even the food calorie counter. So, what is what I've eaten in this? So, with those you get	Gamification for sustained pro-sustainability behaviour; self/peer comparison as

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
		to plot what I went on today, what earlier yesterday? Am I getting better? Can I compare it with my friends? What do I really need to do to actually make this really good over the next month? And feel good about myself. They kind of said, that's what they want. So, something that they can see. [...] I am becoming more sustainable. If I do this and this and this, actually, I could do, I could even better. And I want to compare that with myself with my friends, with my family. So, it's, it's that kind of gamification that we need to, that we need to look at to how to get people using them consistently."	motivator (ethical engagement).
420	3.2.3	"If we think about the growth stages or the business maturity of challenger businesses... perhaps businesses turn their attention to efficiency or scaling and maybe look to technology as a solution." [...] "Technology is a solution. I'm not sure that many food and drink businesses start with technology..."	Trajectory of systemic adoption.
421	3.2.3	"We're doing things like some of the webinars that we do, so we don't do them directly ourselves we go through the professional body and developing them." [...] "How can we make webinars so powerful and when you get the recording, you know, can we edit them so you get rid of all this surplus, I suppose chat that goes on." [...] "It's the e-learning, it's sharing that knowledge, I think it's going to be key"	Formalised knowledge dissemination.
422	3.2.3	"You can enjoy technology, but it's about balance, isn't it? And spending a bit of time actually exploring outside and being a little bit grubby and muddy is actually really good for you, good for your mental health." [...] "Get outdoors more and see if it improves your mental wellbeing."	Explicit emotional wellbeing framing and tension with tech use.
423	3.2.3	"I thought, yeah, you know, I want to get people in the headsets, get them in as long as possible. That was after much consideration and kind of testing out. It didn't feel very ethical to encourage people to spend hours on end." [...] "I've really had to start looking at limiting people's time, not encouraging them to basically find another thing to be addicted to."	Ethical concern about harm/addiction and the emotional costs of immersion.
424	3.2.3	"So I guess for us, the process of doing the decent thing is we're in education and training primarily, but we started off with a free open source learning zone that was accessible to anybody and everybody for free essentially, pointing them into learnings and but also to other people's work. So supporting other people who work in this space as opposed to coming straight in with you know we're going to build classes and develop training online	Digital accessibility as the right/decent thing to do.

EN	SST	Excerpt	Attribution note
		training and we're going to charge for it and everything's going to be essentially walled and behind a pay wall and you have to pay to do it. So, you know the right thing to do is in the space that we work in is we want to raise awareness and educate people on sustainability and how businesses need to operate to give back to people and planet. The right thing to do is to provide access to that as widely as possible with minimum sort of barriers and challenges for people. And then we reached a point where as a business we have to start making money, you have to make money right? So, if you don't make money, you can't be a business, you can't exist as a business. So we bought a product, we've just launched a suite of products that are online learning, but we really thought hard during our process of coming to the price points of those products to make sure again this isn't about pricing ourselves really, really high in a market because we know that the demand for sustainable understanding and skill sets is growing. So we've made sure that again we have priced them at a price we believe is fair and accessible to many because we just want to scale what we do for the learning and the understanding because we believe that once you start to see these things you can't unsee them and then like the journeys we've gone down you know the reality is all around us So that's how we kind of bring those in to our decision-making processes. You know, what's the accessibility of these? Are they realistically affordable? Are they gonna help us meet our goals of, you know, educating as many people, many marketers and business people as we possibly can."	

Source: author synthesis (this thesis).

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