



International Journal of Social Sciences & Cultural Studies (IJSSCS)

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 (2026)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Sustaining Professionalism and Integrity: A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Work Ethics, Leadership, and Institutional Culture

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Article Information

Received: March 21, 2026

Accepted: June 02, 2026

Published: August 15, 2026

Keywords

Ethical Climate, Institutional Integrity, Professional Conduct, School Leadership, Teacher Professionalism

ABSTRACT

What sustains teacher professionalism and integrity in increasingly complex educational environments? This qualitative study explores how ethical conduct and professional development are fostered within institutional contexts from the perspectives of Junior and Senior High School principals. Anchored in Organizational Behavior Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, the study examines how leadership practices and organizational mechanisms shape teacher ethics and professional identity. A phenomenological research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to capture the lived experiences of school leaders. Findings reveal six core enablers of teacher professionalism: adherence to ethical standards, effective stress management strategies, structured conflict resolution mechanisms, targeted motivational programs, systematic performance evaluation tools, and transparent leadership communication. Beyond these structural elements, emergent themes highlight the relational and affective dimensions of professionalism. These include the emotional impact of ethical challenges, the centrality of trust in conflict mediation, the role of collaborative morale in sustaining engagement, the influence of recognition on performance, and the importance of empathetic and participative leadership. The study concludes that while formal institutional frameworks provide essential support, the sustainability of teacher professionalism and integrity is significantly reinforced by emotionally intelligent leadership and a culture of trust and collaboration. It is recommended that educational institutions adopt reflective, human-centered leadership approaches to strengthen ethical resilience and promote sustained professional commitment among teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers played a pivotal role in shaping both the academic and moral development of students, serving as educators and exemplars of ethical conduct. Their professionalism and integrity significantly influenced the quality of the learning environment and the overall effectiveness of educational institutions. In higher education, professionalism extended beyond instructional competence to encompass ethical commitment, self-regulation, and a sustained dedication to lifelong learning (Cruess *et al.*, 2019). Work ethics embodied core values such as responsibility, punctuality, diligence, and respect, attributes that reflected a teacher's commitment to their vocation (Weber, 1905). Integrity, on the other hand, denoted consistency in moral action, honesty, and accountability, which were essential for cultivating trust within academic communities (Kant, 1785; Guerrero-Dib *et al.*, 2020). When teachers consistently upheld these principles, they contributed to a positive educational climate, reinforced institutional credibility, and supported improved student outcomes (Decker *et al.*, 2022). Despite these ideals, ethical lapses, including negligence, bias, and insufficient preparation, had the potential to undermine student trust and compromise educational quality (Molino & Buenvinida, 2019). While existing literature has extensively addressed teacher professionalism and

ethics, much of it remains situated at the macro or policy levels. There had been a notable gap in empirical research examining how these constructs were enacted within specific institutional contexts, particularly in private higher education settings in the Philippines. Addressing this gap, the present study investigated how teacher professionalism and integrity were manifested in practice, as perceived by school principals. It also examined the institutional and leadership mechanisms that shaped ethical behavior, including stress management initiatives, communication systems, conflict resolution strategies, team-building efforts, and reward structures. By providing a context-sensitive analysis, the study aimed to identify both strengths and areas for improvement, thereby contributing to the enhancement of ethical standards and professional conduct in educational institutions.

Research Questions

This study aimed to examine teacher professionalism and integrity as perceived by school principals in Junior and Senior High School settings. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- How were ethical practices, stress management interventions, and conflict resolution strategies implemented to promote teacher professionalism and integrity?

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- In what ways did team-building activities, motivational programs, and reward systems influence ethical behavior, morale, and collaboration among school personnel?

- How effective were employee performance evaluation tools, communication channels, and leadership practices in supporting professional growth and maintaining ethical standards?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is to provide theoretical and empirical support on how ethics, stress, teamwork, motivation, performance systems, communication, and leadership influence organizational behavior and professional conduct.

Ethical Practices in Organizational Behavior

Ethical practices served as a cornerstone of sustainable organizational behavior, encompassing adherence to professional standards as well as the demonstration of integrity, fairness, and transparency in decision-making. When consistently practiced, ethical conduct contributed to a positive organizational climate, strengthened stakeholder trust, and enhanced employee morale.

Treviño and Nelson (2021) emphasized that ethical behavior was critical in establishing organizational legitimacy, noting that institutions that embedded ethical norms experienced higher employee commitment, reduced legal risks, and improved long-term sustainability. Similarly, contemporary research highlighted the growing importance of ethical leadership in technologically driven environments. Kandasamy (2024) underscored the necessity of fairness, inclusivity, and accountability in digital decision-making systems, particularly in the context of artificial intelligence.

However, ethical behavior in organizations was not without complexity. Asencio (2024) introduced the concept of unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB), demonstrating that employees might engage in unethical acts to benefit their organization when leadership overemphasized outcomes over principles. Supporting this, Mayer *et al.* (2019) found that environments lacking clear ethical guidance increased the likelihood of moral disengagement. These findings collectively suggested that ethical leadership required not only policy enforcement but also moral modeling and reflective practice.

Stress Management Interventions

Workplace stress remained a critical determinant of employee performance, well-being, and organizational commitment. Persistent stressors, such as workload demands, role ambiguity, and interpersonal conflict, often resulted in burnout and reduced productivity when left unaddressed.

Richardson and Rothstein (2008) provided foundational evidence that structured stress management programs, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and relaxation techniques, significantly improved psychological

outcomes and job performance. Expanding this perspective, Leka and Houdmont (2010) advocated for a dual-level approach that addressed both individual coping strategies and systemic workplace factors.

Recent advancements introduced technology-driven interventions. Amanvermez *et al.* (2023) confirmed the effectiveness of mindfulness and CBT-based approaches, while Ta *et al.* (2025) demonstrated the potential of wearable technologies and machine learning in real-time stress detection and management. These developments indicated a shift toward integrated, adaptive, and personalized stress management systems in organizational contexts.

Team-Building and Motivation

Team-building and motivation were central to organizational effectiveness, particularly in collaborative environments. Structured team development initiatives promoted trust, communication, and shared leadership, thereby enhancing performance and cohesion (Shuffler *et al.*, 2011).

Subsequent research (Shuffler *et al.*, 2021) highlighted evolving team dynamics shaped by virtual collaboration, diversity, and technological integration, necessitating more flexible and inclusive approaches. Adriansyah *et al.* (2023) further demonstrated that targeted team-building interventions improved cohesion, role clarity, and collective efficacy.

Motivation was closely linked to these dynamics, particularly through Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasized autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of intrinsic motivation. Studies showed that organizations fostering these elements experienced higher engagement and collaboration, especially under transformational leadership (Wang *et al.*, 2020).

Performance and Incentive Tools

Performance management systems evolved into multifaceted tools integrating evaluation, feedback, and motivation. Gerhart and Fang (2015) emphasized that fair and transparent pay-for-performance systems enhanced productivity, while inequitable systems risked disengagement.

Aguinis (2019) expanded this view by advocating for continuous feedback and developmental coaching as integral components of performance management. Meanwhile, the Incentive Research Foundation (2020) identified a shift toward non-monetary incentives, such as recognition and flexible work arrangements—which proved effective in enhancing employee engagement.

In academic settings, performance-based incentives were shown to improve both teaching effectiveness and institutional loyalty (SA Journal of Human Resource Management, 2024). Additionally, digital tools and gamification strategies further supported motivation in hybrid work environments (Larkin *et al.*, 2022).

Conflict and Communication Mechanisms

Conflict and communication were interdependent elements influencing organizational dynamics. While conflict was often perceived negatively, research indicated that task-related conflict could enhance innovation when properly managed (Jehn, 1995).

Thomas (1992) identified key conflict management styles, emphasizing the importance of situational adaptability and open communication. Recent studies reinforced the role of organizational culture and leadership in shaping conflict responses (PMC, 2024).

In increasingly diverse and digital environments, communication challenges intensified. Studies highlighted the importance of culturally responsive communication and hybrid interaction systems to mitigate misunderstandings and promote cohesion (Nature Communications, 2025; Liu *et al.*, 2021).

Emerging Leadership Challenges

Modern leadership operated within complex and rapidly changing environments characterized by digital transformation, globalization, and evolving workforce expectations. Avolio and Kahai (2003) introduced e-leadership, emphasizing the importance of digital competence in managing virtual teams.

Day *et al.* (2014) further argued that contemporary leaders must exhibit adaptability, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking. More recent analyses (McKinsey & Company, 2023) identified a shift toward participative, flexible, and resilience-oriented leadership models.

Transformational leadership remained particularly relevant, as it promoted ethical behavior, innovation, and employee engagement (Shahid, 2024). In educational contexts, leadership increasingly required a balance between academic excellence, technological integration, and social responsibility.

Professionalism and Teacher Ethics

Teacher professionalism encompassed ethical conduct, accountability, competence, and continuous development. Teachers, as moral exemplars, were expected to demonstrate integrity both within and beyond the classroom (Cruess *et al.*, 2019).

Work ethics in education included responsibility, punctuality, and adherence to institutional norms, all of which significantly influenced student outcomes (Najamudin, 2020). However, ethical challenges such as bias and unfair practices continued to threaten educational integrity (Guerrero-Dib *et al.*, 2020; Decker *et al.*, 2022).

Empirical studies indicated that empowerment, leadership support, and institutional culture significantly shaped teacher professionalism (Fitriani & Muljono, 2020; Evetts, 2011). In the Philippine context, contextual and demographic factors further influenced ethical practices, underscoring the need for localized interventions.

Related Studies and Theoretical Foundations

Existing studies reinforced the importance of

teamwork, motivation, and leadership in sustaining ethical organizational behavior. Kelvin-Iloafu (2017) demonstrated that teamwork significantly enhanced productivity and organizational sustainability.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provided a framework for understanding intrinsic motivation and ethical behavior, while Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Avolio, 1994) emphasized the role of leaders in fostering ethical and high-performing environments.

Additionally, Cognitive Evaluation Theory explained how external rewards influenced motivation and ethical conduct (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Together, these frameworks provided a comprehensive lens for analyzing professionalism and integrity in institutional settings.

Research Gap

Despite extensive literature on teacher professionalism and ethics, limited research had examined how institutional strategies influenced ethical behavior within specific private educational contexts. Existing studies largely focused on macro-level analyses, overlooking the micro-level mechanisms, such as leadership practices, communication systems, and performance tools that shaped teacher conduct.

This study addressed this gap by examining how institutional and leadership practices influenced teacher professionalism and integrity from the perspective of school leaders. In doing so, it contributed to a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of ethical behavior in educational institutions.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on an integrated framework combining Organizational Behavior Theory (Robbins & Judge, 2019), Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Organizational Behavior Theory explained how institutional structures and processes, such as ethical practices, communication systems, stress management interventions, team-building, and reward mechanisms, shaped employee behavior, morale, and professional conduct. Transformational Leadership Theory highlighted the role of leadership in fostering ethical environments through vision, motivation, and individualized support, thereby influencing teachers' commitment and integrity. Complementing these, Self-Determination Theory emphasized that the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhanced intrinsic motivation and ethical behavior. Collectively, these theories provided a comprehensive lens for understanding how organizational systems, leadership practices, and motivational processes interacted to sustain teacher professionalism and integrity within educational institutions.

Transformational Leadership Theory, developed by Burns (1978) and refined by Bass (1985), emphasized leadership's capacity to elevate both leaders and followers

toward higher levels of motivation and morality. It identified four core dimensions, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, which fostered ethical behavior, commitment, and continuous improvement. In educational contexts, transformational leadership contributed to teacher development, strengthened institutional trust, and promoted a shared sense of purpose, thereby reinforcing professionalism and integrity. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000), provided a motivational framework for understanding how institutional practices and leadership styles influenced educators' internal drive. The theory posited that individuals demonstrated optimal motivation and ethical behavior when their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were fulfilled. It also distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, emphasizing the internalization of professional values. In educational settings, the satisfaction of these needs was associated with greater integrity, initiative, and sustained professional commitment among teachers.

Collectively, these three theories provided a multidimensional framework for understanding how organizational systems, leadership practices, and psychological needs converged to shape professionalism and ethical behavior among educators. This integrated perspective guided the analysis of institutional practices, enabling the assessment of their effectiveness in promoting professionalism, integrity, and ethical conduct within the academic environment.

Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded in an integrated framework combining Organizational Behavior Theory (Robbins & Judge, 2019), Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Organizational Behavior Theory explained how institutional systems, such as ethical practices, stress management interventions, conflict resolution strategies, communication channels, and performance evaluation tools, shaped teacher behavior and work ethics. Transformational Leadership Theory emphasized the role of leadership in fostering ethical culture through vision, role modeling, motivation, and collaborative engagement, thereby influencing professional conduct. Complementing these, Self-Determination Theory highlighted how the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhanced intrinsic motivation, promoting integrity, accountability, and sustained professional commitment. Collectively, these frameworks provided a comprehensive lens for examining how structural, leadership, and motivational factors interacted to shape teacher professionalism and ethical behavior within educational institutions.

Figure 4 presents a framework integrating Organizational Behavior, Transformational Leadership, and Self-Determination theories, showing how organizational

systems, leadership practices, and psychological factors interact to influence teacher professionalism and integrity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of school principals regarding teacher professionalism and integrity. Grounded in Husserlian phenomenology (Husserl, 1931), the approach enabled an in-depth examination of how participants constructed meaning from complex professional experiences, including ethical dilemmas, motivation, leadership practices, and communication processes within the educational setting. The design aligned with Organizational Behavior Theory (Robbins & Judge, 2019), which emphasized the understanding of workplace behavior and ethical conduct. It was further supported by Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), which highlighted the role of leadership in shaping ethical culture and professional expectations, and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which explained how autonomy, competence, and relatedness influenced motivation and ethical behavior. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings. This approach provided a rigorous, human-centered framework for understanding how professionalism and integrity were experienced, reinforced, and challenged within the institutional context.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide, validated by experts in educational leadership and organizational behavior. The instrument covered ten thematic areas aligned with the study's core constructs: ethical issues in organizational behavior, stress intervention mechanisms, team-building activities, motivational programs, rewards and incentives, employee performance tools, workplace conflict and grievance mechanisms, conflict resolution strategies, emerging leadership challenges, and communication processes. Each section included two open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses based on participants' administrative experiences. Probing questions were used to clarify and deepen responses when necessary.

Validation of the Instrument

The interview guide underwent content validation by three field experts. Their feedback was incorporated to enhance clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. A pilot interview was also conducted with an academic leader outside the research context to refine the structure, wording, and sequencing of the questions.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was secured

from the appropriate institutional offices and department heads. Participants were provided with informed consent forms and were assured of confidentiality. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience and were conducted either face-to-face or virtually. Each session lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent to ensure accurate transcription.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). This process included familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, development of themes, review and refinement of themes, and interpretation of findings. The analysis was guided by the study's theoretical foundations, Organizational Behavior Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Self-Determination Theory,

to ensure alignment between empirical findings and conceptual constructs. Through this process, recurring patterns related to ethical behavior, leadership practices, motivation, and professionalism were identified and synthesized to generate meaningful insights into how school principals perceived and addressed teacher professionalism and integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presented the findings of the qualitative analysis and interpreted them in relation to the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Data were derived from in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the identification of recurring patterns across participants' experiences. The themes were organized according to the key domains of the study and supported by representative statements to ensure

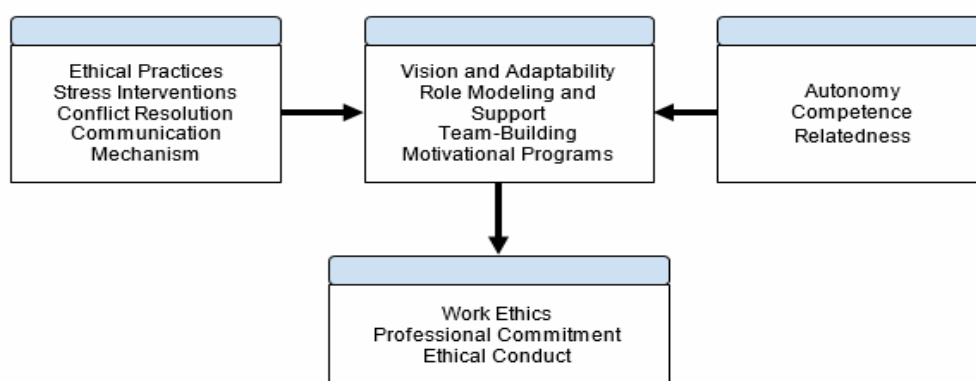


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

credibility and richness of interpretation.

The findings revealed that ethical practices, stress management interventions, and conflict resolution mechanisms functioned as interconnected organizational processes that collectively sustained teacher professionalism and integrity. Challenges in policy adherence and professional conduct indicated the need for continuous reinforcement of institutional standards, while leadership-driven initiatives such as training and recognition programs supported the internalization of ethical behavior. These results aligned with Organizational Behavior Theory, which emphasized the role of structured systems and leadership practices in shaping workplace ethics and accountability.

Moreover, stress management emerged as a critical dimension influencing professional conduct. Institutional efforts, including seminars, retreats, and behavioral monitoring, demonstrated a proactive approach to supporting employee well-being. These interventions enhanced teachers' emotional resilience, which was essential for maintaining consistency in ethical behavior and professional responsibilities. This finding suggested that psychological support mechanisms were integral to sustaining professionalism in demanding educational environments.

In terms of workplace dynamics, interpersonal conflicts

were commonly associated with miscommunication and personality differences. However, the presence of formal grievance mechanisms ensured procedural fairness and transparency, reinforcing trust within the organization. Complementing these structures, leadership practices such as mediation and impartial decision-making played a vital role in resolving conflicts constructively. These approaches reflected elements of transformational leadership, particularly individualized consideration and ethical role modeling, which fostered a culture of fairness and mutual respect.

Overall, the results indicated that the integration of institutional policies, leadership responsiveness, and supportive organizational systems contributed significantly to the development of teacher professionalism and integrity. These factors collectively reinforced ethical behavior, accountability, and reliability, which were essential components of a positive and sustainable educational environment.

The findings indicated that team-building, motivational strategies, and reward systems functioned as complementary mechanisms that strengthened staff morale, collaboration, and ethical behavior. Team-building initiatives fostered trust, open communication, and collective engagement, suggesting that shared experiences contributed to a more cohesive and ethically

aligned work environment. These outcomes reflected principles of Transformational Leadership Theory, where leaders promoted collaboration and modeled positive interpersonal relationships, thereby reinforcing professional values.

Motivational programs further enhanced staff commitment by combining recognition-based and performance-driven approaches. The use of feedback, awards, and incentives demonstrated how leadership sustained engagement and reinforced desired behaviors. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory,

these practices supported teachers' psychological needs for competence and relatedness, which were essential in fostering intrinsic motivation and long-term professional commitment.

Similarly, reward systems, both individual and group-based, served as reinforcing mechanisms that encouraged productivity and ethical performance. Recognition practices not only improved satisfaction but also aligned individual goals with institutional expectations. Organizational Behavior Theory explained these outcomes by highlighting the role of structured systems

Table 1: Themes on Ethical Practices, Stress Interventions, and Conflict Resolution Strategies Supporting Teacher Professionalism and Integrity

Themes	Description	Codes	Significant Statements	Informant Codes
Ethical Issues in Organizational Behavior	Common dilemmas in policy adherence and maintaining professionalism in communication and behavior.	Policy Adherence, Professional Conduct	"Some staff did not follow uniform policies or class punctuality." / "Ethical leadership was promoted through INSET and recognition."	Informants 1 and 2
Intervention in Dealing with Stress of Employees	Support systems and leader responses implemented to identify and manage stress.	Stress Recognition, Support Mechanisms	"Seminars and retreats helped address stress." / "Stress signs were monitored through changes in behavior and performance."	Informants 1 and 2
Conflicts Encountered by Employees (Presence of Grievance Machinery)	Conflicts arising in the workplace and the presence of a grievance system.	Workplace Conflict, Grievance System	"Personality clashes and miscommunication were common." / "The grievance committee provided formal channels."	Informants 1 and 2
Conflict Resolution Strategies	Approaches and practices used to resolve staff conflicts and ensure fairness.	Mediation, Impartial Leadership	"Mediation and integrating style resolved conflicts." / "Listening to all sides avoided bias in decisions."	Informants 1 and 2

and policies in guiding employee behavior and maintaining organizational coherence.

Collectively, the results suggested that leadership-driven initiatives and institutional support systems operated synergistically to promote a positive organizational climate. By integrating collaboration, motivation, and recognition, schools were able to enhance professional engagement, strengthen ethical behavior, and sustain a culture of trust and accountability among staff.

The findings demonstrated that performance evaluation systems, adaptive leadership practices, and effective communication strategies operated as interrelated mechanisms that supported professional growth and reinforced ethical standards. Performance evaluation tools, such as peer reviews and structured assessments, provided clear benchmarks for accountability and development. When implemented as developmental rather than punitive measures, these systems enhanced teachers' sense of competence and encouraged continuous improvement. This aligned with Organizational Behavior Theory, which

emphasized structured systems in guiding performance, and with Self-Determination Theory, which highlighted the role of competence in fostering intrinsic motivation and ethical engagement.

Leadership adaptability also emerged as a critical factor, particularly in addressing challenges related to change and work-life balance. The use of participative and empathetic leadership approaches reflected key elements of Transformational Leadership Theory, where leaders inspired trust, modeled ethical behavior, and supported individual needs. Such practices enabled teachers to navigate transitions more effectively while maintaining professional integrity. From a motivational perspective, these leadership approaches supported autonomy and relatedness, reinforcing commitment and ethical responsibility.

Communication processes further strengthened organizational coherence by ensuring clarity, consistency, and mutual understanding. The use of both formal and informal channels facilitated the dissemination of

Table 2: Themes on Team Building, Motivation, and Reward Systems Enhancing Staff Morale, Collaboration, and Ethical Behavior

Themes	Description	Codes	Significant Statements	Informant Codes
Team Building Activities	Activities conducted to foster collaboration, trust, and work satisfaction.	Collaboration, Morale Building	“Team buildings improved morale and collaboration.” / “Trust and communication increased due to shared activities.”	Informants 1 and 2
Motivational Program Methods	Programs and strategies that motivated staff and sustained morale.	Motivation, Recognition	“Salary increases and awards maintained morale.” / “Motivational efforts were evaluated via feedback and performance.”	Informants 1 and 2
Group and Individual Rewards/ Incentives	Recognition and incentive systems to reward performance and enhance satisfaction.	Performance Incentives, Satisfaction	“Certificates and cash incentives were motivating.” / “Recognition improved satisfaction and output.”	Informants 1 and 2

expectations and feedback, reducing ambiguity and promoting transparency. These findings underscored the role of communication in aligning individual behavior with institutional values, as emphasized in Organizational Behavior Theory, while also reflecting the importance of vision-sharing and engagement in Transformational Leadership Theory.

Collectively, the results indicated that evaluation systems, leadership responsiveness, and communication strategies functioned synergistically to create an environment conducive to professional development and ethical practice. By integrating structural, relational, and motivational dimensions, these mechanisms reinforced accountability, strengthened trust, and sustained a culture of professionalism and integrity within educational institutions.

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Leadership adaptability also emerged as a critical factor,

Table 3: Themes on Performance Evaluation, Leadership Adaptability, and Communication Strategies Supporting Professional Growth and Ethical Standards

Themes	Description	Codes	Significant Statements	Informant Codes
Tools for Employee Performance	Tools and evaluations used to monitor employee performance and guide development.	Evaluation Tools, Professional Development	“Evaluation tools like peer reviews guided training.” / “Assessments influenced promotions and gap analysis.”	Informants 1 and 2
Emerging Issues in Leadership	Leadership challenges arising from change and the adjustments made to respond.	Leadership Adaptability, Change Management	“Resistance to change and work-life balance were challenges.” / “Participative leadership and empathy were applied.”	Informants 1 and 2
Communication Process	Channels and strategies used to communicate and ensure message clarity.	Formal/Informal Channels, Message Clarity	“Memos, meetings, and chats were communication tools.” / “Repeating key points and feedback ensured understanding.”	Informants 1 and 2

particularly in addressing challenges related to change and work-life balance. The use of participative and empathetic leadership approaches reflected key elements of Transformational Leadership Theory, where leaders inspired trust, modeled ethical behavior, and supported individual needs. Such practices enabled teachers to navigate transitions more effectively while maintaining professional integrity. From a motivational perspective, these leadership approaches supported autonomy and relatedness, reinforcing commitment and ethical responsibility.

Communication processes further strengthened organizational coherence by ensuring clarity, consistency, and mutual understanding. The use of both formal and informal channels facilitated the dissemination of expectations and feedback, reducing ambiguity and promoting transparency. These findings underscored the role of communication in aligning individual behavior with institutional values, as emphasized in Organizational Behavior Theory, while also reflecting the importance of vision-sharing and engagement in Transformational

Leadership Theory.

Collectively, the results indicated that evaluation systems, leadership responsiveness, and communication strategies functioned synergistically to create an environment conducive to professional development and ethical practice. By integrating structural, relational, and motivational dimensions, these mechanisms reinforced accountability, strengthened trust, and sustained a culture of professionalism and integrity within educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study explored teacher professionalism and integrity from the perspectives of school principals, guided by Organizational Behavior Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. Findings revealed that ethical practices, stress management, conflict resolution, motivation, performance evaluation, and communication strategies significantly influence teacher conduct. Beyond formal systems, the emotional climate, leadership empathy, recognition, and supportive

Table 4: Emerging Themes Beyond Theories

Memo/Raw Excerpt	Data	Initial Code	Category	Emerging Theme	Analyst's Reflection
"Some staff did not follow uniform policies or class punctuality." / "Seminars and retreats helped address stress."		Policy Adherence / Stress Support Mechanisms	Ethical Practices / Stress Interventions	Ethical Issues and Stress Management	The interviewee spoke with a sense of concern when addressing ethical lapses, but their tone softened when describing stress support—suggesting appreciation for efforts to address well-being.
"The grievance committee provided formal channels." / "Mediation and integrating style resolved conflicts."		Grievance System / Conflict Mediation	Conflict Resolution Structures / Approaches	Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies	A calm and composed tone accompanied the discussion on conflict systems, with a subtle hint of pride in the school's fair and empathetic approach to resolving issues.
"Team buildings improved morale and collaboration." / "Salary increases and awards maintained morale."		Collaboration Building / Incentive-Based Motivation	Team Building / Motivational Strategies	Organizational Climate and Morale Building	The interviewee's responses reflected genuine positivity and emotional warmth, suggesting these initiatives had a strong impact on workplace relationships and motivation.
"Recognition improved satisfaction and output." / "Evaluation tools like peer reviews guided training."		Performance Recognition / Evaluation-Based Development	Reward Systems / Performance Tools	Professional Growth and Recognition Systems	The participant expressed gratitude and reflection, revealing that recognition and evaluation were not only valued but seen as tools for ethical and professional advancement.
"Participative leadership and empathy were applied." / "Repeating key points and feedback ensured understanding."		Adaptive Leadership / Clarity of Communication	Leadership Practices / Communication Mechanisms	Leadership and Communication Effectiveness	The interviewee appeared thoughtful and confident, emphasizing how inclusive leadership and clear communication helped reinforce professionalism and trust in the institution.

relationships emerged as critical factors in fostering professionalism and ethical behavior.

The study highlights that professionalism should be viewed not merely as compliance with policies but as a lived experience shaped by leadership style and organizational culture. Human-centered approaches, including mentoring, inclusive decision-making, and empathetic communication, contribute to a positive ethical climate and sustainable professional conduct. Effective leadership, emotional intelligence, and developmental evaluation practices were found essential in promoting trust, collaboration, and institutional integrity.

Based on these findings, educational institutions should strengthen values-based professional development programs, expand stress intervention and peer-support mechanisms, provide leadership training focused on emotional intelligence and conflict management, and enhance recognition systems that value ethical behavior and collaboration. Performance evaluation should emphasize growth and constructive feedback, while communication practices should foster transparency and participation. Future research may further examine the emotional and relational dimensions of professionalism across diverse educational settings to deepen understanding of how leadership and organizational climate shape teacher ethics and professional identity.

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