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Streaming in the Spotlight: Team Adaptation and Institutional Work in Hybrid, Transparent Esports Organizations

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Communication

by

Chengyu Fang

Committee in charge:

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September 2026

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Streaming in the Spotlight: Team Adaptation and Institutional Work in Hybrid, Transparent Esports Organizations

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by

Chengyu Fang

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation carries the fingerprints of many people, and I am glad to have a page where I can say so. Writing it often felt like a solitary task; finishing it never was.

To my advisor, Ronald Rice: thank you for your steady support through every stage of this process, and for reading and rereading more drafts than either of us could count. Your feedback always arrived sooner and read closer than I had any right to expect, and you treated every draft, even the roughest, as worth your full attention. Your notes made this dissertation better, and your patience made its author better. I am also grateful to my committee members, Jennifer Gibbs and Young Ji Kim, for the questions and feedback that sharpened this work at every step, and for the generosity with which they gave their time to it.

To my parents: you supported me from the other side of the world, without ever being able to be here in person. Every call and every message crossed an ocean and a time difference, and still you never let me feel far from home. Your care and your love gave me the energy to carry this through, and this achievement belongs to you as much as it does to me.

To my cohort and my friends at UCSB, who made a long road feel far less lonely and who celebrated the small milestones as if they were their own. To Nan, who was always ready to talk through an idea with me, whatever shape it was in. To Nitzan, my so-called work wife, who was such a wonderful collaborator on our other projects that I could keep my focus on this one. To Ceciley and Qing, whose friendship grew alongside our garden, and who shared the stress and frustration whenever I needed to hand some of it over. And to

Dan, who has been such a supporter this past year of those of us on the job market, and whose constant engagement with the issues of graduate student life has made this place better.

To the staff of the Department of Communication, especially Jacova and Casey, who supported me through the difficult months when I came close to losing hope. You kept me moving when I could not manage it alone, and your kindness is part of this document in ways no citation can capture.

And to an unexpected friend in the UK, who gave me the last bit of energy to finish this long marathon, and who reminded me that life is so much more than our scholarly work: there are always exciting and meaningful things waiting to be explored.

Finally, to everyone who asked how the dissertation was going and accepted whatever answer I gave: thank you. I finish this degree owing many debts of exactly this kind, and I am glad to owe them.

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ABSTRACT

Streaming in the Spotlight: Team Adaptation and Institutional Work in Hybrid, Transparent Esports Organizations

by

Chengyu Fang

This dissertation examines esports content teams, competitive teams that broadcast their practice sessions and internal operations live to public audiences while competing in sanctioned leagues, as an emergent organizational form that joins radical transparency to hybrid organizing. Drawing on structuration theory, the study integrates team adaptation theory, institutional work theory, institutional logics, and platform affordances into a two-level framework in which transparency and hybridity operate as modalities linking team-level interaction and field-level structure. I followed three League of Legends content teams, Los Ratones, Near Airport, and The Ruddy Sack, from founding to ending between November 2024 and March 2026, combining a comparative case study design with netnographic observation: 152 hours of streamed practice observation documented in systematic field notes, the teams' complete published record, and a cleaned archival corpus of 121,468 records from Reddit, YouTube, Twitter/X, and the esports press, analyzed through theory-anchored qualitative coding with calibrated and audited computational assistance.

The findings show that radical transparency reconstitutes team adaptation itself. The teams developed capabilities that exist because their work is visible: public diagnosis work,

protected formulation practices such as principled abstraction and channel switching, coordination discipline under observation, and learning conducted on the record. The same practices simultaneously functioned as institutional work performed without governance authority. By demonstrating, disrupting, and maintaining the form in public, the teams created the content team category, challenged the field norm of strategic secrecy, and, in dissolving, publicly specified the form's limiting conditions of member commitment, member orientation, audience scale, founder position, and institutional accommodation. Team adaptation and institutional work recursively constituted each other through four communicative integration points, and the form ended where its two modalities were separated.

The dissertation contributes to team adaptation theory, institutional work theory, organizational transparency research, hybrid organizing, and the structurational and communicative study of institutions, and it demonstrates a fully unobtrusive, comparative, corpus-scale qualitative design for studying organizations whose life is constitutively public.

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I. Chapter One: Introduction

A. Chapter Introduction

On any given afternoon, thousands of viewers tune in to watch matches between competitive esports teams. Esports refers to organized and professionalized forms of competitive video gaming structured around tournaments, rankings, and spectator audiences (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Hong & Kim, 2025; Reitman et al., 2020). For most esports teams, competitive preparation remains a backstage activity, shielded from public view and revealed only through match performance. In the esports content teams examined here, competitive teams that broadcast their practice sessions and much of their internal operations live to public audiences, preparation itself becomes the spectacle, as practice sessions unfold live on streaming platforms, with team communications, strategic discussions, and coaching feedback visible to public audiences (Taylor, 2018). Moments of disagreement over tactical approaches, expressions of uncertainty about upcoming opponents, and post-game critique are no longer confined to private team spaces but become part of the public spectacle itself. Organizational life unfolds in real time, continuously observable and responsive to audiences who engage through chat, social media, and other platform affordances (Treem & Leonardi, 2013).

This dissertation examines an emerging organizational form in esports that operates under conditions of sustained public visibility while navigating competing institutional demands (Greenwood et al., 2008). These content teams challenge long-standing assumptions about how competitive organizations adapt, learn, and maintain legitimacy when their internal processes are no longer confined to private settings, raising questions that research on organizational visibility management has begun to address in other contexts

(Flyverbom, 2016, 2019; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Stohl et al., 2016). Their practices raise theoretical questions about how team adaptation unfolds under continuous observation, how transparency reshapes the boundaries between internal and external audiences, and how visible organizational practices contribute to the evolution of field-level norms. The chapter proceeds by situating content teams within the esports context, articulating the multilevel theoretical challenge, and presenting the research questions, followed by a brief overview of the research design and the organization of the dissertation.

B. Transparency and the Reconfiguration of Competitive Organizing

1. Traditional Sports Teams and Controlled Visibility

The practices of content teams represent a significant reconfiguration of how competitive organizations traditionally manage information and visibility. Since the early professionalization of esports in the 2000s, competitive success has been closely associated with strategic secrecy, mirroring norms from traditional sports in which organizational boundaries separate internal preparation from external performance (Seo, 2016; Taylor, 2012). Professional sports organizations invest substantial resources in controlling access to training environments, limiting media presence during practice, and managing the flow of strategic information. These practices reflect a broader competitive logic grounded in information asymmetry, where advantage derives from maintaining superior knowledge about strategies and capabilities while restricting opponents' access to that information (Barney, 1991).

Esports organizations have largely followed similar norms. Despite operating on digital platforms that afford unprecedented connectivity, most professional teams conduct practice in private servers, restrict public discussion of strategy, and reveal competitive

approaches primarily during official matches (Freeman & Wohn, 2019). The underlying rationale is straightforward. Visible practice risks exposing weaknesses, enabling opponents to appropriate innovations, or amplifying internal conflicts that might undermine confidence or cohesion. These concerns align with a substantial body of organizational research emphasizing the importance of protected spaces for experimentation, failure, and learning. In particular, work on psychological safety highlights the value of environments in which team members feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). More recent research emphasizes that psychological safety functions as a critical engine of team learning and adaptation, well beyond its role as an outcome of effective teamwork (Edmondson, 2012, 2018; Jin & Peng, 2024).

These arguments do not suggest though that competitive organizations have ever been fully opaque. Research on organizational visibility management demonstrates that organizations continually calibrate what is seen, by whom, and under what conditions, treating visibility and opacity as strategic resources, not fixed states (Flyverbom, 2016, 2019; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Stohl et al., 2016). Prior research likewise documents forms of selective visibility, managed disclosure, and strategic performance for audiences in both traditional sports and esports (Taylor, 2012, 2018). Content teams differ in the systematic and sustained public exposure of practices that have historically been treated as organizationally private. Rather than treating training, strategy formation, and performance review as private backstage activities (Goffman, 1959), content teams reorganize these practices as simultaneously internal work and public-facing content. This dissertation terms this condition radical transparency. The term marks the inversion of the field norm of

competitive secrecy. Chapter 2 develops this definition and distinguishes the radical character of this transparency, which concerns its relation to field expectations, from its comprehensive scope (Bernstein, 2017; Flyverbom, 2019).

2. Content Teams as a Hybrid Organizational Form

What this dissertation terms "content teams" are competitive esports teams that make transparency a central organizing principle by broadcasting substantial portions of their internal operations to public audiences via platforms such as Twitch and YouTube (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). These broadcasts extend well beyond highlight reels or promotional material, routinely including practice sessions (scrimmages), strategic planning discussions, coaching feedback, and informal social interaction among team members. Content teams pursue this transparency primarily as an entertainment and community-building strategy, cultivating loyal audiences whose attention and engagement in turn carry economic significance. In an industry where sponsorship remains the dominant revenue source (Newzoo, 2023; PwC, 2024), sustained audience attention is what makes teams competing outside the top tiers attractive to sponsors, while merchandise and platform-based viewer support provide supplementary income (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017).

This configuration places content teams at the intersection of multiple institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional logics are the broader cultural beliefs and associated practices that define what is valued, legitimate, and appropriate within a field. Thornton et al.'s (2012) framework identifies institutional logics as ideal types, analytically distinct templates for organizing that rarely exist in pure form but provide cultural cognitive foundations for organizational practice. Their framework specifies seven institutional orders, including market, professional, state, community, family, religion, and corporation, each

embodying distinct assumptions about legitimate goals, appropriate means, and valued identities. Esports content teams navigate three field-specific logics that draw selectively from these broader orders (Thornton et al., 2012). A *competitive logic*, rooted primarily in the professional order, defines worth through demonstrated skill, rankings, and tournament achievement. An *entertainment logic*, rooted primarily in the market order, defines worth through audience attention, engagement, and enjoyment, expressed in the production of compelling content. A *community logic*, rooted in the community order, defines worth through belonging, mutual recognition, and reciprocal investment between teams and their audiences. Although these logics intersect in everyday practice, and their intersection is what makes content teams hybrid organizations, each supplies an analytically distinct basis for evaluating organizational action.

This configuration creates a distinctive form of hybrid organizing. Organizational theory typically treats coexisting institutional logics as sources of tension that require organizations to manage trade-offs, compartmentalize activities, or buffer competing demands in order to maintain legitimacy (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2011). Content teams attempt a different path, working to integrate these logics within core organizational practices instead of managing competition and content production as separate activities: training sessions become both competitive preparation and entertainment, strategic discussions function simultaneously as performance development and audience education, roster decisions weigh competitive skill alongside on-stream presence and audience appeal. How content teams navigate these competing institutional demands, and how their navigation potentially influences broader field-level norms, are central concerns for this dissertation.

The emergence of esports content teams as a distinct organizational form can be traced most clearly within League of Legends, one of the world's largest esports ecosystems (Lee, 2021). Competitive play is organized into tiered regional systems, with top-tier leagues such as the LCS (North America, 8 teams), LEC (EMEA, 10 teams), LCK (Korea, 10 teams), and LPL (China, 14 teams), alongside extensive second-tier and developmental leagues (LoL Esports Staff, 2026). Across regions, this structure supports several hundred professional and semi-professional teams worldwide, a scale that distinguishes League of Legends from titles organized through publisher-run franchised leagues with fixed membership, such as the Overwatch League and the Call of Duty League, or through a single global tournament circuit (Peng et al., 2020; Scholz, 2019). Content-oriented configurations are not unique to League of Legends, as creator-led organizations and fan-centered clubs in other titles and regions display related features. This dissertation focuses on League of Legends because its expansive, tiered league structure has produced the clearest and most sustained examples of teams that combine competitive participation with continuous broadcasting of internal operations.

Within this expansive and stratified ecosystem, new organizational experiments have tended to emerge outside the most institutionally constrained top tiers. In late 2024, former professional player and streamer Caedrel founded Los Ratones in the Northern League of Legends Championship, pioneering a model of near-continuous transparency that included public scrimmages, strategy meetings, and team communications. The team's competitive success and rapid audience growth demonstrated that high-level performance and radical transparency could coexist. This model quickly diffused across regions. In early 2025, retired North American professional player Doublelift founded Near Airport in the North

American Challenger League, explicitly adapting the Los Ratones approach while extending transparency beyond gameplay through additional content formats. The Ruddy Sack illustrates a third pathway. Organized in late 2024 around the streamers IWillDominate and DonJake, on the infrastructure of an established organization and with the veteran coach YamatoCannon, the team competed in the same Northern League of Legends Championship as Los Ratones, moving from a more traditional organizational model toward greater transparency as prominent content creators entered its leadership.

Despite differences in regional context, organizational history, and degree of openness, these teams share defining characteristics that distinguish them as content teams from traditional, non-content esports teams. They institutionalize transparency as an ongoing practice, not an episodic communication strategy. They integrate competitive, entertainment, and community imperatives within core organizational routines. Their organizational viability rests on audience attention and engagement more than on competitive placement. And they position themselves simultaneously as legitimate competitors and entertainment brands. These features support treating content teams as an emerging organizational form with implications of its own for how adaptation, legitimacy, and institutional change unfold.

Throughout the theoretical development in Chapters 2-4, I include a small number of illustrative examples drawn from observational data of the three content teams under study. These examples serve only to clarify abstract concepts in the context of transparent esports organizing. They are preliminary observations that ground the theoretical discussion; the systematic empirical evidence appears in Chapters 6-8, following full documentation of data collection and analytical procedures in Chapter 5. This limited integration of theory and preliminary observation follows the case-oriented tradition in organizational research

(Barley, 1986; Langley, 1999), where iterative movement between conceptual development and empirical grounding strengthens both theoretical precision and contextual validity.

3. Theoretical Implications of Radical Transparency

These three organizations exemplify what appears to be a new organizational form within esports (Scholz, 2019). This phenomenon challenges fundamental assumptions in both organizational theory and competitive practice. Content teams demonstrate that transparency and competitive effectiveness need not operate in inherent tension, contrary to conventional wisdom that has long privileged secrecy in competitive contexts (Bernstein, 2012). These organizations compete successfully while making their competitive processes visible, suggesting that assumptions about necessary trade-offs between openness and performance may reflect historical practice more than competitive necessity. More broadly, content teams create a unique empirical setting where team processes of adaptation and field dynamics of institutional change are both observable in unprecedented ways. Their radical transparency makes visible organizational processes that researchers typically access only through retrospective interviews or limited observation windows (Langley, 1999).

The tensions they navigate between competitive and entertainment demands illuminate how organizations manage competing institutional priorities (Besharov & Smith, 2014). Their existence raises fundamental questions about whether transparency can function as an organizational resource instead of a competitive liability (Flyverbom, 2016), and whether new organizational forms can reshape institutional expectations in emerging fields like esports. Understanding content teams offers insights into how organizations more generally adapt to an era of unprecedented visibility, how hybridity functions when enabled

by digital platforms, and how institutional change operates in contexts where organizational practices are continuously observable.

C. Esports as an Organizational Context

Understanding content teams requires situating them within the broader esports ecosystem and recognizing how this ecosystem differs from traditional sports contexts in ways that both enable and necessitate organizational innovation. Over the past two decades, esports has transformed from informal, community-organized competitions into a professionalized global industry characterized by structured leagues, corporate sponsorships, large prize pools, and audiences that rival those of established sports (Scholz, 2019; Scholz, 2020; Taylor, 2018). This transformation has been rapid and uneven, with institutional development proceeding at different paces across games, regions, and organizational actors (Heidenreich et al., 2022; Scholz, 2019). Global esports revenue grew from approximately 200 million dollars in 2014 to an estimated 2.5 billion dollars in 2024, though widely divergent forecasts for the coming decade reflect persistent uncertainty regarding the industry's long-term economic foundations (Future Market Insights, 2025; Newzoo, 2023; Statista, 2024).

This uncertainty has become especially visible since 2023, during a period widely described as the "esports winter." Slowed investment, reduced sponsorship spending, and organizational contraction have affected teams, leagues, and tournament organizers across regions (PwC, 2024; Statista, 2024). The collapse of FTX in 2022, after the cryptocurrency exchange had become one of esports' most prominent sponsors, exposed the fragility of financial support structures on which many organizations had come to depend. Teams such as TSM FTX, which was forced to rebrand, along with G2 Esports and others, lost major

revenue streams, with limited capacity for immediate replacement. Despite strong viewership or competitive success, multiple organizations have shut down operations or dramatically scaled back. These developments suggest that the economic model supporting esports' initial professionalization has struggled to deliver organizational sustainability (Newzoo, 2023; PwC, 2024). Although industry observers anticipate partial recovery in 2025, the challenge of building stable revenue models remains unresolved (Esports Insider, 2025).

Livestreaming platforms have played a central role in shaping how esports organizations respond to these conditions. Twitch, the dominant platform for live gaming content, reports more than 240 million monthly active users in 2025, up from 55 million in 2015, with similar growth on YouTube Gaming confirming the centrality of livestreaming within the esports ecosystem (Dean, 2025; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019; Taylor, 2018). Unlike traditional sports broadcasting, which relies on media intermediaries and limits direct interaction between athletes and audiences, livestreaming enables continuous, direct engagement. Competitors can cultivate personal brands and communities that sometimes rival or exceed the visibility of the organizations they represent (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). These platform affordances create organizational possibilities that extend beyond marketing, enabling the integration of operational work and public-facing communication (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Persistence of archived content, real-time chat, and integrated monetization systems allow everyday team activities to function simultaneously as internal coordination and audience-facing media, positioning audiences as ongoing evaluators of team activity (Huettermann & Pizzo, 2022; Treem & Leonardi, 2013).

The economic structure of esports further distinguishes it from traditional sports and intensifies pressures for organizational experimentation. Whereas established professional sports diversify income across ticket sales, broadcast rights, merchandise, and long-term sponsorships, prize pools in esports are highly concentrated among a small number of elite teams, leaving most organizations in regional or developmental leagues unable to sustain professional operations through winnings alone (Jin, 2021; Newzoo, 2023). Sponsorships have proven volatile as economic downturns and shifting marketing priorities directly affect investment (Future Market Insights, 2025), broadcast rights generate comparatively little income because much esports content remains freely accessible on streaming platforms (Pizzo et al., 2018), and merchandise sales lag behind those of established sports with longer histories and more entrenched fan cultures (PwC, 2024).

Content teams emerge within these structural conditions as experiments in reorganizing how competitive organizations generate value. Yet the model does not abandon the industry's reliance on sponsorship, which remains the dominant revenue source across esports (Newzoo, 2023; PwC, 2024). The change is in the basis on which that value rests. By leveraging the direct audience relationships enabled by livestreaming platforms, content teams convert everyday organizational work such as scrimmages and reviews into engaging content that attracts and retains large audiences, and this sustained attention, more than top-tier competitive placement, is what makes them viable properties for sponsors while also generating supplementary income through merchandise, subscriptions, and platform programs (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). Lean organizational structures with limited fixed overhead further support viability for teams operating outside the small elite capable of sustaining themselves through prize money or major sponsorship portfolios alone. Whether

this configuration constitutes a durable organizational template or a contingent experiment remains an open question, and the trajectories of the three teams examined here bear directly on it.

The institutional environment of esports further shapes how organizational models such as content teams develop and gain legitimacy. Unlike traditional sports, which operate under long-established governing bodies and relatively stable institutional arrangements, esports remains fragmented and unevenly institutionalized (Heidenreich et al., 2022). Competitive ecosystems are organized primarily at the level of individual game titles, each governed largely by its publisher. Because publishers retain exclusive ownership of game intellectual property and source code, they exercise unilateral authority to sanction competitions, alter game mechanics through software updates, and define the economic structure of the ecosystem (Abanazir, 2019; Scholz, 2019). However, publishers vary substantially in how this authority is exercised: Riot Games maintains centralized control over League of Legends, Valve adopts a more decentralized governance model for Dota 2, and Blizzard Entertainment retains strong oversight over Overwatch, producing meaningful variation in tournament structures, team participation rules, and broadcasting arrangements (Taylor, 2012). These governance differences are further compounded by regional regulatory contexts. In China, state regulations limiting gameplay time for minors shape esports development in line with broader concerns about digital well-being (Ye, 2021). In the United States, esports has developed with minimal direct regulation but also without the institutional support structures characteristic of traditional sports; the NCAA's decision not to govern collegiate esports created a vacuum filled by multiple alternative organizations, resulting in a decentralized and contested governance landscape (Zavian, 2020).

This fragmented institutional context creates both uncertainty and opportunity. In the absence of centralized authority and settled legitimacy criteria, esports organizations operate in environments where norms, best practices, and evaluative standards remain contested. At the same time, weak institutionalization lowers barriers to experimentation that would be difficult in more mature sports systems with tightly regulated ownership, labor, and media practices (Greenwood et al., 2008; Heidenreich et al., 2022). Research on institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields suggests that actors in such contexts often draw on logics from outside the field and seek legitimacy from audiences or external affiliations instead of established authorities (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Content teams exemplify this pattern by incorporating entertainment industry logics and by positioning audiences as key sources of validation alongside competitive results.

Questions of institutional legitimacy remain central to esports' development. Scholars continue to debate whether esports should be understood primarily as sport, entertainment, or a hybrid domain combining elements of both (Hallmann & Giel, 2018). These distinctions carry concrete implications for organizational resources and recognition. Universities must decide whether esports programs belong within athletics departments or student affairs. Governments determine whether professional players qualify for athlete or entertainer visas, shaping international mobility and labor conditions. Such classifications influence how organizations are regulated, funded, and symbolically positioned within broader social systems.

Content teams operate within this unsettled institutional environment in ways that both respond to and potentially reshape its contours. Their transparent practices challenge assumptions about secrecy in competitive preparation. Their audience-centered models

respond to structural vulnerabilities exposed during the esports winter by relocating the basis of organizational value from competitive prestige to sustained audience attention, even as they remain embedded in the industry's sponsorship economy. Their integration of competitive and media functions reflects the broader convergence of sport and entertainment within digital industries (Cunningham et al., 2016). Whether content teams ultimately become a dominant organizational template or remain a niche response will depend on how effectively they balance performance, visibility, and legitimacy as institutional conditions continue to evolve. More immediately, examining content teams provides insight into how organizations navigate economic precarity through innovation, how visibility can function simultaneously as constraint and resource, and how hybrid organizational forms emerge within fragmented and weakly institutionalized fields.

D. The Problem: Understanding Transparent, Hybrid Organizations

1. Two Levels of Process: Team Adaptation and Institutional Work

Esports content teams present a profound organizational puzzle that existing theories only partially address. At their core, these organizations must simultaneously excel as competitive teams while entertaining audiences, manage constant public visibility while maintaining strategic advantages, and navigate established esports institutions while potentially transforming them. This creates a multidimensional phenomenon where team-level processes of adaptation and institutional-level processes of field transformation intersect in ways that are both observable and consequential.

This puzzle is, at its foundation, a communication problem. Transparency is accomplished communicatively, through ongoing choices about what to say, show, and archive for audiences (Stohl et al., 2016). Adaptation in these teams is likewise enacted

through observable talk, as assessment, planning, and reflection unfold as broadcast interaction before live audiences (Cooren et al., 2011). And the institutional consequences of these practices depend on communication as well, since audiences interpret, circulate, and contest what teams make visible across platforms. Understanding content teams therefore requires the analytical resources of organizational communication, which treat communication as constitutive of organizing itself (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

Understanding this phenomenon requires examining several interconnected concepts (adaptation, institutional work, transparency, and hybridity) at multiple levels (micro, macro). At the team level, we must understand *adaptation processes* through which content teams adjust strategies and roles under continuous observation. At the institutional level, we must examine *institutional work* through which visible practices create, maintain, or disrupt field-level norms. Bridging these levels requires attention to *transparency* enabled by digital platforms, which makes team processes visible and therefore potentially institutionally consequential, and to *organizational hybridity*, as content teams navigate competing institutional logics from competitive, entertainment, and community domains. These dimensions operate across multiple analytical levels, from micro-level team interactions to macro-level field structures, connected through mechanisms that this dissertation explicates as modalities in the structuration sense (Giddens, 1984). The following subsections develop each dimension of this theoretical challenge.

2. Team Adaptation Under Radical Transparency

The puzzle begins at the micro level with fundamental questions about team adaptation. Classical models of team adaptation, articulated by Burke et al. (2006) and refined by subsequent research (Maynard et al., 2015; Rosen et al., 2011), depict adaptation

as an iterative process of situation assessment, plan formulation, execution, and reflection. Central to these frameworks, often implicitly, is the assumption that effective adaptation depends on bounded team spaces in which members can engage in candid dialogue, surface failures, and revise strategies without fear of public embarrassment or external interference. Edmondson's (1999) foundational work on psychological safety advances a closely related premise. Team learning requires environments in which interpersonal risk-taking feels safe. More recent research reinforces that psychological safety functions as an "engine" for learning and adaptation, while also emphasizing that such safety is a perishable resource that must be continually produced through team practices such as connecting, clarifying, supporting, and performing (Edmondson, 2012, 2018; Jin & Peng, 2024). Research on virtual and distributed teams similarly demonstrates that a psychologically safe communication climate supports innovation under conditions of geographic dispersion and technological mediation (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006), conditions that characterize much of content teams' platform-based work.

Content teams complicate these assumptions by conducting much of their coordination, reflection, and learning in full public view. Rather than reserving adaptation for protected internal spaces, these teams routinely engage in post-match reviews, coaching discussions, and emotional processing on livestreams accessible to large audiences. For example, when Los Ratones reviewed a disappointing loss during a live-streamed coaching session in summer 2025, viewers observed coach Caedrel dissect tactical errors while players expressed frustration, uncertainty, and disagreement. Tens of thousands of spectators watched in real time as the team worked through the loss. The interaction did not end with the stream. The archived recording remains persistently accessible, available for competitors

to study, for fans to revisit, and for community members to clip, circulate, and reinterpret in subsequent discussions.

Audience responses in such moments are intense and immediate, but they are not primarily oriented toward supporting team learning. Chat reactions include jokes, memes, hindsight critique, exaggerated blame, selective praise, and occasional strategic commentary of uneven quality. Rather than functioning as a coherent source of actionable insight, audience activity amplifies visibility, affect, and reputational stakes. Errors become public events, recorded, replayed, and recontextualized across platforms. Tensions within the team may be highlighted, dramatized, or flattened into simplified narratives. From the team's perspective, this creates an additional layer of complexity. Adaptation unfolds in an environment saturated with reaction, much of which teams must actively ignore, bracket, or strategically manage rather than integrate.

Within this configuration, adaptation becomes simultaneously an organizational process and a public performance. Coaching discussions, scrimmage reviews, and interpersonal disagreements are no longer insulated from external interpretation. They unfold alongside a constantly scrolling stream of audience commentary that teams may glimpse peripherally but cannot fully control. This does not mean that audience responses directly improve adaptation. Instead, they reshape the conditions under which adaptation occurs by introducing persistent visibility, affective pressure, and heightened concern for how actions will be perceived, clipped, or remembered. Teams must adapt to competitive uncertainty while also adapting to the fact that their adaptive practices themselves are on display.

This dynamic generates theoretical tensions that existing adaptation models do not fully resolve. Can teams sustain the trust and candor required for learning when their interactions are continuously observable? Can they experiment with new strategies when failure carries competitive consequences and reputational exposure amplified by digital circulation? Traditional adaptation frameworks presuppose internal feedback loops in which teams diagnose problems, formulate responses, and learn from outcomes in relatively controlled settings (Burke et al., 2006; Ilgen et al., 2005). Content teams operate with feedback environments that extend beyond organizational boundaries, encompassing spectators, commentators, and even competitors who observe the same streams. Audience reactions do not function as reliable informational inputs so much as an interpretive and affective environment that teams must navigate alongside their own sensemaking.

Recent research emphasizes that adaptation is inherently multilevel (Christian et al., 2017), shaped by both internal team processes and external contexts (Christian et al., 2017; Rico et al., 2020). Yet even these accounts typically conceptualize the external environment as a source of performance pressure or task change. None of these accounts anticipates a persistent audience that observes, evaluates, and reacts to team processes as they unfold, and content teams expose this gap. Their adaptive cycles respond to competitive dynamics and to visibility itself. Transparency introduces a novel ecological condition in which adaptation must simultaneously support effective performance and manage public interpretation. Adaptation, on this view, becomes a communicative process through which learning, coordination, and identity are enacted under conditions of continuous observability (Cooren et al., 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

These dynamics raise foundational questions about how adaptation unfolds when teams operate without the protective boundaries assumed by classical models. Understanding content teams requires examining how strategies, roles, and coordination practices evolve in transparent environments, how continuous visibility reshapes the adaptation cycle itself, and how teams navigate the tension between improving competitive performance and sustaining content value under public scrutiny.

3. Institutional Work in Emerging Fields

Beyond their internal dynamics, content teams also operate as potential agents of institutional change within the esports field. Yet existing research on institutional work provides limited guidance for understanding how such organizations might influence field-level norms and expectations. Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) influential framework conceptualizes institutional work as purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions. This framework emerged primarily from studies of established organizations embedded within relatively mature institutional fields, where actors possess recognized authority and engage institutions through formal mechanisms such as regulation, professional associations, or governance structures. Content teams operate under markedly different conditions. They are experimental organizations whose own legitimacy remains unsettled, and having no formal authority to draw on, they exert influence through the cumulative visibility of their practices as these are observed, interpreted, and potentially adopted by others in the field.

When Los Ratones qualified for the European Masters tournament in early 2025 despite operating with near-total transparency, this outcome offered a visible counterexample to the prevailing assumption that strategic secrecy is a prerequisite for

competitive viability. Tournament broadcasts showed Los Ratones players referencing strategies that had been developed openly on stream, with commentators noting that opponents had almost certainly seen these approaches yet struggled to counter them. This competitive success circulated widely through esports media coverage and community discussion, recasting transparency as a potentially legitimate mode of organizing. Instead of issuing explicit claims about best practice, Los Ratones' public performance functioned as a demonstration through which alternative norms could be imagined and debated. Near Airport and The Ruddy Sack display analogous dynamics through different organizational trajectories, a pattern examined systematically in Chapter 7.

Several features of content teams' institutional influence remain under-theorized in existing scholarship. First, research on institutional work has largely focused on deliberate, strategic efforts to shape institutions through activities such as lobbying, standard-setting, or professional training (Hampel et al., 2017; Lawrence et al., 2011). Content teams' influence, by contrast, is often indirect and incremental. It emerges through the repeated public enactment of practices that others observe, interpret, and selectively adopt, with no explicit institutional project behind it. Second, much institutional work research assumes relatively mature fields with stable structures, whereas esports remains an emerging field characterized by contested legitimacy and fluid institutional arrangements (Maguire et al., 2004). In such contexts, organizational practices may do more to shape institutions than to be constrained by them (Ocasio et al., 2015).

Research on institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields suggests that actors often legitimate novel organizational forms by drawing on logics external to the field and by seeking validation from audiences or affiliated domains in place of established authorities

(Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Content teams fit this pattern. They integrate entertainment logics alongside competitive logics in their organizing practices, while relying heavily on community-based legitimacy mechanisms to evaluate those practices.

Within esports, multiple communities coexist and overlap. Professional player communities maintain norms around practice discipline, competitive integrity, and strategic competence. Viewer and fan communities emphasize accessibility, authenticity, and affective engagement. Influencer communities bridge competitive and entertainment spaces, valuing consistency, visibility, and personal branding. Content teams must navigate these intersecting evaluative frameworks simultaneously. Actions that align with competitive norms may be criticized by fans as opaque or disengaged, while practices that satisfy audience expectations for transparency or personality may be viewed by professional peers as distractions from performance. Violations in one domain can undermine legitimacy in others, illustrating how community-based evaluation mediates the institutional consequences of visible practice.

Content teams, in sum, engage in institutional work primarily through the public enactment of adaptation, without formal authority or deliberate institutional intervention. In an emerging field where institutional boundaries remain unsettled, visible team practices can function simultaneously as performance solutions and normative demonstrations. As these practices are observed, debated, and compared across distributed communities, they contribute to the creation, maintenance, or disruption of expectations about acceptable transparency, legitimate competition, and appropriate organizational form in esports. Understanding institutional change in this context therefore requires attention to how public

adaptation processes become institutionally consequential through visibility, imitation, and community-based evaluation as much as through governance.

4. The Challenge of Hybridity and Multiple Logics

Understanding how content teams bridge team-level adaptation and institutional-level influence requires attention to organizational hybridity. These organizations do not simply add content production to otherwise traditional competitive structures as a supplementary activity. Rather, they operate as hybrid organizations in which multiple institutional logics simultaneously shape core operations, decision-making processes, and organizational identity. Research on hybrid organizations, particularly influential frameworks developed by Battilana and Lee (2014) and Besharov and Smith (2014), has primarily examined organizations that combine social and commercial logics, such as social enterprises, benefit corporations, and nonprofit organizations with earned income strategies (Battilana et al., 2017). While this literature offers important insights into how organizations manage competing demands, the configuration of hybridity observed among content teams differs in both form and consequence.

Content teams operate at the intersection of the competitive and entertainment logics introduced above, while relying on community-based legitimacy mechanisms to evaluate and sustain those practices. What matters for hybrid organizing is less what each logic values than how each one organizes work. *Competitive logic* treats strategic control and informational asymmetry as sources of advantage and runs on tournament schedules, seasonal cycles, and long-term trajectories of skill development and team cohesion. *Entertainment logic* demands transparency, accessibility, and immediacy, and runs on

platform rhythms and content production schedules. These two logics structure what content teams do: how they train, prepare, allocate resources, and present themselves publicly.

Community logic operates differently. In canonical institutional logics theory, it functions as a source of legitimacy and authority distinct from formal hierarchy and market exchange (Thornton et al., 2012). More recent scholarship on open source and commons-based peer production demonstrates that community logic can, in some settings, function as a distinct mode of production that organizes task allocation and quality control through peer-based coordination (Benkler, 2006; Lee & Cole, 2003; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). Content teams occupy a different configuration. In esports, community participation does not extend to the direct organization of competitive labor or strategic decision-making. Authority over training, strategy, and execution remains with players and coaches. However, community logic is nevertheless constitutive in its effects. It structures how organizational actions are interpreted, evaluated, sanctioned, and economically sustained through visibility, engagement, and normative judgment.

This configuration produces a form of hybridity in which production is organized through competitive and entertainment logics, while legitimacy is mediated through community-based evaluation. Content teams must therefore navigate tensions between winning and entertaining alongside the ongoing scrutiny of audiences whose reactions shape reputational standing, economic viability, and perceived authenticity. Community logic does not subsume competitive or entertainment logics. Instead, it conditions their viability by influencing which hybrid arrangements are accepted, celebrated, or criticized over time.

These tensions surface in routine organizational decisions about what aspects of competitive preparation to make visible and how that visibility is managed over time. As

competitive scrutiny of publicly available footage increases, teams face pressure to protect strategic detail, while entertainment and community expectations continue to favor openness and access. Rather than resolving these tensions once, teams manage them through ongoing recalibration of what is shown, when, and to whom. The empirical chapters examine how the three teams navigated these recalibrations in practice.

Across everyday organizational practices, hybrid tensions recur and require continual negotiation. Practice schedules must balance optimal training conditions with platform rhythms and audience availability. Personnel decisions must account for on-stream presence, narrative appeal, and content production capacity as well as competitive skill and strategic fit. Strategic innovations must be weighed against both their competitive value and the risks associated with revealing them publicly. Resource allocation must support both performance-oriented investments, such as coaching and training infrastructure, and media-oriented investments, such as streaming technology and editing. Even organizational identity becomes contested terrain, as content teams must present themselves simultaneously as serious competitors, engaging entertainers, and authentic community participants.

Hybridity in this context is not a temporary imbalance or a transitional state. It is a durable organizing condition that shapes how decisions are made, justified, and evaluated over time. Competitive, entertainment, and community logics rarely align fully, and no single logic provides a stable hierarchy for resolving conflict. As a result, content teams must develop organizational practices, boundary-setting strategies, and communicative framings that allow them to navigate incompatible demands while remaining intelligible and legitimate across domains.

This ongoing navigation of hybridity also enables content teams to exert influence beyond organizational boundaries. By visibly managing the tensions among competitive performance, entertainment production, and community-based legitimacy, teams enact models of organizing that others in the field can observe, compare, and replicate. In an emerging institutional environment where expectations remain unsettled, the ways in which organizations sustain and recalibrate hybrid arrangements become institutionally consequential. Hybrid navigation thus is an internal organizational challenge and, at the same time, a mechanism through which content teams contribute to the shaping of field-level norms concerning transparency, legitimacy, and appropriate forms of competitive organization.

5. Transparency and Platform-Mediated Organizing

Underlying the challenges faced by content teams is the fundamentally digital and platform mediated nature of their organizing. Research on digital organizing has made substantial progress in recent years, examining how platform affordances shape organizational communication, how virtual teams coordinate across distance and time, and how digital technologies enable novel organizational forms (Gibbs et al., 2023; Nambisan et al., 2019; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). However, this body of work has devoted less attention to how sustained digital visibility alters the relationship between everyday organizational practices and institutional change, particularly in contexts where organizations systematically open their internal processes to public view.

Digital organizing research conceptualizes communication technologies in terms of affordances, or the action possibilities they enable for organizational actors (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). For content teams, streaming platforms provide four key affordances

(described and applied in more detail in Chapter 2). *Visibility* enables geographically dispersed audiences to observe organizational practices in real time, transforming traditionally private activities like training and strategic discussion into publicly observable performances. *Persistence* ensures these performances remain accessible through archived streams and recorded videos, creating durable records reviewable long after initial events. *Editability* allows teams to refine how practices are presented through camera positioning, overlays, and post-production choices. *Association* enables connections between content, creating networks that link practices to broader field-level conversations. Visibility and persistence are especially consequential because they constitute the foundational conditions through which radical transparency becomes possible.

Platform affordances, such as visibility, are technical capabilities that define what streaming technology makes possible. Transparency, by contrast, is an organizational practice that describes how teams deliberately leverage these capabilities to make internal operations publicly accessible. Following Albu and Flyverbom's (2016) performativity approach, transparency does not merely reveal pre-existing organizational realities; it actively reshapes practices, roles, and behavioral norms through the act of making work visible. Content teams enact transparency through systematic decisions about streaming, recording, and archiving their competitive preparation, thereby transforming technological affordances into consequential organizational practice.

Existing research on digital affordances has focused primarily on their intra-organizational effects, such as how visibility influences workplace relationships or how persistent communication supports organizational memory (Rice et al., 2017). Less attention has been paid to how these affordances connect micro-level organizational practices to field-

level sensemaking by making them available for ongoing interpretation, comparison, and adoption. This dissertation addresses that gap by examining content teams as sites where affordance-enabled transparency operates simultaneously at team and institutional levels.

Emerging research on transparency in digital environments begins to address these dynamics, though with mixed conclusions. Work on the "transparency paradox" suggests that visibility does not automatically produce trust or effectiveness and instead requires selective activation and careful governance (Deloitte Insights, 2024). Related research demonstrates that digital platforms enable unprecedented levels of observational control over work, reshaping how labor is performed and evaluated (Kellogg et al., 2020). Research on transparency in organizational contexts further demonstrates that visibility alters behavior in consequential ways. Bernstein's (2012, 2017) studies of manufacturing settings show that transparency can reduce productive communication as workers adapt their behavior for observability, while Flyverbom's (2016, 2019) work examines how organizations strategically manage what becomes visible and to whom. Yet this literature largely treats transparency either as a hazard to be contained or, in an older and still influential tradition that frames openness as an unqualified organizational good (Eisenberg, 1984; Gibbs et al., 2013), as a value to be maximized; neither position treats it as the foundation of an organizational model. Content teams invert this assumption by adopting systematic transparency as a core organizing strategy, even as they continue to make deliberate choices about how that transparency is enacted, a distinction developed further in Chapters 2 and 4.

These perspectives clarify how digital affordances enable visibility while leaving unresolved how sustained transparency makes organizational adaptation institutionally consequential. In content teams, transparency functions as a mechanism linking team level

adaptation to institutional level influence. Visibility lays adaptive practices open to other organizations, analysts, and stakeholders, enabling comparison, imitation, or differentiation. Persistence extends these effects by creating durable records that can be mobilized in debates about appropriate organizational conduct, competitive legitimacy, and acceptable levels of openness. The inclusion of audience reactions within these records does not primarily provide reliable strategic input, but it does shape how practices are evaluated, contested, and remembered. Public adaptation also introduces accountability pressures that constrain certain forms of experimentation while legitimating others, influencing which adaptive responses are perceived as viable within the field. Chapter 2 returns to the discussion of the implications of affordances for esports content teams.

Through these mechanisms, adaptation becomes a recursive process in which teams draw upon existing institutional expectations while simultaneously reshaping them through visible practice. Platform affordances do not merely mediate organizational communication. They structure the conditions under which adaptation becomes institutionally consequential. By making internal processes persistently observable, content teams transform adaptation from a bounded organizational activity into a publicly interpreted phenomenon, contributing to ongoing cycles of institutional reproduction and change.

6. Toward an Integrated Framework

The central theoretical challenge of this dissertation is to develop a framework capable of explaining how multiple organizational processes and competitive logics intersect under conditions of sustained transparency, using the context of esports content teams. Content teams operate at the intersection of *team-level adaptation*, *institutional work* in an emerging and fragmented field, *organizational hybridity involving competing competitive,*

entertainment, and community logics, and *organizational transparency* as a core organizing principle that keeps internal processes publicly accessible. Existing organizational theories tend to address these dimensions separately. Team adaptation theory focuses on micro-level coordination and learning (Burke et al., 2006; Maynard et al., 2015). Institutional work theory examines how actors shape field-level norms and practices (Hampel et al., 2017; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Research on hybrid organizing explains how organizations manage multiple institutional logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014). Digital organizing scholarship analyzes how transparency is enacted through platform affordances that shape communication, visibility, and coordination (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). No existing framework integrates these perspectives to explain how they interconnect when organizations adopt transparency as a core organizing principle. The contribution of this dissertation is accordingly bounded: it explains how transparency and hybridity connect team-level adaptation with field-level institutional work in an emerging field, without claiming a general theory of digital organizing.

Addressing this gap requires treating transparency as a strategic and institutional orientation that reshapes how organizational practices operate across levels. For content teams, transparency transforms adaptation from a largely internal process into one that unfolds in relation to external audiences and field-level expectations. By intentionally opening training, coordination, and reflection to public view, teams expose adaptive practices to ongoing interpretation, comparison, and evaluation beyond organizational boundaries. Transparency thereby creates pathways through which micro-level organizational practices can acquire institutional relevance without relying on formal governance mechanisms.

Such a framework must also account for organizational hybridity as an ongoing organizing condition, not a stable structural form (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Content teams do not resolve tensions between competitive, entertainment, and community logics; instead, they continually navigate these competing demands through everyday organizational decisions. Transparency intensifies this navigation by making such decisions publicly observable and therefore subject to multiple evaluative standards. Hybrid organizing thus shapes how teams adapt internally and how those adaptations are justified, legitimated, and contested within the broader field.

From a structuration perspective (Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005), content teams draw upon existing institutional expectations regarding competition, entertainment, and appropriate openness as they adapt their practices. At the same time, by enacting transparency in routine organizational activity, they contribute to the reproduction or transformation of those expectations. Institutional pressures influence when and how teams adapt, while transparent adaptation practices feed back into field-level understandings of what is legitimate, effective, or appropriate. Transparency therefore enables a recursive process in which organizational action both reflects and reshapes institutional structures.

Within this process, audiences play an important but bounded role. They are not co-producers of organizational strategy or coordinators of adaptive work. Rather, they function as interpretive and evaluative actors whose responses shape the conditions under which transparent practices gain legitimacy or encounter resistance. Through attention, commentary, and engagement, audiences influence how transparent adaptations are received and remembered, without directly directing organizational action. Audience interpretations

thus mediate the recursive relationship between organizational practice and institutional expectation.

Chapter 4 develops this framework in full. In brief, the dissertation draws on structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as an organizing logic that distinguishes interaction, where team adaptation unfolds, from structure, where institutional work operates, and identifies transparency and hybridity as the modalities connecting the two. Transparency functions as an action-structuring modality that shapes how practices are enacted under conditions of visibility, and hybridity functions as a logics-navigating modality that shapes how teams draw on competitive, entertainment, and community logics in the course of adaptation. These concepts generate the research questions that follow.

E. Research Questions

This dissertation investigates esports content teams through one primary research question with three complementary sub-questions that examine both team-level and field-level dynamics. The overarching question asks: *RQ: How do content teams simultaneously manage adaptation processes and engage in institutional work through transparent, hybrid organizing practices?* This question captures the central puzzle: understanding what enables teams to learn and coordinate under public scrutiny with active audience participation, and how those very practices shape what counts as legitimate organizing in esports. Three sub-questions address different aspects of this multilevel phenomenon, each building directly from the theoretical challenges articulated in the preceding sections.

1. RQ1: Team Adaptation Under Transparency

RQ1: a) How do content teams adapt their strategies, roles, and processes in transparent environments; b) How does transparency reshape the team adaptation cycle as it unfolds under multiple evaluative demands?

This question treats team adaptation as a process that unfolds under multiple evaluative demands at once. Content teams prepare, perform, and reflect before observers who apply different criteria to the same practices. Competitive peers and analysts judge the quality of preparation and the soundness of strategy, viewers judge entertainment value, and community members judge openness, authenticity, and consistency with the team's stated identity. The dissertation does not measure or analyze performance in any of these domains. It examines how teams orient to these plural criteria as they adapt: how the criteria surface in team talk and visible practice, and how their competing demands shape decisions about what to show, when, and to whom.

Transparency connects these evaluative regimes by making the same adaptive practices visible to all simultaneously. Because training, experimentation, and reflection occur in public view, audiences assess adaptation against competitive, entertainment, and community criteria at once, and these criteria do not align automatically. Competitive rigor can generate audience respect, while content-oriented choices may compromise preparation. Conversely, highly optimized training environments may alienate audiences by limiting access. Adaptation under transparency thus involves ongoing negotiation among competing evaluative criteria, with no single performance goal to optimize.

This configuration challenges core assumptions in team adaptation theory. Classic models emphasize bounded and private spaces as conditions for experimentation, error

acknowledgment, and learning (Burke et al., 2006; Edmondson, 1999). Content teams, by contrast, adapt under sustained public visibility with active audience participation. While psychological safety likely shapes how teams manage interpersonal risk under these conditions (Edmondson, 1999), this dissertation does not assess psychological safety directly. It draws on psychological safety theory to contextualize the adaptation paradox that transparent teams face, namely that behaviors typically protected by privacy are enacted under observation. Chapter 2 reviews this literature to establish the theoretical backdrop for interpreting observed practices. Chapter 6 presents the findings addressing this question.

RQ1 examines this phenomenon along two analytically connected dimensions. First, RQ1a investigates how content teams reconfigure strategies, roles, and processes when adaptation unfolds on stream with real-time audience commentary. This includes how teams manage the visibility of experimentation, error correction, and interpersonal negotiation under observation. Second, RQ1b examines how transparency reshapes the adaptation cycle itself by altering how situations are assessed, plans are formulated, and learning is conducted through changes in what information is available, to whom, and when. These dimensions are interdependent. Changes to the adaptation cycle shape how strategies, roles, and processes are reconfigured, while those reconfigurations in turn influence how each phase of the cycle operates under transparency. The question directs attention to how teams manage the tension between competitive integrity and content visibility as adaptation unfolds under transparency.

2. RQ2: Institutional Work Through Visible Practices

> *RQ2: How do public adaptation processes function as institutional work by creating, maintaining, or disrupting norms and practices in esports?*

RQ2 shifts attention from team-level adaptation to institutional-level influence, focusing on how transparent organizational practices acquire institutional significance beyond their immediate organizational context. It addresses a critical gap in institutional work scholarship, which has primarily examined how organizations shape institutions through formal governance mechanisms, professional associations, and regulatory engagement in relatively mature fields (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In emerging fields, however, actors often lack stable institutional positions or recognized authority and must instead legitimate novel organizational forms through alternative pathways, including alignment with external logics and validation by audiences or affiliated domains (Battilana et al., 2009; David et al., 2013; Hardy & Maguire, 2008).

Content teams give this dynamic concrete form. Rather than relying primarily on tournament success or formal recognition from governing bodies, they draw on entertainment and community logics external to traditional competitive sport. They seek legitimacy through sustained public visibility and ongoing engagement with audiences who evaluate organizational practices as they unfold. Transparency thus transforms audiences from passive observers into evaluative publics whose reactions can affirm, contest, or reshape the meaning of organizational action. Through this process, adaptation practices that are made visible, discussed, and compared across teams become potential sites of institutional work.

RQ2 directs attention to how team-level practices scale into field-level norms and expectations, with particular emphasis on audiences functioning as mediators of institutional influence. When a content team normalizes streamed practice sessions, does that practice create new expectations for organizational transparency that other teams encounter and

respond to under audience pressure? When teams narrate strategic decision-making for viewers, do those narratives maintain standards for accessibility and openness that sustain community-based legitimacy? Conversely, when organizations resist certain forms of transparency, do those choices maintain established boundaries between internal coordination and public performance, or do they disrupt those boundaries by attracting critique and accusations of secrecy or inauthenticity?

Framed in this way, RQ2 conceptualizes content teams' transparent practices as engaging in multiple forms of institutional work simultaneously. Public adaptation may contribute to institutional creation by introducing new norms around visibility and audience access. It may support institutional maintenance by stabilizing shared expectations about competitive integrity, acceptable transparency, or community engagement. It may also enable institutional disruption by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about strategic secrecy, professional distance, or the separation between competitive preparation and public performance. Whether these practices acquire field-level significance depends less on organizational intent than on how audiences interpret, circulate, and respond to them.

This question foregrounds the particular role that audiences and visibility play in making institutional work possible for organizations without formal authority. Audience evaluation operates as a source of legitimacy, validating, contesting, or recalibrating organizational practices in real time. The visibility of adaptation lets practices circulate across organizational boundaries, where comparison and imitation determine whether emerging norms diffuse or dissipate. And audiences carry institutional expectations across platforms, discussing, advocating for, and enforcing standards in ways that amplify organizational influence. Chapter 3 develops the theoretical grounding for these dynamics,

and the empirical chapters examine which mechanisms actually connect visible practice to field-level consequence. Chapter 7 presents the findings addressing this question.

Framed this way, RQ2 treats institutional work as an emergent outcome of visible organizing, more than as deliberate intervention by powerful actors, in a fragmented and weakly institutionalized field. Content teams may not seek to reshape esports institutions explicitly, yet their transparent navigation of adaptation leaves organizational possibilities observable, comparable, and contestable. In fields such as esports, where formal governance remains unsettled and legitimacy criteria are still in flux, such visible practices can exert disproportionate influence on how norms, expectations, and boundaries evolve over time.

3. RQ3: Recursive Dynamics Between Levels

> *RQ3: a) How do institutional pressures from competing logics shape adaptation triggers and processes in hybrid teams; and b) How do transparent team adaptation practices reshape institutional norms and relationships among those logics?*

The first two research questions establish team-level adaptation processes (RQ1) and field-level institutional influence (RQ2) as analytically distinct phenomena. RQ3 integrates these levels by examining their recursive constitution, the process through which team practices and institutional structures mutually shape one another over time. This integration addresses a persistent challenge in organizational research: explaining how micro-level action produces macro-level structures while those same structures simultaneously constrain and enable micro-level action (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Content teams provide a particularly tractable context for examining these dynamics because sustained transparency brings recursive processes into view in ways that are typically inaccessible to researchers.

RQ3 approaches recursivity along two analytically connected directions, referring to structuration concepts, corresponding to its two components. In the first direction (structure → interaction) (RQ3a), institutional pressures shape adaptation by functioning as triggers and constraints that inform when teams adapt, what they adapt, and how adaptation unfolds. Competitive calendars establish temporal rhythms, platform conventions shape what forms of visibility are possible, sponsorship logics influence economic viability, and community expectations establish legitimacy criteria. Teams navigating competitive, entertainment, and community logics simultaneously encounter pressures that may align or conflict, requiring ongoing negotiation over which institutional demands to prioritize. These pressures shape the conditions under which adaptation is initiated, constrain available responses, and influence how teams justify their choices to multiple audiences.

In the other direction (interaction → structure) (RQ3b), transparent adaptation practices feed back to reshape institutional arrangements over time. When teams publicly enact adaptation, those practices become available for observation, comparison, and evaluation by distributed audiences. Through repetition and circulation, some practices may acquire normative status, shifting field-level expectations about what counts as legitimate organizing. Teams that successfully navigate competing logics while maintaining transparency may reconfigure the relationships among those logics, establishing new templates for how competitive performance, entertainment production, and community engagement can coexist. Visible practices may stabilize into field-level norms through validation and diffusion, or dissipate as failed experiments through critique and abandonment.

Central to this recursive process are transparency and hybridity as modalities that mediate between levels. Transparency functions as an action-structuring modality that makes recursivity observable, allowing teams to visibly draw on institutional rules, norms, and resources while simultaneously demonstrating alternatives or modifications to those templates. Adaptation thus both enacts existing structures and contributes to their evolution, consistent with structuration theory. Hybridity functions as a logics-navigating modality that shapes what gets enacted and transformed. Because teams operate under competing institutional logics, their visible navigation of these logics can reconfigure how they relate to one another and which logics become dominant in particular contexts. Together, these two modalities specify mechanisms through which interaction and structure recursively constitute one another in digitally mediated hybrid organizations. Chapter 4 develops the theoretical framework that formalizes these recursive dynamics, and Chapter 8 traces them empirically by integrating the team-level and field-level findings.

Audiences play an active role in sustaining these recursive dynamics. Rather than observing passively, audiences compare practices across teams, establish evaluative standards through collective interpretation, and validate or contest organizational choices in real time. They circulate practices through community discussions, effectively carrying institutional templates across organizational boundaries, and they enforce emerging norms through advocacy and pressure. RQ3a and RQ3b therefore treat recursivity as an empirically traceable process made visible through archived streams, chat logs, community discourse, and teams' responsive adjustments to audience feedback.

4. Integration of Research Questions

The three research questions work together as one integrated investigation. The first clarifies the micro-level processes through which teams accomplish learning and coordination under conditions that most theories assume would inhibit adaptation, with audiences actively participating in feedback loops. The second explains how these micro-level processes acquire institutional meaning through visibility, interpretation, replication, and audience amplification. The third binds the two by examining how institutional forces shape local practices and how local practices, once public and validated by audiences, contribute to institutional change through the modalities of transparency and hybridity.

Together, the three research questions provide the analytical architecture for the dissertation: they motivate the multilevel theoretical framework, organize the empirical design, and anchor the contributions to theories of adaptation, institutional work, and organizing in digitally visible environments where audiences function as active participants. The questions recognize that understanding content teams requires moving beyond dyadic relationships between teams and institutions to triadic relationships among teams, institutions, and audiences, with transparency and hybridity enabling complex patterns of influence across all three. The empirical chapters address these questions through systematic analysis of three content teams operating under different organizational conditions and competitive contexts, investigating how transparent adaptation unfolds in practice, through what mechanisms hybrid practices acquire institutional significance, and how audiences participate in both team-level and institutional-level processes.

F. Research Design Overview

To investigate these questions, this dissertation employs a comparative case study design (Yin, 2018) examining Los Ratones, Near Airport, and The Ruddy Sack, three content teams that represent different organizational trajectories, regions, and degrees of openness while sharing the defining characteristics of the form. Because these teams broadcast and archive substantial portions of their internal operations, the study uses an unobtrusive, qualitative design based entirely on publicly available materials, including archived livestreams and videos, community discussions, social media, and news coverage spanning the teams' founding and development periods. Analysis proceeds through theory-guided qualitative coding of adaptation processes and institutional work, followed by cross-case comparison to identify common mechanisms and contextual variation across the three teams. Chapter 5 documents the case selection rationale, profiles of the three teams, data sources and sampling procedures, coding and analytical procedures, ethical considerations for research in public digital spaces, and quality criteria in full.

G. Dissertation Roadmap

This dissertation proceeds in nine chapters. Chapter 2 reviews team adaptation theory, transparency research, and digital organizing scholarship to develop the interaction level of the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 reviews institutional work, hybrid organizing, and field-level change literatures to develop the structure level. Chapter 4 integrates these literatures into the theoretical framework, specifying how transparency and hybridity function as modalities connecting team adaptation with institutional work and presenting the integrated model that guides the analysis. Chapter 5 documents the research design, including case profiles, data sources, coding procedures, and quality criteria. Chapter 6

presents findings addressing RQ1a and RQ1b, examining how the three teams adapt across the four adaptation phases under conditions of radical transparency. Chapter 7 presents findings addressing RQ2, examining how transparent hybrid practices constitute institutional work through creating, maintaining, and disrupting forms. Chapter 8 addresses RQ3a and RQ3b by integrating the two sets of findings, specifying the recursive mechanisms that connect team-level adaptation with field-level institutional work and articulating how transparency and hybridity operate as co-equal modalities linking the levels. Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation by synthesizing the findings across all three research questions, drawing out theoretical contributions and practical implications, including what the study offers organizational communication scholarship more broadly, and acknowledging limitations and directions for future research.

H. Chapter Conclusion

Theoretically, this dissertation advances a multi-level understanding of organizational adaptation by explaining how transparency and hybridity operate as modalities that connect team processes with institutional structures. It extends team adaptation theory by demonstrating how communicative visibility both constrains and enables collective learning and coordination under public scrutiny, and it refines institutional work theory by showing how hybrid organizational forms engage multiple logics simultaneously to create new possibilities for field-level change. Through this integration, the study develops a structurationist framework that situates content teams within the recursive relationship between everyday organizing practices and broader institutional evolution. Along the way, it speaks directly to organizational communication scholarship on visibility management, platform-mediated organizing, and the communicative processes

through which organizations gain and sustain legitimacy (Flyverbom, 2019; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Stohl et al., 2016).

Practically, the study offers insights for organizations navigating digital visibility and audience participation. It shows how transparency, when strategically enacted, can become a mechanism for accountability, legitimacy, and creative engagement, and how hybridity can be leveraged to bridge institutional boundaries and sustain novel value systems. These lessons are especially relevant for esports organizations experimenting with content-driven models, but they also speak more broadly to any context where digital infrastructures make organizational work increasingly observable.

In conclusion, this dissertation positions content teams as an unusually clear window into how organizations adapt and innovate in an era of radical transparency and institutional hybridity. By examining how transparency and hybridity shape both micro-level adaptation and macro-level transformation, the study contributes to a growing conversation about what it means to organize, learn, and maintain legitimacy in digitally mediated environments.

II. Chapter Two: Team Adaptation in Transparent Environments

A. Chapter Introduction

This chapter develops the theoretical foundation for understanding how content teams adapt when their adaptive processes unfold under conditions of radical transparency. I begin with team adaptation theory (Burke et al., 2006; Maynard et al., 2015; Rico et al., 2020), which provides conceptual vocabulary for analyzing how teams adjust their strategies, processes, and coordination patterns in response to changing conditions. However, this literature generally rests on three assumptions that content teams routinely violate: that adaptive sensemaking is bounded primarily within the team, that team interactions are largely ephemeral, and that performance is evaluated primarily against task-specific criteria. Content teams instead adapt in public, leave persistent digital traces of their work, and are evaluated simultaneously by competitive, entertainment, and community audiences whose criteria sometimes align and sometimes conflict.

Throughout this dissertation, *radical* describes the relationship between content-team practices and the established norms of their field. Professional esports organizations typically treat practice sessions, scrim results, coaching interventions, and internal disagreements as protected competitive information, and the field's dominant organizational model keeps these processes behind organizational boundaries (Sabtan et al., 2022; Taylor, 2012, 2018). Content teams invert this norm. The processes the field protects most carefully are the very processes these teams make visible most consistently. The three assumptions identified above are disrupted as a direct consequence of this inversion. Sensemaking extends beyond the team boundary, interactions persist as public records, and evaluation multiplies across audiences because the field's norm of secrecy no longer filters what

outsiders can observe. The term radical therefore marks a qualitative departure from the field baseline; it does not imply that everything becomes visible.

As Chapter 4 will argue and the results chapters will further demonstrate, transparency in these organizations remains managed. Teams make continual choices about what to reveal and maintain protected spaces for work that requires privacy. These choices do not diminish the radical character of the practice because the relevant baseline is a field in which broadcasting internal operations contradicts settled expectations about what competitive organizations keep private. In scope, this transparency is comprehensive in the sense reviewed below, holding broad domains of organizational activity continuously visible to diverse audiences (Bernstein, 2017; Flyverbom, 2019). In relation to field norms, it is radical.

Locating the concept this way also positions it within research on organizational visibility management rather than against it. That literature establishes that organizations continually calibrate what is seen, by whom, and in what form, and that visibility and opacity function as paired strategic resources along a continuum, not as opposed states (Flyverbom, 2016, 2019; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Stohl et al., 2016). Organizational communication research complicates the picture from both directions: one tradition has treated openness as a value to strive for, an "ideology of openness" in which more communication is presumed better (Gibbs et al., 2013), while work on strategic ambiguity (Eisenberg, 1984) and communication privacy management (Petronio, 2002) shows that withholding, hedging, and selective disclosure are ordinary, often functional means of navigating interaction, and that the need to manage disclosure intensifies where it carries strategic cost. Radical transparency, as this dissertation uses the term, is therefore not a

claim that content teams abandon visibility management or attain transparency as an end state. It names a position on the visibility-management continuum, a practice of making as much of competitive preparation visible as circumstances allow, in a field where privacy is the assumed default for that activity, so that disclosure unremarkable in a field organized around openness amounts to a consequential departure here. The findings chapters accordingly show the teams adjusting this position over time, restricting selected sessions before major matches and moving sensitive formulation off stream, and Chapter 6 treats those adjustments as part of the practice, not as exceptions to it.

Extending adaptation theory to these conditions requires three moves: specifying what kind of organizational entity a content team resembles, analyzing how radical transparency affects adaptive practice, and identifying the technological conditions through which transparency operates. The chapter develops these arguments across four theoretical threads. The first describes *team adaptation theory*, including the four-phase model of situation assessment, plan formulation, execution, and learning, the distinction between immediate adaptation and longer term learning, and the role of team reflexivity in connecting them. The second introduces the *bona fide group perspective* (Putnam & Stohl, 1990; Stohl & Putnam, 1994) to conceptualize content teams as groups with permeable boundaries and constitutive contexts. The third examines *organizational visibility* as a performance condition, drawing on Flyverbom's (2016, 2019) visibility regime framework and related work on the transparency secrecy nexus (Ringel, 2019) to analyze how public observation reshapes each phase of adaptation. The fourth examines *digital platform affordances* of visibility, persistence, editability, and association (Treem & Leonardi, 2013) as the infrastructure through which transparency operates and through which its effects on

adaptive work are mediated. The chapter concludes by outlining the analytical orientations that emerge from integrating these frameworks.

B. Team Adaptation Theory Foundation

1. Team Adaptation

Team adaptation refers to a team's capacity to adjust its strategies, processes, and coordination patterns in response to changing task demands and environmental conditions (Burke et al., 2006). Decades of research demonstrate that adaptive teams outperform rigid ones across a range of outcomes, including decision quality, innovation, and task performance (Burke et al., 2006; LePine, 2003, 2005; Maynard et al., 2015). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that adaptability is a robust predictor of team effectiveness across domains, with effect sizes comparable to or exceeding those of many traditionally emphasized team competencies (Christian et al., 2017). As organizational environments become more volatile and boundaries more permeable, understanding how teams adapt has become a central theoretical concern.

Esports illustrates this volatility in acute form. Professional teams must continually respond to game patches that alter core mechanics, shift dominant strategies, and redefine what constitutes effective play (Gisbert-Pérez et al., 2024; this and subsequent game-specific terms are defined in the glossary in Appendix D). These changes often occur on compressed timescales, leaving teams with limited opportunity to experiment privately or stabilize routines. In this context, the speed and quality of adaptation frequently differentiate competitive success from failure. Systematic review of esports team research identifies team adaptation frameworks as among the most applicable for analyzing competitive gaming

teams, and notes that much existing esports team research undertheorizes the psychological and communicative mechanisms through which adaptation occurs (Raetze et al., 2025).

Research on esports team coordination provides additional context for understanding adaptation in these settings. Kahn and Williams (2016) demonstrate that transactive memory systems, or organized knowledge structures specifying who on the team knows what, strongly predict competitive performance in MOBA team contexts. Teams coordinating expertise across roles outperform teams with comparable individual skill but less developed collective cognitive structure. Musick et al. (2021) find that esports players describe effective team cognition as combining shared awareness of dynamic game states with mutual understanding of teammates' skills and reasoning patterns, and that this collective cognition develops through accumulated experience, deliberate preparation, and the social climate within which communication occurs. Ching et al. (2024) show through large-scale quasi-experimental analysis that prior competitive interaction between players improves subsequent coordination through the development of implicit mutual understanding, with stronger effects when explicit communication channels are constrained. Together, these findings establish that the cognitive and communicative foundations of adaptive coordination in esports are both empirically distinctive and theoretically tractable.

2. The Four-Phase Model of Team Adaptation

Burke et al. (2006) proposed a four-phase model of team adaptation that conceptualizes adaptation as a cyclical process consisting of *situation assessment, plan formulation, plan execution,* and *team learning*. Subsequent research has demonstrated the model's applicability across a range of domains, while also refining how these phases unfold in practice (Georganta et al., 2021a, 2021b; Rosen et al., 2011).

Situation Assessment involves recognizing when current approaches are no longer effective and understanding why change is necessary. Teams engage in this phase both during active task performance, as within-task assessment, and during transition periods between performance episodes, as between-task assessment. Effective assessment requires monitoring multiple information streams simultaneously, including changes in the task environment, performance feedback, and internal team functioning. This monitoring involves scanning for salient cues, or environmental signals that conditions have shifted, and interpreting those cues through collective sensemaking (Marks et al., 2001). High-performing teams develop strong cue recognition capabilities and detect anomalies quickly, allowing them to identify when adaptation is required. Research on aviation crews shows that teams that recognized situational changes early and redistributed workload appropriately avoided disasters, whereas teams that were slower to detect anomalies did not. These findings show that rapid, accurate situation assessment has direct consequences for outcomes (Waller, 1999).

A critical capability necessary for situation assessment is shared situational awareness. Team members form a mutual understanding of the task environment that enables coordinated responses with minimal explicit communication. In esports contexts, teams assess situations continuously by tracking game state (e.g., map vision control through wards, spawn times for contested neutral objectives), opponent patterns (e.g., the opposing jungler's pathing through neutral territory, roaming habits), and their own performance metrics (e.g., creep score per minute and kill participation, measures of resource efficiency and fight involvement). A team might recognize during a match that its prepared strategy is failing against an unexpected opponent approach, which triggers immediate reassessment.

This recognition may occur through explicit communication or through distributed perception in which multiple team members notice anomalies and adjust their own behaviors while trusting others to do the same.

Plan Formulation translates assessed situations into concrete action plans. Teams develop new strategies, adjust existing approaches, or select from repertoires of prepared responses. The formulation phase ranges from rapid tactical adjustments executed in seconds to comprehensive strategic overhauls developed over extended periods. Effective formulation requires both individual expertise and collective coordination (DeChurch & Haas, 2008). Members share assessments, propose alternatives, evaluate options together, and commit to chosen approaches. This collective work includes setting goals, identifying required resources, anticipating contingencies, and establishing clear role assignments for implementation.

Teams with well-established communication patterns and shared mental models formulate plans more efficiently than teams that require extensive deliberation for every adjustment (Mathieu et al., 2000). Contemporary research on agile teams demonstrates that the agile way of working positively relates to team adaptive performance, with this relationship partly mediated through team goal specificity (Steegh et al., 2025). This suggests that formulation processes that enable teams to set and refine specific goals support more effective adaptation. In esports, plan formulation occurs at multiple timescales. During matches, teams make split-second decisions about positioning, engagement timing, and resource allocation. Between matches, they develop macro strategies that account for opponent tendencies, shifts in the game meta, the prevailing set of dominant strategies under the current patch, and their own evolving capabilities.

Plan Execution implements formulated plans through coordinated action. This phase demands precise role performance, real-time adjustments as conditions evolve, and ongoing monitoring of how well the plan addresses the triggering problem. Execution quality depends on individual skill, collective coordination, and the capacity to detect when implementation deviates from expectations (Marks et al., 2001). Teams that execute adaptively maintain awareness of both their plan and the evolving situation, making micro-adjustments that keep implementation aligned with goals even as conditions shift. Poor execution can undermine even well-formulated plans, while skilled execution can compensate for imperfect formulation by adapting the plan during implementation.

In high-pressure environments, execution often requires what researchers call implicit coordination, where team members adjust their behaviors based on shared understanding rather than explicit direction (Rico et al., 2008). This capability develops through repeated experience working together and depends on trust that teammates will fulfill their responsibilities. Hassell and Cotton (2017) demonstrate in video-mediated team settings that audience awareness and self-monitoring under visible conditions increase cognitive load in ways that degrade performance on coordination-intensive tasks, suggesting that the additional attentional demands created by public transparency affect execution quality independently of task difficulty. In esports matches, execution involves simultaneous individual performance and collective choreography. Players must execute mechanical skills while coordinating positioning, timing engagements, and managing resources in real time. A plan to pressure an opponent's weak side requires each player to execute their role while responding to how opponents react and how teammates position themselves.

Team Learning involves reflection on what occurred, why it occurred, and what should change going forward. This phase transforms immediate adaptive responses into durable capability improvements. Learning requires examining what occurred, why it occurred, and what should change, converting immediate adaptive responses into generalizable insights applicable to future challenges (Edmondson, 1999, 2002). Teams that engage in systematic reflection and after-action reviews develop stronger adaptive capabilities over time (Tannenbaum & Cerasoli, 2013). The learning phase depends on conditions that enable candid examination of errors and genuine critique of performance. Research on virtual and computer-mediated teams shows that a psychologically safe communication climate, understood as a shared team-level perception that members can communicate openly without threat, shapes whether virtual team structures support innovation or lead to more guarded exchange. Communication climate thus functions as a more proximate influence on learning behavior than virtual structure itself (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). Kolbe et al. (2020) similarly show that the psychological conditions supporting learning in debrief settings are fragile and dynamic, requiring deliberate facilitation to establish and sustain.

3. Adaptation, Learning, and Reflexivity

Conceptual clarity requires treating immediate adaptation and longer-term learning as related but analytically distinct processes (Argote, 2011; Edmondson et al., 2007). *Immediate adaptation* refers to near-term adjustments addressing current challenges. *Learning* involves extracting generalizable insights applicable beyond immediate circumstances, including identifying causal patterns across multiple experiences and establishing new routines that persist after triggering events resolve (Argote & Miron-

Spektor, 2011). Teams can adapt successfully without learning, and can learn through structured review without immediate adaptation. The relationship between the two is consequential. Teams that adapt effectively but fail to extract lessons must repeatedly address similar problems, while teams that combine effective adaptation with systematic learning build cumulative adaptive capacity (Burke et al., 2006).

Team reflexivity connects immediate adaptation to longer-term learning (West, 1996). *Reflexivity* involves collectively reviewing team objectives, strategies, and processes, including what the team is trying to accomplish, how it is proceeding, and whether its approaches are effective (Schippers et al., 2014; Widmer et al., 2009). A recent meta-analysis confirms that reflexivity improves team performance and that leaders shape its development partly through the climate conditions within which reflection occurs (Leblanc et al., 2024). The quality of reflexive practice determines whether teams extract lessons that accumulate into improved adaptive capacity or conduct reviews that identify surface symptoms while leaving underlying patterns unaddressed.

4. Iterative Dynamics Across Phases

While Burke et al. (2006) initially presented the four phases as sequential stages, subsequent empirical work reveals a more dynamic pattern. Georganta et al. (2021a, 2021b) demonstrate that adaptation in practice is iterative, with phases overlapping and interacting instead of proceeding in strict sequence. Teams assess situations while executing plans, formulate new approaches during execution when original plans encounter unexpected obstacles, and learn from execution experiences that immediately feed back into ongoing assessment. Rosen et al. (2011) similarly emphasize the non-linear character of adaptation in dynamic settings, whereas high-performing teams often iterate flexibly, sometimes revisiting

earlier phases as needed. This iterative dynamic is especially pronounced in esports, where game states evolve continuously and the distinction between assessment and formulation can collapse during high-pressure moments that require near-simultaneous diagnosis and response. The model nonetheless provides analytically indispensable vocabulary. The four phases denote distinct forms of cognitive and communicative work, including assessment, planning, execution, and learning, that can be examined and compared across different organizational and transparency conditions.

C. Content Teams as Bona Fide Groups

Understanding how content teams adapt requires examining what kind of organizational entity they resemble. The four-phase model, like most team adaptation research, was developed for bounded teams whose membership is clearly defined, whose interactions are primarily internal, and whose performance context is typically treated as environmental background (Maynard et al., 2015). Content teams depart from this profile in several ways. Their membership varies: substitutes fill roster positions within competitive cycles, players depart and transfer between organizations, and individual members maintain creator channels and audiences that predate and extend beyond the team. Their practice sessions are often open to large audiences whose real-time commentary may become part of the communicative environment within which adaptation unfolds. Their strategic decisions are visible to competitors, and the potential use of that information can shape subsequent competitive conditions. Their organizational identity is partly constructed through ongoing interaction with audience communities whose expectations and responses can be consequential for the team's viability. Treating these actors as external variables, when they

are constitutive features of the team's organizational context, misrepresents what content teams are and how they function.

The *bona fide group* perspective, developed by Putnam and Stohl (1990) and elaborated in subsequent work (Stohl & Putnam, 1994, 2003), offers a useful concept for capturing these dynamics. The perspective has been extended to groups constituted through internet platforms. Lai (2014) showed that groups formed online and sustained through both online and in-person interaction exhibit the permeable boundaries and multiple memberships the framework describes, which supports its application to digitally embedded collectives such as content teams.

Bona fide groups are characterized by two features: permeable, fluid boundaries and substantial contextual interdependence. *Permeability* refers to the way membership boundaries shift with task demands, audience participation, and organizational circumstance. Putnam and Stohl (1990) observe that bona fide groups maintain relatively stable identities even as their boundaries "regularly cross, blend, and reshape" through interaction with their environment (Beck et al., 2016, p. 668). In content teams, this permeability can be observed in several ways. Participation is not limited to formal roster membership, as guest streamers, coaches, and collaborators may join sessions on a temporary or situational basis. Team activities are also routinely accessible to external audiences through livestreams and archived content, which allows observers to follow, interpret, and respond to team processes over time. Platform infrastructures such as Discord further create spaces where team members and segments of the community may interact across partially overlapping contexts, although the degree of interaction varies across teams. In addition, organizational boundaries are shaped by ongoing connections to sponsors, platform partners, and the broader

competitive field, all of which introduce external considerations into team practices without necessarily requiring direct participation in moment-to-moment interaction.

Contextual interdependence refers to the extent to which the group is embedded in, and partly shaped by, its broader environment. Its functioning cannot be understood apart from the platform affordances that structure transparency, the audience community whose investment may inform accountability, the competitive field that defines legitimate practice, and the economic conditions that constrain organizational choices. For content teams, parasocial investment by audiences represents one form of contextual interdependence with potential organizational implications. Kowert and Daniel (2021) describe livestreaming relationships as "one-and-a-half-sided" due to the potential for reciprocal interaction and strong community affiliation enabled by platform architecture. This quasi-relational investment can heighten audience expectations around transparency, accountability, and explanation, which may in turn shape how content teams communicate about their adaptive processes. Audience communities that follow a team over time may also accumulate interpretive context, which informs how ongoing activities are evaluated and discussed.

The bona fide group perspective also draws attention to the tensions associated with permeable boundaries and contextual interdependence. Stohl and Putnam (2003) identify recurring tensions between open and closed boundaries, stability and change, and individual and collective identities. In content teams, these tensions can be understood as features of the organizational form itself. Teams that foreground transparency as part of their identity may need to navigate boundaries between disclosure and protection, as well as between authentic self-presentation and strategic information management. Stohl and Cheney (2001) suggest that such tensions are often engaged through what they term a "paradox mindset," in

which competing demands are held and managed in tension rather than resolved through either-or choices.

D. Organizational Transparency as Performance Context

The bona fide group framework establishes what content teams resemble. Understanding how transparency shapes their adaptive work requires examining how organizational transparency may reshape the practice of adaptation as a condition that influences how organizational work is structured and performed. Flyverbom's (2016, 2019) analysis of visibility regimes provides a useful theoretical account for this process.

1. Visibility Regimes and Transparency as Practice

Flyverbom (2016) argues that organizational transparency operates through visibility regimes, defined as constructed arrangements that determine who sees what, when, and in what form. These regimes do not simply reveal underlying organizational reality. They configure what becomes visible, how that visibility is interpreted, and what behavioral consequences may follow. This perspective treats transparency as an ongoing practice of managing what is made visible and how it is framed for interpretation, never a binary state. Flyverbom's (2019) digital prism concept extends this argument by suggesting that digital platforms do not simply transmit organizational activity but shape it through platform features, algorithmic logics, and design assumptions. The condition this framework describes has also been given empirical traction. ter Hoeven et al. (2021) developed and validated a measure of organizational information visibility, showing that the degree to which organizational information is available to observers can be treated as a measurable organizational condition with consequences of its own.

Albu and Flyverbom (2019) describe organizational transparency as performative in the sense that making work visible can influence practices, roles, and behavioral expectations. A content team that streams its practice is therefore not only revealing activity but also organizing that activity in relation to anticipated observation. This suggests a reciprocal relationship in which transparency and organizational practice are mutually constitutive, as the conditions of visibility shape how work is performed while those practices in turn define what becomes visible.

2. How Observation Reshapes Adaptive Work

Research on behavioral change under observation provides a basis for examining how adaptive processes may be affected by transparency. The insight that observation shapes conduct long predates systematic study, appearing in doctrines of divine omniscience and in Bentham's (1787/2020) design for an institution whose occupants could be watched at any moment. Early organizational research gave the insight an empirical form: the Hawthorne studies suggested that awareness of being observed can influence behavior (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Zajonc's (1965) social facilitation theory offers a more sustained account: the presence of others can increase arousal, which tends to narrow attention toward dominant response pathways, facilitating well-learned, practiced behaviors while interfering with novel or complex cognitive work. The mechanism operates through attentional allocation, where the presence of others increases physiological arousal and focuses attention on familiar response patterns, which helps with tasks that benefit from narrowed execution but hinders tasks requiring flexible, exploratory thinking (Guerin, 1986). Hassell and Cotton (2017) extend these findings to video-mediated team settings, showing that self-view and awareness of being observed can increase cognitive load and self-monitoring in

ways that degrade performance on coordination-intensive tasks. In streaming contexts where team members are persistently visible to external audience, this self-monitoring load may be more sustained, redirecting attentional resources that might otherwise support adaptive coordination work.

These dynamics can be considered in relation to the four phases of team adaptation. During execution, when teams enact practiced strategies and coordination routines, observation may in some cases enhance performance through motivational effects and sharpened focus on mechanical skills (Zajonc, 1965). During situation assessment and plan formulation, which involve interpreting ambiguous information, generating multiple competing interpretations, and exploring alternatives, the same attentional narrowing may constrain flexibility (Guerin, 1986). During team learning, where candid reflection and critique are important, self-monitoring may make such practices more difficult to sustain. Observation can also heighten evaluation awareness, which may encourage more cautious behavior and reduce willingness to propose uncertain or unconventional ideas (Guerin, 1986).

These dynamics are intensified in live streaming contexts by the permanent record that archiving creates. The knowledge that any misstep can be clipped, shared, and discussed publicly creates pressure for continuous self-regulation that teams in private organizational settings do not face (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). This persistence can extend the temporal scope of accountability and may influence how team members manage their behavior.

Table 2.1 summarizes how these observational dynamics intersect with the four team adaptation phases. Consistent with the qualitative orientation of this study, the table presents sensitizing orientations for analysis, not predicted effects.

Table 2.1

The Four Adaptation Phases Under Conditions of Radical Transparency

Adaptation Phase	Core Communicative Work	Conditions Introduced by Transparency
Situation assessment	Monitoring cues and collectively interpreting shifting conditions (Marks et al., 2001)	Diagnosis unfolds before observers; attentional narrowing may constrain interpretive flexibility; audience commentary becomes part of the environment teams must bracket or manage
Plan formulation	Proposing, evaluating, and committing to strategies (DeChurch & Haas, 2008)	Deliberation may reveal tactical intent to competitors; exploratory reasoning is exposed before it is refined; the entertainment value of visible deliberation becomes a consideration
Plan execution	Coordinated enactment with real-time adjustment (Rico et al., 2008)	Observation may support well-practiced routines while self-monitoring load competes with coordination demands (Hassell & Cotton, 2017; Zajonc, 1965)
Team learning	Reflection, error analysis, and extraction of lessons (Edmondson, 1999)	Candid critique acquires a performative dimension; archived records support cumulative review while raising the

Adaptation Phase	Core Communicative Work	Conditions Introduced by Transparency
		interpersonal stakes of acknowledging error

3. The Transparency-Secrecy Nexus and Boundary Management

How content teams navigate these phase-specific tensions, maintaining the transparency their organizational model requires while protecting the conditions that support effective adaptive work, is the central question Ringel's (2019) analysis of the transparency-secrecy nexus addresses. Ringel (2019) rejects the view of transparency and secrecy as opposites on a single continuum, conceptualizing them instead as practices that organizations manage simultaneously through deliberate compartmentalization. Drawing on archival and interview data from a political party organization, Ringel (2019) shows that organizations often maintain frontstage activities that are visible to external audiences while preserving backstage spaces for deliberation, planning, and error assessment. These boundaries are not fixed but shift with competitive context, audience expectations, and the organizational activities involved.

For content teams, the transparency-secrecy nexus is a structural feature of the organizational form. Teams may make aspects of their adaptive work visible while limiting access to other elements that carry competitive sensitivity. Managing this boundary involves developing communicative practices that accommodate transparency while protecting operationally sensitive information from competitors who may also be watching. Bernstein (2012) demonstrated through manufacturing research that increased visibility can heighten

accountability, as observed workers adhere more closely to procedural expectations, but may also inhibit experimentation, since observed workers avoid novel approaches whose early execution appears uncertain. This accountability-experimentation tradeoff could be especially acute during between-task adaptation, where extended experimentation and revision must occur under conditions that may make early attempts visible before they are refined.

Heimstädt (2017) identifies a related phenomenon in which organizations symbolically enact transparency through visible practices while limiting substantive disclosure, a process he terms *openwashing*. In content team contexts, this concept is analytically useful as a reminder that the presence of a stream does not necessarily mean that the organizational work most consequential for competitive outcomes is contained within it. Transparency, in other words, is always a matter of degree and organizational construction.

This construction becomes particularly complicated in live streaming contexts, where transparency can exceed organizational control. Reischauer and Ringel (2023) distinguish between managed and unmanaged transparency, noting that digital platforms can produce disclosures that organizations did not intend and cannot retract. In live settings, post-game reviews, draft disagreements, and real-time coaching exchanges may be captured as they unfold and enter the public record without prior filtration. This unmanaged dimension of live content creates organizational conditions that more carefully managed disclosure does not, both in terms of audience perception of authenticity and in terms of the competitive and reputational consequences that unfiltered disclosure can carry.

4. Public Learning and Postmortem Narratives

When reflexive practices such as post-game debriefs, season reviews, or public accountability discussions occur in visible settings, they may take on additional communicative functions beyond internal learning. Dobusch et al. (2022) analyze public postmortem statements as communicative genres that combine elements of reflection and impression management, constructing organizational narratives that manage how audiences understand what happened and why. From this perspective, public learning narratives are constructed accounts, not simple reflections of internal processes, and they can influence how organizational trajectories are understood. For content teams, visible reflexive practices may contribute to how team development is interpreted, how accountability is articulated, and how broader norms of competitive practice are discussed. These effects are likely to vary across contexts and over time, depending on how teams structure their transparency practices and how different audiences engage with them.

E. Digital Platforms and Affordances: Infrastructure for Transparent Organizing

The organizational transparency that shapes content teams' adaptive work does not operate through an abstract medium. It is mediated by specific digital platforms whose technological properties structure what forms of transparency are possible, what persists and what disappears, how content can be revised and presented, and how team practices become connected to broader networks of interpretation and community. Treem and Leonardi (2013) identify four affordances of social media that are consequential for organizations navigating digital transparency: visibility, persistence, editability, and association. These affordances are relational rather than fixed properties of platforms alone. They represent action possibilities that emerge from the interaction between platform capabilities and

organizational actors' purposes (Evans et al., 2017; Gibson, 1979). The definitional inconsistencies Evans et al. (2017) diagnosed persist in the most recent systematic review of the affordance literature, which supports anchoring this analysis in the original four-affordance framework (Ronzhyn et al., 2023). For content teams, all four affordances shape adaptive work in distinct ways, with editability and association taking on particular organizational salience under conditions of live streaming.

1. Visibility

The *visibility affordance* refers to the extent to which information and behavior that was previously private becomes perceivable to others through digital mediation. For content teams, visibility situates adaptive work as both an internal organizational process and a potentially observable one. Situation assessment, plan formulation, execution, and learning may occur in view of multiple observers, including supporters, competitors, sponsors, and field actors, each bringing different interests, levels of expertise, and interpretive frameworks. This multi-audience visibility does not simply add observers to processes that would otherwise unfold identically. It can influence what communication is produced, at what level of specificity, and in what register, since communication oriented toward functional coordination and communication oriented toward broader comprehension or engagement are not always aligned and cannot always be optimized simultaneously.

2. Persistence

The *persistence affordance* refers to the extent to which communications, decisions, and actions endure beyond their immediate moment of occurrence as part of a retrievable archive. Persistence extends visibility across time. What is visible in the moment may remain accessible, and archived content can be retrieved and recontextualized in ways that

neither creators nor observers fully anticipate. For team learning, persistence introduces both opportunity and constraint. The opportunity is longitudinal: teams can review past episodes with fuller knowledge of their consequences, identify patterns that may not be apparent in real time, and track how their approaches evolve across a competitive season. This capacity for cumulative pattern recognition across an archived record can support adaptive capability in ways that are less available in settings where interactions leave no persistent trace (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). The constraint lies in ongoing accountability. Prior commitments, stated principles, and visible failures remain accessible and may be reintroduced into current decision contexts, shaping what teams can do without reputational consequence. The past remains continuously present in ways that can constrain future action.

3. Editability

The *editability affordance* refers to the extent to which content can be revised and refined before it is shared. In live streaming contexts, this affordance operates in an unusual way. Live streams offer minimal editability, with content often transmitted without revision prior to its appearance. What is said during a coaching exchange, what emerges during a draft disagreement, and what errors are acknowledged in a post-game review may enter the public record without filtration. This limited editability of the live medium is central to how content teams communicate in their primary format. At the same time, teams produce edited content, such as VOD compilations, highlight reels, and prepared commentary, that allows for more deliberate framing and contextualization. The asymmetry between low-editability live content and higher-editability curated content creates a specific organizational condition. The same adaptive episode can exist in multiple versions, one relatively unfiltered

and another more deliberately constructed, requiring teams to manage how these versions relate and what each conveys across contexts. This makes the management of editability a more complex organizational task for content teams than for organizations that rely primarily on edited, asynchronous communication.

4. Association

The *association affordance* refers to the ways in which people, content, and organizational contexts become linked across digital environments. In streaming and social media settings, association operates through mechanisms that are particularly consequential for content teams. Individual moments can be clipped, circulated across platforms, and linked to specific individuals or teams through distribution systems and algorithmic recommendation, often independently of their original context and without direct organizational mediation. Over time, team members may become associated with particular communication patterns, coaching approaches, or adaptive tendencies through the accumulation of such material. Teams may also become associated with broader organizational values or norms through the visible record of how they handle adversity, accountability, and learning. This associative structure means that individual episodes are rarely isolated. They become connected through accumulated records and interpretive linkages that develop over time, contributing to how organizational identity is constructed and understood across different contexts. For content teams, identity formation can therefore involve processes of accumulation and association that are less pronounced in private organizational settings.

5. Platform Architecture as Organizational Context

Beyond these four affordances, specific platform architectures shape the forms of transparency that content teams can enact. Twitch's stream delay settings influence whether teams can engage with live chat during competitive draft phases without exposing formulation work to opponents. YouTube's recommendation systems affect which aspects of a team's adaptive practice reach audiences beyond its existing community, shaping which practices gain broader field-level visibility. Discord's channel architecture provides technical infrastructure for managing distinctions between more public and more restricted interaction spaces, aligning with the boundary dynamics described by Ringel (2019). These architectural features are not neutral containers for organizational processes. They actively shape what transparent adaptive work looks like and what consequences it carries. Flyverbom (2022) extends the visibility regime argument to this architectural level, examining how digital architectures of visibility structure what can be seen, by whom, and with what ordering effects. In contexts with relatively limited formal governance structures, platform policies and affordance designs can function as de facto governance mechanisms that influence which organizational practices are technically feasible and commercially viable (Doshi & Schmidt, 2024; Taylor, 2018).

F. Chapter Conclusion

Table 2.2

Summary of Key Theories, Literature, Concepts, and Their Core Functions

Main Theoretical Framework	Key Literature	Core Concepts	Core Functions

Four-phase team adaptation model	Burke et al. (2006); Georganta et al. (2021a, 2021b); Rosen et al. (2011)	Situation assessment; plan formulation; plan execution; team learning; reflexivity	Establishes what teams do when they adapt and creates the basis for examining how each phase is affected differently by conditions of transparency
Bona fide group perspective	Putnam & Stohl (1990); Stohl & Cheney (2001); Stohl & Putnam (1994, 2003)	Permeable boundaries; contextual interdependence; dialectical tensions	Establishes how content teams can be conceptualized as groups, reframing audiences, competitors, and platforms as constitutive
Organizational transparency	Bernstein (2012, 2017); Flyverbom (2016, 2019); Albu & Flyverbom (2016)	Visibility regimes; digital prism; transparency-secrecy nexus; unmanaged transparency	Explains how conditions of transparency may influence each adaptive phase and why the boundary between visible and protected organizational work requires ongoing management
Platform affordances	Evans et al. (2017); Gibson (1979);	Visibility; persistence; editability; association	Specifies the technological mechanisms through which transparency operates, with

	Treem & Leonardi (2013)		each affordance creating distinct conditions for different aspects of adaptive work

As shown in Table 2.2, this chapter has assembled four theoretical frameworks, each addressing a distinct analytical question raised by the study of content teams. Team adaptation theory, including the four-phase model, the distinction between adaptation and learning, and reflexivity as the mechanism linking them, establishes what teams do when they adapt and what kinds of cognitive and communicative work each phase involves. The bona fide group perspective establishes how to conceptualize content teams as groups: collectives with permeable boundaries and constitutive contextual interdependence, whose adaptive processes cannot be understood apart from the audience communities, competitive relationships, and platform structures that shape their functioning. Flyverbom's visibility regime framework, together with Ringel's transparency-secrecy nexus and related work on organizational transparency as practice, establishes how transparency operates as a condition for adaptive work. It draws attention to how adaptation may take on both functional and performative dimensions, how frontstage and backstage distinctions become relevant organizational concerns, and how conditions may vary across adaptive phases in ways that align with findings from social facilitation research. The affordance framework, treating visibility, persistence, editability, and association as analytically distinct but interrelated dimensions, establishes the technological mechanisms through which these conditions are

enacted, with editability and association taking on particular salience in live streaming contexts.

These four frameworks orient the empirical analysis that follows. They direct attention to how teams manage the boundary between visible and protected adaptive work, how persistence can function as both a resource for learning and a source of ongoing accountability, how permeable boundaries situate teams in relation to multiple stakeholders, and how editability and association shape the form of visible learning and the organizational identities that develop over time. Chapter 6 draws on these frameworks to examine how these dynamics unfold across three content teams operating under different organizational conditions, and what this variation suggests about the capabilities involved in adapting under conditions of transparency. Chapters 3 through 5 develop the broader theoretical and methodological foundation for this analysis, including a review of institutional work and hybrid organizing, an integrated theoretical framework, and a discussion of methodology.

III. Chapter Three: Institutional Work Through Hybrid Organizing

A. Chapter Introduction

Team-level adaptation does not occur in an institutional vacuum. The adaptation processes examined in Chapter 2 both draw upon and potentially transform broader institutional structures that define legitimate practice in esports. When content teams adapt transparently, the improvement in their own performance is only part of what happens. They demonstrate to broader audiences what professional esports teams do, how they organize, and what counts as legitimate competitive practice, and these demonstrations can influence field-level norms, governance structures, and definitional boundaries. A team livestreaming its practice sessions is both adapting to its immediate training needs and potentially normalizing transparency as a standard of competitive preparation. Understanding this dual function requires examining the structure level of organizing, the institutional arrangements that both enable and constrain organizational action.

This chapter develops that structure level by integrating three literatures. *Institutional work theory* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) explains how actors create, maintain, and disrupt institutional arrangements, and how such work operates differently in emerging fields, where actors cannot rely on established logics, positions, or stable collectivities and instead draw on resources from adjacent domains (David et al., 2013). *Research on hybrid organizing* (Battilana & Lee, 2014) examines how organizations blend multiple institutional logics and manage the identity and legitimacy tensions that arise from inhabiting several institutional domains at once. *Field-level change scholarship* addresses how emerging fields develop governance structures and legitimacy mechanisms through contested processes,

with particular attention to how digital platforms reshape institutional dynamics (Hinings et al., 2018).

The chapter proceeds in five movements. It first develops institutional work theory, including its evolution toward practice-driven accounts of change. It then characterizes esports as an emerging field, establishing the governance conditions under which content teams operate. The third section examines hybrid organizing, culminating in the three-logic configuration specific to content teams, and associated tensions and identity work. The fourth section analyzes how digital visibility and audiences transform institutional work. The chapter closes by synthesizing these perspectives into an account of content teams' institutional position, specifying what forms of influence are available to them and what limits constrain that influence.

A brief note on terminology is warranted before proceeding. The esport content teams examined in this dissertation are semi-formal organizations. Although they maintain organizational trappings, including defined roles, revenue-sharing arrangements, and collective decision-making processes, they emerged from informal discussions and passion projects among team members, with little formal incorporation or deliberate strategic planning behind them. This semi-formal character does not diminish their engagement with institutional dynamics. It positions them as apt exemplars of practice-driven institutional work, in which routine organizing decisions become institutionally consequential without formal entrepreneurial intent or hierarchical authority (Lawrence et al., 2011; Smets et al., 2012). This distributed, practice-embedded character of institutional work matters especially for hybrid organizations, whose members enact multiple logics within the same practices and whose everyday accommodations among those logics can therefore carry institutional

consequence. The frameworks developed here apply to organizing processes and collective action generally (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011), and references to "organizational" practices throughout should be read as describing organizing processes and coordinated collective action, without implying fully formalized corporate structures.

B. Institutional Work: Creating, Maintaining, and Disrupting

Institutional theory has long grappled with questions of structure and agency in organizational life. Early neo-institutional scholarship emphasized how organizations conform to institutional pressures, adopting legitimate structures and practices to gain acceptance within their fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This perspective illuminated important dynamics of isomorphism and legitimacy seeking but offered limited insight into how institutions themselves change. Organizations often appeared as passive recipients of institutional influence, with little part in institutional construction (Greenwood et al., 2008). Recognizing this limitation, scholars directed attention toward institutional entrepreneurship and examined how change agents mobilize resources and political support to transform institutional arrangements (Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988). Yet this entrepreneurship perspective risked overcorrecting by portraying change as the work of heroic individuals while obscuring the mundane, ongoing practices through which institutions are reproduced and transformed in everyday organizational life (Lawrence et al., 2009, 2011).

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) proposed institutional work as a framework that encompasses both dramatic institutional projects and subtle everyday practices. They defined institutional work as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (p. 215). This definition marked a

conceptual shift from institutions as structures to the agency of actors in shaping those structures over time. The framework redirected attention from outcomes, such as whether new institutions emerge or existing ones persist, to the practices through which actors engage with institutions regardless of whether those efforts ultimately succeed (Lawrence et al., 2011). This shift acknowledged that institutional influence often operates through incremental, partially successful, and even contradictory actions more often than through clean, linear projects that either succeed or fail. At its core, institutional work represents communicative practices through which actors attempt to shape the meanings, norms, and taken-for-granted assumptions that constitute institutional arrangements (Zilber, 2009).

1. Categories of Institutional Work

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identified three broad categories of institutional work, each encompassing multiple forms of practice. *Creation work* establishes new institutions by developing novel rules, practices, or belief systems that come to structure organizational behavior. *Maintenance work* preserves existing institutions by ensuring adherence to established norms and repairing institutional arrangements when they face challenges. *Disruption work* undermines or transforms existing institutions by attacking the assumptions, reward systems, or power relations that support them. These categories not mutually exclusive. Actors often engage in multiple forms of institutional work simultaneously, and specific practices may serve creation, maintenance, or disruption depending on the context (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Table 3.1 provides an overview of these categories and their role in the analysis of content teams.

Table 3.1

Institutional Work Categories and Their Role in Analysis

Category	Subcategories	Definition	Content Team Examples	Analytical Use
Creating Institutions	Advocacy, Defining, Constructing identities, Theorizing, Changing normative associations	Establishing new institutions by developing novel rules, practices, or belief systems that come to structure organizational behavior	1) Teams creating norms where practice sessions become public entertainment; 2) Constructing "content team" as legitimate organizational form	Code stream observations and archival data for evidence of teams advocating new practices, defining new organizational forms, and constructing new identities that blend competitive and entertainment logics
Maintaining Institutions	Enabling, Policing, Deterring, Valorizing and demonizing,	Preserving existing institutions by ensuring adherence to	1) Teams maintaining community engagement routines and	Examine how teams sustain hybrid practices over time, maintain

	Mythologizing, Embedding and routinizing	established norms and repairing institutional arrangements when they face challenges	viewer interaction practices; 2) Preserving competitive legitimacy while meeting entertainment demands	audience relationships, and preserve legitimacy across competitive and entertainment domains
Disrupting Institutions	Disconnecting sanctions, Disassociating moral foundations, Undermining assumptions	Undermining or transforming existing institutions by attacking the assumptions, reward systems, or power relations that support them	1) Undermining assumption that competitive preparation requires privacy; 2) Disconnecting sanctions against entertainment-focused activities in competitive teams	Track moments where teams explicitly challenge traditional norms, especially around secrecy and separation of competitive and entertainment spheres

Creation work takes diverse but interrelated forms, including advocacy, defining, constructing identities, theorizing, and changing normative associations. Advocacy mobilizes political and regulatory support for new institutional arrangements through mechanisms such as lobbying, public campaigning, or alliance building. Defining establishes clear boundaries around new practices or organizational forms by specifying what counts as legitimate membership or appropriate behavior. Constructing identities creates new roles or subject positions that actors can inhabit, making possible new patterns of practice (Lok, 2010). Theorizing articulates cause-effect relationships or moral rationales that justify why new institutions are desirable or necessary (Greenwood et al., 2002). Changing normative associations reworks connections between practices and the moral foundations that justify them. These forms of creation work frequently operate in combination. When esports associations lobby governments to recognize competitive gaming as a legitimate sport, they engage in advocacy. When they establish codes of conduct for professional players, they define appropriate behavior. When they create certification programs for coaches or referees, they construct identities. When they publish white papers explaining the developmental benefits of competitive gaming, they theorize. Content teams engage in creation work when Los Ratones broadcasts strategic planning sessions, demonstrating to field audiences that competitive preparation can occur transparently, or when Near Airport publicly discusses player recruitment criteria, establishing new norms about team-building processes in professional esports.

Maintenance work sustains institutions through continuous attention, reinforcement, and repair. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identify several forms of maintenance work, including enabling, policing, deterring, valorizing and demonizing, mythologizing, and

embedding and routinizing. Enabling work ensures adherence to institutional rules by providing incentives, training programs, or resources that make compliance feasible and attractive. Policing enforces institutional rules through monitoring, auditing, and sanctioning rule violations. Deterring establishes coercive barriers that make alternatives costly or threatening. Valorizing and demonizing reinforce institutions through narratives that celebrate exemplary adherents and castigate deviants, thereby communicating the moral boundaries of appropriate practice (Zilber, 2009). Mythologizing preserves institutional histories and founding stories that reinforce legitimacy and taken-for-granted status. Embedding and routinizing infuse normative foundations into organizational practices. These maintenance practices demonstrate that institutions do not persist through inertia alone; they require continuous work to remain salient, stable, and enforceable (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Traditional sports leagues, for example, engage in extensive maintenance work through rules committees, referee training programs, and public disciplinary actions. Content teams engage in maintenance work by preserving competitive integrity standards even while operating transparently, as when teams publicly analyze their gameplay to demonstrate continuous skill development, or when they maintain rigorous practice schedules that viewers can observe, thereby reinforcing norms about professional dedication and performance standards.

Disruption work challenges existing institutions by undermining their cognitive, normative, or regulative foundations. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identify several forms of disruption work, including disconnecting sanctions, disassociating moral foundations, and undermining assumptions. Disconnecting sanctions weakens reward structures that incentivize compliance. Disassociating moral foundations challenges normative assumptions

that justify an institution's existence. Undermining assumptions exposes contradictions or dysfunctions in existing arrangements, making taken-for-granted practices untenable. Disruption work can be dramatic and confrontational, as when activists protest unjust laws or whistleblowers expose wrongdoing (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). It can also be subtle and incremental, as when practitioners quietly introduce alternative practices that gradually erode the legitimacy of established approaches. Content teams' transparency practices illustrate this latter form of disruption. Broadcasting internal operations challenges long-standing assumptions about the necessity of organizational secrecy in competitive contexts. When Los Ratones livestreams team deliberations about strategic adjustments or roster decisions, they undermine taken-for-granted beliefs that competitive advantage requires information asymmetry. When Near Airport publicly shares salary structures and contract negotiations, they disassociate competitive success from financial opacity, challenging institutional norms that treat compensation as proprietary information. These communicative practices function as disruption work through persistent demonstration, without direct confrontation, that alternative organizing approaches remain viable.

The three categories of institutional work provide conceptual tools for understanding how content teams' organizational practices may function at the institutional level. However, recognizing that teams engage in institutional work does not imply intentional institutional change projects. As the following section demonstrates, much institutional work emerges from routine practices aimed at solving immediate operational problems, not from deliberate efforts to transform institutional arrangements.

2. Institutional Work as Emergent Practice

Since 2006, institutional work theory has developed into a substantial research stream that both refines the original framework and extends its application across diverse empirical domains (Lawrence et al., 2009, 2011). Early extensions emphasized institutional entrepreneurship, examining how change agents marshal resources to create new institutions or transform existing ones. This research documented cases ranging from HIV/AIDS advocacy (Maguire et al., 2004) to transformations within professional service firms (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), highlighting how entrepreneurs mobilize political support, theorize new practices, and construct new identities. Over time, however, scholars increasingly recognized that institutional work extends well beyond entrepreneurial projects. Many actors engage in institutional work without occupying formal change-agent roles, and much institutional change arises from routine practice (Smets et al., 2012).

This recognition shifted attention toward maintenance work and, more broadly, toward the cumulative institutional effects of everyday practice. Research demonstrated how professionals inadvertently challenge institutional norms through routine work (Battilana, 2011), how identity work by marginalized groups gradually reshapes institutional expectations (Creed et al., 2010), and how localized practice innovations diffuse to reconfigure entire fields (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Zietsma and Lawrence (2010), for example, showed how ongoing boundary negotiations between forestry companies and environmental activists, conducted through repeated small interactions, not formal policy interventions, transformed the institutional field of forestry management. Collectively, this scholarship revealed that institutional change can be practice-driven as much as project-

driven, emerging from bottom-up improvisation that proves workable and spreads (Smets et al., 2012).

The relationship between institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work therefore warrants careful consideration. Institutional entrepreneurs are often conceptualized as actors who break with prevailing norms and mobilize resources to create new institutions (Battilana et al., 2009). While this perspective captures important dynamics, it risks portraying institutional change as primarily the product of exceptional individuals pursuing deliberate transformation projects. The institutional work lens broadens this view by recognizing that change frequently emerges from aggregated routine actions and localized innovations. Smets and others (2012) describe this process as *practice-driven institutional change*, in which practitioners solve immediate operational problems and, in doing so, gradually reshape field-level institutions.

Practice-driven change operates through mechanisms distinct from entrepreneurial change. Rather than mobilizing political coalitions or explicitly theorizing new institutional arrangements, practitioners engaged in practice-driven change innovate locally in response to concrete challenges. When these innovations prove useful, they spread through demonstration and imitation, bypassing formal diffusion channels. Change tends to occur incrementally and may initially escape the attention of institutional authorities. Only in retrospect does it become evident that the accumulation of altered practices has transformed institutional expectations. Smets and colleagues illustrate this process in their study of international law firms, where lawyers improvising new practices to serve global clients inadvertently reshaped norms of professional conduct. These lawyers were not attempting to change institutions; they were attempting to do their jobs effectively. Their successful

improvisations became models others adopted, eventually reconfiguring what counted as appropriate lawyering practice.

This perspective on practice-driven change clarifies how content teams may influence institutional norms in esports. These teams are not necessarily pursuing explicit projects to transform the field. Instead, they develop operational practices that help them function effectively within their particular organizing contexts. By enacting these practices transparently, however, they put their innovations on display for others. When Los Ratones broadcasts scrimmages and publicly discusses strategic reasoning, the team addresses an immediate problem of how to engage audiences while preparing competitively. This integrated transparent practice may not be designed as institutional work. Yet when other teams observe it, recognize its utility, and begin experimenting with their own versions of transparent preparation, Los Ratones' routine operations function as practice-driven institutional work, gradually shifting norms around acceptable transparency in competitive preparation (Smets et al., 2012). Similarly, when Near Airport incorporates public tryouts and community feedback into recruitment processes, these practices address operational needs while simultaneously demonstrating alternative models of team building in public-facing competitive contexts.

A critical insight emerging from practice-driven change scholarship concerns how field context shapes institutional work. Recent research comparing institutional entrepreneurship in emerging versus mature fields identifies important differences in legitimation strategies (David et al., 2013). In mature fields, actors can leverage established logics, positions within professional networks, and collective action through formal associations. In emerging fields, by contrast, such resources are limited or absent. Actors

must instead import logics from adjacent domains, seek affiliations with external authorities, and emphasize broader social or cultural benefits over narrowly professional interests. This analysis carries significant implications for content teams. Operating in esports, an emerging field characterized by contested governance and weak institutional frameworks, content teams cannot rely on established professional associations or widely accepted competitive norms. Instead, they draw on institutional logics from entertainment streaming, digital content creation, and online community building, domains with more developed institutional arrangements, and blend these with competitive esports logics to create novel hybrid forms. Their institutional work therefore operates through mechanisms distinct from those available in traditional, mature sports fields with entrenched governing bodies and regulatory infrastructures. Legitimacy in such settings is best understood as a process of ongoing social judgment formation, in which evaluators continually form, revise, and express assessments of organizations and practices, and in which those assessments aggregate into collective validity over time (Suddaby et al., 2017). For organizations without institutional endorsement, legitimacy must be continuously earned before distributed evaluators, a condition that the following sections show is intensified by the visibility of digital platforms.

This section has established that institutional work encompasses creation, maintenance, and disruption practices through which actors shape institutional arrangements, that such work often grows out of routine practice, and that emerging fields demand distinct legitimation strategies. The next section characterizes the specific emerging field within which content teams conduct this work.

C. Esports as an Emerging Field

1. Emerging Fields as Institutional Conditions

The institutional dynamics examined thus far unfold within broader field contexts that shape what is possible for organizations and what becomes consequential beyond the organizational level. An institutional field comprises a community of organizations that share a common meaning system and interact more frequently with one another than with actors outside the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008; Zietsma et al., 2017). Fields provide taken-for-granted rules, shared understandings, and governance structures that order organizational activity (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Established fields such as healthcare or higher education exhibit clear institutional structures, including recognized professional roles, formal regulatory bodies, widely understood success metrics, and relatively stable boundaries defining who belongs to the field and what activities the field encompasses (Greenwood et al., 2008). These fields actively maintain boundaries through ongoing certification and assessment systems that serve dual functions: maintaining professional knowledge and competence while excluding under-trained, incompetent, or non-compliant actors from practice (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Organizations operating in established fields face strong institutional pressures to conform to field-level expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Emerging fields present markedly different institutional conditions (Hinings et al., 2018). They often persist for extended periods of uncertainty and contestation in which field boundaries, governance arrangements, and normative expectations remain unresolved (Fligstein, 2001; Padgett & Powell, 2012). Authority is ambiguous, with multiple parties claiming the right to set standards or define legitimate practice (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Legitimacy is contested, never assumed (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). These conditions create both opportunity and vulnerability. The absence of entrenched structures can increase latitude for experimentation with novel practices and organizational forms (Battilana et al., 2009). At the same time, organizations lack the institutional supports associated with mature fields, including established career paths, recognized certification systems, stable funding mechanisms, and shared understandings of how to operate successfully (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). In this sense, emerging fields require organizations to build workable arrangements while also navigating, and sometimes contributing to, field-level institution building (David et al., 2013).

The organizational conditions described in Chapter 1 reflect deeper institutional dynamics that shape esports as an emerging field. Esports exemplifies what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Fligstein and McAdam (2012) characterize as fields undergoing active construction, where actors compete to establish governance structures, define legitimate practices, and determine evaluative standards. Although the industry has expanded dramatically over the past two decades, it continues to exhibit uncertainty regarding fundamental organizing principles and sources of authority (Scholz, 2019). Comparative historical work shows how compressed this institutionalization has been. Organizing structures that developed in traditional sports across the second half of the nineteenth century emerged in esports within roughly two decades of the mid-1990s, under conditions in which publishers held intellectual property control from the outset (Summerley, 2020). The publisher-centric governance model introduced in Chapter 1 produces institutional dynamics of its own. Unlike traditional sports, which operate through layered governance hierarchies involving international federations, national associations, and leagues, esports is

structured around discrete competitive ecosystems dominated by private game publishers who retain intellectual property control over competitive titles (Karhulahti, 2017). Each publisher establishes its own competitive ecosystem with specific governance arrangements, preventing the emergence of unified field-level structures and contributing to persistent fragmentation (Heidenreich et al., 2022).

2. Governance Fragmentation and Publisher Power

Recent developments illustrate ongoing institutional work alongside enduring constraint. In December 2024, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile introduced the FIA Esports Code as Appendix E to the International Sporting Code, becoming the first traditional sports federation to establish dedicated esports regulation through licensing systems, competitive standards, and disciplinary procedures for sim racing (FIA, 2024). France's Digital Republic Act and subsequent decrees introduced legal recognition and labor protections for professional esports players (Décret n° 2017-330, 2017). The Global Esports Federation expanded to 178 member federations by 2024 and achieved International Olympic Committee recognition, positioning itself as a potential global governing body (Chan, 2024; International Olympic Committee, 2023). Yet these formalization efforts coexist with persistent fragmentation, and their authority remains limited so long as publishers retain ultimate control over competition formats, rule changes, and intellectual property.

Many scholars accordingly continue to describe esports governance as resembling a "wild west" (Hutchinson et al., 2025). Research on UK esports governance documents thin regulatory structures, financial dependence on volatile sponsorship markets, imbalanced power relations favoring publishers, and limited stakeholder representation in decision-

making (Hutchinson et al., 2025). The esports winter of 2023 to 2024, during which many teams disbanded, downsized, or restructured in response to declining sponsorships and rising costs, exposed how weakly institutionalized fields lack the buffering mechanisms that might otherwise stabilize organizations during economic downturns (Maas, 2023; Newzoo, 2024; PwC, 2024). These conditions simultaneously constrain organizational action and create space for innovation, and content teams emerged in part as responses to them.

Publisher dominance fundamentally shapes the field's institutional architecture. Publishers possess what Heidenreich et al. (2022) describe as "undisputed and taken-for-granted legitimacy," grounded not in negotiated authority but in intellectual property ownership. This represents a legitimation mechanism distinct from traditional sports governance, where authority emerges through collective organization and negotiated rulemaking. The result is what Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) would recognize as asymmetric institutional work conditions: organizations seeking to stabilize field-level norms lack the regulatory authority to enforce them. The World Esports Association and eSport-Bund Deutschland illustrate this constraint. Both pursue legitimacy through isomorphic mimicry of traditional sports institutions, adopting similar governance structures, lobbying for recognition, and establishing standardization programs, yet both remain structurally subordinate to publisher authority (Heidenreich et al., 2022). Consequently, governance claims in esports tend to be partial and segmented, not field-wide. Teams, player associations, and tournament organizers must negotiate with publishers over competition settings, patch timing, and rules, attempting to institutionalize norms without possessing formal authority to enforce them (Karhulahti, 2017). This institutional configuration

explains why field norms remain contested and provisional, and why organizational innovation works through practice instead of institutionalized prescription.

New institutional actors further complicate this picture. The Esports World Cup Foundation, backed by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, represents an attempt to shape global esports governance through financial intervention instead of negotiated institutional development. Launched in 2024 with substantial prize pools and club partnership programs, the Foundation positions itself as a quasi-governing body seeking to stabilize competition and support team sustainability (Reuters, 2025). However, its authority derives primarily from economic leverage, with little grounding in normative consensus or cognitive legitimacy. This raises questions about how institutional arrangements develop when concentrated financial power substitutes for collective governance. Authority here follows resources, a pattern that reflects the field's weak institutionalization and the absence of established mechanisms for collective self-governance.

3. Legitimacy Contests and Categorical Ambiguity

Beyond governance structures, the legitimacy challenges discussed in Chapter 1 reflect what Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) describe as boundary work. Debates over whether competitive gaming constitutes "real" sport are more than rhetorical, representing efforts to define field membership and establish jurisdictional claims over specific domains of activity (Peng et al., 2020). These debates carry practical implications for funding eligibility, media recognition, visa classification for international players, and inclusion in multi-sport events. Some actors pursue legitimacy through conformity to traditional sports models, emphasizing parallels in skill development, strategic depth, team coordination, and competitive pressure. Others resist institutional assimilation, arguing that esports is a distinct

domain with its own values and practices that should not be subordinated to traditional sports frameworks.

Esports remains difficult to categorize because it genuinely spans multiple institutional domains (Heidenreich et al., 2022). Competitive elements align with sport logics that emphasize meritocratic achievement, structured competition, and performance excellence. Entertainment elements stem from the games' design as media products and from platform-based creator-audience relationships that prioritize engagement, narrative, and spectacle (Cunningham et al., 2021; Taylor, 2012). Community elements draw from gaming and internet subcultures that value participation, shared knowledge, and collaborative meaning-making, not from traditional sports institutions with their emphasis on spectatorship and organizational hierarchy. This genuine hybridity at the field level complicates efforts to stabilize organizing around a single dominant logic (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012). Rather than resolving into either sport or entertainment, esports may be developing as a distinct institutional form that permanently combines competitive, entertainment, and community logics in ways that require organizations to navigate contradictory demands and competing evaluative criteria.

Content teams, by explicitly organizing around all three logics simultaneously, illustrate how organizations navigate and enact this hybridity within an emerging and weakly institutionalized field. Their transparent practices challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the necessity of secrecy in competitive preparation, assumptions grounded in sport logics. Their audience-centered models respond to the economic vulnerabilities and governance fragmentation described in Chapter 1. Their integration of competitive and entertainment functions reflects the field's unresolved positioning across

institutional domains. Whether content teams ultimately become institutionalized as a legitimate organizational template or remain a niche adaptation will depend on how effectively they manage tensions between performance, visibility, and legitimacy as the field continues to develop. More immediately, examining content teams provides insight into how organizations engage in institutional work under conditions of economic precarity, how visibility functions simultaneously as constraint and resource, and how hybrid organizational forms emerge within fragmented and weakly institutionalized fields.

D. Hybrid Organizing Under Institutional Complexity

1. Hybridity and the Problem of Coherence

Organizations often seek coherence by privileging a dominant institutional logic or a recognizable organizational form that provides a template for goals, structures, decision-making processes, and success metrics (Greenwood et al., 2011; Thornton et al., 2012). For example, for-profit corporations typically foreground a market logic that emphasizes growth and profitability, nonprofit organizations foreground a social welfare logic that emphasizes mission achievement and community impact, and professional partnerships foreground a professional logic that emphasizes expertise development and peer recognition. When organizations can credibly present themselves as embodying a familiar form, they benefit from clearer stakeholder expectations, simplified coordination, and enhanced legitimacy (Hannan et al., 2007).

Hybrid organizations complicate this coherence by combining multiple institutional logics or organizational forms within a single entity. Battilana and Lee (2014) define *hybrid organizing* as the activities, structures, processes, and meanings through which organizations make sense of and combine aspects of multiple organizational forms. Although their

empirical focus centered on social enterprises, the conceptual insights extend to organizations that straddle distinct institutional domains more broadly (Battilana et al., 2015). Hybrids are analytically significant because they sustain plural commitments that generate persistent challenges around internal coordination, external legitimacy, and organizational sustainability. They face pressures to clarify identity, privilege one logic over others, or compartmentalize competing commitments into separate units (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Pache & Santos, 2013). Sustaining hybridity therefore requires continuous organizational work, not one-time structural decisions (Battilana & Dorado, 2010).

At the same time, hybridity can be generative. Combining disparate logics can enable innovation and flexibility that are difficult to achieve within single-logic organizations (Seo & Creed, 2002). Competing principles may foster creative problem solving as organizations develop practices that serve multiple objectives simultaneously (Jay, 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011). This generative potential, however, must be balanced against real risks. Organizations that fail to manage competing logics effectively may experience mission drift, internal conflict, decision-making paralysis, or loss of legitimacy as stakeholders become uncertain about what the organization represents (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Ebrahim et al., 2014). In this dissertation, hybridity provides a framework for explaining why content teams' transparency practices are at once operational choices and legitimacy strategies directed at multiple audiences whose expectations are grounded in different institutional logics.

Recent scholarship has further emphasized that hybridity cannot be understood solely as an organizational-level design choice. Instead, hybrid forms are shaped by the broader institutional contexts and problem domains within which organizations operate

(Mair & Rathert, 2020). These contexts influence whether hybrid forms emerge, what tensions become salient, and how organizations attempt to stabilize or adapt over time. In esports, the relevant problem domain centers on sustainability and legitimacy under platform-dependent revenue conditions. The contraction commonly described as the esports winter of 2023 to 2024 exposed the fragility of sponsorship-driven business models and the absence of stable governance arrangements (Newzoo, 2024). Content teams emerged partly as responses to this institutional crisis, suggesting that their hybrid form reflects adaptation to field-level conditions as much as discretionary strategic choice.

2. Configuring Hybrid Organizations: Structure, Membership, and Identity

Research in the 2010s converged on several key dimensions along which hybrids must make choices about how to combine multiple institutional logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013). At one extreme, organizations can fully integrate their logics, blending them together in everyday work. At the other extreme, they can highly differentiate their logics, keeping them separate in distinct domains of activity (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Most organizations adopt some mix of integration and differentiation across different aspects of their operations, creating complex configurations that reflect choices about where to blend logics and where to buffer them (Battilana et al., 2015).

Structural and Activity Configurations. Organizations make fundamental choices about whether to integrate or differentiate logics across their operations. This dynamic appears clearly in how activities are organized. Battilana and Dorado's (2010) study of microfinance banks illustrated these alternatives. Los Andes achieved an integrated model in which every loan simultaneously met commercial and social goals. Rather than separating commercial lending from development lending, the bank designed loan products and

assessment criteria that inherently served both purposes. Other banks created separate units and products for social versus commercial activities, effectively operating as two organizations under a single legal entity. This differentiated approach allowed each unit to optimize for its own logic without internal compromise, but it also created coordination challenges and a less unified organizational identity.

Similar patterns emerge in how organizations configure activities and roles more broadly. Organizations can create arrangements that separate competing logics into different domains, each with its own leadership, responsibilities, and resources (Pache & Santos, 2013). This reduces direct internal conflict, since individuals working within each domain can focus on a single logic without constantly negotiating with colleagues who prioritize a different logic (Besharov & Smith, 2014). However, separation also creates coordination problems and may produce fragmented organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Alternatively, organizations can adopt integrated arrangements that require members to work across logics. This promotes integration and cohesive identity but surfaces tensions as members continually balance competing demands without clear partitioning of responsibilities.

Membership and Socialization. Team composition represents another important dimension of organizing choice (Battilana et al., 2015). Organizations can recruit individuals who themselves embody hybrid skills and values, meaning people who can credibly operate according to multiple logics because they have been socialized into both (Besharov & Smith, 2014). For example, a social enterprise might recruit people with both business training and nonprofit experience, who do not experience tension between financial sustainability and social mission because they have internalized both values. Alternatively,

organizations can assemble specialists for each logic, bringing together individuals with deep but distinct expertise (Pache & Santos, 2010). This specialist approach may provide stronger capabilities within each domain but can also intensify internal debates about priorities.

Besharov and Smith (2014) emphasized that membership and socialization choices significantly influence whether members perceive logics as conflicting or compatible. Recruiting people who can appreciate both sides, or training members to do so, tends to improve alignment and reduce debilitating conflict. Beyond individual capabilities, organizations develop boundary spanning mechanisms that help bridge divides between logics. These include appointing dual leadership, with coleaders or management teams that include people with deep expertise in each logic so that both perspectives inform decisions; creating cross-functional arrangements or task forces that bring together members from different parts of the organization to work on activities that inherently span logics; and developing hybrid professional identities at the individual level by training people to understand and appreciate multiple logics so they can act as interpreters between constituencies (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005).

Identity Work. Beyond structural and membership choices, hybrids engage in ongoing identity work to manage how plural commitments are understood internally and externally (Glynn, 2000; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Identity work involves crafting narratives and symbols that define "who we are" in ways that encompass multiple logics. Rather than allowing internal or external audiences to define the organization as primarily one thing or another, hybrid organizations proactively construct identities that make sense of plural commitments. This work addresses both internal coherence, helping members understand

their collective purpose and how different activities fit together, and external legitimacy, communicating to stakeholders that the organization's hybrid nature represents a coherent and valuable approach, not confused opportunism (Navis & Glynn, 2011). These identity constructions are an ongoing communicative practice through which organizations continuously negotiate what their hybridity means (Zilber, 2009).

Scholars examining hybrid identity have identified sharply different approaches organizations take to managing plural commitments. Organizations pursuing integrated approaches often craft what Glynn (2000) termed flexible identities, attempting to claim entirely new organizational categories that inherently blend multiple logics. These organizations position themselves as genuinely novel forms, not combinations of existing types. Social enterprises adopting "double bottom line" identities exemplify this approach, framing commercial and social objectives as naturally integrated (Jay, 2013). Similarly, content teams may position themselves as a new category of professional competitive entertainment teams that inherently combine competitive excellence, audience engagement, and community participation as coequal and mutually reinforcing objectives.

Organizations pursuing differentiated approaches may develop what researchers describe as compartmentalized identities, acknowledging distinct organizational facets while strategically emphasizing different aspects in different contexts (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). This approach recognizes internal multiplicity without claiming seamless integration. The organization maintains that competing logics represent legitimate but separable dimensions of collective identity, with each dimension appropriate for particular activities or stakeholder relationships. Wry and colleagues (2014) found that successful hybrids often engage in strategic presentation across stakeholder groups, highlighting whichever organizational

dimension resonates most strongly with each audience while maintaining that both dimensions authentically represent the collective.

Alignment and Ongoing Management. The literature suggests that alignment across these dimensions promotes stability (Battilana et al., 2015; Greenwood et al., 2011). Organizations that choose integration should do so consistently across activities, membership, culture, and practices in order to avoid confusion about how the organization operates. Los Andes exemplified such consistency. It integrated activities, hired young staff without established banking or social work identities, socialized them into a blended identity, created unified structures without separate departments, and cultivated a cohesive culture around development banking (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). This consistency helped manage tensions by building an organization in which members did not perceive commercial and social logics as competing because they were never asked to choose between them. However, perfect alignment is difficult to achieve, and many hybrids exhibit mixed configurations, integrating in some dimensions while differentiating in others (Smith & Besharov, 2019). Gümüsay et al. (2020) extend this insight with the concept of *elastic hybridity*, showing how organizations facing central and incompatible logics can sustain unity by allowing practices and meanings to remain open to multiple interpretations, so that members anchored in different logics can each recognize the organization as their own.

Recent work has reconceptualized how organizations manage institutional complexity. Rather than viewing certification or legitimation mechanisms solely as external validation, research now examines them as enabling and constraining infrastructures (Cherrington et al., 2026). Studies of B Corporation certification, which confirms that a commercial organization achieves standards of transparency, accountability, and

environmental and social performance, show how formal frameworks for accountability and stakeholder engagement function as scaffolds that make paradoxes manageable rather than resolvable (Boni et al., 2025; Kim & Schifeling, 2022). This perspective shifts emphasis from solving tensions between competing logics toward continuously managing them through institutional supports that provide structure while preserving productive tension.

This literature establishes that hybrids navigate plural logics through interrelated mechanisms, including *structural choices* about integration versus differentiation, *membership decisions* about hybrid individuals versus specialists, *boundary spanning practices* that bridge logic divides, and *identity work* that shapes how plural commitments are understood. While esports content teams likely engage with some of these dynamics, this dissertation focuses on how transparency and hybridity function as distinctive modalities through which teams manage plural commitments. Specifically, it examines how public visibility and ongoing integration of institutional logics operate as organizing mechanisms in digitally mediated contexts. For content teams, digital platform affordances and community norms may function as enabling and constraining infrastructures that structure how teams navigate competitive, entertainment, and community logics without requiring full resolution of inherent tensions. Player streamers who excel competitively while naturally engaging audiences exemplify boundary spanning dynamics, demonstrating through individual practice that combining competitive excellence with entertainment value remains feasible and potentially synergistic.

3. Institutional Logics and Hybrid Configurations

Understanding hybridity requires an appreciation of institutional logics, the broader belief systems and associated practices that guide organized activity. As introduced in

Chapter 1, this dissertation draws on Thornton et al.'s (2012) framework of institutional logics (*market, professional, state, community*, and *family*) to identify three field-specific logics operating in esports: competitive, entertainment, and community logics. These logics provide distinct prescriptions for appropriate goals, practices, and forms of authority, shaping how organizations define success and organize work.

When organizations attempt to integrate multiple logics simultaneously, they become hybrid organizations, bringing diverse value systems under a single organizational arrangement. Such hybridity generates what Greenwood et al. (2011) termed *institutional complexity*, a condition in which organizations face incompatible prescriptions from multiple institutional logics. Besharov and Smith (2014) offered a framework for understanding how this complexity manifests. They proposed two key dimensions: *compatibility*, the extent to which logics prescribe consistent or contradictory actions, and *centrality*, the extent to which each logic is core to the organization's mission and operations. Crossing these dimensions, they identified four ideal-type configurations that capture different organizational experiences of logic multiplicity: aligned, contested, dominant, and estranged. The four configurations outlined by Besharov and Smith (2014) are presented here for definitional clarity and conceptual grounding and are not applied as a typology in the empirical analysis. In this dissertation, these configurations function as sensitizing categories that clarify the range of ways institutional complexity may be experienced. This treatment follows the current direction of the logics literature, which cautions against deploying logics as fixed analytical labels and calls for research that examines how logics cohere and endure through values, everyday practice, and ongoing governance (Lounsbury et al., 2021). The three logics examined here are accordingly treated

as patterns sustained in the field's talk and evaluation, and the empirical chapters trace how audiences invoke, enforce, and weigh each logic in practice.

When multiple logics are all central and highly compatible, teams experience *aligned configurations*. The logics reinforce or easily synergize with one another, allowing organizations to pursue dual objectives without significant internal conflict. An aligned hybrid experiences relatively smooth integration and can serve different stakeholder expectations simultaneously because those expectations rarely conflict. For content teams, alignment might exist when competitive preparation and audience entertainment naturally complement each other, for example when showcasing player skill development improves performance and engages fans who enjoy watching improvement narratives. Community participation can align with both competitive and entertainment logics when audience feedback helps teams identify talented players or when community voting on team decisions creates engaging content while incorporating stakeholder perspectives into organizational governance.

In contrast, when multiple central logics fundamentally clash in their prescriptions, organizations face *contested configurations*. This represents a volatile scenario in which members experience frequent battles over priorities. Teams facing contested configurations may oscillate between different priorities depending on which coalition has influence at a given moment, or they may experience paralysis as decision-making becomes mired in unresolvable conflicts (Smith et al., 2013). A content team might experience a contested configuration when serious competitive training regimes conflict with entertaining content. If authentic training is boring to watch and entertaining content compromises training quality, the team faces a genuine dilemma with no easy resolution. Similarly, community

demands for inclusive decision-making may conflict with competitive needs for rapid, expert-driven strategic adjustments.

When one logic clearly dominates organizational focus while other logics are secondary and compatible with the main logic, Besharov and Smith (2014) identified *dominant configurations*. The peripheral logics create little friction and may even support the dominant logic. Traditional sports teams often exhibit a dominant competitive logic with entertainment as a secondary, compatible concern, where entertainment serves primarily to promote the sport and rarely conflicts with competitive goals. The dominant configuration is relatively stable because secondary logics are not prominent enough to create sustained tensions.

Finally, *estranged configurations* emerge when multiple logics exist but one dominates while others are peripheral and seen as incompatible. Whenever a peripheral logic asserts itself, it is quickly overridden by the dominant logic. Tensions may be latent, but they seldom surface overtly because the dominant logic eclipses alternatives before conflicts become acute. An estranged configuration might characterize an esports organization run entirely as a media business with a nominal competitive team that is never allowed to interfere with entertainment priorities. In that case, the competitive logic is present in name only.

This framework shows that not all hybrids face the same challenges. The centrality of each logic and their mutual compatibility shape very different organizational experiences. Hybrids with compatible logics, or those that can buffer incompatible logics through domain separation, tend toward stability. Those with central, opposing logics face continual challenges in decision-making and legitimacy (Pache & Santos, 2010). External factors also

matter. Field-level pressures may tilt the balance toward certain logics or shape their compatibility. If the broader esports field expects teams to engage audiences, that field-level expectation may increase compatibility between competitive and entertainment logics by aligning stakeholder expectations across both domains. The emergence of community logic as a third core dimension in esports, reflecting platform cultures of audience participation and co-creation, adds complexity but may also enable novel configurations that traditional sports do not exhibit.

4. The Three Logics of Content Teams

As established in Chapter 1, esports content teams exemplify hybrid organizing organizations that navigate *competitive, entertainment,* and *community logics* (Heidenreich et al., 2022). These logics carry different norms and values that create genuine tensions for team organizing (Besharov & Smith, 2014). A *competitive esports logic*, drawing from traditional sports, prizes meritocracy, expertise development, disciplined training, strategic sophistication, and winning as the ultimate success metric (Parry, 2019). It prescribes practices such as rigorous practice schedules, strategic secrecy to maintain competitive advantage, hierarchical coaching structures, and professionalized management (Reitman et al., 2020). An *entertainment logic*, drawing from media industries, prizes audience engagement, content creativity, personality-driven narratives, and viewership as the primary success metric (Cunningham et al., 2021). It prescribes practices such as regular content production, transparency and behind-the-scenes access to build audience connection, personality cultivation to create engaging characters, and responsiveness to audience feedback and trends (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). A *community logic*, drawing from digital platform cultures and participatory media, prizes collective identity,

distributed participation, shared ownership of outcomes, and community cohesion as core values. It prescribes practices including audience input into decision-making, recognition of community members as stakeholders, not passive consumers, transparent communication about organizational activities, and cultivation of belonging through shared rituals and insider knowledge (Jenkins, 2006; van Dijck, 2013). Table 3.2 summarizes the three logics, their institutional roots, and their distinct roles in content team organizing.

Table 3.2

Three Institutional Logics in Esports Content Teams

Dimension	Competitive Logic	Entertainment Logic	Community Logic
Institutional tradition	Professional order; traditional sport (Parry, 2019; Reitman et al., 2020)	Market order; media industries (Cunningham et al., 2021; Nieborg & Poell, 2018)	Community order; participatory digital culture (Jenkins, 2006; Thornton et al., 2012)
Core values	Meritocracy, expertise, discipline, strategic sophistication	Audience engagement, creativity, personality-driven narrative	Belonging, mutual recognition, collective identity
Prescribed practices	Rigorous practice schedules; strategic secrecy; hierarchical coaching	Regular content production; behind-the-scenes access; responsiveness to trends	Transparent communication; recognition of audiences as

			stakeholders; shared rituals
Primary success criterion	Winning	Viewership and engagement	Legitimacy, authenticity, sustained loyalty
Role in content teams	Organizes competitive production	Organizes content production	Evaluates and legitimates practices organized by the other two logics

These three logics do not automatically align. Optimal competitive preparation may not make engaging content, since watching teams run drills or study game film may bore audiences (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019). Strategic transparency may compromise competitive advantage if opponents learn team strategies (Jenny et al., 2017). Time allocated to content production or community engagement reduces time available for focused training (Taylor, 2012). Personnel decisions become complex when teams must consider competitive skill, on-camera presence, and community rapport simultaneously (Burroughs & Rama, 2015). Community demands for participation in roster decisions may conflict with coaching expertise about optimal team composition. The hybrid nature of content teams therefore creates ongoing tensions that must be actively navigated through communicative identity work and structural choices (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

5. Hybrid Tensions in Content Team Organizing

Research on hybrid organizations has documented several persistent challenges that resonate with the content team context. Battilana and Dorado (2010) found that hybrid organizations must often make critical decisions during early formation about whether to pursue organizational *differentiation* (separating activities aligned with different logics) or *integration* (expecting organizational members to embody multiple logics simultaneously). This choice has lasting consequences for organizational culture, hiring practices, and capacity for coordination (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). Content teams have developed various approaches to navigating these tensions. Some maintain domain differentiation, treating competitive activities as focused on training and tournaments, content creation activities as focused on media output, and community management as distinct stakeholder relations work (Pache & Santos, 2013). This reduces day-to-day clashes, because each domain can prioritize its own logic without constant negotiation. However, it requires strong coordination at the organizational level to ensure all domains serve overall team goals and may produce a fragmented identity if domains develop distinct subcultures (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Los Ratones, for instance, might separate practice sessions (competitive logic), highlight videos (entertainment logic), and community voting sessions (community logic) into distinct activities with different personnel primarily responsible for each.

Other teams adopt more integrated approaches, expecting players themselves to function as content creators and community participants simultaneously (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). This integration strengthens the team brand by allowing audiences to connect directly with competitive players and participate in team processes (Cunningham et al., 2021) but intensifies tensions as individuals must personally balance competing demands

(Besharov & Smith, 2014). Players may view content and community responsibilities as distractions from training, creating internal resistance, or they may embrace these activities and then face scrutiny about whether entertainment and community focus undermines competitive performance. The integrated model places much of the burden of managing competing logics on individuals, not on organizational structures. Near Airport's approach of recruiting players who already have streaming audiences exemplifies this integration, by hiring individuals whose existing practice demonstrates capacity to navigate multiple logics simultaneously.

Pratt and Foreman (2000) identify additional complexity in hybrid identity management, distinguishing between organizations that maintain multiple identities in tension versus those that attempt to synthesize a coherent hybrid identity. Content teams navigate this tension through communicative framing, sometimes emphasizing their competitive credentials ("we're here to win"), sometimes their entertainment orientation ("we're creating content for our community"), and sometimes attempting to present these as naturally aligned ("winning is more entertaining"). The success of these framings depends partly on audience reception and partly on whether organizational practices support the claimed integration. When teams claim that competitive excellence and entertainment value align naturally but then reduce transparency to protect competitive advantage, audiences may perceive inconsistency or inauthenticity, undermining community-based legitimacy.

The hybrid organizing literature also reveals how different combinations of logics generate distinct forms of organizational tension. Greenwood et al. (2011) distinguish between *compatible logics* that can be pursued simultaneously with minimal conflict, competing logics that require active balancing and trade-offs, and *conflicting logics* that

create fundamental incompatibilities. Among content teams, competitive and entertainment logics appear to be competing rather than fully conflicting. They generate genuine tensions and require careful balancing, but organizations have demonstrated that both can be pursued through strategic coordination. However, specific practices may face more severe conflict. Revealing strategic preparation in detail is likely to create true incompatibility between competitive advantage and entertainment transparency, forcing teams toward partial concealment or strategic editing of content.

Community logic operates somewhat differently. Rather than organizing production activities like competitive and entertainment logics, community logic functions primarily as an evaluative framework through which other practices are interpreted (Thornton et al., 2012). This creates an unusual form of hybridity in which two logics structure what organizations do while a third logic shapes how those activities are assessed and legitimated. The literature on commons-based peer production (Benkler, 2006; O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007) demonstrates that community logic can, in some contexts, directly organize productive work through distributed coordination and peer evaluation. Among content teams, however, community participation does not extend to organizing competitive preparation or strategic decision-making. Instead, community logic mediates organizational legitimacy by establishing expectations about transparency, authenticity, and alignment between claimed values and visible practice.

This configuration has important implications for adaptation. Organizations navigating multiple production logics (competitive and entertainment) while being evaluated through a third legitimacy logic (community) face pressures that single-logic organizations do not. They cannot simply optimize for any single logic without risking evaluation failure

in another domain. They cannot fully compartmentalize logics because audiences observe and assess integration itself as a signal of authenticity. And they cannot assume that successfully managing tensions privately will translate to external legitimacy, because community logic requires visible evidence of appropriate navigation. These conditions create both constraints and opportunities for organizational innovation, as teams develop novel practices for managing multi-logic demands while remaining observable and evaluable.

6. Identity Work and Legitimacy in Hybrid Content Teams

Identity work is central to successful content teams (Glynn, 2000; Jay, 2013). These organizations cultivate identities as high-performance competitors, relatable entertainers, and community-centered collectives. Some teams use branding and narratives that explicitly celebrate this triadic nature. Phrases such as "we grind to be champions, we share the journey, and we build together" capture an ethos that presents competitive excellence, transparent documentation, and community participation as natural and complementary (Wry et al., 2011). Boundary spanners are especially valuable. Player-streamers who excel competitively, naturally engage audiences, and actively participate in community discussions act as human bridges between logics, demonstrating through their practice that the three-way combination remains feasible (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). Community managers who understand competitive dynamics and content requirements similarly bridge operational domains, translating between specialist perspectives and facilitating coordination.

Content teams also face legitimacy challenges on multiple fronts (Heidenreich et al., 2022). Sports traditionalists may dismiss teams that emphasize entertainment or community

participation as not “real” competitors and question whether organizations focused on content creation and audience engagement maintain competitive integrity (Parry, 2019). Entertainment industry observers may not take competitive gaming seriously as a professional endeavor, viewing it as a niche subculture (Taylor, 2012). Platform communities may criticize teams perceived as treating audiences instrumentally. Content teams must therefore engage in legitimacy work across multiple domains (Suchman, 1995). They conform to competitive norms by maintaining training professionalism and competitive integrity, while also conforming to entertainment norms by generating consistent viewership and cultural relevance, and to community norms by demonstrating authentic engagement with audience perspectives and honoring participatory commitments. This triadic legitimacy work is a challenge particular to hybrid organizing in contexts where all three logics face external skepticism from actors anchored in single-logic traditions (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Navis & Glynn, 2011). Research on legitimacy in social media contexts supports this reading of where such work now occurs. Castelló et al. (2016) document a networked legitimacy strategy in which organizations gain legitimacy through participation in open, non-hierarchical platforms and through the co-construction of agendas with their audiences, conditions under which legitimacy depends on sustained engagement more than on formal endorsement. For content teams, whose principal evaluators are the platform communities themselves, this networked pathway is the primary one available.

The challenges content teams face in navigating competing logics generate organizing innovations, practices that serve multiple objectives simultaneously (Jay, 2013). When content teams invite community input on roster decisions or team design choices such as names, logos, and jerseys through polls, chat deliberation, or member-only votes, they

create practices that operate across competitive, entertainment, and community logics. Similarly, when teams stream practice sessions in which player performance is evaluated in real time and roster decisions are discussed publicly, they develop hybrid practices that integrate competitive selection, content production, and community sensemaking in one practice. Whether such innovations remain locally contained or acquire field-level influence depends on broader contextual conditions, particularly the institutional environment in which content teams operate and the digital platforms through which these practices become visible (Smets et al., 2012). The next section examines the digital infrastructure through which these practices become visible.

E. Visibility, Audiences, and Institutional Work in Digital Contexts

1. Digital Platforms and Institutional Work

Esports is inherently digital, and its development has been inseparable from digital platforms, including game platforms, streaming services, and social media. The concept of *platformization* captures how online platforms are reshaping cultural and industrial fields. Nieborg and Poell (2018) defined *platformization* as the penetration of digital platforms into the production, distribution, and monetization of cultural goods. Major technology firms such as Twitch, YouTube, and Facebook, along with game publishers themselves, act as institutional actors with significant power over field dynamics. Their policies, algorithms, and business models directly shape which organizational practices are feasible and valuable.

Streaming platforms have created new channels for content delivery that bypass traditional sports media (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). This development enabled esports to flourish without relying on television network deals, a significant advantage for an emerging field that might have struggled to gain access to established broadcast channels (Taylor,

2018). However, platform dependence creates new forms of institutional constraint (van Dijck et al., 2018). Changes in platform policies or algorithms directly affect how teams and players operate. Twitch's rules on content monetization shape team revenue models. YouTube's algorithms influence what types of content receives wide distribution (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). The logic of platformization emphasizes data-driven, algorithmic distribution and monetization through advertising and subscriptions, and this logic increasingly influences field norms (Poell et al., 2022). Success in esports is measured not only through tournament performance but also through follower counts, stream viewership, and online engagement, metrics defined and controlled by platforms (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017).

Recent scholarship has extended institutional work concepts to digitally mediated and emergent fields, contexts particularly relevant for understanding content teams. Digital industries often lack fully stabilized institutional frameworks, making them productive settings for examining how institutions are created, contested, and reconfigured (Hinings et al., 2018). Digital affordances alter how institutional work is produced, observed, and circulated (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Fessi and Ben Slimane (2023), for example, show how market digitalization facilitates new forms of institutional work by reshaping producer–consumer relationships, increasing consumer influence over norms, dematerializing market objects, and normalizing digital platforms as legitimate economic arenas. In such fields, institutional change may be propelled by new practices and relationships enabled by technology, practices that intentionally or unintentionally reconfigure institutional arrangements (Hinings et al., 2018).

Digital platforms also enable what Doshi and Schmidt (2024) term *soft governance*, transparency-based mechanisms that allow participants in low-governance environments to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate actors without relying on formal regulatory structures. This conceptualization is especially relevant for esports, where publisher dominance and fragmented governance create conditions in which transparency itself functions as a governance mechanism. Content teams' decisions to broadcast organizational operations create forms of voluntary accountability that audiences, sponsors, and other stakeholders can use to evaluate legitimacy. Transparency thus operates as more than information disclosure, becoming an infrastructure through which governance emerges in the absence of strong formal institutions.

At the same time, transparency in digital contexts is not a neutral or automatic condition. Research on the European Union's Digital Services Act transparency database demonstrates how platforms can strategically comply with transparency requirements while maintaining opacity around actual decision-making processes (Shahi et al., 2025). Organizations curate what they make visible, how they frame visible activities, and which audiences gain access to particular forms of visibility. Content teams similarly engage in strategic visibility management, as discussed in Chapter 2, selectively broadcasting practices, curating archived content, and framing organizational activities for diverse audiences. This strategic dimension means transparency functions simultaneously as a resource for building legitimacy and as a constraint that shapes what organizations can reasonably do while under observation.

2. Visibility Infrastructure and Its Mechanisms

The communicative infrastructure created by digital platforms reshapes how institutional work operates. In traditional organizational contexts, many practices remain invisible beyond organizational boundaries due to legal, competitive, or professional constraints. Innovation typically occurs behind closed doors, and knowledge about effective practices spreads gradually through professional networks, consulting relationships, or formal publications (Greenwood et al., 2002). By contrast, digital platforms make organizational practices immediately and widely observable. Content teams broadcast their practices to large audiences who can witness them in real time and revisit them through archived recordings. This shift transforms institutional work from a largely indirect process into one grounded in public demonstration, where organizational practices themselves become visible sites of institutional influence (Hinings et al., 2018).

Platform affordances structure this transformation through three interrelated institutional mechanisms. First, *immediate demonstration* occurs when visible practices become instantaneously available as field-level reference points. Unlike traditional fields where innovations diffuse gradually, a single streamed session can demonstrate a novel practice to every team in the field at once, including implementation details that would normally remain private (Smets et al., 2012). Second, *temporal extension* operates through persistent archives that extend institutional influence beyond the moment of performance. Practices streamed once remain available months or years later, enabling mimetic diffusion as organizations encounter archived content through platform algorithms, community sharing, or deliberate searches for organizational models (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Third, *distributed interpretation* arises as audiences connect observed practices to broader field-

level debates through cross-platform discussion, constructing shared understandings of what practices signify and what they reveal about legitimate organizing (Evans et al., 2017). Through these interpretive processes, specific team actions are reframed as exemplars of more general organizational approaches.

Together, these mechanisms form a visibility infrastructure (Flyverbom, 2016, 2019) that mediates between organizational practice and institutional influence. This infrastructure enables institutional work by creating channels through which team-level practices become publicly legible demonstrations, as when Los Ratones' livestreamed roster decisions provide observable models for incorporating audience feedback into team governance. At the same time, the same infrastructure constrains institutional work by producing recursive accountability. Archived streams render past actions continuously present, requiring current practices to remain intelligible in relation to earlier commitments visible in prior VODs (video on demands, Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Digital visibility therefore functions simultaneously as a resource that amplifies institutional influence and as a constraint that limits how organizations can revise practices without reputational consequence.

At the same time, visibility generates accountability pressures that can constrain institutional entrepreneurship even as it enables rapid diffusion (Flyverbom, 2019). Teams are aware that their practices will be observed, evaluated, and compared, which may inhibit experimentation with approaches that could appear illegitimate despite being potentially effective (Christin, 2020). The same affordances that enable institutional innovation through public demonstration also generate pressures toward conformity, as organizations become reluctant to deviate visibly from established expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Platforms therefore enable both rapid institutional change and rapid institutional enforcement, creating a persistent tension between experimentation and conformity.

The dematerialization of esports as digital products creates unique institutional dynamics. The "sport" itself can be patched and altered through software updates, meaning that rules of play can literally change with new versions. This creates instability uncommon in traditional sports, where rule changes happen slowly through collective governance (Greenwood et al., 2002). In esports, stakeholders must continuously negotiate with publishers about game balance and competitive settings, essentially trying to institutionalize practices around version stability during competitions in order to preserve competitive integrity. Teams, player associations, and tournament organizers lobby publishers about patch timing and scope, attempting to create informal norms even though publishers retain unilateral technical control (Karhulahti, 2017). This represents a novel form of institutional work specific to contexts where the competitive object itself remains digitally mutable. Content teams engage in this work when they publicly test patches, demonstrate competitive impacts of updates, and create community discussions about balance changes, using their visibility to generate pressure on publishers through demonstrated effects, since formal governance channels are largely closed to them.

3. Distributed Participation and Transparency as Governance

Digital contexts also expand who can participate in institutional work, a second consequence of the visibility affordance: when organizational practice is visible to dispersed audiences, the capacity to evaluate, theorize, and contest institutional arrangements extends well beyond established professionals and organizational leaders. Traditional institutional work scholarship often focuses on established professionals or organizational leaders whose

formal positions confer authority (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Digital platforms, however, enable audiences to participate as carriers, enforcers, and contributors to institutional work. Audiences act as institutional carriers when they observe practices, share clips, and amplify demonstrations across platforms. They function as institutional enforcers when they compare organizations, demand consistency between stated values and observable actions, and exert public pressure for alignment with community norms. They become institutional participants when they provide direct feedback, suggest organizational changes, or, as in cases like Los Ratones, vote on team decisions. This distributed participation introduces additional complexity into institutional work processes, blurring traditional boundaries around who can legitimately influence institutional arrangements.

Recent legitimacy scholarship clarifies how this distributed participation aggregates into institutional consequence. Bitektine and Haack (2015) distinguish between individual propriety judgments, the assessments particular evaluators form about whether a practice is appropriate, and collective validity, the shared perception that a practice is accepted within a field. Under stable conditions, validity suppresses deviant individual judgments, but in unsettled fields the relationship inverts, and shifts in distributed individual judgments can cascade into new collective validity. Digitally networked arenas accelerate this dynamic, as evaluations that once formed through slow professional channels now form publicly, visibly, and interactively across social media, where they are subject to contagion, contestation, and rapid revision (Etter et al., 2019). For content teams, audience judgments expressed in chat, forums, and social platforms are the raw material from which field-level validity may emerge, which is why audience evaluation carries institutional weight despite audiences holding no formal authority.

Digitalization also reshapes what institutional work looks like in substantive terms. Fessi and Ben Slimane (2023) identified forms of institutional work enabled by digital markets, including normalizing digital platforms as legitimate arenas for activity, dematerializing market objects by redefining them as digital goods, and shifting producer-consumer relationships by enabling direct engagement. In esports, the community's acceptance of streaming platforms as legitimate spaces for sports spectatorship represents successful normalization work (Cunningham et al., 2021). A decade ago, watching competitive gaming on Twitch was marginal; now it is standard practice among esports fans. This normalization emerged through distributed actions: tournament organizers choosing Twitch over traditional broadcast, teams prioritizing streaming engagement, and fans treating stream chat as integral to the viewing experience (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Content teams participate in and accelerate this normalization by treating streams as primary competitive venues, not secondary broadcast channels, effectively reversing traditional hierarchies where physical events are primary and digital broadcasts are derivative.

These dynamics position transparency as a governance infrastructure in a field where formal governance remains contested. Lacking reliable certifications or endorsements from authoritative governing bodies, content teams rely on continuous public demonstration, and institutional work becomes inseparable from communicative performance, as organizations must repeatedly enact the institutional arrangements they advocate through visible practice (Doshi & Schmidt, 2024). The final section draws these threads together into an account of content teams' distinctive institutional position.

F. Content Teams' Institutional Position

1. Organizational Innovation in an Evolving Field

Institutional fields do not simply crystallize into stable forms. They evolve through ongoing processes of negotiation, experimentation, and selection (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). In emerging fields like esports, this evolution remains actively underway (Heidenreich et al., 2022). Different organizational models compete for legitimacy and resources (Battilana et al., 2009). Governance proposals vie for acceptance (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Multiple logics about what esports fundamentally is remain in tension: is it sport, entertainment, technology, community, or some novel hybrid? The outcomes of these contests remain uncertain, creating both opportunities and risks for organizations (Thornton et al., 2012).

Content teams represent organizational innovators in this evolving field (Battilana et al., 2009). By developing hybrid competitive-entertainment-community models and operating with high transparency, they propose new answers to questions about how esports teams should organize. Their success or failure influences whether these innovations diffuse to become new templates for organizing or remain marginal experiments (Greenwood et al., 2002). The relationship between organizational innovation and field evolution has been extensively theorized in institutional scholarship. Organizational experiments undertaken by individual actors can gradually shift field-level norms and structures through various pathways: by demonstrating viability of alternative forms, creating competitive pressures, attracting resources, or entering field-level discourse (Battilana et al., 2009; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Greenwood et al., 2002; Phillips et al., 2004; Smets et al., 2012; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). What remains less well understood is how such influence operates in

contexts where organizational practices are continuously visible to field-level actors, without needing professional networks, publications, or formal knowledge transfer to diffuse.

The digital platforms discussed in the previous section create new conditions for this relationship. Because content teams' practices are persistently visible on streaming platforms, their organizational innovations become immediately observable to distributed field actors: other teams, sponsors, tournament organizers, publishers, and community members. A coach can watch how Los Ratones handles roster decisions; a sponsor can observe Near Airport's operational transparency; a publisher can see community reactions to patch changes. This continuous visibility transforms organizational experimentation into potential field-level demonstration, though whether such demonstrations actually influence field evolution depends on how diverse actors interpret and respond to what they observe.

Field evolution, however, is not determined by organizational innovation alone. Publisher power, platform policies, economic conditions, and broader cultural trends all shape which innovations survive and which fade (Heidenreich et al., 2022). Because publishers retain ultimate control over competition formats, intellectual property, and game updates, organizational innovations that conflict with publisher interests face structural limits regardless of their effectiveness or popularity. Platform policy changes can similarly make previously viable practices untenable. The esports winter of 2023 to 2024 demonstrated how economic shocks can override organizational innovation, as many teams with innovative practices still disbanded when venture capital funding contracted and sponsorship revenues collapsed (Maas, 2023). The two teams that disbanded during this study period, The Ruddy Sack and Near Airport, provide valuable temporal variation for examining both possibilities (Morris, 2025; Xu, 2025). Their dissolution despite developing

innovative practices raises questions about whether institutional innovations alone suffice without additional resources or favorable field conditions (cf. Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

2. Three Conditions of a Distinctive Position

Content teams' distinctive positioning within esports emerges from the intersection of the institutional dynamics examined in this chapter. Their structural characteristics create particular affordances and constraints for engaging in institutional work. Three conditions prove especially consequential: their boundary-spanning hybrid position, esports' status as an emerging field, and their distinctive legitimacy challenges.

First, content teams *occupy a boundary-spanning position* that enables novel forms of institutional work (Battilana et al., 2009). Because they operate at the intersection of competitive, entertainment, and community logics, they must develop practices that satisfy all three simultaneously (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Unlike traditional esports teams that prioritize competitive logic or entertainment organizations that focus solely on media production, content teams cannot adopt established templates and must innovate to navigate their hybrid positioning (Jay, 2013). Los Ratones' incorporation of community voting into roster decisions, for instance, emerged from members' desire to involve their audience rather than from a strategic plan to revolutionize team governance. Yet this practice, once demonstrated publicly, became available as a model that other organizations could reference in developing their own approaches to stakeholder participation.

Their semi-formal nature may enhance their capacity for practice-driven change. Without elaborate hierarchies or formal strategic planning systems, innovations arise from members solving practical problems in real time (Lawrence et al., 2011). Because these practices emerge organically, they resemble the conditions that produce practice-driven

institutional change (Smets et al., 2012). Their experimental ethos and informal origins make their innovations potentially more accessible and replicable for other teams who face similar operational challenges.

Second, esports' *status as an emerging field* creates a receptive environment for organizational experimentation while simultaneously constraining the scope of potential influence (Hinings et al., 2018). Institutional fluidity lowers resistance to alternative organizing models, and absence of entrenched structures enables new practices to gain traction more readily than they might in mature fields with established governance (Padgett & Powell, 2012). David et al.'s (2013) analysis of institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields suggests that actors in nascent domains must draw on logics from outside their field, affiliating with external authorities and emphasizing societal benefits over narrow professional interests. Content teams exemplify this pattern, importing entertainment streaming logics from platforms like Twitch and YouTube, community participation norms from digital creator cultures, and hybrid business models from social media influencers. Their institutional work thus operates through demonstration of alternative possibilities drawn from adjacent fields.

Yet as established in the previous section, publisher dominance and platform dependence create structural limits. Content teams can influence norms about how teams operate, engage audiences, manage revenue, and involve communities, but they cannot directly alter formal competitive structures or intellectual property regimes. Their institutional work operates primarily at the organizational and normative levels rather than at the regulatory level (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This creates an important scope condition: content teams may reshape what counts as legitimate team practice and what

organizational forms appear viable, but they cannot fundamentally alter the publisher-centric power structure that defines esports' institutional architecture. Their influence necessarily operates within publisher authority, not against it.

Third, content teams face *distinctive legitimacy challenges* that shape which practices endure. Their hybrid nature subjects them to skepticism from competitive purists, entertainment industry observers, and community members concerned about authentic participation versus performative engagement (Besharov & Smith, 2014). Competitive traditionalists question whether entertainment and community focus undermines performance. Entertainment audiences may find competitive seriousness limiting or inaccessible. Community members may suspect that participatory gestures serve marketing purposes more than genuine stakeholder inclusion. Content teams therefore engage in legitimacy work across multiple domains (Suchman, 1995), demonstrating competitive integrity, entertainment value, and community authenticity simultaneously (Navis & Glynn, 2011). The transparency discussed in the Digital Platform Infrastructure section intensifies these pressures by making practices publicly observable and difficult to compartmentalize (Flyverbom, 2019). Teams cannot present different identities to different stakeholders when all stakeholders can observe the same streams and archived content.

These legitimacy dynamics intersect with broader field-level contests about whether esports is sport, entertainment, community, or hybrid form (Heidenreich et al., 2022). Content teams' ability to reconcile competitive, entertainment, and community logics offers potential models for the field's evolving identity (Jay, 2013). If they succeed in demonstrating that all three logics can coexist productively, they provide existence proofs for institutionalizing hybridity at the field level. If they falter, demonstrating irresolvable

tensions between logics, they highlight contradictions that may push the field toward clearer specialization (Thornton et al., 2012). As noted in the previous section, the fact that two of the three focal teams disbanded raises important questions about whether institutional innovation alone suffices without additional structural supports, suggesting that field-level institutional work may require enabling conditions, including economic viability, publisher support, or platform stability, in addition to novel practices.

Together, these three conditions position content teams as semi-formal hybrids operating transparently in an emerging, digitally mediated field facing economic uncertainty and governance fragmentation. They develop innovations born of necessity, specifically, the need to navigate competing logics, sustain their operations, and establish legitimacy across multiple stakeholder groups. Through the digital affordances described earlier, these innovations become visible to the field and may contribute to institutional evolution depending on how other actors interpret and respond to them (Smets et al., 2012). However, the scope and sustainability of this influence depend on the field-level factors established in the previous section: publisher policies, platform stability, economic conditions, and broader field evolution toward formalization or continued fragmentation. Understanding whether and how content teams' practices constitute consequential institutional work requires empirical examination of how their transparent operations actually unfold and how field-level actors respond to the demonstrations these operations create.

G. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter developed the theoretical foundation for understanding content teams as hybrid organizations operating in an emerging field where their practices may constitute institutional work through mechanisms shaped by digital contexts. By integrating three

complementary literatures, including institutional work, hybrid organizing, and field-level change, the chapter illuminated distinct but interconnected dimensions of content teams' institutional positioning.

Institutional work theory establishes that actors shape institutions through routine practices as well as explicit change projects (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Smets et al., 2012). Institutional creation, maintenance, and disruption occur not only through formal reform efforts but also through the cumulative effects of everyday problem-solving. Recent developments emphasize how institutional work operates differently in emerging versus mature fields, with actors in nascent domains necessarily drawing on external logics, affiliating with outside authorities, and building legitimacy through demonstration (David et al., 2013). Digital affordances accelerate these dynamics by making organizational practices visible and persistent, enabling rapid demonstration effects while creating accountability pressures that constrain experimentation (Hinings et al., 2018). Critically, digital platforms enable new forms of soft governance through transparency, allowing participants to evaluate organizational legitimacy through observed practices in contexts where formal governance structures remain weak or contested (Doshi & Schmidt, 2024).

Hybrid organizing research examines the tensions and generative potential that arise when organizations navigate multiple institutional logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Hybrids must decide how to integrate or differentiate logics across their structures and practices, must engage in identity work to legitimate their plural commitments, and must manage legitimacy expectations from multiple audiences (Besharov & Smith, 2014). The interplay of logic centrality and compatibility shapes whether organizations experience alignment or conflict (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Jay, 2013). Recent work reconceptualizes institutional

complexity as requiring continuous management through enabling-constraining infrastructures instead of permanent resolution, and emphasizes how institutional context, including social problem domains that organizations address, shapes the nature and viability of hybrid forms (Mair & Rathert, 2020). For content teams, navigating competitive, entertainment, and community logics creates organizing challenges that generate innovations because no established templates exist for this three-way combination.

Field-level change scholarship situates these organizational dynamics within the broader institutional environment of esports (Heidenreich et al., 2022). That environment remains fluid and contested, characterized by publisher dominance, platform dependence, economic uncertainty exemplified by the "esports winter" of 2023–2024, and unresolved questions about whether esports should be defined as sport, entertainment, community, or hybrid domain (Thornton et al., 2012). The formalization efforts reviewed above have not settled these questions: esports governance continues to draw characterization as a "wild west" marked by thin structures and imbalanced power dynamics (Hutchinson et al., 2025). Digital infrastructures enable new forms of institutional work through visibility and rapid practice diffusion (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), and audiences function as institutional carriers, enforcers, and participants who shape organizational practices through distributed engagement, without holding formal authority.

Synthesizing these literatures reveals content teams as organizing entities whose hybrid nature, semi-formal structures, digital visibility, and field context give them an unusual capacity for institutional influence. Their practices arise from the practical need to balance competitive, entertainment, and community demands while sustaining their operations. When these practices are broadcast and archived, they become institutional

resources for field-level learning, regardless of whether they succeed or fail (Smets et al., 2012). Their experiments may inform broader expectations about legitimate organizing within esports and offer models for navigating the field's hybrid identity and economic challenges. However, the dissolution of The Ruddy Sack and Near Airport during the study period raises important questions about scope conditions for practice-driven institutional change, suggesting that organizational innovation alone may not suffice without favorable economic conditions, publisher support, or field-level stability (Morris, 2025; Xu, 2025).

This review and analysis complements Chapter 2's focus on team adaptation by demonstrating how adaptive practices also function as institutional work within the emerging field of esports. Where Chapter 2 examined the *interaction level* of organizing (how teams coordinate action and improve performance under conditions of transparency), this chapter examined the *structure level* (how institutional arrangements both enable and constrain organizational action and how organizational practices may transform those arrangements). Chapter 4 will integrate these perspectives through a structuration framework that explicitly links team adaptation and institutional work. It will show how transparency and hybridity serve as modalities that recursively connect micro-level adaptation processes with macro-level institutional dynamics, positioning the empirical analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 to examine how content teams' transparent practices simultaneously address adaptation challenges while potentially contributing to institutional evolution in esports. The theoretical synthesis developed across Chapters 2, 3, and 4 thus provides the conceptual apparatus necessary for analyzing the empirical phenomena that subsequent chapters investigate.

IV. Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework and Research Model

A. Chapter Introduction

This chapter develops an integrated theoretical framework that addresses a persistent analytical challenge: how do organizational practices simultaneously constitute team-level adaptation and institutional-level work? The preceding chapters have established two parallel theoretical foundations. Chapter 2, focusing on the *interaction level*, examined team adaptation theory, exploring how teams learn and coordinate through transparent practices that challenge conventional assumptions about bounded organizational spaces. Chapter 3, focusing on the *structure level*, explored institutional work theory and hybrid organizing, investigating how organizational practices contribute to field-level change when organizations navigate multiple institutional logics. While these theoretical domains illuminate distinct organizational phenomena, they have traditionally operated as separate analytical silos, leaving researchers without conceptual tools for examining their recursive relationship.

Content teams in esports provide a strategic research site for addressing this analytical gap. Their transparent practices operate simultaneously as team adaptation at the interaction level and as potential templates for institutional change at the structure level. When content teams publicly discuss strategic adjustments, experiment with new coordination approaches, or integrate competing organizational goals, these practices serve immediate team needs while becoming visible demonstrations that may influence field-level norms. Understanding this dual character requires theoretical integration, not the sequential application of separate frameworks.

The chapter proceeds in five movements. It first establishes structuration theory as the organizing logic that enables multilevel integration, showing how Giddens' (1984) account of recursive relationships between practices and structures provides analytical scaffolding without supplanting the separate contributions of team adaptation and institutional work theories. It then elaborates four integration points, distinct communicative mechanisms through which team practices and institutional structures mutually constitute each other: communicative adaptation as institutional production, institutional pressures as communicative triggers, visibility as communicative infrastructure, and hybridity as communicative integration work. The third movement synthesizes these mechanisms to show how transparency and hybridity operate as interdependent modalities linking the two levels. The fourth presents the integrated theoretical model that visualizes these relationships. The chapter closes by connecting the framework to the dissertation's three research questions, establishing the analytical foundation for the empirical investigation that follows.

B. Structuration as Organizing Logic

Structuration theory emerged from Giddens' (1984) effort to transcend the theoretical dualism between voluntaristic accounts emphasizing human agency and deterministic accounts emphasizing structural constraint. Where earlier theoretical traditions treated structure and agency as opposing forces requiring theoretical reconciliation, Giddens proposed the duality of structure: structure is not external to action but exists only as instantiated through action, while action always draws upon structural properties even when transforming them. Contemporary treatments of structuration in organization studies advise applying its concepts in a spare, sensitizing fashion, as orienting devices for empirical

analysis, and they locate the theory's enduring value in its insistence that structure and agency are mutually constitutive (Chatterjee et al., 2019). This dissertation follows that guidance, drawing on the duality of structure and the concept of modalities as sensitizing concepts and leaving the remainder of Giddens' apparatus aside. This foundational insight has profound implications for organizational analysis because it reframes how we understand the relationship between organizational practices and institutional arrangements (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). Rather than treating institutions as contexts within which organizations operate, or organizations as building blocks from which institutions emerge, structuration conceptualizes them as mutually constitutive through ongoing social practices.

The theory identifies three dimensions through which this mutual constitution operates: *signification* (meaning systems), *legitimation* (normative frameworks), and *domination* (resource allocations). In this dissertation, these dimensions function as sensitizing concepts rather than analytic categories, clarifying how meaning, norms, and power are implicated in organizational practice without being operationalized directly. As structural properties, they both enable and constrain action while existing only insofar as they are reproduced through action (Giddens, 1984). When organizational members communicate, they draw upon existing meaning systems to make themselves intelligible while potentially reshaping those systems through their communicative choices. When they justify decisions, they invoke normative frameworks that authorize certain actions while potentially expanding or contesting those norms. When they mobilize resources, they rely on existing distributions of authority and capacity while potentially redistributing them through

use. This recursive relationship means that structural properties are simultaneously the condition and consequence of organizational practice.

Organizational communication scholarship has extended structuration theory by examining how communication constitutes organization through the reproduction and transformation of structural properties (Poole & McPhee, 2005; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). McPhee and Zaug's (2000) communicative constitution of organization approach identifies distinct communication flows through which organizations recursively constitute themselves and their environments: membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning. Recent work demonstrates that structuration remains analytically productive for understanding contemporary organizational phenomena, particularly in digitally mediated contexts where communication leaves durable traces available for repeated interaction across space and time (Brummans et al., 2014; Scott & Allen, 2022). The communicative constitution perspective emphasizes that communication is not something that happens within organizations but rather is the process whereby organizations are constituted (Bourgoin et al., 2020).

1. Structuration as Integrative Framework

For this dissertation, structuration functions as an organizing logic. It provides meta-theoretical scaffolding that specifies relationships between theoretical domains without supplanting what each contributes on its own. The framework does not require adopting structuration's full theoretical apparatus or its particular ontological commitments. Instead, it leverages structuration's conceptualization of recursive relationships to organize how team adaptation theory and institutional work theory relate within the study.

This approach follows established precedent in organizational research where structuration provides integrative logic without becoming the primary analytical lens. Barley and Tolbert (1997) demonstrated how structuration could organize relationships between institutional and organizational levels without requiring full structurationist analysis, showing how scripts mediate between institutions and action. Orlikowski (2000) showed how structuration could frame technology-practice relationships while foregrounding substantive theories of technology use, developing the concept of technology in practice to examine how technologies are enacted through recurrent use. The present study employs similar logic: structuration organizes the multilevel framework while team adaptation and institutional work theories provide substantive analytical power.

2. Modalities as Connecting Mechanisms

The relationship between team practices (interaction) and institutional structures (structure) operates through what structuration conceptualizes as modalities: the means by which structural properties are translated into action and action reproduces or transforms structures (Giddens, 1984). Giddens identifies three modalities corresponding to the three dimensions of structure mentioned above: interpretive schemes mediate between signification structures and communicative interaction, norms mediate between legitimation structures and sanctioning practices, and facilities mediate between domination structures and power relations. These modalities are the practical means through which the duality of structure operates in ongoing social interaction.

For content teams, two modalities are particularly consequential for connecting team adaptation with institutional work: *transparency* and *hybridity*, as elaborated in the prior chapters. These are not additional structuration dimensions, nor are they organizational

attributes that teams simply possess. Rather, they are case-specific organizing modalities through which the core structuration dimensions of meaning, legitimacy, and power are enacted in practice. Transparency operates as a modality that conditions how interpretive schemes and communicative interaction are linked, shaping which team practices become visible, persistent, and open to evaluation across organizational boundaries. Hybridity operates as a modality that conditions how normative frameworks and sanctioning processes are linked, enabling teams to draw upon multiple institutional logics when making organizational decisions, while their visible navigation of those logics can, over time, reshape what counts as legitimate organizing. Understanding how these modalities function therefore requires examining the concrete dynamics through which team practices both draw upon and reproduce institutional structures.

C. Four Integration Points: Communicative Mechanisms Connecting Team Interaction and Institutional Structure

The framework's analytical leverage emerges from specifying how team practices and institutional structures recursively constitute each other through four interconnected dynamics. These integration points are facets of a single continuous process through which content teams simultaneously adapt as teams and engage in institutional work. Each point identifies a distinct communicative process that connects interaction and structure, revealing how structuration's duality operates in transparent hybrid organizing. Together, they demonstrate that content teams cannot be adequately understood by examining adaptation and institutional work sequentially but instead require analysis of how these processes operate simultaneously through specific communicative mechanisms.

Table 4.1

Integration Mechanisms Between Team Practices and Institutional Structures

Integration Point	Direction	Core Communicative Mechanism	Central Theoretical Anchors
1. Communicative Adaptation as Institutional Production	Team → Institution	Adaptive talk (problem framing, strategy justification, learning conversations) constitutes field-level meanings	CCO four flows (McPhee et al., 2025; McPhee & Zaug, 2000); institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006)
2. Institutional Pressures as Communicative Triggers	Institution → Team	Institutional logics translated into adaptation triggers through sensemaking and framing	Sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005); institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012)
3. Visibility as Communicative Infrastructure	Team → Institution	Platform affordances transform bounded practices into portable field-level performances	Platform affordances (Treem & Leonardi, 2013); visibility regimes (Flyverbom, 2016, 2019)
4. Hybridity as Communicative Integration Work	Institution ↔ Team	Identity talk, boundary work, and justification practices integrate competing logics,	Hybrid organizing (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014)

producing organizational innovation

1. Integration Point 1: Communicative Adaptation as Institutional Production

Team adaptation is fundamentally communicative. When teams assess situations, they engage in communicative sensemaking processes where members collectively interpret environmental changes through dialogue (Weick et al., 2005). When teams formulate plans, they develop shared understandings through discursive practices that frame problems and justify solutions. When teams execute strategies, coordination happens through ongoing communication that adjusts action to emerging circumstances. When teams reflect on outcomes, learning occurs through conversational processes that extract lessons and update shared knowledge (Argote, 2013). Classical adaptation theory acknowledges these communicative dimensions but treats them as means for accomplishing adaptation, stopping short of recognizing that communication is adaptation (Weick, 1995).

The communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) perspective clarifies this distinction by positioning communication as the very process whereby organizations are constituted (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). McPhee and Zaug's (2000) four flows model, recently elaborated in book-length form with explicit grounding in structuration theory (McPhee et al., 2025), illustrates this constitutive view by identifying recurring communicative processes through which organizations are produced and sustained. That grounding reinforces the compatibility between the four flows perspective and the structurationist organizing logic adopted in this dissertation. In this dissertation, the four flows function as sensitizing concepts and are not applied directly as analytic categories in the empirical analysis. They provide conceptual grounding for understanding why

adaptive communication in content teams simultaneously accomplishes coordination, identity work, and institutional positioning. When content teams engage in adaptive communication under transparency, they necessarily participate in constitutive organizing processes, including negotiating membership and identity, coordinating action, structuring ongoing practices, and relating their activities to field-level arrangements. This framing carries a core implication of the CCO perspective: team adaptation cannot be conceptually separated from organizational constitution because adaptive practices are themselves constitutive acts that shape what the organization is, how it operates, and how it is situated within its institutional environment.

When conducted transparently, adaptive communication simultaneously functions as institutional work regardless of whether teams explicitly intend field-level influence. Building on Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) conception of institutional work as embedded in everyday organizational practice, content teams' public adaptation processes become consequential beyond their immediate organizational context. Transparency opens routine problem-solving, strategic debate, and learning activities to audiences who can interpret, evaluate, and circulate them within the field.

For example, when Los Ratones publicly debates how to respond to a major game patch that alters core mechanics, this interaction simultaneously accomplishes multiple organizational functions at different levels. At the team level, the discussion constitutes situation assessment and plan formulation within the adaptation cycle, as members diagnose how changes affect competitive viability and develop strategic responses (Burke et al., 2006). The team must interpret technical implications, evaluate tactical options, and coordinate implementation. In this sense, the interaction reflects team adaptation as

conventionally theorized. Conducting this deliberation publicly through livestreaming, however, transforms what the communication accomplishes. The affordance of visibility makes strategic reasoning observable to distributed audiences, including other professional teams, aspiring players, coaches, and community members interested in strategic development (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). The affordance of persistence ensures that this demonstration remains available through archived recordings, enabling repeated viewing and retrospective analysis. Editability affords teams some capacity to shape how this record is presented, for example by muting audio or limiting access during moments of heightened conflict or strategically sensitive discussion. Through such selective presentation, teams manage the boundary between legitimate professional disagreement and internal dysfunction, influencing how adaptation is publicly interpreted. Finally, the affordance of association enables field-level conversations to emerge as observers connect the discussion to broader debates about strategy, professionalism, and legitimate competitive preparation.

Through these affordances, team-level adaptive communication becomes field-level meaning work. Other teams observing the deliberation gain concrete evidence challenging institutional assumptions about strategic secrecy. If Los Ratones maintains or improves competitive performance while sharing strategic reasoning openly, they demonstrate that transparency and competitive effectiveness need not be mutually exclusive. This demonstration engages in what Smets et al. (2012) call "*practices in the making*", routine organizational activities that acquire institutional significance through their capacity to provide templates for organizing. The strategic discussion becomes institutional work through its visibility and interpretability as an alternative approach to professional team operations.

This first integration point clarifies that transparent team adaptation inherently produces institutional effects through communicative processes. Teams engaging in adaptive sensemaking simultaneously engage in meaning work at the institutional level when their sensemaking becomes publicly observable. The adaptive talk, such as problem framing, strategy justification, and learning conversations, constitutes field-level meanings about what counts as legitimate professional practice (Coburn, 2001). Content teams do not need to shift from "doing adaptation" to "doing institutional work". These occur simultaneously through the same communicative practices made visible by transparency.

This mechanism reveals why understanding content teams requires analytical tools capable of examining practices as simultaneously team-level and institutional-level phenomena. The communicative practices through which teams adapt are the same practices through which institutions are reproduced and potentially transformed. Structuration theory's duality of structure captures this relationship. Team adaptation draws upon institutional structures by relying on institutionally shaped diagnostic categories, planning frameworks, and learning schemas that define what counts as a problem, a viable response, or successful learning. At the same time, adaptation practices can produce or modify those structures when teams publicly enact alternative ways of organizing, such as normalizing open strategic deliberation, demonstrating selective transparency around competitive preparation, or integrating audience feedback into routine coordination. Through repeated visibility, these practices can stabilize new expectations about legitimate preparation, appropriate openness, and the relationship between competition and publicity, thereby contributing to the ongoing reconfiguration of institutional norms.

2. Integration Point 2: Institutional Pressures as Communicative Triggers

While the first integration point examined how team practices produce institutional structures, this second point explores the reverse: how institutional structures shape team practices by functioning as adaptation triggers. This direction is equally important for understanding structuration's recursive character, where structures that emerge from practices subsequently constrain and enable new practices (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Giddens, 1984). However, institutional structures do not automatically "trigger" team adaptation through mechanical causation. Rather, they become triggers only through communicative sensemaking processes where teams interpret and enact institutional pressures as situations requiring adaptive responses (Weick et al., 2005).

Traditional team adaptation theory identifies triggers as environmental changes, performance feedback, and internal team dynamics (Burke et al., 2006; Christian et al., 2017). Teams adapt to game patches, opponent strategies, skill development needs, and coordination challenges. These triggers reflect the competitive logic dominating traditional esports organizing: teams respond to factors affecting their ability to win matches and tournaments. Content teams respond to these triggers as well, but their hybrid position across competitive, entertainment, and community domains creates additional adaptation pressures absent for teams operating within single institutional logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014). These additional pressures do not exist as objective forces; they emerge through teams' communicative sensemaking about their institutional environment.

Consider how audience expectations function as adaptation triggers for content teams. Declining viewership numbers do not automatically signal a problem requiring

adaptation; instead, teams must make sense of this data by constructing narratives about what it means (Weick, 1995). Is viewership declining because content has become stale and repetitive? Because streaming schedules conflict with audience availability patterns? Because competitors offer more engaging formats? Because the current game meta (see Appendix D for more detailed definition) produces boring matches? Each interpretive frame constructs the "problem" differently and implies different adaptive responses. This framing happens through team communication where members propose interpretations, contest alternatives, and construct shared understandings that guide action (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

The entertainment logic that positions viewership as organizationally relevant provides vocabularies and categories through which teams interpret these patterns. Teams familiar with streaming culture understand concepts like “peak hours,” “content fatigue,” and “audience retention” as meaningful categories for diagnosing situations. They draw on broader field-level conversations about what makes compelling streaming content when evaluating their own practices. They may reference successful streamers or content teams as exemplars when framing what changes might improve engagement. This sensemaking process demonstrates how institutional logics function as “vocabularies of practice” that shape how situations appear and what responses seem appropriate (Ocasio et al., 2015; Thornton et al., 2012).

Similarly, community expectations function as triggers through communicative interpretation, not direct causation. When community members express concerns about authenticity, question alignment between team actions and stated values, or challenge the team’s commitment to particular norms, teams must make sense of what these expectations

mean for their operations (Thornton et al., 2012). Does maintaining community legitimacy require altering how team members interact during streams? Being more transparent about decision-making processes? Modifying practices that community members perceive as inauthentic or contradicting team identity? Teams engage in sensemaking conversations that frame community expectations in relation to competitive needs, entertainment goals, and organizational identity (Coburn, 2001). Community logic provides interpretive frameworks for understanding legitimacy and belonging, but how teams actually construct these community concerns as requiring particular adaptations happens through situated sensemaking.

Platform affordances similarly function as triggers through interpretive processes. When Twitch modifies its algorithm affecting content visibility, or YouTube changes monetization policies, these changes do not deterministically cause team responses. Instead, teams must communicatively make sense of how platform changes affect their operations. This might involve monitoring how changes affect viewership patterns, discussing strategic implications with other content creators, experimenting with different content approaches, and collectively evaluating what adaptations might maintain or improve platform performance. The affordances enable or constrain certain organizational possibilities, but translating these affordances into concrete adaptation triggers requires active sensemaking work (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017).

This second integration point clarifies that institutional pressures become triggers through communicative sensemaking and framing processes. Teams make institutional structures relevant to their practices by interpreting situations through institutionally provided vocabularies, categories, and frameworks (Weick et al., 2005). This reveals

structuration operating in the reverse direction from the first integration point: where communicative adaptation produces institutional meanings, communicative sensemaking translates institutional structures into team-level triggers. The duality appears in how teams both draw upon institutional logics to make sense of their environment and potentially transform those logics through the specific interpretations they enact. A team that successfully adapts by interpreting viewership data through novel frameworks may demonstrate alternative sensemaking approaches that other teams subsequently adopt, recursively transforming how institutional pressures are understood and enacted across the field. Table 4.2 summarizes these adaptation triggers.

Table 4.2

Content Team Adaptation Triggers by Institutional Logic

Institutional Logic	Trigger Type	Example Adaptation Demands
Competitive	Legitimacy Maintenance	Adapting practice intensity when the esports community questions the team's competitive credibility
	Resource Dependencies	Modifying strategic approaches based on tournament performance requirements
	Identity Tensions	Resolving conflicts between players prioritizing competitive excellence and those prioritizing content creation
Entertainment	Legitimacy Maintenance	Adapting content formats when audiences question the team's commitment to entertainment value

	Resource Dependencies	Adjusting streaming schedules based on viewership analytics and platform algorithm requirements
	Identity Tensions	Navigating internal debates about whether the team is "competitive players who stream" or "entertainers who compete"
Community	Legitimacy Maintenance	Adapting communication practices when the community challenges the team's authenticity or alignment with stated values
	Resource Dependencies	Modifying engagement approaches based on community feedback and participation patterns
	Identity Tensions	Balancing responsiveness to community expectations with maintenance of professional boundaries

Note. These triggers emerge through communicative sensemaking and do not operate as mechanical causes. Teams actively interpret situations through institutional frameworks, constructing what counts as requiring adaptive response. Community logic operates as a legitimating and evaluative logic that mediates how competitive and entertainment practices are interpreted.

3. Integration Point 3: Visibility as Communicative Infrastructure

This integration point examines how team practices become institutionally consequential through the communicative infrastructure that visibility creates, bypassing formal diffusion channels. While Integration Point 1 addressed what transparent adaptation

produces in terms of institutional meanings, this point addresses how those meanings circulate and accumulate as institutional resources.

Scholarship on transparency increasingly conceptualizes visibility as an active communicative infrastructure that transforms organizational action (Albu & Christensen, 2024; Flyverbom, 2016). When organizations make internal processes visible, they do not simply add observers to existing activities. Instead, they reconstitute those activities as performances for institutionally diverse audiences (Goffman, 1959). Bernstein's (2012) research on transparent factories demonstrates this transformation. Workers who know their labor is observable alter their practices in ways that simultaneously support internal productivity goals and external demonstrations of legitimacy. Flyverbom (2016, 2019) extends this analysis to digital contexts, showing how visibility creates recursive accountability structures in which past actions remain continuously present through archived records.

Platform affordances provide the technical architecture for this communicative infrastructure (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Visibility converts bounded team activities into observable public performances available to distributed audiences. Persistence extends these performances over time, creating archival resources that enable retrospective review, comparison, and recontextualization. Editability allows teams to frame strategically what becomes visible and how it appears. Association connects individual performances to broader field-level conversations, enabling interpretive communities to construct shared understandings. These affordances actively transform organizational practices as they transmit them, through the recursive accountability structures they create (Flyverbom, 2019).

The recursive dynamic operates as follows. Team practices made visible through streaming become available for institutional interpretation. Persistence ensures that these practices remain accessible as observers review, discuss, and compare them across contexts. Association links practices to field-level conversations in which observers construct meanings such as "this demonstrates effective coaching," "this violates competitive norms," or "this represents organizational innovation." These collectively constructed meanings become institutional resources, including templates, benchmarks, and cautionary examples, that shape subsequent organizational action. When teams observe how their own practices are interpreted, they adjust future performances in response, generating new visible material for institutional interpretation. Visibility thus produces a recursive loop in which practices shape institutional meanings, institutional meanings shape practices, and affordances provide the infrastructure enabling each cycle.

A single streamed coaching session illustrates the joint operation of these affordances in brief. Visibility makes coaching methodology observable beyond the team, persistence retains the session for later review and reference, association connects it to broader field-level conversations about professional development, and editability shapes how the session is framed for different observers. The empirical chapters examine such episodes in detail. Table 4.3 summarizes the platform affordance mechanisms.

This visibility infrastructure transforms the coaching session from bounded team activity into field-level demonstration potentially influencing how other organizations approach similar practices. The transformation occurs through the infrastructure making the session continuously available, interpretable, and connectable to institutional conversations. This demonstrates why transparency functions as a modality in Giddens' (1984) sense: it

mediates between team practices and institutional structures by providing the means through which practices become structurally consequential. Teams draw upon transparency as a resource (deciding what to reveal based on institutional norms about organizational boundaries) while their transparent practices potentially transform structures (demonstrating that previously private activities can be conducted publicly).

Table 4.3

Platform Affordances as Visibility Infrastructure in Content Teams

Affordance	Definition	Mechanism	Content Team Example
Visibility	Making processes observable to distributed audiences beyond organizational boundaries	Transforms bounded team activities into public phenomena available for interpretation by institutionally diverse audiences	Live-streaming practice sessions converts internal coordination into observable performances; strategic discussions become visible to competitors, aspiring players, and community members
Persistence	Maintaining observable information over time through archival records	Extends potential institutional influence far beyond initial performances; enables retrospective sensemaking and mimetic diffusion	VOD (video on demand) archives allow repeated viewing of coaching sessions months after initial stream; teams can systematically review adaptation patterns; other organizations discover

			and potentially adopt demonstrated practices
Editability	Enabling selective revelation and strategic framing through visual composition and conversational repair	Allows active management of what becomes visible and how it appears; demonstrates transparency as performance requiring ongoing strategic work	Camera positioning balances educational value with competitive secrecy; overlay information frames strategic reasoning; teams develop sophisticated practices for protecting exploratory work while making polished demonstrations visible
Association	Connecting individual practices to broader field-level discussions and interpretive communities	Amplifies institutional influence by enabling observers to construct shared meanings and link practices to institutional debates	Twitch chat, Discord servers, and Reddit discussions interpret team practices as exemplars of broader organizing approaches; community conversations transform specific adaptations into general templates

Note. These affordances collectively create "visibility infrastructure" (Flyverbom, 2016) that mediates between team practices and institutional structures.

This third integration point clarifies that understanding institutional consequences of transparent adaptation requires examining not only what teams do (Point 1) but how visibility infrastructure makes those doings available for institutional interpretation and

potential diffusion. The same adaptive practices might have minimal institutional impact if conducted privately or substantial impact if conducted through rich visibility infrastructure. This reveals transparency operating as a modality distinct from the communicative content it makes visible: teams must navigate both what they communicate (adaptive content) and how it becomes visible (infrastructure), with both dimensions shaping institutional consequences.

4. Integration Point 4: Hybridity as Communicative Integration Work

This fourth integration point examines how hybridity drives team-level innovation through communicative practices that integrate competing institutional logics. Where Point 2 explored how institutional structures become triggers through sensemaking, this point investigates the innovative organizational responses that emerge when teams must simultaneously satisfy multiple institutional demands. The distinction matters: Point 2 addresses how pressures are interpreted as requiring adaptation; Point 4 addresses how teams actually accomplish adaptation under competing pressures through communicative negotiation processes.

Hybridity scholarship conceptualizes hybrid organizations as those operating across multiple institutional logics that embody different assumptions about organizational purpose, appropriate practices, success metrics, and stakeholder priorities (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013). Content teams simultaneously participate in competitive esports (emphasizing performance, skill development, strategic secrecy), entertainment streaming (emphasizing audience engagement, accessibility, transparent operations), and community-based digital culture (emphasizing belonging, mutual recognition, and reciprocal investment between teams and audiences). Each logic provides normative frameworks that

guide action, but these frameworks often conflict in specific situations, creating coordination challenges requiring innovative solutions (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Denis et al., 2015).

The innovation emerges from teams engaging in communicative integration work where they actively negotiate how to satisfy competing demands. This work takes several interconnected forms. Identity talk involves communicative construction and reconstruction of organizational identity in relation to competing logics (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). When content teams discuss whether they are "fundamentally competitive teams that stream" or "streamers who compete professionally," they engage in identity work that shapes subsequent organizational decisions. These identity conversations rarely settle questions definitively, instead providing ongoing frames through which teams interpret their priorities and justify their choices.

Consider The Ruddy Sack deliberating about practice schedules. Competitive logic suggests optimizing schedules around peak team performance conditions and strategic preparation needs. Entertainment logic suggests scheduling during peak audience availability windows and maintaining the consistent output that platform systems reward. Community logic suggests honoring the schedules audiences have come to rely on and preserving the sense of shared routine on which belonging rests. These logics provide conflicting guidance for what seems like a straightforward scheduling decision. Teams cannot simply "pick a logic" because they need to maintain legitimacy across all three domains to sustain their hybrid operations (Kraatz & Block, 2008).

Instead, teams engage in communicative negotiation processes where they actively work to integrate competing demands instead of choosing between them. This might involve identity talk that foregrounds particular aspects of team identity: "We're entertainers first,

which means prioritizing audience availability even if it's not optimal practice timing." Or it might involve boundary work that partitions different activities across different temporal or spatial zones: "We'll do exploratory practice in private during off-peak hours, then stream polished training sessions during peak hours." Or it might involve justification work that reframes apparent conflicts as actually compatible: "Streaming during peak hours serves competitive preparation because the pressure of audience observation creates realistic high-stakes practice conditions" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2021; Tost, 2011).

Through these communicative processes, teams may develop novel organizational practices absent in single-logic contexts. Integrated training-entertainment sessions can emerge from active negotiation of how to serve both competitive development and audience engagement simultaneously. These formats might include explaining strategic reasoning while executing drills, incorporating viewer suggestions into practice scenarios, or structuring sessions to balance skill development with entertainment pacing. These innovations emerge from teams' creative communicative integration of competing frameworks (Pache & Santos, 2013).

Hybrid professionals prove particularly important for this integration work: individuals possessing competencies spanning divergent institutional logics who can effectively navigate competing demands (Hampel et al., 2017; McGivern et al., 2015). For content teams, these might include players who excel at both competitive performance and audience engagement, coaches who develop strategy while explaining it entertainingly, or managers who understand both esports structures and digital media monetization. These individuals enable integration by speaking multiple "institutional languages" fluently,

framing activities in ways that resonate with multiple constituencies while maintaining credibility across domains (Battilana & Dorado, 2010).

The communicative integration work also enables institutional influence running in both directions (hence this point's bidirectional arrow in Table 4.1). When content teams successfully navigate competing logics through innovative practices, they demonstrate to each institutional domain that integration is possible. A team maintaining competitive effectiveness while maximizing transparency challenges competitive esports assumptions about strategic secrecy. A team producing engaging content while preserving authentic competitive focus challenges entertainment streaming assumptions about content optimization. These demonstrations potentially transform institutional structures by expanding understandings of viable organizational forms within each field (Greenwood et al., 2011).

This fourth integration point clarifies that hybridity functions as a modality connecting team practices with institutional structures by requiring ongoing communicative negotiation. Teams draw upon multiple institutional logics when making decisions, and their successful navigation potentially transforms those logics by demonstrating integration possibilities. The innovations emerging from communicative integration work, including hybrid practices, roles, and identities, represent team-level solutions to institutional-level contradictions. When these innovations prove successful and become visible through transparency infrastructure (Point 3), they acquire potential to influence field-level understandings of legitimate organizing.

5. Summary: Four Communicative Mechanisms as Integrated Dynamics

These four integration points together reveal how content teams operate as sites where micro-level team practices and macro-level institutional structures continuously constitute each other through specific communicative mechanisms. Point 1 (communicative adaptation as institutional production) shows what adaptation produces institutionally through meaning work. Point 2 (institutional pressures as communicative triggers) shows how institutional structures shape team action through sensemaking. Point 3 (visibility as communicative infrastructure) shows how practices travel institutionally through affordances. Point 4 (hybridity as communicative integration work) shows how innovation emerges from negotiating competing logics.

Together, they form a coherent theoretical account of structuration operating through transparency and hybridity as modalities. Transparency enables Points 1 and 3 by making adaptive communication visible and persistent, transforming it into institutional meaning work conveyed through visibility infrastructure. Hybridity enables Points 2 and 4 by positioning teams to draw upon multiple logics when making sense of triggers and requiring communicative integration work that produces innovation. These modalities operate interdependently: teams navigate institutional pressures from multiple logics (Point 2) by developing innovations (Point 4) whose visibility (Point 3) demonstrates alternative organizing possibilities (Point 1), which may recursively transform the institutional structures (Point 2) from which new pressures emerge.

The four points are distinct yet interconnected, revealing different facets of the same recursive process. They provide analytical vocabulary for examining how particular team-level practices relate to particular institutional-level consequences without reducing this

relationship to simple causation. Instead, they show how practices and structures mutually constitute each other through ongoing communicative processes, which is what structuration theory conceptualizes as the duality of structure operating through modalities.

D. Transparency and Hybridity as Interdependent Modalities

The four integration points reveal how transparency and hybridity function as modalities mediating between team practices and institutional structures. However, understanding their role requires clarifying how they operate interdependently, not sequentially. This section synthesizes the previous analysis to show how these modalities work together to enable the recursive constitution of content teams.

1. Transparency as Action-Structuring Modality

Transparency functions as an action-structuring modality: it reconfigures how organizational practices are enacted by making them observable, interpretable, and evaluable beyond the team boundary (Bernstein, 2012, 2017; Flyverbom, 2016, 2019). When adaptation is conducted transparently, team practices such as situation assessment, plan formulation, execution, and reflection must be intelligible and defensible to internal team members and to external audiences who observe and evaluate these processes. Transparency therefore restructures the accountability, sensemaking, and justification work through which organizational practices are accomplished, enabling team-level activities to acquire institutional relevance through their visibility.

The framework conceptualizes transparency as a patterned organizing practice that requires ongoing communicative work (Albu & Christensen, 2024; Christensen & Cheney, 2015). Even content teams committed to high levels of openness actively manage what becomes visible. Decisions about camera placement, stream timing, conversational

boundaries, and the framing of visible activity reflect understandings of competitive risk, audience expectations, platform incentives, and reputational consequences. Transparency is thus always managed, never total, requiring teams to navigate competing demands for authenticity, competitive secrecy, entertainment value, and educational accessibility at the same time.

Platform affordances, discussed in Integration Point 3, supply the mechanisms through which transparency operates as a modality. Visibility, persistence, editability, and association do not simply transmit organizational practices to external observers. They transform how those practices are enacted by embedding them within infrastructures of distributed observation and evaluation. When teams know that their adaptation processes will be visible, persistent, editable, and associable, they alter those processes to address this extended accountability environment. The affordances therefore become constitutive of transparent organizing.

Affordance-enabled transparency produces four properties that give it its action-structuring character. These four terms are this framework's own synthesis of the transparency and affordance scholarship reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. First, *dual enactment demands* mean that practices function simultaneously as operational work and as public display. Teams cannot orient solely toward internal coordination or solely toward what observers see. Strategic discussion must accomplish planning while also serving as entertainment, education, and evidence of professionalism for the audiences watching it unfold. Second, *recursive accountability* emerges because archived content makes past actions continuously present, constraining which subsequent behaviors appear credible or coherent (Flyverbom, 2019). Teams cannot easily reverse course or experiment with

approaches that contradict earlier public commitments without addressing the reputational consequences of perceived inconsistency.

Third, *strategic revelation* capacities enable managed visibility. Through editability and framing choices, teams can make some activities highly visible while protecting others, revealing transparency as layered (Bernstein, 2012). Most transparent teams retain protected spaces for exploratory work that requires psychological safety, strategic planning that depends on competitive secrecy, or interpersonal conflict resolution that benefits from privacy. Transparency therefore involves ongoing boundary work to determine what merits visibility and what requires protection. Fourth, *distributed evaluation* means that diverse audiences judge organizational legitimacy through multiple interpretive frameworks that teams cannot fully control. A single coaching session may be evaluated simultaneously by competitors assessing strategic sophistication, community members judging psychological safety, aspiring professionals seeking methodological templates, and critics looking for exploitable weaknesses. Teams must anticipate and address these varied evaluative perspectives at once.

Together, these four properties—dual enactment demands, recursive accountability, strategic revelation, and distributed evaluation—explain why transparency goes beyond making private processes visible and reconfigures how adaptation is enacted. Adaptation under transparency becomes a distinct organizational activity that requires different competencies, creates different learning opportunities and constraints, and generates different institutional consequences than adaptation conducted privately. Transparency therefore operates as a modality in the structuration sense. It shapes the relationship between

team practices and institutional contexts by transforming the conditions under which those practices are carried out.

2. Hybridity as Logics-Navigating Modality

As developed in Chapter 1, hybridity functions as a logics-navigating modality that structures how content teams operate across competing institutional demands. Chapter 1 established that content teams navigate competitive, entertainment, and community logics, with the first two organizing production activities while the third mediates legitimacy and evaluation. Building on this foundation, this section further explicates how hybridity functions within the framework as a logics-navigating modality that connects team-level practices to field-level institutional change.

Transparency as Hybrid Demand and Hybrid Consequence. Transparency operates simultaneously as a requirement imposed by hybrid organizing and as a practice through which hybridity is navigated. Entertainment logic demands transparency as a source of content because audiences cannot engage with invisible preparation. Community logic demands transparency as evidence of authenticity because hidden practices generate suspicion that organizations are concealing problematic behavior or failing to honor stated values. Competitive logic, however, creates countervailing pressures for strategic opacity, since information revelation can compromise competitive advantage. This produces a configuration in which transparency is overdetermined by some logics and actively resisted by others, making it a persistent site of organizational negotiation rather than a stable practice.

The adaptation processes examined in Integration Point 2 demonstrate how this hybrid configuration shapes teams' temporal and strategic flexibility. Teams cannot simply

reduce transparency when facing competitive pressure, because doing so violates entertainment and community logics on which their organizational identity depends. They also cannot maintain unrestricted transparency indefinitely, because doing so exposes strategic information to opponents and can undermine competitive viability. As a result, adaptation involves not only changing practices but also recalibrating hybrid boundaries by determining what remains visible, what becomes concealed, how those decisions are communicated, and whether audiences accept the modified transparency as legitimate.

Selective concealment practices illustrate this dynamic in brief. A team may mute strategically sensitive discussions, shift detailed analysis off-stream, or abbreviate reviews while maintaining general visibility of scrimmages and training, preserving a transparent identity while creating protected space for competitive adaptation. Whether audiences accept such boundary modifications appears to depend on accumulated trust and established reputation, a contingency the empirical chapters examine directly.

The theoretical point is this: in hybrid organizations where transparency is constitutive of identity, adaptation cannot be cleanly separated from identity work. Every adaptive change that affects visibility becomes simultaneously a change in how the organization enacts its hybrid identity. Teams must continuously negotiate not just what practices to adopt, but what visibility those practices will have, how that visibility will be framed, and whether stakeholders across different institutional domains will accept those framings as legitimate. Transparency thus functions as both a constraint on adaptation (limiting what can be changed privately) and an enabler of adaptation (allowing teams to publicly experiment and receive immediate feedback on whether changes maintain legitimacy).

Hybridity and Temporal Rhythms of Adaptation. The three-logic configuration also generates temporal dynamics of its own for adaptation. Competitive logic orients toward seasonal cycles, tournament schedules, and long-term development trajectories. Teams can defer competitive experimentation to off-season periods, test innovations in lower-stakes matches, and pursue long-term cohesion building across roster continuity. Entertainment logic orients toward continuous content production, daily or weekly streaming schedules, and responsiveness to platform trends and audience feedback loops. Teams must maintain consistent content output regardless of competitive calendar, respond quickly to shifting viewer interests, and provide regular engagement touchpoints. Community logic orients toward sustained relational investment, gradual reputation building, and temporal consistency between stated commitments and ongoing practice. Teams must demonstrate that their values persist across changing circumstances.

These different temporal orientations create adaptation challenges beyond those present in single-logic organizations. When competitive needs suggest reducing training visibility to protect strategic innovations, entertainment logic's content production rhythms demand consistent streaming schedules, while community logic requires explaining any transparency changes as consistent with established values, not competitive opportunism. Teams therefore try to time adaptations to satisfy multiple temporal frameworks simultaneously, which often compresses decision-making as they attempt to address emerging competitive pressures while maintaining content calendars and sustaining community trust..

Organizational transitions and dissolutions place these temporal tensions under particular pressure, as roster changes, practice modifications, and strategic adjustments that

make sense within competitive logic simultaneously disrupt content rhythms and community expectations (Morris, 2025; Xu, 2025). Chapter 7 examines how these pressures unfolded across the three cases.

This temporal complexity carries theoretical implications that Chapter 9 develops after the empirical analysis. Where standard adaptation theory assumes organizations can control the timing of adaptive change (Burke et al., 2006; Maynard et al., 2015; Tyre & Orlikowski, 1994), hybrid organizations must satisfy multiple temporal frameworks simultaneously, making adaptation a form of temporal navigation work that involves decisions about when to change as much as what to change.

Hybrid Navigation as Institutional Work. Integration Point 4's examination of institutional work demonstrates how hybrid navigation itself becomes a form of field-shaping activity. Traditional institutional work theory emphasizes how actors deliberately attempt to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions through strategic action (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). However, content teams' institutional influence often operates through a different mechanism: by visibly navigating hybrid tensions, teams provide observable models of organizing that others can witness, evaluate, and potentially emulate, regardless of whether teams intend institutional influence.

This works through three interconnected processes. First, *transparency makes hybrid navigation visible* to field audiences who can observe not just outcomes but processes, such as how teams balance competing demands, what tradeoffs they make, and how they communicate boundary decisions. This visibility allows other organizations to learn from both successes and failures without experiencing the same costs directly. Second, *community evaluation provides immediate feedback* on whether specific hybrid practices achieve

legitimacy, effectively crowd-sourcing institutional experimentation as multiple teams try different approaches and audiences signal which ones resonate. Third, *the multiplicity of institutional logics creates natural variation* in hybrid approaches (some teams lean competitive, others entertainment, others toward community integration), providing the field a range of models to select from, with no single prescribed template.

Through this mechanism, hybridity enables institutional work that differs from deliberate institutional entrepreneurship. Content teams may lack resources, authority, or strategic intent to reshape their field, but their visible navigation of multi-logic demands demonstrates that hybrid organizing is possible, reveals which specific practices support it, and provides evidence of outcomes that inform others' decisions. As more organizations adopt hybrid approaches, even partially or experimentally, field-level expectations shift regarding what constitutes legitimate organizing in esports. Teams that successfully sustain hybrid organizing long enough to become established exemplars (like Los Ratones during its peak) exert disproportionate influence because their practices become reference points that others measure themselves against.

The institutional work literature has primarily examined how organizations deliberately create, maintain, or disrupt institutions through formal mechanisms: lobbying, standard-setting, professional development, regulatory engagement (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). Content teams' institutional influence operates through demonstration and diffusion. By making hybrid navigation visible, they lower perceived barriers to adoption for other organizations. By receiving community evaluation in real time, they provide evidence about which hybrid approaches achieve legitimacy. By operating as exemplars, they create cognitive templates that other organizations can reference when

considering their own hybrid possibilities. This form of institutional work may be particularly consequential in emerging fields like esports where formal institutional structures remain weak and organizational practices can more readily influence field-level development.

3. Interdependence of Modalities

Understanding content teams requires recognizing that transparency and hybridity operate interdependently. Transparency makes hybrid practices visible, transforming them into institutional demonstrations. A team's innovative integration of training and entertainment only acquires institutional significance through visibility infrastructure that makes the practice observable, persistent, and connectable to field-level conversations. Without transparency, hybrid innovations might serve immediate team needs without becoming templates for institutional change. This demonstrates transparency's necessity for translating team-level innovation into institutional influence.

Conversely, hybridity creates the distinctive practices that transparency makes visible. Content teams' adaptation processes become institutionally interesting specifically because they integrate competing logics in ways that challenge conventional approaches. If content teams simply conducted traditional competitive practice that happened to be visible, this might have less institutional impact than integrated training-entertainment sessions that demonstrate novel organizational possibilities. The substantive innovation enabled by hybridity provides content worth making visible through transparency.

The modalities also jointly shape team-level dynamics. Transparency creates dual enactment demands because team practices serve internal coordination and external display at once. Hybridity supplies the different registers in which that display is read: the same

practice is watched as competitive preparation, as entertainment, and as evidence of community commitment. Teams cannot address transparency's dual enactment demands without navigating hybridity's competing logics, and cannot integrate competing logics without managing how that integration appears through transparency. The modalities are thus constitutively entangled rather than additively combined.

The recursive relationship between team practices (interaction) and institutional structures (structure) operates through these combined modalities. Team practices draw upon institutional structures through both transparency and hybridity: teams decide what to reveal based on institutional norms about organizational boundaries while navigating competing logics based on institutional arrangements that define legitimate organizational forms. Simultaneously, practices potentially transform structures through both modalities: visibility of innovations makes them available for emulation and field-level debates, while successful integration of competing logics demonstrates alternative organizational possibilities that may expand institutional boundaries.

Understanding content teams therefore requires examining this recursivity across levels. The framework conceptualizes content teams as organizations whose core dynamics arise from the interaction of transparency and hybridity, two features that cannot be understood separately operating as interdependent modalities. Their organizing practices cannot be adequately understood by examining transparency and hybridity sequentially but instead require examining how they operate together to enable simultaneous team adaptation and institutional work. Table 4.4 summarizes these interdependencies.

Table 4.4

Interdependence of Transparency and Hybridity Across Adaptation Phases

Team Adaptation Phase	Transparency's Role	Hybridity's Role	Combined Effect
Situation Assessment	Makes diagnostic reasoning publicly visible to stakeholders from different institutional domains	Requires evaluating situations relative to multiple success criteria (competitive, entertainment, community legitimacy)	Teams must navigate multiple interpretive frames simultaneously while these multidimensional assessments become visible demonstrations of hybrid diagnostic practice
Plan Formulation	Exposes integration efforts to observation; makes coordination mechanisms through which teams navigate competing imperatives visible	Requires developing strategies that serve competitive, entertainment, and community authenticity goals simultaneously	Planning sessions demonstrate to multiple institutional audiences how multi-logic integration can be achieved; visibility makes hybrid planning available as organizational model

Execution	Transforms coordinated action into publicly observable phenomenon with institutional consequences	Creates enactment complexity as teams must simultaneously execute competitive strategies and remain legible to audiences with different engagement preferences	Real-time visibility of managing competing performance demands demonstrates to field how organizations can navigate hybrid pressures during action
Learning/ Reflection	Creates both challenges (public self-criticism may affect psychological safety) and opportunities (archived records enable systematic review) for learning under observation	Requires extracting lessons relevant to multiple goals (competitive improvement, entertainment value, community legitimacy, sustainable functioning)	Teams must reflect on multidimensional success criteria while these reflections remain visible to institutional audiences who may interpret learning processes differently than teams intend

This section has demonstrated that transparency and hybridity function as modalities in Giddens' (1984) structurationist sense: they mediate between interaction and structure by providing the practical means through which the duality of structure operates. The four integration points specify distinct communicative mechanisms, while transparency and

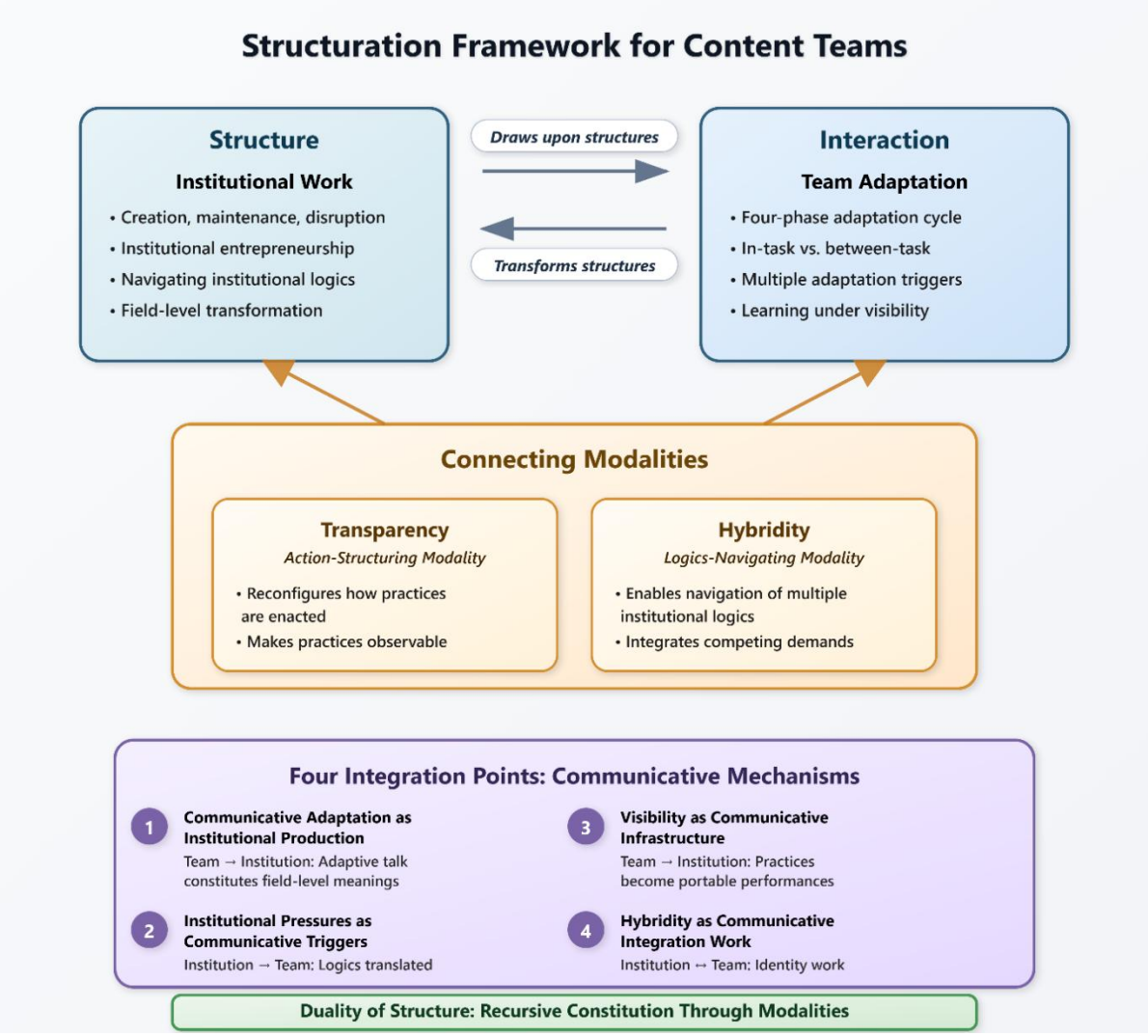
hybridity provide the modalities through which those mechanisms connect practices with structures. Together, they form an integrated theoretical framework for understanding content teams as sites where micro-level and macro-level organizational phenomena recursively constitute each other.

E. Integrated Theoretical Model

Figure 4.1 visualizes how the framework's components relate to one another, synthesizing the preceding theoretical development into a single representation of content teams as sites where micro-level practices and macro-level structures recursively constitute each other.

Figure 4.1

Two-Level Theoretical Framework for Content Teams



The model organizes the framework's elements into two levels connected by the modalities. At the interaction level, the four-phase adaptation cycle unfolds through the communicative practices examined in Chapter 2. At the structure level sit the institutional arrangements examined in Chapter 3: field norms, the three institutional logics, and the governance conditions of the emerging esports field. Transparency and hybridity occupy the connecting position that modalities hold in structuration theory, with the four integration

points specifying the concrete communicative mechanisms through which influence travels in each direction. The downward path runs through Integration Point 2, as institutional pressures become adaptation triggers through sensemaking, while the upward paths run through Integration Points 1 and 3, as adaptive communication produces institutional meanings that circulate through visibility infrastructure. Integration Point 4 spans both directions, as institutional contradictions drive team-level innovation whose visible navigation may reshape the logics that produced them. The circular arrangement of these paths represents the framework's central claim: the relationship between adaptation and institutional work is recursive, with each cycle of visible practice drawing on and potentially transforming the structures that condition the next

F. Addressing the Research Questions

The framework grounds each of the dissertation's research questions by specifying the recursive dynamics connecting team practices with institutional structures. This section states each question as investigated and identifies the framework components that inform it. The full rationale for each question appears in Chapter 1; the purpose here is to establish the analytical mapping that organizes the empirical chapters.

1. Research Question 1: Team-Level Adaptation Under Transparency

> **RQ1:** *a) How do content teams adapt their strategies, roles, and processes in transparent environments; b) How does transparency reshape the team adaptation cycle as it unfolds under multiple evaluative demands?*

Within the model, RQ1 is anchored at the interaction level, where the four-phase adaptation cycle unfolds. The framework's central claim about this level, however, is that it cannot be studied as if it were self-contained. Both modalities condition every phase of the

cycle, which is why the framework treats transparent adaptation as reconstituted organizational work, something more than traditional adaptation with audiences watching. Classical adaptation models presuppose bounded spaces for candid deliberation and experimentation (Burke et al., 2006; Edmondson, 1999; Rosen et al., 2011); content teams conduct all four phases under more or less continuous public observation.

The four properties of transparency identified earlier specify how this reconstitution operates across the cycle. Dual enactment demands mean that during situation assessment, teams diagnose challenges through publicly visible discussion, which constrains candid acknowledgment of weakness while enabling rapid incorporation of external perspectives. During plan formulation, deliberation risks revealing tactical intent to competitors while acquiring entertainment value as visible reasoning. During execution, coordination proceeds under real-time observation that adds performance pressure alongside accountability. During learning and reflection, self-criticism becomes public commitment, with archived records supporting systematic review while raising the interpersonal stakes of acknowledging error. Recursive accountability adds a temporal dimension: because archives persist, current adaptations must cohere with previous visible commitments, so teams manage the narrative continuity of change as well as its substance. Strategic revelation and distributed evaluation complete the picture, as teams decide what merits visibility and what requires protection while anticipating audiences who judge the same practice through divergent frameworks.

The hybridity modality contributes the evaluative structure within which these dynamics play out. Integration Points 2 and 4 establish that adaptations are constructed and judged against competitive, entertainment, and community criteria simultaneously, with no

single performance goal to optimize, so that adaptation involves ongoing communicative integration work as much as technical adjustment.

The framework accordingly directs empirical attention toward three things: the practices teams develop to manage visibility across the phases, including layered arrangements that distribute exploratory work into protected spaces while presenting synthesized learning publicly; the meta-communication through which teams negotiate what becomes visible and how it is framed; and the recalibrations that follow when visibility arrangements are strained or contested. Chapter 6 examines how the three teams enacted these practices across the adaptation cycle.

2. Research Question 2: Institutional-Level Work Through Visible Practices

RQ2: *How do visible adaptation practices function as institutional work that creates, maintains, or disrupts norms and practices in esports?*

Within the model, RQ2 traverses the upward pathway from interaction to structure, which runs through Integration Points 1 and 3 in sequence. Point 1 explains what visible adaptation produces: transparent adaptive communication simultaneously functions as meaning work at the institutional level, so that teams engage in institutional work regardless of whether they intend field-level influence, consistent with Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) emphasis on mundane everyday actions as the substrate of institutional dynamics. Point 3 explains how those meanings travel: visibility infrastructure converts bounded practices into portable demonstrations that circulate, persist, and accumulate as institutional resources.

The interdependence of the modalities adds a specification that matters for this question: what makes a demonstration institutionally legible is its hybrid character. A team conducting conventional competitive practice that happens to be visible demonstrates little;

a team visibly integrating competing logics demonstrates an organizational possibility the field has not settled. And because community logic occupies the evaluative position in the three-logic configuration, whether a demonstration acquires normative standing depends on distributed audience judgment as much as on the demonstrating team's intent, the dynamic Chapter 3 grounded in multilevel legitimacy theory.

The institutional work occurring through these demonstrations can take the three forms that organize Chapter 7's analysis. Creation work happens when teams establish norms and practices that did not previously exist in the field, as when the pioneering content team model demonstrated that radical transparency could be viable in professional esports. Maintenance work happens when teams preserve competitive standards while expanding the acceptable practices for achieving them, validating traditional competitive values through unconventional means. Disruption work happens when teams challenge assumptions about necessary trade-offs, as sustained transparent competitiveness disrupts the assumption that openness and effectiveness are incompatible.

The framework also identifies conditions affecting whether demonstrated innovations actually influence field-level norms. Performance proves critical, since transparent practices accompanied by competitive decline may reinforce the very assumptions they were positioned to challenge. Institutional position matters, since demonstrations from established teams carry more weight than those from marginal organizations. And field context shapes receptivity, since periods of economic strain make demonstrated alternatives to conventional models more consequential than periods of stability would. Chapter 7 traces how each team's visible practices functioned across the

three forms and under what conditions those demonstrations gained or lost purchase in the field.

3. Research Question 3: Recursive Connections Between Levels

RQ3: *a) How do institutional pressures from competing logics shape adaptation triggers and processes in hybrid teams; and b) How do transparent adaptation practices reshape institutional norms and relationships among those logics?*

Within the model, RQ3a and RQ3b represent the full circuit: one complete traversal of the recursive loop that Figure 4.1 depicts, from structural conditioning through visible practice and back. The integration points supply the bidirectional mechanisms. In the structure-to-interaction direction, Integration Point 2 shows how institutional pressures become adaptation triggers through communicative sensemaking, and Integration Point 4 shows how competing logics require integration work that shapes which adaptive responses get constructed. In the interaction-to-structure direction, Integration Points 1 and 3 show how visible practices become demonstrations that other actors can observe, interpret, and adopt.

The first direction (RQ3a) can be stated concretely in the framework's own vocabulary. When viewership declines, entertainment logic supplies interpretive categories such as content fatigue and audience retention that construct the situation as requiring content adaptation. When competitive results decline, competitive logic supplies categories such as strategic staleness and coordination breakdown that construct it as requiring competitive adaptation. When community concerns arise about authenticity or values alignment, community logic supplies frames of selling out or staying true that construct it as requiring identity work. The same events thus become different triggers depending on which

vocabulary teams reach for, and hybrid teams must frequently reconcile several constructions of a single situation at once.

The reverse direction (RQ3b) operates through demonstration, with a further recursive facet that Integration Point 4 identifies: institutional contradictions drive team-level innovation, and when integrated practices prove visible and viable, they may transform the arrangements that produced the contradictions, expanding what each logic treats as legitimate and opening hybrid institutional space where integration becomes expected. The recursivity appears most clearly when examining how current structures emerged from previous practices and now constrain new ones. Teams currently operating in esports draw on categories such as "content team" that earlier demonstrations established; those categories are now part of the institutional structure that enables and constrains present organizing, and present practices may in turn expand or transform them for future teams.

This multilevel character addresses Powell and Colyvas's (2008) call for microfoundations of institutional theory grounded in concrete organizational practices. By specifying mechanisms connecting the levels through transparency and hybridity as modalities, the framework moves beyond abstract assertions that levels are connected to concrete examination of how connection happens through identifiable communicative processes. Chapter 8 addresses this question by integrating the findings of Chapters 6 and 7, specifying the recursive mechanisms the empirical analysis surfaces and articulating how transparency and hybridity operate as co-equal modalities connecting the levels.

G. Chapter Conclusion: Toward Empirical Investigation

This chapter has developed an integrated theoretical framework addressing a persistent analytical challenge in organizational research: how do practices simultaneously

constitute micro-level adaptation and macro-level institutional work? The framework leverages structuration theory as organizing logic to specify four communicative mechanisms through which team practices and institutional structures recursively constitute each other. These mechanisms reveal content teams as particularly strategic research sites where organizational phenomena typically treated as separate analytical domains operate visibly and simultaneously. The integrated theoretical model (Figure 1) visualizes these recursive relationships, showing how transparency and hybridity function as interdependent modalities connecting team-level adaptation with institutional-level work through specific communicative integration points.

The four integration points provide conceptual vocabulary for empirical investigation. Integration Point 1 (communicative adaptation as institutional production) directs analytical attention to how team-level adaptive communication simultaneously functions as field-level meaning work. Empirical analysis can examine what specific adaptive practices become visible, how they are framed and interpreted, and what institutional meanings they produce. Integration Point 2 (institutional pressures as communicative triggers) directs attention to how teams make sense of their institutional environment through multiple logics. Empirical analysis can examine which institutional frameworks teams invoke when diagnosing situations, how they construct problems requiring adaptation, and how competing frameworks create coordination challenges. Integration Point 3 (visibility infrastructure) directs attention to platform affordances structuring what becomes visible and how. Empirical analysis can examine teams' strategic decisions about revelation, how they manage dual enactment demands, and how archived content circulates through field-level conversations. Integration Point 4 (hybridity as

communicative integration work) directs attention to innovative practices emerging from navigating competing logics. Empirical analysis can examine identity talk, boundary work, and justification practices through which teams integrate institutional demands.

The framework deliberately avoids reducing these dynamics to deterministic predictions. Content teams' transparent practices create potential for institutional influence without guaranteeing it. Successful integration of competing logics demonstrates organizational possibilities without ensuring diffusion. Team adaptation under transparency remains challenging despite sophisticated management. The framework provides analytical vocabulary for examining when, how, and under what conditions these dynamics operate, without asserting universal relationships. This approach recognizes that empirical investigation may reveal unexpected patterns, boundary conditions, and contextual factors shaping how recursive dynamics actually unfold in practice.

V. Chapter Five: Method

This chapter details the research design and procedures through which the study examined team adaptation and institutional work in content teams. The preceding chapters established the theoretical framework; this chapter describes how that framework was operationalized across two levels of analysis, how the three cases were bounded, how data were collected and prepared, and how the analysis proceeded from raw material to the findings presented in Chapters 6 through 8. Throughout, the chapter maintains the terminology established in Chapter 2: transparency refers to the organizational practice of making internal processes observable, while visibility refers to the platform affordance identified by Treem and Leonardi (2013) and to Flyverbom's (2019) visibility regime framework.

A. Research Design

I employed a comparative multiple case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018) with embedded units of analysis at two levels. At the interaction level, the units were *adaptation episodes*: bounded sequences, typically spanning a practice block or a match and the review surrounding it, in which a team recognized changed circumstances, formulated and executed a response, and extracted lessons. A patch that reshaped the draft, a substitute entering the roster, or a loss that exposed a coordination problem could each open such an episode, and an episode closed when the team named what it had learned or moved on. At the structure level, the units were *instances of institutional work*: purposive actions by the teams, such as founding announcements, streamed demonstrations of practice, and dissolution statements, together with their circulation through audiences and media, that created, maintained, or disrupted institutional arrangements in the esports field. This

embedded design followed directly from the structurational framework developed in Chapter 4, which positions transparency and hybridity as co-equal modalities linking the two levels.

1. Analytical Approach

The study's analytical approach is theory elaboration (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017; Vaughan, 1992). Elaboration names the mode of inquiry that begins from an existing theoretical model and uses close engagement with cases to specify, refine, and extend it: contrasting the model with a setting it was not built for, adding or respecifying constructs, and establishing the conditions under which its claims hold (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017). Vaughan's (1992) account of case analysis as a heuristic for elaborating theory describes the path this study follows. Chapters 2 through 4 assembled established frameworks whose scope assumptions content teams violate; the empirical chapters run those frameworks through three cases of the form; and Chapter 9 returns the frameworks with refinements and scope conditions attached, the outputs elaboration is designed to produce. Elaboration also explains why the design begins from research questions instead of hypotheses: the frameworks are trusted enough to organize inquiry, and expected to be incomplete in a setting that removes the bounded, ephemeral, single-logic conditions under which they were developed.

The analysis draws its working techniques from grounded theory: constant comparison across sessions, teams, and time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in vivo coding that preserves participants' own labels, analytic memoing, theoretically guided sampling of episodes, and negative case analysis (Morse et al., 2002). In how it handles prior theory, the study sits with the informed and constructivist strands of that tradition, which hold that

existing theory strengthens grounded analysis when engaged openly (Thornberg, 2012) and that prior knowledge enters interpretation in any case, as sensitizing concepts if nothing else (Blumer, 1954; Charmaz, 2014; Kelle, 2005). The study goes one step further than informed grounded theory: the top level of its coding structure, the four adaptation phases, the three forms of institutional work, the three logics, and the four affordances, was fixed by the frameworks being elaborated, and the levels beneath it emerged from the material. Grounded theory supplies the techniques; theory elaboration names the logic that governs their use.

Each layer of the resulting procedure follows an established methodological tradition. The overall movement belongs to the comparative case tradition, in which a priori specification of constructs is an accepted and even recommended starting point (Eisenhardt, 1989) and analysis proceeds by relying on the theoretical propositions that motivated the study (Yin, 2018). The coding architecture is a hybrid of deductive and inductive elements of the kind Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) formalize. For the observational data, the procedure is template-style: an a priori template, here the four adaptation phases, organizes the corpus, while the codes within the template are developed and revised against the data (Brooks et al., 2015), through the flexible-coding sequence of theoretically derived indexing followed by close analytic coding (Deterding & Waters, 2021). For the archival data, the codebook-governed procedure described under Analytical Procedures below is a directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005): existing theoretical categories operationalized for application to a large corpus, with channels retained, the semantic supplement and the negative-case flags, for material the categories do not anticipate. The fieldwork stance behind both sits in the lineage of theory-driven ethnographic work: analytic ethnography's

program of linking fieldwork to extant theory (Snow et al., 2003), adaptive theory's joining of pre-existing and data-generated theorizing within one design (Layder, 1998), and, most directly, the extended case method's practice of running received theory through an anomalous case in order to rebuild it (Burawoy, 1998), transposed here to a netnographic setting.

Placed against the field's usual oppositions, the approach is neither deductive in the hypothesis-testing sense nor inductive in the classical grounded theory sense, and it does not follow the abductive program of Timmermans and Tavory (2012): the frameworks come first, and the aim is to return them improved. The coding tables should be read with this architecture in mind. The category level in Table 5.4 and Appendix A is theory-anchored; the analytic codes within each category are the emergent product of close reading; and the refinements and scope conditions of Chapter 9 are the elaboration the design was built to produce.

The design leveraged an unusual property of the empirical setting. Because content teams broadcast their practice sessions, strategic deliberations, and internal conflicts, I could observe organizational processes that research on conventional teams must reconstruct from retrospective accounts. Two methodological traditions organized how I did so, and their relationship should be stated explicitly. The comparative case study supplied the architecture: the definition and bounding of the cases, the logic of selecting them for theoretical variation, the replication strategy through which I examined whether mechanisms identified in one case recurred in the others, and the discipline of analyzing each case as a whole before comparing across cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). Netnography (Kozinets, 2020) supplied the fieldwork practices through which I generated evidence within

that architecture, because both the teams' organizational life and the field's response to it were conducted online: sustained observation of naturally occurring streamed activity, immersive field notes, and systematic collection of the archival traces through which audiences and media received and debated what the teams did. The netnography was therefore a component of the comparative case study, not a separate method run alongside it. Its observational procedures generated the primary evidence within each case, its archival procedures generated the secondary evidence, and the comparative design determined what those materials were evidence of. The design relies entirely on naturally occurring public material, an unobtrusive approach that avoids the reactivity of researcher-elicited accounts and suits a phenomenon whose defining property is that its organizational life is conducted in public.

Comparability across the cases rested on four features held constant by design. All three teams competed in the same game under the same publisher's rules, so patches, formats, and competitive vocabulary were shared. All three enacted the same organizational form as defined in Chapter 1, streaming substantial portions of their competitive preparation while competing in a sanctioned league. All three operated within overlapping windows between November 2024 and early 2026, so field-level conditions such as the liberalization of practice streaming and the growth of co-streamed coverage applied to each. And I collected the same families of data for each case through the same procedures, so differences in the record reflect differences in the cases rather than in the instruments. Within that constant frame, the cases varied on the dimensions the framework identifies as consequential, and Table 5.1 documents that variation.

Case dynamics during the collection window strengthened the comparative design in a way the original proposal could not have anticipated. All three focal teams reached an ending or fundamental transition within the study period: Near Airport withdrew from competition and disbanded in June 2025, The Ruddy Sack's founding streamers and coaching principals departed in July 2025, and Los Ratones announced its dissolution in February 2026 following its Tier 1 debut. These endings provide temporal variation rather than a success and failure contrast. Each case displays the full arc of the organizational form, from founding through operation to conclusion, at different tempos and under different conditions, permitting comparison of how the same underlying processes unfold across compressed and extended trajectories.

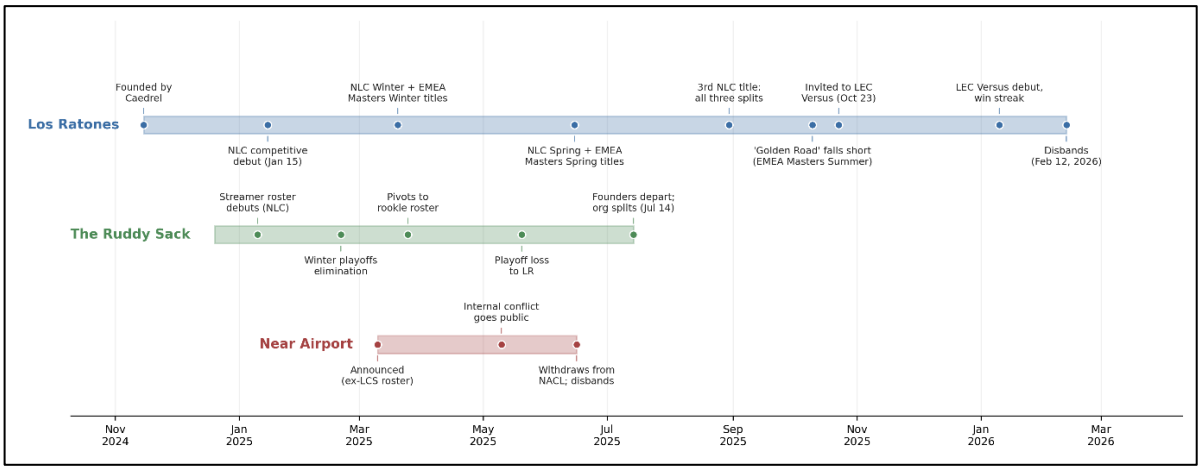
B. Case Selection and Case Boundaries

I selected the three teams purposively, following the logic of theoretical sampling in which cases are chosen for their capacity to illuminate the constructs under study rather than for statistical representativeness (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). Two criteria governed the selection. First, a case had to enact the form fully, competing in a sanctioned league while streaming substantial portions of its competitive preparation, so that both levels of the framework could be observed in the same organization; adjacent streamer-founded organizations that competed without streaming their preparation, or streamed without competing in a sanctioned league, enacted only one side of the form, and Chapter 9 draws on them as comparison points, not cases. Second, the cases together had to vary on the dimensions the framework treats as consequential: resources and audience scale, orientation between the competitive and entertainment logics, and institutional position within the league system. Los Ratones was the form’s most developed and most widely watched

instantiation; Near Airport was a modestly resourced adoption of the same template in a different region, founded in explicit inspiration from the flagship; and The Ruddy Sack was an entertainment-forward variant competing in the same league as Los Ratones. No other team in the study period combined sanctioned competition with preparation streaming at a comparable scale, so the three cases approximate the population of full instantiations available for study, not a sample from a larger pool. Table 5.1 profiles the three cases, and Figure 5.1 presents their competitive arcs and key organizational events on a common timeline.

Figure 5.1

Competitive Arcs and Key Organizational Events of the Three Cases, November 2024 Through March 2026



Note. Bars span each case's arc as bounded for this study; The Ruddy Sack's first iteration ends at the July 14, 2025 departure of its founding figures, after which the organization continued under separate ownership outside the study's scope. NLC = Northern League of Legends Championship; NACL = North American Challengers League; LEC = the EMEA

Tier 1 league; EMEA Masters = the continental championship for regional league teams. Event dates are drawn from the teams' published record and field observation.

Los Ratones, founded in November 2024 by the streamer and former professional player Caedrel, represents an institutionally developed and authenticity-oriented instantiation of the form: the team competed in the Northern League of Legends Championship while streaming its scrims, drafts, and reviews, won every domestic and continental title available to it in 2025, and received an unprecedented invitation to Tier 1 competition before dissolving on February 12, 2026. Near Airport, founded in March 2025 by the former professional player Doublelift with a roster of veteran North American players, represents a modestly resourced and structurally constrained instantiation: the team competed one split in the North American Challengers League before withdrawing in June 2025. The Ruddy Sack, organized around the streamers IWDominate and DonJake with YamatoCannon as coach, represents a spectacle-forward and entertainment-driven instantiation in the same league as Los Ratones; the case is bounded as the organization's first iteration, from its late 2024 formation through the departure of its founding figures on July 14, 2025.

Table 5.1

Case Profiles of the Three Content Teams

Characteristic	Los Ratones	Near Airport	The Ruddy Sack
Founding and principals	Founded November 2024 by Caedrel, a streamer and former professional player	Founded March 2025 by Doublelift, a former professional player,	Organized in late 2024 around IWillDominate and DonJake on an established

		in explicit inspiration from Los Ratones	organization's infrastructure, with YamatoCannon as coach
League and competitive arc	NLC; won every available domestic and continental title in 2025; received an unprecedented invitation to Tier 1 (LEC) competition	NACL; entered through open qualifiers and competed one split	NLC, the same league as Los Ratones; Winter and Spring 2025 splits
Roster character	Prominent streamers and veteran professionals under Caedrel's coaching	Veteran North American professionals returning from retirement, with Croissant as coach	Initial streamer and veteran roster replaced in February 2025 by development players under the same coaching leadership
Instantiation of the form	Institutionally developed and authenticity-oriented	Modestly resourced and structurally constrained	Spectacle-forward and entertainment-driven
Transparency practice	Near-total: streamed scrims, drafts, and reviews, with selected	High: streamed scrims, reviews, and	Selective and principal-driven, broadcast from

	sessions private before major matches	coordinated player streams	coach and owner perspectives
Revenue basis	Sponsorship-anchored with minimal direct viewer income; profitable at dissolution	Modestly resourced, combining viewer support with limited sponsorship	Hybrid, drawing on the established organization's structure and a community fund experiment
Ending and case boundary	Dissolved February 12, 2026 following its Tier 1 debut. In the founder's own account, LEC participation required ceasing to stream scrims, removing the practice that defined the form, and the model imposed a structural exhaustion and exposure he would not recommend to others; successor	Withdrew from competition and disbanded June 16, 2025. In the team's own account, competing at the level sought required an "all-in" professional commitment that members' existing streaming careers, personal obligations, and schooling could not accommodate	Bounded at the July 14, 2025 departure of the founding figures, with a small purposive slice of transition reaction retained. The principals' two public diagnoses: a roster oriented to individual brands instead of a unified competitive drive, and an economic model in which a streamer team below Los Ratones' scale

	arrangements treated as archival evidence	offered too little incentive to sustain

Note. NLC = Northern League of Legends Championship; NACL = North American Challengers League; LEC = the EMEA Tier 1 league. All three cases reached an ending or fundamental transition within the study period, providing temporal variation across compressed and extended trajectories.

Case boundaries required explicit decisions because two of the organizations persisted in altered form beyond the theoretically relevant period. For The Ruddy Sack, systematic collection ended at the July 14, 2025 announcement that the founding streamers were departing and the organization was restructuring, since the first iteration constitutes the case; a small purposive slice of reaction content from the days following the announcement was retained as evidence of transition sensemaking. The first iteration itself contained an internal transition worth noting: after elimination from the Winter playoffs in February 2025, the team replaced its streamer roster with development players under the same coaching leadership, a pivot that features in the Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 analyses. For Los Ratones, collection extended through the February 2026 dissolution and the remainder of the study window, with successor arrangements treated as archival evidence about the model, not an extension of the case. The overall collection window ran from November 1, 2024, immediately preceding the Los Ratones announcement, through March 31, 2026.

C. Data Sources and Collection Procedures

I drew on two families of data, ordered by design. *Streamed team practice*, documented through systematic observation and field notes, was the primary data for the study as a whole, and provided the content for human conceptual and thematic coding. It

provided the evidence for the team-level analysis of adaptation reported in Chapter 6, and it supplied the record of the teams' own practices, founding articulations, and dissolution accounts on which the institutional analysis of Chapters 7 and 8 rests. A *documentary and archival dataset*, assembled and coded computationally from public platforms, served as secondary data with a bounded and essential function: it documented how the observed practices were received, classified, and debated across the field, evidence that observation of the teams alone cannot supply and that Chapters 7 and 8 draw on for their reception and field-response claims. Table 5.2 summarizes the archival data by case and platform.

Table 5.2

Archival Data by Case and Platform After Cleaning

Data type	Platform/source	Los Ratones	Near Airport	The Ruddy Sack
Community discussion	Reddit posts	1,840	64	24
	Reddit comments	90,181	4,111	1,690
Audience reception	YouTube comments	18,124	1,041	1,058
Team output	YouTube videos	217	24	13
Public commentary	Twitter/X	1,959	120	364
Press coverage	Esports and general news	428	183	27

Note. Counts are records retained after cleaning; 524 records held under review flags are excluded. Reddit comments include full discussion threads collected under keyword-

matched posts. Collection search terms are described in the text; the analytic keyword dictionaries later applied to these records are reproduced in Appendices B and C.

1. Streamed Team Practice and Field Notes

Systematic observation of streamed team activity followed the protocol established in the proposal and refined during the pilot period. The teams' practice is preserved in extensive public video-on-demand archives, persistent recordings of the original live broadcasts that can be replayed, paused, and revisited at any time, and these archives form the observational universe from which sessions were sampled; I observed most sessions asynchronously through these recordings, which permitted verbatim capture and repeated viewing, alongside live observation of selected broadcasts. For Los Ratones, a dedicated scrim playlist maintained on a team-affiliated channel preserves over one hundred scrim session recordings alongside the team's official match broadcasts and other published output; Near Airport's channel documents its competitive existence at near completeness; and The Ruddy Sack's sessions are archived across its principals' channels. I sampled observation sessions purposively from this universe to capture complete adaptation cycles, spanning preparation blocks, official matches, and the review sessions surrounding them. Temporal bracketing (Langley, 1999) distributed the sampled sessions across the early, middle, and late portions of each competitive split, so that every phase of every contested split is represented in the documented sample , not only its most eventful stretches. Critical incident sampling (Flanagan, 1954) complemented the bracketed cycles, capturing pivotal adaptation moments outside the regularly sampled periods, identified through team announcements of strategic shifts, stream titles indicating adaptation events, and concentrations of community attention.

A structured observation protocol translated the four-phase framework of Chapter 2 into operational markers for adaptation-relevant talk, and field notes documented each episode in those terms. Situation assessment markers included cue recognition statements ("their jungler hasn't shown in a while") and situational awareness sharing; plan formulation markers included goal specification ("our goal is to stall until late game") and strategy proposals; plan execution markers included coordination commands ("engage now") and reactive adjustments; and team learning markers included performance recaps and lesson extraction ("main lesson: we need better vision control when ahead"). Each documented episode was attributed to its adaptation trigger and to its in-task or between-task timing. Alongside this phase-anchored record, field notes captured contextual notes on production choices, audience interaction, and moments in which the fact of being observed visibly entered team activity.

The notes took a two-layer form common to sustained field observation. Raw notes taken in real time during observation total 297 pages and were consolidated into structured session-level entries, each anchored to a dated session and its archived video-on-demand link, consisting of timestamped observations of team talk and play, with theoretically significant utterances captured verbatim and keyed to their timestamps for later verification, followed by embedded analytic commentary in which observations judged significant were tagged with an explicit rationale, a practice that functioned as in-situ analytic memoing and preserved the distinction between description and interpretation within each entry. The consolidated corpus comprises 51 session entries spanning November 2024 through February 2026, containing nearly two thousand timestamped observations; Table 5.3 summarizes the observational corpus by case. Los Ratones was sampled selectively across

its national league, continental, and LEC periods from its archive of well over one hundred available sessions; Near Airport, whose entire competitive existence fell within the study window, was documented at nearly session-level completeness; and The Ruddy Sack's first iteration was covered across its split. Session length varied widely with the day’s schedule, and sessions extended longest where scrim blocks adjoined the players' individual streamed play; observation therefore concentrated on the information-dense portions of team activity, the preparation, match, and review segments in which adaptive talk clusters, yielding 152 hours of focused observation across the three cases. The remainder of the archive was not treated as unobserved: video-on-demand persistence permitted targeted consultation of undocumented sessions when the documented sample, the teams' published output, or community discussion pointed to a theoretically significant episode, and repeated viewing of archived sessions served as a check on the accuracy of real-time notes.

Quoted dialogue from observed sessions is transcribed verbatim from the archived broadcasts at the timestamps cited with each excerpt. I verified every quotation against the recording, correcting the automatic captions' rendering of game vocabulary and assigning speaker attributions during verification; where a speaker could not be identified with confidence, the turn is attributed by role or left unattributed. Quotations drawn from field notes reproduce near-verbatim captures made during observation and are marked as such in the text. In-game terminology is glossed in brackets at its first occurrence. Team communication in all observed sessions was spoken, conducted over voice chat and captured on the broadcast audio, with all three teams operating in English; text chat belongs to the audience side of the record and enters the analysis as archival data, not as team talk. Streamed practice sessions are multi-party settings in which talk frequently overlaps, with

in-game communication, coaching commentary, and side conversations running concurrently. Transcription prioritized accuracy over completeness. Turns were transcribed where speech and speaker could be established with confidence against the recording, overlapping or unintelligible segments are marked with ellipses, and exchanges whose content or attribution could not be established are not quoted. Displayed excerpts accordingly represent the recoverable thread of a conversation and may omit concurrent talk; where an elision falls within a quoted exchange, it is marked in the text.

Table 5.3

Observational Corpus by Case

Characteristic	Los Ratones	Near Airport	The Ruddy Sack
Archived universe	Over one hundred scrim sessions on a dedicated team-affiliated playlist, plus official broadcasts and published output	Near-complete video record of the team's competitive existence on its channel	Sessions archived across the principals' channels, broadcast from coach and owner perspectives
Session entries in field note corpus	15	24	12
Composition of documented sessions	Scrim blocks and official matches (12); founding, update, and dissolution videos (3)	Scrim blocks and official matches (20); founding, roster, team-content, and retrospective videos (4)	Scrim blocks and official matches (11); announcement video (1)
Period documented	November 2024–February 2026	March–June 2025	December 2024–July 2025
Session length	Scrim and match sessions M = 5.8 hr (range 2–10 hr); announcement, update, and dissolution videos under one hour	Scrim and match sessions shorter than Los Ratones' on average; announcement, roster, and retrospective videos under one hour	Shortest sessions of the three cases (2–5 hr); announcement video under one hour

Note. Session entries are the consolidated, session-level field note entries described in the text; each is anchored to a dated session and its archived video-on-demand link. Session lengths are full video-on-demand durations. Observation concentrated on the information-dense preparation, match, and review segments, yielding 152 hours of focused observation across the three cases.

2. Documentary and Archival Data

I assembled the archival data through platform-specific collection procedures, each selected for coverage of the study window and compliance with platform terms of service, and each writing records into a unified schema that preserved the native identifier, permanent link, author, timestamp, full text, and engagement metrics of every item. For each case, the collection search terms comprised the team's name with its common variants and abbreviations, together with the names of its principals, as specified in the collection configuration files; these collection search terms are distinct from the analytic keyword dictionaries documented in Appendices B and C and applied during analysis. All collection software, the configuration files specifying search terms and case boundaries, and processing logs are retained as part of the audit trail.

Reddit data come from the official Reddit API. For each case, I executed searches on the case search terms within r/leagueoflegends across four ranking orders to maximize coverage within the platform's result limits, and retrieved the complete comment tree beneath every matched post, on the reasoning that the discussion threads under announcement, match, and dissolution posts carry the densest reception evidence. For Los Ratones, I additionally sampled the community subreddit r/PedroPeepos purposively through keyword search and through retrieval of the period's most engaged posts with their

comment trees. Comments retain the identifier of their parent post, permitting thread-level contextualization during analysis.

YouTube data come from the YouTube Data API, restricted to the teams' official channels. I retrieved every video published within each case's window with its engagement statistics, and collected the 100 comment threads per video returned first under the YouTube Data API's relevance ordering, a platform-determined ranking that favors highly engaged threads. For The Ruddy Sack, whose official channel consisted principally of industry interview content, collection was purposive rather than exhaustive: I collected the team's self-produced documentary and the coaching principal's team-focused series in full, a selection documented in the audit trail. I supplemented the official-channel corpus purposively with a small number of third-party field commentary videos identified during analysis, principally podcast episodes in which established esports commentators analyzed the content team model; these were collected with their comment threads under the same procedure and are flagged as purposive additions in the corpus inventory.

I collected *press coverage* by querying Google News across a specified set of esports outlets, including Dot Esports, Sheep Esports, Dexerto, esports.gg, and Esports Charts, together with unrestricted queries on the same case search terms, and retrieving the full text of each article from the publisher. A minority of articles, principally from publishers that block automated access, could not be retrieved in full and were retained at headline level.

I collected *Twitter data* in two complementary ways. I retrieved every post from each team's official account within its case window, providing a complete record of official organizational communication. I then collected public commentary mentioning the teams purposively, not exhaustively: a full-archive search index served as a discovery instrument,

with queries on the case search terms chunked by month to guarantee coverage of the entire timeline and restricted to posts exceeding an engagement threshold of twenty likes, on the rationale that field-level reception is carried disproportionately by widely circulated commentary. I verified posts used as evidence at their live public locations, so that the evidentiary record consists of the public posts themselves, not the index. Around theoretically pivotal moments, including each founding announcement, each ending, and the Los Ratones Tier 1 invitation, I collected complete reply and quotation threads for the anchoring posts. This purposive approach to archival evidence is consistent with the study's treatment of institutional reception as documentary material gathered through theoretical sampling rather than census enumeration.

D. Data Preparation

I cleaned the raw corpus of 125,686 records through a rule-based procedure designed for auditability: no record was silently deleted, and every excluded record was moved to a quarantine file with a machine-readable reason, permitting review and reversal of any decision. Exclusions removed records with no meaningful text, deleted or removed content, bot-authored content, exact duplicates, and two categories of false positives inherent to the cases' names. Because the phrase near airport is ordinary English, relevance for that case was established positively, by requiring the presence of League of Legends vocabulary, roster names, or esports outlet markers, rather than by attempting to enumerate off-topic vocabulary. Because Los Ratones is a common Spanish phrase, archival records confidently detected as non-English, through script-based detection for non-Latin text and statistical detection at a high confidence threshold for Latin-script text, were excluded, establishing an English-language scope for the reception analysis; the teams' own official output was

exempted from language exclusion and flagged instead, since organizational communication is primary case material in any language. Records matched only through broad person-name searches were flagged for exclusion. Exclusions totaled 3,694 records: non-English content accounted for 1,955, concentrated in Twitter material matching the Spanish phrase, and records lacking League of Legends context under the positive-relevance rule for Near Airport accounted for 304, with the remainder comprising records with no meaningful text (999), duplicates (317), off-topic airport matches (79), and bot-authored content (40). A further 524 records were retained under review flags rather than excluded, principally suspected off-topic material (358) and records outside the collection window (84), alongside promotional content, person-name matches, and the teams' own non-English output; these flagged records are excluded from the counts in Table 5.2. After cleaning, 121,468 records were retained.

E. Analytical Procedures

1. Team-Level Analysis of Adaptation

For the team-level analysis reported in Chapter 6, I applied the four-phase adaptation framework to the observational record, coding field notes and video-on-demand review for situation assessment, plan formulation, plan execution, and team learning as defined in Chapter 2, using the operational markers specified in the observation protocol above. The four phases were fixed in advance; what I coded within them was not. Following the logic of flexible coding (Deterding & Waters, 2021), I first indexed every documented episode to its phase and then coded, within each phase, the recurring practices through which the teams conducted that phase under transparent conditions, staying close to the teams' own talk and retaining in vivo labels where teams named their own practices, as with the *solo queue urge*,

the *information camp*, and the *stage team*. In Deterding and Waters's (2021) vocabulary, these second-layer codes are analytic codes: fine-grained codes developed during focused analysis and applied within an indexed structure, as distinct from the broad index codes, here the four adaptation phases, that organize the corpus in the first pass. This second layer of coding, conducted through constant comparison across sessions, teams, and time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), produced 29 analytic codes, each naming a recurring, observable practice through which a phase was conducted, such as comfort disclosure, channel switching, and coach self-inclusion. I then consolidated the analytic codes into five categories by relating each phase's practices to the condition they manage: four phase-specific categories, *public diagnosis work*, *protected formulation*, *coordination discipline*, and *learning on the record*, and one cross-phase category, *visibility boundary work*, capturing the talk through which teams actively managed the line between what practice made visible and what it withheld. Because the categories are anchored in the a priori adaptation phases, I do not label them axial categories in the grounded theory sense of constructs built up freely from open coding; they are theory-anchored categories whose content, the analytic codes and their anchoring instances, emerged from the data. I conducted all observational coding myself. Table 5.4 presents the categories, their constituent analytic codes, and anchoring instances, and Appendix A supplies the full observational codebook with definitions; the named practices analyzed in Chapter 6, such as principled abstraction, channel switching, and the accountability-appreciation cycle, are these category-level constructs.

I then examined how the transparency and hybridity modalities shaped each phase, tracing how visible practice altered the information environment in which assessment occurred, how audience and commercial considerations entered plan formulation, how

execution proceeded under observation, and how learning was conducted as public performance. Chapter 6 documents these procedures in the context of its findings; they are summarized here for completeness.

Table 5.4

Phase-Anchored Categories and Analytic Codes for the Observational Analysis of Team Adaptation

Category (adaptation phase)	Condition managed	Analytic codes	Anchoring instances
Public diagnosis work (situation assessment)	Diagnosing the team's state before audiences and opponents	comfort disclosure; self-quantification; opponent-model talk; information camp (in vivo); dual-register explanation; exposure-risk talk	Comfort check-ins with substitute support (NA, April 3, 2025); pre-season scrim win-rate disclosure (NA, March 2025); raptors as information camp (LR); stream-observation risk discussion (NA playoffs, May 24, 2025)
Protected formulation	Planning without creating	principled abstraction; deferred specification and channel switching; patch	New-season objective priorities (LR, January 6, 2025); reformulation

(plan formulation)	exploitable commitments	reading; comfort-versus-optimal negotiation; contingency reformulation; capability-based draft philosophy	around substitutes (NA, Armao block); discarding setup-heavy compositions (TRS, February 18, 2025)
Coordination discipline (plan execution)	Executing coordinated action under observation	commit-immediately rule (in vivo); present-tense communication; grouped-play prescription; overcommit correction; spell-state tracking; performance-context identity claims (stage team, in vivo); execution-under-compromise	Post-Baron-misplay rule (LR, November 25, 2024); pointless commentary critique (TRS, April 2025); stage team self-labeling (TRS)
Learning on the record (team learning)	Extracting lessons in public with a persistent archive	coach self-inclusion; accountability-appreciation sequencing; habit naming (solo queue urge, in vivo); rule extraction; endpoint retrospective; archive-anchored accountability	"Int less" self-note (LR, November 25, 2024); gratitude exercise (TRS, April 2025); dissolution retrospectives (NA, June 16, 2025; LR, February 12, 2026)

Visibility boundary work (cross-phase)	Managing the line between disclosed and withheld practice	observation acknowledgment; audience-directed pedagogy; disclosure boundary talk; planned record release	Private scrims before major matches (LR); NDA-bounded disclosure of merger talks (LR, February 2026); commitment to publish scrim results post-split (LR)

Note. In vivo codes retain the teams' own labels. Categories are anchored in the a priori adaptation phases; analytic codes emerged from close reading of the session entries. Anchoring instances are documented in the field note corpus and analyzed in Chapter 6.

2. Field-Level Analysis of Institutional Work and Reception

The field-level analysis, reported in Chapters 7 and 8, combined the two families of data according to the division of labor described above: the observational record and the teams' published statements evidenced the institutional work the teams performed, while the archival data evidenced the field's reception of that work. I grounded the codebook governing the archival portion in the study's theoretical vocabulary, in the manner of directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005); the full codebook, with each family's definitions, operational markers, and boundary conditions, is reproduced in Appendix B. It defined code families for the three forms of institutional work with their constituent practices, the competitive, entertainment, and community institutional logics and their tensions, legitimacy granting and contestation, the transparency and hybridity modalities, the four platform affordances, a family for enacted cross-level interactions in which team

practice and field response meet within a single record, and a set of reception categories I developed for the archival data: recognition of the organizational model, cross-case comparison, adoption and emulation talk, dissolution sensemaking, authenticity evaluation, and field-level implication.

During calibration I established the coding conventions that governed application: codes applied only to material concerning the case teams or the organizational form; recognition of the model required the record to topicalize the form itself, beyond a passing mention of the name (a comment debating whether stream teams can compete at the top level qualifies; a comment that merely names Los Ratones does not); legitimacy codes required the team's standing or right to its position to be genuinely at stake, distinguishing a claim that a team does not belong in its league from ordinary criticism of a lost match; when logic tension was coded, the constituent logics substantively invoked were coded alongside it; adaptation codes in archival data were treated as second-order observations of team processes, distinct from the first-order observational evidence grounding Chapter 6; and affordance codes applied only where an affordance performed explicit analytical work in the material.

Given the corpus scale, I used computational assistance for retrieval while keeping interpretation in my own hands. I translated the codebook's operational markers into transparent lexical dictionaries, reproduced in full in Appendix C, and applied them as case-insensitive regular-expression matchers across the cleaned corpus to identify the subset of records containing candidate theoretical vocabulary and to rank records by the density of candidate categories. The dictionaries flagged 28,472 records. To give one illustration of the dictionaries' grain, the legitimacy-contestation dictionary included the pattern "just (a)

content", capturing the field's recurring dismissal of the teams as content rather than competition, and the dissolution-sensemaking dictionary matched forms of "disband". A semantic supplement, also documented in Appendix C, guarded against vocabulary the dictionaries could not anticipate: using a local sentence-embedding model (all-MiniLM-L6-v2; Reimers & Gurevych, 2019), I compared sentence embeddings of each record against embedded code definitions and added the 3,000 highest-similarity records not already flagged, yielding a reading pool of 31,472 records. This procedure served as a retrieval and prioritization instrument in the tradition of computationally assisted qualitative analysis (Deterding & Waters, 2021; Nelson, 2020): flagged records formed a reading list ordered by likely theoretical relevance, and flagging itself carried no analytical weight. I refined the dictionaries once during calibration, after review of the flagged material surfaced lexical patterns that generated systematic false positives. I then analyzed the flagged material through close reading, examining records in their thread context, coding them against the codebook, and memoing, issuing retrieval queries iteratively as the analysis developed, in the manner of flexible coding of large qualitative datasets (Deterding & Waters, 2021).

3. Computational Assistance and Pilot Calibration

Computational assistance ran as a three-stage pipeline: the keyword-based candidate flagging described above (Stage 1), model-assisted coding (Stage 2), and an independent second-rater audit (Stage 3). During analysis I developed and calibrated the Stage 2 procedure for model-assisted coding, reflecting emerging methodological practice in which large language models serve as coding instruments whose output is validated by the researcher (Chew et al., 2023; Törnberg, 2024; Ziems et al., 2024). The procedure supplies the full codebook, each record, and the record's parent post or video context to a large

language model (Claude Sonnet 4.6), which returns candidate codes, each accompanied by the exact supporting text span, a one-sentence rationale, and a confidence rating.

I calibrated the procedure through a pilot before applying it at scale, treating myself and the model-assisted procedure as first and second coder. The pilot comprised 85 records, a size set not by a power calculation but by coverage: the sample was drawn to overrepresent rare and theoretically central categories, such as dissolution sensemaking and cross-level interaction, until every code family was represented in sufficient numbers to observe the procedure's behavior on it. For a twelve-item verification batch spanning the procedure's confidence range, I adjudicated every proposed code interactively with full thread context, accepting 28 of 30 proposed code applications and adding eight codes the procedure had missed. The procedure erred on the side of omission, missing codes more often than assigning unwarranted ones, an under-coding profile I treated as acceptable for a retrieval-oriented instrument, because omissions remain recoverable through close reading while spurious applications would inflate the coded counts. The calibration produced the coding conventions reported above, two documented corrections of case attribution that demonstrated the necessity of thread context, and two negative cases discussed in Chapter 7. Following calibration, I applied the procedure to the full reading pool of 31,472 records, each supplied with its parent context. The procedure assigned at least one code to 16,015 records (50.9 percent) and declined to code the remaining 15,457. That application rate is what the design predicts, not a shortfall: the pool had been assembled by deliberately over-retrieving flaggers, so a large share of flagged records containing candidate vocabulary without codable content is consistent with the under-coding profile established in calibration. Coded records received 38,603 code applications in total, a mean of 2.4 per

coded record, each accompanied by its supporting span and rationale; 17,967 applications carried high confidence, 18,760 medium, and 1,876 low, and 2,748 were flagged as candidate negative cases for the analysis described below. I quarantined twenty-four output rows carrying malformed record identifiers from all counts, consistent with the corpus-level principle that no anomaly is silently discarded.

Stage 3 audited the Stage 2 coding. Stage 2 coding was conducted with Claude Sonnet 4.6; the Stage 3 audit was conducted with Claude Opus 4.8 as an independent second rater, selected to minimize shared bias with the primary coder, since two models with different training emphases are unlikely to share the same systematic errors, so their disagreements are more informative than disagreements between two runs of one model would be. I drew the audit sample at random from the records that had received at least one code, at a sampling rate of 15 percent (n = 2,402 of 16,015). The auditor received each sampled record with its parent context, the proposed codes, and their supporting spans, but not the first pass's rationales, under deliberately adversarial instructions: apply the codebook and its coding conventions strictly, return an agree or disagree verdict with a reason for every proposed code, list any codes the codebook clearly supports that the first pass missed, and owe the original coding no deference. The verdicts routed the audited sample into three streams: agreements, which received spot checks; disagreements, which entered a human adjudication queue that I worked through with full thread context; and proposed additions, which I reviewed the same way. Overall code-level agreement between the two models was 62 percent, highest for the concretely descriptive code families at roughly 83 to 84 percent and lower, between 35 and 40 percent, for the higher-inference families in which application turns on interpreting stance and implication. I treated model-to-model agreement as a

screening instrument that directs human attention, not as a validity statistic, under the standing rule that evidence entering the dissertation is human-verified. The audit calibrates the evidentiary weight the coded counts can bear, and Chapter 9 states the resulting policy as a limitation: counts for descriptive families are reported as characterizations of the corpus, counts for interpretive families serve only as context, and no substantive claim in the findings chapters rests on a coded count alone, since the qualitative claims were developed through direct reading of the underlying material. Every quoted archival item was verified at its live public source.

4. Cross-Case Comparison and Temporal Analysis

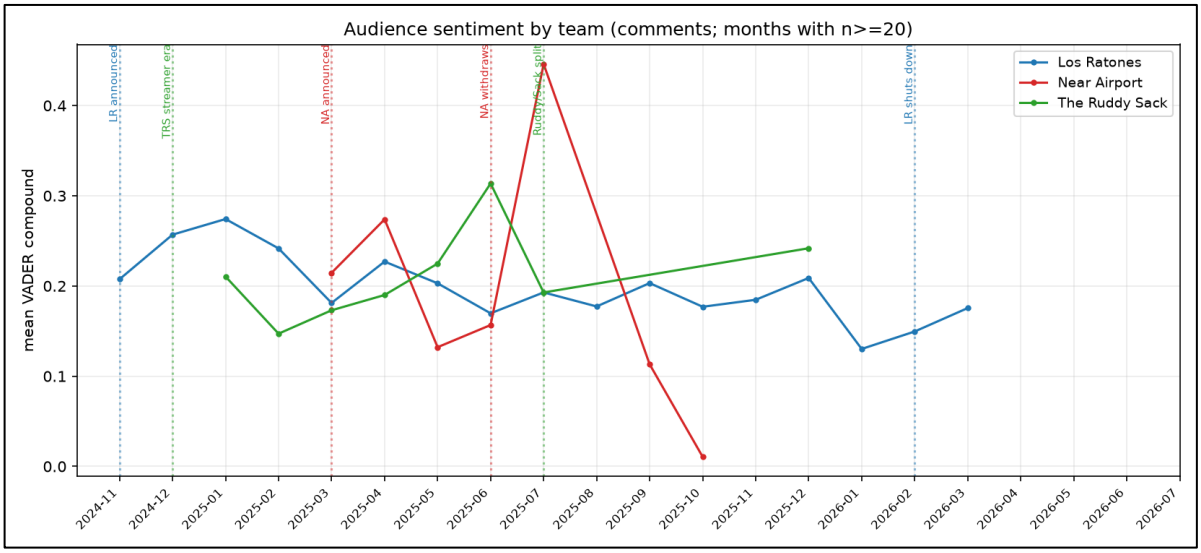
My cross-case analysis followed the replication logic of comparative case research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018): I examined whether the mechanisms identified within each case recurred across cases, how contextual differences in resources, orientation, and league position inflected them, and where boundary conditions appeared. The corpus supported this comparison directly, since audiences and media themselves compared the cases constantly, treating Los Ratones as the template against which the other teams were measured; I coded such explicit comparison talk as its own reception category and analyzed it as field-level evidence in Chapter 7. Temporal bracketing (Langley, 1999) organized each case's material into phases anchored by the key organizational events documented in Chapter 1, permitting analysis of how adaptation practices and institutional reception evolved across founding, operation, transition, and ending periods.

Descriptive computational summaries of the corpus contextualized the qualitative analysis and located periods of concentrated field attention. I computed monthly discussion volume per case and aligned it with the documented case events, and I scored comment

sentiment with the VADER lexicon (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014), aggregated by month where a case had at least 20 comments; I treated the sentiment series strictly as contextualization because general-purpose sentiment instruments misread gaming vernacular, in which terms such as "insane" function as praise. Engagement summaries, computed as median engagements per official video and per team post, described the scale of each case's audience infrastructure, and a log-odds comparison of distinctive vocabulary across the cases served as a validity check confirming that each case's discussion corpus was dominated by discourse about that case. Figure 5.2 presents the sentiment change over time.

Figure 5.2

Audience Sentiment by Team Across the Study Period



Note. Mean compound sentiment score computed with the Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner (VADER; Hutto & Gilbert, 2014), for comment-platform records, by month, for months with at least 20 comments per case. Dotted lines mark key organizational events. Series are exploratory context for the qualitative analysis; lexicon-based sentiment instruments misread gaming vernacular.

I attribute quoted archival material in the findings chapters by platform and month, for example (Reddit, December 2024), in place of formal citation, since community commenters are not identified by name in keeping with the ethical approach described in this chapter; excerpts from esports press coverage are attributed as press material in the same convention. I preserve full source records, including URLs, for every quoted item.

Because the design integrates multiple data families and analytical procedures across the three research questions, Table 5.5 assembles the full analytic architecture in one place: the level and unit of analysis each question addresses, the data that bear on it, the procedures applied, and the chapter reporting the results.

Table 5.5

Overview of Research Questions, Units of Analysis, Data, and Analytical Procedures

Research question	Level and unit of analysis	Primary data	Analytical procedures and reporting
RQ1: Team adaptation under radical transparency	Interaction level; adaptation episodes	Systematic observation of streamed practice (152 focused hours; 51 session entries; Table 5.3), with the teams' published record	Phase-anchored coding with emergent analytic codes consolidated into five categories (Table 5.4; Appendix A); within-case analysis, then cross-case comparison. Reported in Chapter 6 and summarized in Table 6.1

Research question	Level and unit of analysis	Primary data	Analytical procedures and reporting
RQ2: Institutional work through visible practices	Structure level; instances of institutional work and their reception	Teams' founding, update, and dissolution statements and streamed demonstrations (primary); cleaned archival reception corpus of 121,468 records across Reddit, YouTube, Twitter/X, and the esports press (secondary; Table 5.2)	Codebook-based coding of institutional work, logics, legitimacy, and reception (Appendix B); staged retrieval through lexical dictionaries and a semantic supplement (Appendix C); model-assisted coding with calibration and audit; close reading in thread context. Reported in Chapter 7 and summarized in Table 7.1
RQ3: Recursive dynamics between the levels	Cross-level; episodes where team practice and field response meet	Both data families, aligned to case events through temporal bracketing	Tracing the four integration points across cases; temporal bracketing (Langley, 1999); replication logic of comparative case analysis; negative case analysis. Reported in Chapter 8 and summarized in Table 8.1

Note. The observational record grounds Chapter 6 and remains the primary evidence in Chapters 7 and 8; the archival corpus supplies the reception and field-response evidence those chapters draw on, per the division of labor described under Data Sources and Collection Procedures.

F. Quality and Rigor Strategies

I pursued quality and rigor through the strategies specified in the proposal, several of which acquired concrete form in the procedures described above. Prolonged engagement, the sustained presence in a setting that lets a researcher learn its vocabulary, rhythms, and recurring actors well enough to distinguish the typical from the exceptional (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), took the form of sustained observation across each case's full period of

activity, spanning 16 months for the longest case and encompassing every competitive split each team contested. Triangulation proceeded across observation and the archival data: adaptation episodes identified in streams were cross-referenced with the teams' own published accounts and with audience and press reception, and the teams' published retrospectives, founding announcements, and dissolution statements supplied participants' own articulated perspectives on episodes identified observationally.

Negative case analysis (Morse et al., 2002) was conducted deliberately, and two negative cases identified during calibration illustrate the practice. In one, audience members pressed a team toward the entertainment logic and away from competitive investment, inverting the prevailing pattern in which audiences demand competitive seriousness. In the other, transparency damaged legitimacy instead of building it, as streamed internal dysfunction became the basis for sustained professional criticism of a team principal. Both cases are developed in Chapter 7 and shaped the theoretical claims of Chapter 8. Reflexivity was maintained through a research journal documenting positionality, emerging interpretations, and analytic decisions, with particular attention to the researcher's familiarity with the esports field, which aided interpretation of vernacular and in-jokes while requiring vigilance against insider assumptions; one calibration episode, in which a widely celebrated video was initially misread as a roster departure when it was in fact a community joke, is recorded in the journal as a concrete demonstration of why computational and even careful human inference from titles requires verification against contextual knowledge.

G. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted under institutional review board approval and followed the Association of Internet Researchers' guidance for internet research ethics (franzke et al.,

2020). All corpus material is public: the teams broadcast their practice as a constitutive organizational choice, and the archival data consist of public posts, comments, and published articles. The analysis nonetheless distinguishes among kinds of public actors. Team members, organizational principals, and journalists are public figures acting in professional capacities and are identified by their public names. Ordinary community members are not the study's subjects; where their posts are quoted as reception evidence, they are attributed to platform and date without usernames, and quotations were checked against the live source to avoid attributing deleted or edited statements. Collection methods were selected for compliance with platform terms of service, using official interfaces where available; where a third-party index was used for discovery, evidence was verified at its public source, and no credentialed or private material of any kind was collected. Data are stored on encrypted university-managed storage, and the corpus will be retained per institutional data management policy for verification purposes without public release of the compiled dataset, since aggregation of public material into a searchable corpus creates capabilities the original posters did not anticipate.

VI. Chapter Six: The Four Phases **of Team Adaptation Under Radical Transparency**

A. Chapter Introduction

Seven days after Caedrel announced that he was starting a League of Legends team, Los Ratones spent an afternoon finding out what it could play. The November 22, 2024 session, streamed and archived under the title "Trying New Champions," ran five practice games against Team Azzapp. Between games the team reasoned aloud about unfamiliar picks, lane swap options, and the implications of the fearless draft format [under which a champion, who has once played in a series, is unavailable for the rest of a series]. Nothing about the afternoon was unusual as competitive preparation. What was unusual is that anyone could watch it, and that the recording remains publicly available with every misjudgment intact. This chapter examines what that condition does to team adaptation.

The chapter applies the frameworks developed in Chapters 2 through 4 to empirical material drawn from 152 hours of stream observation across the three content teams between November 2024 and February 2026, alongside the teams' published record and the documentary and archival data described in Chapter 5. The archival coding described there also locates the chapter's evidentiary boundary: of 2,910 adaptation-relevant code applications in the archival corpus, 2,743 are second-order commentary in which audiences and media describe team processes, with only 154 between-task and 12 in-task observations. First-order adaptive work is visible almost exclusively through direct observation of streamed practice, which is why the observational record grounds this chapter and remains the primary evidence in Chapters 7 and 8, where the archival material does its own secondary work of documenting the field's reception. Throughout, I attend to how the bona

fide group's constitutive context, platform affordances, and the transparency-secrecy nexus shape each form of adaptive work and the organizational capabilities it requires.

The three cases hold different configurations of the conditions this chapter examines, and Chapter 5 profiles them in full; what matters here is the contrast. *Los Ratones*, led by prominent streamer and former professional Caedrel, enters the period as the most institutionally developed content team in the dataset, with an established streaming practice and the longest record of publicly transparent competitive preparation. *The Ruddy Sack*, co-owned by IWillDominate and organized around coach YamatoCannon and a roster of prominent veterans including Perkz and Jankos, runs a spectacle-forward configuration in which entertainment logic operates alongside competitive logic and frequently through it, making performative self-presentation a defining organizational characteristic. *Near Airport*, founded by six-time LCS champion Yiliang "Doublelift" Peng, pairs a decorated veteran roster, Spica, Pobelter, Biofrost, and streaming personality TFBlade, with coach Croissant and a more modest content infrastructure, and disbands after a single competitive split, which makes it the dataset's evidence on what happens when the form's foundational conditions are only partially in place.

A word on presentation logic before the analysis begins. Each subsection anchors its analysis in the case whose observed sessions document the dynamic at issue most extensively, and I name that case in the subsection heading. The other cases enter where they extend the dynamic, vary it, or mark its boundary. The anchor case is an exemplar, and the cross-case pattern each dynamic belongs to is consolidated in the chapter conclusion and Table 6.1; where a dynamic appears in only one case, I say so and bound its scope accordingly. The analysis moves through the four adaptive phases in turn, treating them as

the distinct forms of adaptive work defined in Chapter 2 and operationalized in Chapter 5, even as they overlap in practice.

B. Situation Assessment as Public Diagnosis

1. The Dual-Audience Diagnostic Problem

Situation assessment is fundamentally a diagnostic activity. Teams interpret environmental signals, evaluate performance, compare current conditions to shared expectations, and develop collective judgments about what the situation requires. Prior research conceptualizes this process in settings where diagnostic work is internally bounded, interactions are ephemeral, and assessments are shielded from competitive and reputational exposure (Burke et al., 2006). Content teams conduct situation assessment continuously and publicly, and the difference reshapes both what the diagnostic process involves and what forms of assessment become organizationally viable.

Because content teams' boundaries are constitutively shaped by audiences, competitors, sponsors, and platform structures that observe their practice, these actors do more than watch an otherwise intact assessment process. They participate in shaping what gets assessed, how assessments are communicated, and what information can be shared without competitive cost. Situation assessment is the adaptive phase where this constitutive relationship becomes most consequential, since the diagnostic work required for coordination is simultaneously the most tactically sensitive and the most audience-legible dimension of visible competitive preparation.

The result is what I call a *dual-audience diagnostic problem*. Teams assess their competitive situation for the functional purpose of coordinating an adaptive response while simultaneously communicating that assessment to audiences who find the diagnostic

conversation itself valuable, whether as entertainment, as education about professional decision-making, or as evidence of organizational accountability. The two purposes pull in different directions. Functional assessment benefits from precise technical language shared among team members, whereas audience engagement benefits from accessible explanation that brings diagnostic logic within reach of non-experts. Managing that tension requires communicative practices that serve both purposes at once, a form of adaptive work the conventional theory has not needed to address.

2. Assessment as Developing Organizational Capability (Los Ratones)

Public assessment of the team's own capabilities was built into Los Ratones' founding week. The November 22 block against Team Azzapp, framed explicitly as trying new champions, ran five games in which the team tested unfamiliar picks, worked through lane swap options, and reasoned aloud about fearless draft implications, converting what conventional teams treat as private capability testing into public experimentation. The register of that experimentation is audible in the first game's review, where Caedrel closed the analysis by converting the game's repeated error into a standing rule, in an exchange with the team's mid laner, Nemesis:

> Caedrel: The main thing that we just have to learn from this game, the only thing that I want you guys to know, cuz we did it twice, is sometimes we put vision down, and this is a very common mistake people make, you put vision down and you think it's secure and that's it. We have to defend our vision no matter what. The second they walk in and do this, we can't just be autopiloting [...]
>
> Nemesis: I don't get what I'm doing here honestly. [...] I'm [expletive] trolling, like I don't know what I'm doing here.

Caedrel: The choke here has to be held. If they can get space and walk in here, the contest is so much easier for them, because their carries can walk up. But always, always, always on this side, on red side, especially if we have this bush and we're ahead: defend it with your life. Don't give this bush ever.

(Los Ratones practice session, November 22, 2024; video 5ZJ_bvPZiio, 27:48–28:35)

The exchange runs in two registers at once, and the difference between them is the diagnostic capability this subsection traces. The player's self-assessment stays at the level of symptom and self-blame: not knowing what he is doing, "trolling." Caedrel's response works at the level of structure, naming the recurring error, stating the rule that prevents it, and attaching the rule to a map location any viewer can see. The diagnosis coordinates the team and simultaneously teaches the audience what competent play looks like, which is the dual-audience problem being solved in real time. And because the block sat in founding week, conducting this assessment publicly established the team's baseline in view of the audience that would later evaluate its trajectory against that baseline.

The capability developed quickly across the observed sessions. In the November 21 session against Jankos, post-game vocabulary was largely reactive: the team identified "overstaying," remaining in a lane past the point of safety, as a specific failure, and the analysis stayed with symptoms, describing the pattern as turning a winning position into a "clown fiesta" by not backing [returning to base] in time. By November 25, Caedrel's pre-game briefings had turned prospective, identifying communication volume and individual coordination habits as variables to correct in advance of play, with the jungler Velja's tendency toward silence and the top laner Baus's lane swap behavior set as diagnostic targets

before the games began. The November 26 session then shows the further architectural shift, in an exchange that began with Velja diagnosing his own opening pattern:

> Velja: It's like I'm pretty autopilot when it comes to level one, and if you don't go enemy jungle it's like I'm always late on my bot camps [...]
>
> Caedrel: What you need to do is you should start Raptors [a neutral jungle camp], and you know why I tell you start Raptors, because you can just see what happens. If you start Raptors and Caitlyn's [a specific LOL champion] here and Braum's [a specific LOL champion] walking in, then you can take your Raptors, run away [...]
>
> Velja: Ok with Nidalee [a specific LOL champion], I can't really start Raptors, you know, I have a spear [...]
>
> Caedrel: The main thing you need to do is, your first camp in a lane swap is always an information camp, right? So if you do Raptors and you see Caitlyn here, or Caitlyn Wukong walking here, then you can do Raptors and get out. If you see Caitlyn top, then you can go Raptors, Krugs, Red into top. Like, that camp just allows you to decide where you go, basically. Or Wolves is fine, you just need to start there somewhere, so you can then figure out how you get the top to dive, or how you can full clear the top to cover.
>
> (Los Ratones practice session, November 26, 2024; video EYTaN-62XaY, 21:00–22:05)

The principle folds assessment into the opening of play itself. Velja names his failure pattern in symptom terms, autopilot and late camps, and pushes back on the first correction with a champion-specific constraint, and the resolution neither prescribes a fixed opening

nor accepts the symptom framing. The first camp exists to produce information, and the plan stays deliberately incomplete until the map supplies what the pre-game assessment cannot. Situation assessment, on this design, does not conclude when competitive play begins. It extends into the first minutes of the game, which is why I treat the exchange as an architectural shift in the team's diagnostic practice and a principle that recurred across the observed sessions.

This approach is also an organizational response to the conditions of transparent practice. A fully specified plan, assessed before the game and articulated on stream, becomes visible to the audience, which supports engagement, and to opponents who may be watching, which introduces competitive risk. A principle-based approach that defers specific commitments to real-time information gives the audience comprehensible strategic logic while mitigating the exposure that pre-game tactical specificity would create. The editability affordance is central here: because live streams offer minimal editability, the level of abstraction at which assessment is publicly articulated becomes the primary mechanism for managing what the transparency of the diagnostic process reveals and what it protects.

The capability ultimately acquired offensive as well as defensive applications. In the October 17 EMEA Masters quarterfinal, the team openly deliberated during the draft phase over whether to commit visibly to one role assignment or to introduce deliberate ambiguity, describing the tactic as a "fake flex" designed to mislead opponents about their actual intentions. This second-order move becomes available only through accumulated experience with transparent practice: the team's awareness of what opponents can observe, built across a season of visible assessment work, let it use that visibility strategically. Where principled abstraction withholds specificity to protect tactical options, the fake flex uses apparent

specificity to generate false expectations. The audience sees the deliberation, the opponent sees the apparent commitment, and the actual plan departs from what either could confirm. The persistence affordance matters here in a less obvious way: precisely because Los Ratones' patterns are archived and legible to opponents, a deliberate departure from those patterns carries misdirectional force.

Persistence thus left a record of the team's diagnostic capacity developing, and the development was itself publicly legible. By mid-season, analytical moves that required extended post-game discussion in November could be initiated through brief references, as the archive provided a shared conceptual foundation that supported abbreviated communication. Audiences who followed the team across its archived sessions could watch the progression from extended diagnosis to abbreviated reference.

3. Assessment Under Commitment and Competitive Constraints (Near Airport)

Near Airport's relationship to situation assessment begins before competitive play, in an unusual practice of pre-season diagnosis. At the team's public launch, Pobelter disclosed that during the first two weeks of practice the team was winning only approximately ten percent of its scrim games, a period that required what Doublelift described as "therapy sessions" to sustain team morale. The disclosure functions as transparent situation assessment: a public reckoning with organizational readiness that establishes a diagnostic norm of evaluating the team's condition honestly and making the evaluation visible regardless of what it reveals. The norm proved consequential across the season. In April competitive play against DarkZero Dragonsteel, TFBlade stated his individual champion comfort aloud during draft, preferring Trundle over Jayce on his own confidence with meta considerations set aside, extending assessment into terrain that conventional competitive

practice treats as protected. Assessments of individual readiness are competitively exploitable, and making them visible on stream reflects a diagnostic logic that prices honest collective evaluation above the informational advantage concealment would provide.

TFBlade's case extends the logic from champion comfort to competitive identity. In a post-match interview after the April 24 DarkZero Dragonsteel series, he narrated a reformulation of his approach to competitive play: he cannot pick hyper-aggressive champions and expect to win in a team context, and the controlled, team-oriented style he has adopted is a deliberate departure from the solo-queue identity his audience knows well. Because that identity is public and extensively archived across years of individual streaming, the reformulation is assessable against a prior record in a way that private players' developmental adjustments are not. His acknowledgment that the change departs from what audiences know of him reinforced Near Airport’s competitive credibility because it carried a visible cost: the audience could observe both the new approach and the extent of the adjustment it required.

Near Airport's practices also show how transparency generates specific competitive vulnerability. During the NACL playoffs series against Winthrop University, a champion select glitch caused Pobelter to lock the wrong champion, a disruption partly attributed to the possibility that Winthrop players were watching Near Airport's stream during the draft phase. The stream sniping accusation, whether ultimately substantiated or not, points to a structural tension in transparent competitive practice: teams assess their situation in a context where making the assessment publicly visible may alter the situation being assessed. The incident gives the dynamic concrete form, and it structures draft-phase assessment

across the dataset. Assessment unfolds in the presence of actors whose interests depend on that assessment remaining incomplete.

4. Assessment Infrastructure and the Absence of Shared Cognitive Structures (The Ruddy Sack)

The Ruddy Sack's transparent drafting debates illustrate a distinct dimension of how transparency shapes situation assessment, though the character of that transparency differs from Los Ratones in analytically important ways. In a January 2025 scrim session, the team openly discussed the viability of different support picks, with players voicing concerns about champion comfort and matchup vulnerabilities, such as a support whose weak early game concedes the lane to an aggressive opposing duo. The diagnostic work was genuine, but the register in which it unfolded often carried the inflections of the team's entertainment identity. YamatoCannon's coaching interventions were frequently marked by exaggerated expressiveness and theatrical emphasis, performing the role of honest coaching for an audience as much as enacting it for the team. Los Ratones' visible diagnostic process invites audiences into the team's reasoning; the Ruddy Sack's visible assessment more often performs the appearance of that invitation, with the organizational relationship to the audience oriented toward production while participation stays notional.

The Ruddy Sack's assessment challenges are evident from the organization's first session. YamatoCannon opened the inaugural scrim against NORD Esports by acknowledging that he had not engaged with game content for two to three weeks and that no pre-scrim meeting had been held to synchronize champion pools and strategies, resulting in what he described as "fake picks that didn't synergize." The breakdown reflects a missing organizational infrastructure more than a failure of individual attention: the shared cognitive

structures that enable effective situation assessment require deliberate establishment and maintenance, and the Ruddy Sack had not built them before streaming began. The team’s handling of the disclosure turns on the entertainment frame through which the dysfunction is presented. The session absorbs disorganization into the chaotic, high-energy spectacle that defines the team's content identity, and a developmental challenge requiring sustained reckoning never quite comes into view. Making organizational unreadiness entertaining becomes a form of assessment management that forestalls critical community evaluation, and it simultaneously limits how far transparent disclosure can function as organizational learning once it has been converted into content. The team's constitutive context, particularly the coaching staff's content creator identities and the expectation of immediate public output, structured the organization's launch before the internal conditions for effective adaptation were in place.

C. Plan Formulation Under Conditions of Radical Transparency

Plan formulation translates assessed situations into action plans, and commitment is the operative concept, since plans coordinate members' expectations about what each will do. Under transparency, these commitments become visible to audiences with competing interests: the team's audience seeks strategic logic it can follow, sponsors and field observers look for evidence of professional competence, and competitors search for exploitable tactical detail. Managing that multi-stakeholder visibility is the central organizing challenge distinguishing content team formulation from formulation in conventional competitive settings, and the practices I document below are all, in one way or another, enactments of the transparency-secrecy nexus (Ringel, 2019): arrangements that keep a frontstage open while preserving conditions for the deliberation the frontstage cannot host.

1. Principled Abstraction as a Formulation Strategy (Los Ratones)

Across Los Ratones sessions, Caedrel's post-game coaching consistently operated at a register of principled abstraction. Reviews identified principles to guide decision-making and left the specific actions of the next game open, such as "when you open the map, commit to a unified side" or "your first objective after a fight is to define the next step, rather than revisiting the fight just won." These principles offer substantively correct competitive guidance while remaining articulated at a level of abstraction that permits public sharing without committing the team to exploitable tactical specifics. The transparency-secrecy nexus is enacted here through communicative register: frontstage and backstage are differentiated by the level of specificity at which formulation is articulated, and both occur on stream.

The association affordance shapes formulation in ways specific to content teams. Past formulation discussions are archived and become associatively linked to competitive outcomes through the accumulated record, so the team's public history of plan formulation becomes a resource opponents can study. Near Airport's formulation challenges illustrate the dynamic directly. In the post-elimination debrief following the NACL playoffs series against Conviction, Croissant identified the fearless draft format as a formulation constraint that exceeded the team's preparation, with coach and players reflecting on being forced into high-pressure decisions on champions they had not practiced. Transparent practice had made visible which champions the team could reliably formulate plans around, which in turn shaped the options opponents could select to constrain them. Association lets audiences and competitors connect individual episodes to the team's accumulated strategic history, making formulation exposure a structural condition of competition for transparent teams.

The December 1 session put this condition on the recording's own title card. The session is archived as "BAUS CHAMP POOL TARGETED" because opponents had studied the visible history of Baus's champion selections and constructed their draft around banning his most practiced options, directly constraining Los Ratones' formulation space before the picks began. This is the association affordance operating as formulation liability in its most literal form: the accumulated public record of what a player plays has become a database opponents exploit in real time. The team's discussion during the session reflects the constraint explicitly, with Caedrel and players navigating formulation around the reduced pool the bans had created. The episode clarifies why principled abstraction is an organizational necessity as much as a communicative preference. When the visible record narrows the tactical space within which novel formulation can occur, operating at the level of principle preserves the formulation flexibility that specific public commitments would spend.

2. Formulating the Formulation Process: Channel and Temporal Separation (Los Ratones)

The management of formulation architecture becomes visible in a different way at the close of the December 7 session, conducted as a final test before an official match. Caedrel ended the session by scheduling the next day's formulation work:

> Caedrel: All right, good games today. I'll do some drafting and, uh, I think we kind of know what the prios [priorities] are, but obviously it's the finals, so I want to make sure we're prepared for, like, multiple different comps [team compositions]. We'll go through draft tomorrow. The game starts at 5, uh, we'll meet at like 3:30 and we'll do a 30 minute meeting, play some 1v1s and

ARAMS [a fast-paced 5v5 game mode in *League of Legends* played on the Howling Abyss that focuses on constant team fights], get into the vibes, and then we'll, we'll go for it.

Velja: Sorry, can you repeat, when we meet?

Caedrel: 3:30.

Velja: Okay, okay

Caedrel: 3:30 CET [...] if you want to play some warm-up games in solo queue, I recommend, get yourself into, uh, a good mood and good vibes. We'll do draft talk [...]

(Los Ratones practice session, December 7, 2024; video 7HXgulkV484, 2:12:04–2:12:39)

Notice what has been institutionalized. The session ends by formulating the formulation process itself: the coach takes the drafting work home, a dedicated meeting is placed ninety minutes before the official game, and its content is specified in advance as draft talk, warm-up, and collective mood-setting. The arrangement answers the asymmetry the editability affordance creates, since live-stream formulation unfolds without the protective revision that preparation-focused communication requires, and the scheduled meeting supplies conditions the stream cannot. And the announcement is itself made on stream, so the move conceals nothing about formulation occurring. The frontstage makes visible that backstage preparation is happening; the backstage provides what the frontstage cannot. This is the transparency-secrecy nexus enacted through temporal and channel separation, where the previous subsection showed it enacted through register.

The pattern of channel switching reflects a broader, deliberate management of the same affordance. During scrim sessions, teams formulate plans in live-stream conditions that offer minimal editability, so ideas, once voiced, become part of the persistent record. Before official matches, teams sometimes shift to channels with greater editability and lower transparency, as in the December 1 session, where Caedrel noted that a team had requested to scrim off-stream. When formulation involves tactical commitments too specific to share publicly, teams move that work into less transparent contexts, and the shift stays consistent with the team's transparency identity because the decision to move off-stream is itself made visible.

3. Formulation Under Roster Instability and Draft Constraint (Near Airport)

Near Airport's most compressed formulation challenge arrived through roster substitution. When Doublelift and Biofrost stepped out for sponsor obligations during the regular season, the team's established draft identity, built over weeks of visible scrim preparation around specific player champion pools, had to be reformulated around substitutes Sushee and Kelpo, who brought different champion profiles and limited experience within the team's systems. Pre-game draft discussions during the Blue Otter series show formulation as genuinely provisional: the team explored Sushee's Tristana as an anchor pick and Kelpo's unconventional champion preferences as potential strategic assets, and both formulations stayed exploratory, with confidence visibly deferred.

Transparency creates a specific organizational asymmetry in this context. The visible record of Near Airport's established draft patterns, developed across weeks of streamed preparation, was available to opponents who had been watching. The substitution-driven uncertainty, equally visible on stream, provided additional information: that the team's

formulation capacity during this period was constrained by the departure of the players around whom that capacity had been built. Transparent formulation produces organizational knowledge that persists through the archive; it also generates competitive intelligence for opponents who know how to read what the archive records.

Near Airport also formulated organizational goals publicly in a mode that has no equivalent in private organizations. At a team dinner following a five-game winning streak, the players committed on camera to a team hot tub stream if they won both splits and reached the LCS. The commitment is encoded as entertainment content and delivered to an audience that will hold the team to it, a form of accountability that persistence preserves and association distributes: the archived commitment stays linked to the team and its members wherever their names circulate, so the audience enforcing the plan needs no access to the original session across the remainder of the season. Community members referenced it as a measure of competitive seriousness, and the players could not quietly revise it downward without the revision being visible. This is plan formulation operating at the scale of the team's season, and the transparency condition converts what would otherwise be an internal aspiration into a public commitment whose terms are fixed by the moment of their articulation.

4. When Collective Commitment Cannot Be Achieved (The Ruddy Sack)

The formulation episode I treat as the phase's limiting case is the Ruddy Sack session conducted the day before NLC playoffs. The formulation challenge was collective before it was tactical: the team could not achieve shared commitment on a core draft pick. The disagreement began as an evaluation of Skarner's viability and collapsed within a few turns:

YamatoCannon: Like as long as we have AD option [attack damage; physical-damage champions], I don't mind the AP options [ability power; magic-damage champions] into Skarner. But I am not a big fan of like the Skarner match against Sejuani [an opposing champion] like as an example.

Jankos: I think Maokai [an alternative pick] is maybe better, yeah.

Lider: Skarner is mega OP [overpowered; unusually strong in the current game version] still, just letting you guys know.

Jankos: I mean Fnatic [a professional team] did lose. Did you see what happened to Razork [Fnatic's jungler]? Okay, bro, but like so like okay, but that already makes your argument so fucking dumb.

Lider: But it's not no no, no.

Jankos: Okay, can you join the lobby [the game's pre-match room] and stop yapping about being like? [...] No no no, I understand Skarner is really OP. But a guy who doesn't play a single mage [a magic-damage champion class]? […]

Lider: You are so bad at Skarner and you don't want to play it. I understand it. Bro, you are so bad on Skarner. I didn't want to say this but I have to be blunt about you because you are mega boosted [holding a rank above his actual skill] on that champ.

Jankos: That's that's perfectly fine.

Humzh: Oh fuck! He said you're boosting Yankos yo. I would not take that from an AD abuser [a player who leans exclusively on attack-damage champions].

Jankos: I'll take it. I'll take it. I'll take it.

YamatoCannon: Alright, Perkz you can start [pick and ban, the draft phase], brother.

(The Ruddy Sack practice session, February 18, 2025; video mM7IX44nSNg, 3:12–4:12)

The coach's two contributions bracket the episode. YamatoCannon opens in an evaluative register, conditional and matchup-specific, and the exchange never returns to it. Substantive content appears twice more, Lider's strength claim and Jankos's counterexample, and every subsequent turn is about persons: who is bad on the champion, who is "boosted," who will stand by an insult. Even the attempt to end the argument, Jankos telling Lider to join the lobby and stop yapping, arrives wrapped in a further credibility attack. Humzh's contribution converts the insult into spectacle, reacting to it the way a caster would narrate it for an audience. And the resolution, when it comes, is procedural: "Alright, Perkz, you can start." Pick and ban begins with the disagreement left standing, and no turn anywhere in the sequence transforms it into a decision.

Teams frequently contest draft priorities, so the failure lies past disagreement itself, in the absence of any mechanism for converting disagreement into commitment before the plan had to be enacted. The plan could not be formulated because collective agreement could not be constituted. The team played the playoff series the following day and was eliminated; the failure documented here is the failure to enter that series with a collectively owned plan.

The failure illuminates a structural tension that the Ruddy Sack's entertainment-first identity intensifies. The team's investment in visible drama and interpersonal expressiveness, a defining feature of its content production, creates conditions in which the boundary between genuine competitive disagreement and performed conflict becomes difficult to maintain, and Humzh's commentator turn shows the conversion in miniature: a teammate's

insult is instantly reframed as a moment for an audience. Where Los Ratones developed a coaching culture that converts disagreement into articulated principle, the Ruddy Sack's organizational persona turns disagreement itself into a content resource, productive for entertainment and corrosive for formulation. Members adhered to incompatible logics within the same conversation, some pursuing a formulation the group would commit to while the friction itself was being played as content, and the communicative work that produces shared commitment, what I read as a failure of collective sensemaking, never got completed. The coaching presence that might have converted the Skarner question into a decision procedure instead moved the session forward with the question unresolved. Because all of it occurred on stream, association links the episode to the team's broader trajectory: an organization constituted around the Los Ratones model in which entertainment identity increasingly displaced the organizational substrate that principled formulation requires.

YamatoCannon's management of formulation at other points in the season shows how coaching philosophy shapes the communicative form of transparent formulation. In January 2025 scrims, he facilitated draft discussions explicitly transparent about players' confidence with specific champions, framing the disclosures as evidence of organizational honesty about individual development needs. The framing positions what might otherwise appear as competitive vulnerability as evidence of organizational health, using association to connect visible formulation practice to the team's identity as an organization that prioritizes development. The transparency is genuine and carries competitive cost, and the framing works only as far as the team sustains a coherent identity around developmental honesty, which allows the cost to be read as part of the organizational model.

D. Plan Execution and Social Facilitation Under Public Observation

Plan execution implements formulated plans through coordinated action, and it is the phase most directly shaped by the social facilitation dynamics outlined in Chapter 2. Zajonc's (1965) insight that audience presence facilitates well-practiced behaviors while impairing novel or complex coordination is especially relevant here, where teams enact coordination patterns instead of working primarily in a diagnostic or reflective mode. Hassell and Cotton's (2017) finding that audience awareness and self-monitoring in video-mediated settings increase cognitive load in ways that degrade coordination-intensive performance applies directly as well, since streaming creates sustained conditions of observation with no intermission.

1. Collective Commitment as an Execution Norm (Los Ratones)

The execution failure identified most consistently across all three cases is what Caedrel described in multiple Los Ratones sessions as being "homeless," a state in which players lack a clear map position, objective, or coordinated purpose. The term captures a specific breakdown in which individual players pursue actions that are reasonable in isolation while the team loses the coordinated structure that makes those actions collectively effective. The failure is a coordination breakdown and a transparent one at once. A team that appears homeless on stream becomes difficult for audiences to follow, generates less engagement, and weakens the impression of professional competence that sponsors and field observers use to evaluate the organization. The visibility of the failure adds organizational stakes that private coordination breakdowns do not carry.

Los Ratones built its execution norms early, and built them in public. The November 21 session established a rule addressing commitment at the level of individual decision-

making: "if the team makes a play, everyone must commit immediately, even if it is a suboptimal choice, to avoid being caught in between decisions." The rule targets the breakdown that occurs when members hedge their commitments on independent real-time assessments of a play's likelihood of success, which is how individually competent players produce collectively dysfunctional outcomes. Four days later, the pre-game briefing shows the norm-setting register in which such standards were issued:

> Caedrel: A couple points individually. Velja, today you need to be speaking more. You need to speak more on what you're doing, where you're going, what your plan is, what you need. You don't have to obviously just spit random [expletive], but like, what are you thinking, we need to know what you're thinking, okay? And Baus, just the lane swap thing. Get XP [experience points] in the lane please. If you just play back, get XP, whatever it is. Don't walk up, don't be too degenerate, try not to trade too much HP [health] for minions and [expletive]. All right, let's rock.
>
> Baus: Do you have a point for yourself, Caedrel?
>
> Caedrel: Yeah, int less [to die recklessly].
>
> (Los Ratones practice session, November 25, 2024; video Bez5iWJvOcg, 0:00–0:40)

The briefing does three things in forty seconds. It converts diagnosis into execution targets, one per player, specific enough to be checked against the session that follows. It does so before an audience that can also check them, which is the accountability structure the archive then preserves. And the closing exchange runs the accountability in the other direction: a player audits the coach, and the coach binds himself to a standard phrased in the community's own vocabulary for his play. The humor is load-bearing. Norms issued in this

register invite compliance without ceremony, and the willingness of the coach to be a target keeps the candor symmetrical, a dynamic I return to in the team learning section, where its limits become visible. What social facilitation theory identifies at the level of individual cognitive load, these practices manage at the level of collective norm-setting, in terms legible to both the team and the watching audience.

A complementary failure mode appears in the April 30 Near Airport session, where the team identifies a different breakdown at the commitment stage: a player communicates a conditional intention, stating "I have a TP [Teleport, a cross-map ability] flank if it looks good," and teammates interpret the condition as already evaluated and met when it has not been. The team engages prematurely because the "if" was never explicitly resolved. Where the Los Ratones rule addresses hedging after a commitment is understood to exist, this episode addresses ambiguity about whether a commitment exists at all. Together the two cases map the range of commitment failure in transparent execution: in one, individual assessment undermines a shared plan after it is established; in the other, imprecise communication prevents the shared plan from being established in the first place. Near Airport's articulation of the failure after the fact, and the agreement to verbalize conditional states explicitly in future, shows execution-level breakdowns generating communication norms through the same debrief process that tactical errors do.

The remedy Caedrel prescribed across the season, "holding hands" and playing as a cohesive unit of five, appears in the December 11 session in its fullest observed form, applied to the player least suited to it by style:

> Caedrel: Baus, um, I'm just going to give you the rundown and I think I'll tell you what should be good, okay? Because you did great, you kind of like went bot,

got bot tier one [the outermost turret], the four-man is holding hands perfectly. I don't know if we just don't like Baus today, but I feel like we need to hold his hand more and be a five-man holding. Cuz you went top, fought to the death, based [returned to base], went top, fought to the death, died, respawned, went top, fought to the death, almost died, and then you based, went bot, fought to the death and died. And the four-man is running the map. But our side lane play this game with Baus, we got to hold his hand a bit.

Baus: No, this is just what Quinn [Baus's champion, built for mobility] does. Like, because of my boots and how fast I am, I can take like three fights while other people can take one. [...]

Caedrel: [...] My boy Nemesis is just sitting there like, guys, where am I going, every wave is dead, where should I play. So the sequence was just strange from the beginning in my opinion. [...] What ends up happening, which I don't like, because I want you to be strong, is I feel like from this moment onwards you're just zoned out from the game, and we need to find a way to get you into the game.

(Los Ratones practice session, December 11, 2024; video 3p_95a9y3cA, 1:53:53–1:55:48)

The norm arrives as negotiation. Caedrel documents the pattern in a litany that works simultaneously as diagnosis for the team and comedy for the audience, Baus answers with a champion-specific logic that is competitively serious, and the coach's response gives the objection standing, voices the teammate the style strands, and converts the dispute into a design problem the team owns together. The closing move frames the correction as care for

the player's effectiveness. Holding hands does dual work in exactly the sense this section has been tracking: coordinated five-player movement is more effective competitively and more legible to viewers than dispersed individual positioning, so the solution aligns functional and performative demands without explicit trade-off management. The display adds to that claim the mechanism of adoption. The norm holds because it survives contact with the team's strongest counter-style, in public, with the disagreement itself becoming part of what the audience watches.

2. Execution Identity and the Performance of Practice (The Ruddy Sack)

The Ruddy Sack's organizational approach to execution under transparency turns on a conceptual move that appears in IWillDominate's commentary between official NLC matches: the explicit claim to being a "stage team." The framing distinguishes two modes of execution, exploratory scrim performance, which can be tentative and experimental, and official match execution, which activates under conditions of heightened competitive consequence. The claim performs organizational work within a transparent practice context by giving audiences a frame for interpreting discrepancies between scrim results and competitive performance, pre-empting evaluations that would treat practice difficulties as evidence of competitive inadequacy. It is frontstage and backstage management conducted entirely in view, with the boundary drawn by competitive occasion instead of by access.

The claim also reflects a deeper dimension of the team's identity. For an organization whose public persona is built around theatrical self-presentation, the official match becomes the site of peak performance twice over: competitive stakes are higher there, and the production infrastructure, locker room reveals, press conference formats, IWillDominate's running commentary, reaches full elaboration there. Under radical transparency, where both

modes of execution are visible within the same streaming environment, audiences can evaluate the claim directly. Persistence maintains a record of scrim performance alongside official match performance, leaving the “stage team” claim either substantiated or undermined by accumulated evidence. Where Los Ratones managed the formulation-execution relationship through principled abstraction and explicit rule development, the Ruddy Sack managed it through identity claims about the relationship between practice and performance, claims that remained continuously assessable by audiences observing both contexts, with the entertainment framing itself part of the execution identity being performed.

YamatoCannon's April 2025 intervention on communication quality, displayed in full in the team learning section, addresses a related dimension. His critique of 'pointless commentary,' players narrating past events during fights still in progress, targeted communication that interferes with in-game coordination, since commentary about what just happened consumes attentional resources needed for what is unfolding. The standard he emphasized, communicating about the present situation and the next step with the recent past left for review, supports competitive coordination while producing talk that is more legible and instructive to the watching audience. Functional and performative demands converge on the same behavioral norm.

3. Execution Under Compound Disruption

Near Airport's defining execution episode under disruption occurs during the NACL playoffs series against Winthrop University, when a client bug caused Pobelter to lock the champion Anivia during the draft phase in place of the intended Ashe. The execution implications extend beyond adjusting to an unintended champion. After discussion with

officials and deliberation with teammates, Pobelter chose to proceed with the pick, a form of execution management under constraint that accepts conditions that cannot be changed and recalibrates expectations around them, ending the organizational crisis by absorbing it. The session also illustrates a dimension of transparent execution the social facilitation literature does not address: managing simultaneously a competitive execution challenge, an organizational controversy involving officials and opponents, and a live audience observing in real time. Players negotiated with officials, communicated their assessment to the audience, debated the stream sniping accusation among themselves, and returned to competitive play, all within the same visible, unedited streaming context. The audience was an active witness to the crisis itself.

Los Ratones' entry into the LEC in early 2026 represents the most institutionally demanding execution context in the dataset and produces a distinct adaptive response. Caedrel's dissolution video describes the first week as among the most depressing periods the players had experienced, marked by public and private scrutiny of a kind the regional circuit had not imposed. The team's adaptive strategy was to reduce engagement with external noise altogether, retreating into what Caedrel describes as a "tight-knit circle" and prioritizing internal cohesion over external responsiveness. The subsequent competitive turnaround, winning five of six games in the split's final stretch before a ninth-place finish, suggests the strategy produced its intended effect on execution quality even as the organizational model it had replaced was no longer operative: scrim streaming had ceased upon entering the LEC, the transparency that had constituted the team's identity had been withdrawn by institutional necessity, and execution had to be sustained through internal conditions alone. The episode shows that the adaptive capabilities transparent practice

developed, the shared vocabulary, the coordination norms, the coaching culture, remained functional after the transparency that produced them had ended.

Near Airport's playoff series against Conviction shows the contrasting dynamic, facilitation operating productively under pressure. In a critical game three fight, when the team's standard engagement pattern proved ineffective against the opponent's composition, players articulated the required adjustment and executed it, identifying the problem, stating the revised plan, coordinating all abilities onto the opposing Tristana to force out her escape ability, and committing fully. Under high-pressure conditions with a large audience present, the team's practiced capacity to coordinate through concise, explicit communication was facilitated, exactly as the theory predicts for routinized patterns.

4. The Limits of Social Facilitation

The limits of facilitation become evident when teams attempt coordination patterns that have not stabilized into routines. Strategic experiments across the dataset, the Ruddy Sack's unconventional compositions, Near Airport's departures from comfort picks under fearless draft conditions, Los Ratones' first-time champion deployments, consistently exhibit more uneven execution than established patterns, with coordination breakdowns and mid-execution hesitation occurring more frequently than in games built on familiar compositions. The pattern aligns with social facilitation theory: audience presence supports practiced execution while constraining novel coordination.

A May 15 Near Airport playoff preparation session against CCG shows execution uncertainty generating new coordination infrastructure through transparent practice. During post-game analysis, a player's admission that they could not determine whether their own position was safe, "I can't tell if I am divable or not" [vulnerable to a coordinated attack

under their own turret], led to an immediately articulated protocol: players commit to verbalizing status updates, including stating "I'm not divable" when the information is relevant to a developing play. The admission of uncertainty occurs publicly, the protocol is formulated publicly, and subsequent execution can be assessed against the new standard by an audience present at its creation. This is the productive form of what facilitation constraints otherwise produce only as limitation. When novel coordination fails visibly, the failure generates communication norms more explicit and more durable than the informal adjustments private teams make without public record. The limit of facilitation is also a condition of its development.

For content teams that build experimentation into their identity, this produces a structural tension: the experimental work that differentiates them as content and supports longer-term adaptive development is the same work that transparent execution conditions make more difficult. The December 11 session provides the concrete case. When Caedrel described a first-time level-one strategy as producing an "insane map state," the assessment was positive, and the execution of that strategy involved the hesitation and coordination gaps that novel coordination under observation predictably generates. That such experiments occur publicly, with their early execution necessarily imperfect, is part of the organizational bargain transparency imposes.

E. Team Learning as Transparent Reflexivity

1. The Post-Game Debrief as Genre

Team learning is the adaptive phase most thoroughly shaped by transparent practice, and the post-game debrief is its primary institutional site across all three cases. In every observed session, each game was followed within minutes of its ending by a structured

review that examined what occurred, identified key breakdowns or successes, and articulated principles for subsequent application. The consistency of this structure across teams with different coaching philosophies suggests that the publicly visible debrief has become a recognizable genre of content team practice. It persists because it simultaneously supports competitive learning and meets audience expectations for access and explanation. Dobusch et al. (2022) characterize public postmortem narratives as communicative genres that enact impression management alongside genuine accountability, and the post-game debrief operates in this dual register.

The debrief communicates differently to different audiences. For the team, it serves its conventional learning function: diagnoses are made, causes identified, principles articulated, behavioral commitments established. For the viewing audience, it provides access to professional-level strategic reasoning and puts the cognitive processes underlying competitive decision-making in view. For sponsors and field observers, it signals organizational seriousness. These functions generally align, though the degree of alignment depends on the coaching culture within which the debrief occurs.

The central challenge for coaches lies in sustaining conditions for genuine learning, candor, individual accountability, and honest diagnosis of failure, while conducting that learning in public. The psychologically safe communication climate that Gibson and Gibbs (2006) identify as a key mediator of whether virtual teams engage in genuine innovation or more guarded exchange is directly relevant here: the climate coaches and members construct in visible, mediated settings shapes whether the learning phase functions as developmental work or shifts toward guarded interaction. The three coaching cultures I observed solved this problem differently, and the next subsection takes them in turn.

2. Coaching Culture and the Conditions for Candor

At Los Ratones, Caedrel's approach builds conditions for candid learning through explicit self-inclusion. The November 25 pre-game briefing displayed in the execution section ended with exactly this move: after setting individual targets for two players, the coach accepted a player's audit of his own play and bound himself to a standard phrased in the community's vocabulary. The norm of distributed accountability it established is publicly visible and became part of the team's organizational identity. Audiences could observe that the team's leader held himself to the same expectations as the players, which reinforced both the legitimacy of his critiques and the conditions for candor when those critiques landed.

At The Ruddy Sack, YamatoCannon's approach operates through an accountability-appreciation cycle, and the April 8 session shows the full cycle within a single afternoon. The critique came first, delivered mid-review and by name:

> YamatoCannon: I guess I can mention this to you, Nata. And uh, I think, Nata, that there is too much commentary that's pointless in the game. Like, uh, midfight, you're calling them like eBay flash, and then you talk about the fight that happened and the how it's supposed to go. I guess there's too much useless [expletive] coming from your side, um, that you need to be mindful of this.
>
> Nata: Yeah, the eBay flash is useless, but the how the fight has to go, I think that’s fine cause [...]
>
> YamatoCannon: There was, there was a lot more comments that I don't remember specifically, but you need to keep this in mind. Or like.
>
> Nata: Yeah, I get what you are [saying]

YamatoCannon: You're also like micromanaging, playing midfight, telling him to charm, Rakan was e on, as like, you, you need to just focus on your game more. Because you're talking about that fight, and you miss the swap into top because you're talking about this fight, continue talking about this fight, and then you go into bottom side and you space out. Uh, same on your side, Natty. Like, um, as a jungler, the responsibility on you to be insanely consistent in how you communicate is super important [...]

(The Ruddy Sack practice session, April 8, 2025; video 8bC1P9pQUAI, 11:00–11:24)

The critique is specific, behavioral, and mechanistic. It names a communication practice, then specifies its cost as an attention budget: talk spent narrating the last fight is awareness withdrawn from the next move, the missed swap into top, the spacing out on bottom side. It also distinguishes two failure modes within the same fault, Nata's micromanagement of teammates mid-fight and the jungler's inconsistency, holding each player to a standard fitted to his role. And Nata's reply engages the substance, conceding one item and defending another. Criticism delivered this way invites negotiation about the behavior instead of a defense of the person, which is the precondition for what happened later in the session.

The observable outcome arrived unprompted, twenty-five minutes on, and from a player the session's critique had not touched. Reflecting on their own performances after a difficult game during this scrim session, support player Marlon volunteered his own assessment: "Guys, I'm back. And I just want to say I played this game terribly," to which a teammate answered, "You're good, brother. You're good. It's all good" (video

8bC1P9pQUAI, 35:47–35:53). Candor offered voluntarily, and received with support, is the behavioral signature of the safety the coaching cycle is built to produce, and its appearance in a third player marks the climate as a team property, produced by the visible cycle without being confined to the individuals inside it. The session then closed with the cycle's other half:

> YamatoCannon: I want to end the day by, I want you guys to, uh, share something good, uh, about your teammate. You can choose whoever. I want you to share something that you think is good, and that you're happy that you are on the same team with, as an exercise of, of gratefulness. This is how I want to end, instead of the final game.
>
> Nata: You know what? I'll, I'll start. Natty, you're pretty good at clearing your camps. I'll give you that. I'm not even saying this as a joke. A lot of junglers, they don't know how to clear the camps efficiently and on time, but you're pretty good at that.
>
> Marlon: You know what I will say? Okay, I will say this because this is the highest form of appreciation [...] And I will give it to you, Nata. I am so confident that you will do well in isolation that I don't mind pathing away from you [choosing routes away from his side of the map, trusting it to hold], and there's few people I do this [...]
>
> Nata: I'm honored.
>
> Marlon: Because you are very, very solid on the weak side [the side receiving fewer team resources]. Good job.

YamatoCannon: Yeah, you two are the most Scandinavian people ever, bro. Like, it's crazy, bro.

(The Ruddy Sack practice session, April 8, 2025; video 8bC1P9pQUAI, 39:05–40:11)

The exercise is structured by the coach and performed by the players, and the performance carries the analytical weight. Nata, named in the session's opening critique, initiates the round, and he directs the appreciation at Natty, the critique's other target, so the repair of the morning's accountability work is enacted by the people it was aimed at. Both recipients are praised in the same technical, behavioral register in which they were criticized: camp efficiency for the jungler who had been pressed on communication consistency, and for Nata, a weak-side reliability precise enough that Marlon frames his own pathing decisions as trust. Recognition and critique are thereby established as the same kind of speech act pointed in different directions. The coach's contributions frame the sequence at both ends, the structure that opens it and the teasing that closes it, marking the register in which the team's candor stays breathable. All of it happened on stream, so the audience watching the critique also watched its counterweight, and the team's psychological safety is itself part of the archived record.

Croissant's approach at Near Airport operates through what I call collaborative ownership, in which accountability is distributed through shared acknowledgment that the team's constraints belong to everyone who created them. The stance is most visible at the season's end. The post-elimination debrief opened with the coach's game-by-game accounting and closed with the players accounting for the coach:

Croissant: [...] And then, game four, I think we could have [...] but, uh, yeah. I just, I have regrets, and I will tell you guys more about them, and what would be different for next split. But all I can say right now is I'm sorry. And, yeah.

TF Blade: You're good.

Doublelift: Don’t be sorry, bro.

Pobelter: We appreciate you, Croissant. You put in so much hard work for the team.

Biofrost: Thank you for your effort. [...]

Pobelter: GG's, everyone.

Doublelift: Yeah. GGs. I'm down to, you know, talk with you guys either collectively or one-on-one, whenever. Um, yeah, just let me know.

Biofrost: But don't ever talk to me again. [laughter]

Tonington: I think for today we just take it easy and figure it out over discord when everyone is [free].

Pobelter: Yeah, we can set up a day in the next few days or next week or something to talk about stuff

Doublelift: Yeah, for sure. [...]

Doublelift: I just want to say, you know, while everyone's still here and everyone's stream's on, I just want to say, I think, Croissant, thank you. Like, he doesn't get paid to do any of this work. All of us, we kind of do have, like, a direct benefit. Croissant doesn't. And he works really hard with really limited resources, like scrim time. And um, I think his job of drafting for a team that scrims like five games per week is super [expletive] up. So, you know, thanks, Croissant. [...] I think you did amazing.

(Near Airport post-elimination debrief, May 31, 2025; video 01mcMdjLv0M, 2:32:23–2:35:02)

Accountability here flows in both directions at once, and neither direction runs through coaching authority. Croissant claims the regrets and the apology without assessing the players from above; the players answer by relocating responsibility in structure, naming the constraints the coach worked under, the unpaid role, the limited scrim time, in front of the audience that had watched those constraints accumulate all season. The joke in the middle does the same work the humor did at Los Ratones, keeping candor breathable at the worst organizational moment the team had faced. The stance fits the conditions Near Airport operated under: a roster of veterans whose competitive histories preceded and exceeded the coach's own, and whose willingness to learn candidly depended on the coach claiming no authority he had not earned through equivalent investment. Because the constraints had been disclosed publicly across the season, this public reckoning with how they compounded carried an accountability that a private conversation would not.

Across the Los Ratones observation period, the learning culture also generated a lexical resource that works as diagnostic shortcut and accountability mechanism at once: the shared vocabulary of "solo queue habits." First articulated in the November 25 review, where a player's tendency to push one additional wave instead of recalling was named the "solo queue urge," the concept recurred all season as a named failure mode whose cause is embedded in its label. In the individual ranked queue, taking one more wave is usually acceptable because no coordinated consequence follows; in team play the same individually rational instinct desynchronizes five players. Naming the habit after its source told the

players what they were doing and why, and spared the team a fresh technical diagnosis at each recurrence.

Under transparent practice, the label also performs accountability work beyond the immediate session. Audiences who followed the team recognize the phrase, members can use it as a corrective signal without re-establishing its context, and the archive keeps a running record of how often the named failure recurs after being identified. Persistence turns shared learning vocabulary into a longitudinal accountability mechanism, making the gap between learning and enactment visible to the team and its audience alike.

The same affordance structures the season's most persistent developmental storyline, the tension between Baus's individually optimized habits and the coordination demands of team play. The issue appears in the November 25 briefing, resurfaces in the November 26 reviews, and continues through December into the January restart. Because the sessions are archived, the accumulated discussion builds understanding that persists, and by mid-season Caedrel could reference the issue briefly, the archive supplying the context. Persistence lets conversations build instead of restarting. It also introduces constraint: repeated documentation produces recursive accountability, and continued recurrence becomes visible as a gap between stated commitments and enacted behavior, with organizational stakes private developmental challenges would not carry.

3. Displaced Accountability and Unmanaged Transparency

Displaced accountability, as the preceding analysis has begun to show, refers to accountability migrating from the organization's internal processes to the audience's interpretive work on the archive. *Unmanaged transparency*, introduced in Chapter 3 (Reischauer & Ringel, 2023), names the condition in which visibility outruns the

organization's capacity to frame what it exposes. The limits of managed transparent reflexivity become visible where the two meet. Following Los Ratones' final European Masters tournament, one team member streamed for approximately thirty minutes after a loss, venting in sustained detail about a teammate's performance before deleting the segment. Editability permits removal after the fact; the interpretive responses already underway could not be retracted. The deletion drew attention to its own absence, prompting community members who had not watched live to locate clips already circulating on Reddit.

Reflexive accountability in this episode ran outside the team's established learning infrastructure entirely, distributed through association and persistence beyond any single organizational actor's ability to govern. Unmanaged transparency is visible here with particular clarity: transparency outpacing the interpretive infrastructure available to govern it. The implication for transparent team learning is bounded, since Los Ratones' learning practices remained robust across the observation period. The episode shows that transparent practice creates an accountability infrastructure that can activate independently of the adaptive learning cycle, extending reflexivity into spaces the debrief was never designed to address.

A different valence of displaced accountability appears in the Ruddy Sack's elimination series documentation. IWillDominate's pre-match commentary notes that Jankos was observed playing a browser game during a scrim session in the days before elimination playoffs, and the observation is delivered to his streaming audience as a symptom of the team's collective motivational problem. In a private team environment the behavior might go unrecorded. The stream made it visible independently of any organizational decision to disclose it, and the public commentary converted ambient organizational information into a

narrative about competitive commitment. This is visibility operating through the incidental capture of organizational life that streaming creates as a background condition, with accountability following from the audience's interpretive work on what it has seen.

An earlier Near Airport episode offers the distributed version. When Doublelift missed a scheduled team meeting, the mid laner who had arranged time to attend expressed visible frustration on stream; the coach, watching through his own concurrent stream, provided running commentary to his audience; and Doublelift encountered the sequence the next day through Reddit posts and VOD records, responding on his own channel. The accountability process unfolded across multiple intersecting streams, each adding a layer to a distributed interpretive sequence that no single actor controlled. Formal authority provided no insulation: the team founder remained subject to the same visibility conditions as everyone else. The episode clarifies a structural feature the bounded post-game review cannot account for. Under transparent practice, organizational moments become multi-site events, open to simultaneous interpretation by audiences applying different evaluative frameworks.

4. Organizational Learning Across the Season Arc

The Bwipo guest coaching session in December 2024 provides a contrast case by disrupting the usual learning relationship. Bwipo enters as an expert voice without ongoing responsibility for future sessions and without embedded ties to the coaching relationship, and the position shapes his feedback's form. His diagnostic framing operates at a higher altitude than Caedrel's session-based coaching, identifying broad structural tendencies, "lack of coordinated setup," "poor formation and positioning," "failure to adapt to mistakes when a teammate is caught," where Caedrel's reviews work through specific moments and

immediate consequences. The contrast reveals a trade-off inherent in sustained transparent coaching: the interpersonal attunement that supports incremental development also limits the altitude from which the organization can be assessed, while the guest coach purchases altitude at the price of relationship.

Near Airport's learning culture varied across the season, with its most organizationally consequential learning at key endpoints. Early-season debriefs show a team developing accountability norms, players taking ownership of errors and offering constructive feedback. An intermediate moment appears in Biofrost's post-match interview after the May 10 Pulse Star series, where he identifies that the team environment had previously been "hindered by toxic communication" and has since matured, crediting changes in how members communicate and noting that his collaborative dynamic with Doublelift had developed in ways it had not in prior professional contexts. This is a learning narrative about team process, delivered publicly, assessable against the archived record of the communication it describes.

IWillDominate's assessment following the Ruddy Sack's playoff loss to Bulldog Esports arrives at a different organizational moment and in a distinctively theatrical register, delivered immediately after elimination, without the separation that allows managed narration, yet still within the ever-present awareness of audience. He identifies the season as "a failed project," attributes the failure to players lacking a "unified drive to improve and win together," and states a requirement for future efforts: recruiting players who are "genuinely bought in and passionate about the competitive process, rather than focusing on brand recognition or individual fame." Even in candor, the systemic framing performs, and the founder's self-presentation as the one who identifies the structural flaw converts

organizational reflection into narrative. The learning content carries weight regardless. The recognition that competitive commitment cannot be substituted by individual brand motivation aligns directly with the systemic condition identified in the broader analysis, an immediate, transparent reckoning with structural limits, delivered in a form the archive preserves and keeps legible as content.

Team learning at Los Ratones ultimately operated at two scales the debrief format cannot fully capture: the *session level*, where tactical insights accumulate, and the *organizational level*, where the team's understanding of its own viability develops. Following elimination from the EMEA Masters semi-final against KCB, reflection shifted to the second scale. Players discussed losing "the happiness and camaraderie that defined their early success," and Caedrel identified the need to "rethink how we do scrims," a structural diagnosis of the conditions required for sustained adaptation. The learning became visible through the dissolution of the session structure itself: in place of a formal debrief, the session offered collective reflection on what the team had become and what it would need to be to continue.

The subsequent update video translated that reflection into structural planning, including adjustments for content production under LEC conditions and identification of the constraints the invitation imposed, above all the conditions barring the streamed scrims and open practice that had constituted the team's model, so that participation at the higher tier required withdrawing the transparency the organization was built on. This learning is set apart by its structural conditioning. The team had learned, collectively and publicly, where the limits of its organizational model lay, and the same transparency that made the model

possible made the reckoning visible to everyone who had followed the team across the season.

F. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the four phases of team adaptation are reshaped when they unfold under conditions of radical transparency. Table 6.1 summarizes the findings by adaptive phase, with the chapter's named concepts and mechanisms carried in their own column so that the summary preserves the analysis's conceptual inventory alongside its findings. Across the three teams, I find that transparency affects adaptive work unevenly. Each phase has a different relationship to the affordances through which transparent practice is enacted, and each poses a distinct organizational challenge that teams must develop specific communicative capabilities to manage.

Table 6.1
Summary of Findings: Team Adaptation Under Radical Transparency

Adaptive phase	**Key findings**	Named concepts and mechanisms	**Illustrative practices and evidence**
Situation assessment	Assessment becomes public diagnosis conducted for dual audiences and develops as an organizational capability with a visible developmental record; disclosure of the team's own state becomes	Dual-audience diagnostic problem; diagnostic registers (symptom and structure); information camp principle; fake flex	Founding-week public experimentation and dual-register review (LR); information camp exchange (LR); comfort check-ins with a substitute and pre-season win-rate disclosure (NA);

	normal diagnostic material; visible assessment creates exposure risk and, once mastered, supports offensive uses of the visibility condition		stream-observation risk in playoffs (NA); offensive application in the EMEA Masters quarterfinal (LR)
Plan formulation	Commitment is the operative concept: exposure is managed through register, channel, and timing in place of walls; plans are publicly rebuilt around patches and personnel; formulation fails when collective commitment cannot be constituted	Principled abstraction; channel switching and temporal separation; formulating the formulation process; collective commitment failure	Coaching principles and off-stream scrim shift (LR); scheduled pre-match draft meeting (LR); substitution reformulation and the public season commitment (NA); the day-before-playoffs session in which no plan could be collectively owned (TRS)
Plan execution	Practiced coordination tolerates and at times benefits from observation	"Homeless"; "holding hands"; commit-	Pre-game execution targets and the grouped-play negotiation (LR);

	while novel patterns suffer; execution norms align competitive and communicative demands; execution persists under compound disruption and under the most institutionally demanding conditions	immediately rule; present-tense communication norm; "stage team" claim	present-tense norm and stage-team identity claim (TRS); execution through the champion-select disruption (NA); Tier 1 competition as the limiting execution context (LR); divability protocol (NA)
Team learning	The public debrief operates as a genre sustained by distinct coaching approaches; naming converts diagnosis into shared vocabulary; persistence extends learning while imposing recursive accountability; displaced accountability and unmanaged transparency mark the limits of managed reflexivity;	Debrief as genre; coach self-inclusion; accountability-appreciation cycle; collaborative ownership; "solo queue habits"; displaced accountability; unmanaged transparency	Self-inclusion and habit naming (LR); critique-appreciation sequence (TRS); post-elimination debrief (NA); deleted-segment episode (LR); cross-channel accountability sequence (NA); endpoint retrospectives (NA; TRS; LR)

	endpoint learning scales to the organization		
Cross-phase	Transparent adaptation is a continuously maintained accomplishment; the tension between individual competitive identity and collective adaptive capacity is enacted in public and maps onto the three organizational outcomes	Recursive accountability; tension between individual identity and collective capacity	Visibility boundary work across cases; TFBlade's public reformulation (NA); cross-case outcome mapping

Note. LR = Los Ratones; NA = Near Airport; TRS = The Ruddy Sack.

Situation assessment under radical transparency produces a dual-audience diagnostic problem in which the same communicative act must serve functional coordination for the team and legible explanation for the audience simultaneously. Teams that develop principled diagnostic frameworks, moving from reactive and descriptive analysis toward anticipatory and structural framing, resolve this tension more effectively than teams that remain at the level of reactive diagnosis. Los Ratones' development across the season shows this capability building publicly: diagnostic vocabulary consolidating, assessment becoming prospective, and the opening moves of competitive play architecturally redesigned as a continuation of the assessment process. The persistence affordance makes this development legible to the team and to the audience that follows it alike, transforming the accumulation of diagnostic capability into a publicly visible organizational achievement.

Plan formulation under radical transparency requires managing the tension between the commitment that effective coordination requires and the competitive exposure that public commitment creates. The most consistent solution across the dataset is principled abstraction: formulating at a level of generality that communicates strategic logic to the audience without generating exploitable tactical specificity for opponents. Principled abstraction requires an organizational substrate, including collective commitment, shared strategic vocabulary, and coaching relationships that have developed trust across multiple sessions, that not all content teams can build at the pace transparent practice demands. The Ruddy Sack's formulation crisis the day before NLC playoffs shows what happens when that substrate is absent: the communicative work required to produce shared commitment cannot be completed, and the failure is visible to an audience that has followed the organizational trajectory through which that substrate should have developed. Near Airport's substitution-driven formulation instability shows a different vulnerability: the visible record of established draft patterns creates competitive intelligence for opponents, and roster disruption makes the gap between established identity and current capability publicly legible in ways that private organizations manage entirely off the record.

Plan execution under radical transparency is the phase most directly governed by social facilitation dynamics. Audience presence facilitates practiced, well-established coordination patterns while constraining the novel and exploratory coordination that competitive development requires. The tension this creates for content teams is structural: the experimental work that defines them as content is precisely the work that transparent execution makes more difficult. Teams navigate it through explicit execution norms that align competitive and communicative demands simultaneously, and the most durable of

these norms are those in which the solution to a competitive problem is also the solution to a communicative one. Compound-disruption episodes, in which teams execute competitively while managing organizational crises in full public view, expose a further demand that the social facilitation framework, developed for contexts where performance and organizational management are separable activities, does not anticipate.

Team learning under radical transparency operates across two scales that the post-game debrief cannot contain on its own. At the session level, transparent reflexivity produces organizational resources that accumulate through the persistent record and build adaptive capability over time. At the organizational level, transparent learning ultimately operates through the competitive season itself, through moments of reckoning that reveal whether the organizational form is viable, whether the conditions it requires are in place, and what it costs when they are not. These reckonings concentrate the chapter's organizational learning because they occur when the competitive stakes of impression management have been removed, leaving only the transparent account of what the experience revealed.

Taken across the three cases, the organizational capabilities that effective transparent adaptation requires differ in kind, and only secondarily in degree, from those that private adaptation requires. Assessment must serve diagnosis and narration simultaneously. Formulation must achieve commitment without overspecification. Execution must honor established norms while managing compound disruption. Learning must maintain candor while performing accountability for multiple audiences with incommensurable frameworks. Content teams that develop these capabilities, or begin with the organizational conditions that enable their development, are more likely to sustain the hybrid form, and those that cannot tend to dissolve.

The chapter's theoretical touchpoints can now be stated together. The four-phase architecture of team adaptation (Burke et al., 2006) survived contact with this setting: assessment, formulation, execution, and learning remained distinguishable forms of work with distinct communicative demands. What changed is the boundary condition the theory assumes, while the bona fide group perspective (Putnam & Stohl, 1990; Stohl & Putnam, 1994) supplies the accurate description of the change, since audiences, opponents, platforms, and sponsors participated constitutively in every phase, with the teams' permeable boundaries doing analytic work in each section above. Goffman's (1959) frontstage and backstage survived as functions while their material form changed, differentiated in these organizations by register, channel, and timing on a stage that never closes. And the Ruddy Sack's formulation crisis gives empirical shape to what Gautier et al. (2023) describe as failures of collective sensemaking, showing what such a failure looks like when it happens on the record, the day before elimination. These consolidations prepare the institutional analysis to come: each capability documented here is also, as Chapter 7 will show, a demonstration the field could watch.

A thread connecting the three cases across all four phases is the tension between individual competitive identity and collective adaptive requirements. All three teams include players whose established competitive personas, shaped through years of individual streaming and solo-queue practice, create friction with the coordination demands of team adaptation. Los Ratones manages the tension through sustained coaching culture: the "solo queue habits" vocabulary builds across an archived season into a shared accountability mechanism that makes the gap between individual optimization and collective coordination named and trackable. The Ruddy Sack encounters the same tension in a different

organizational frame: the entertainment identity absorbs individual-versus-collective conflict as dramatic content, which preserves the visibility of the tension without providing mechanisms to resolve it. Near Airport produces a third variant: TFBlade's voluntary public reformulation of his competitive identity converts individual adaptation into a transparent organizational commitment whose accountability is maintained by the audience that witnessed its articulation. The three outcomes—the form sustained until institutional conditions withdrew its constitutive practice, dissolution through motivational collapse, and single-split withdrawal through structural incompatibility—map with some precision onto these three relationships between individual identity and collective adaptive capacity. In all three cases, transparent practice adds one thing: the relationship is enacted in public, so its quality and its consequences are legible to everyone watching. Chapter 7 turns from these interaction-level dynamics to examine what becomes institutionally consequential when this adaptive work is made persistently visible, and how transparent practice travels beyond the focal organizations into the field in which all three teams operated.

VII. Chapter Seven: Institutional Work Through Hybrid Organizing: Creating, Disrupting, and Maintaining the Content Team Form

A. Chapter Introduction

Chapter 6 examined how esports content teams adapt when their adaptive processes unfold under conditions of radical transparency. This chapter turns from team adaptation to its institutional consequences. The same practices that constitute team-level adaptation, conducted in public and preserved in the archive, also function as institutional work within the emerging field of competitive esports. When a content team broadcasts its preparation, names its own organizational model, or articulates the conditions under which that model succeeds and fails, coordinating its members is only part of what it accomplishes. It enacts, before a watching field, a claim about what a competitive organization can be. I analyze those claims as institutional work, addressing the second research question by examining how content teams create, maintain, and disrupt institutional arrangements through their hybrid organizational practices.

The analysis proceeds from the account of institutional work developed in Chapter 3. Content teams conduct their institutional work from a distinctive field position. They are formally embedded participants in the field's competitive structure, holding sanctioned league placements, competing under publisher-governed rules, and in one case operating within an established organization's existing infrastructure, yet they hold no governance authority within that structure. They do not set competitive rules, control admission, or occupy the regulatory positions through which institutional work research has conventionally traced change (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Their work accordingly concentrates in the normative and cultural-cognitive forms of that framework, constructing

identities, reconfiguring normative associations, and theorizing the organizational form; the forms that require governance access, advocacy, vesting, and standard-setting, lie outside their reach.

Esports content teams are experimental organizations whose own legitimacy remains unsettled, and they exert influence through the cumulative visibility of their practices as these are observed, interpreted, and selectively adopted by others in the field. Their institutional work operates through demonstration, with formal embeddedness as its enabling condition. It is because the teams compete in sanctioned circuits, and because those circuits certify their results, that their visible practice counts as a claim about competitive organizing instead of exhibition. Hybridity enables the work throughout. Because content teams inhabit competitive and entertainment logics simultaneously, and rely on community logic to legitimate the combination, their visible practice constitutes a claim about competitive organizing that a single-logic organization could not advance.

The analysis draws on two complementary bodies of evidence. The primary evidence is the same stream observation and organizational record that anchors Chapter 6, with particular attention to the founding announcements through which each team defined its organizational model and the dissolution statements through which two of the three cases articulated the conditions and limits of the form. Alongside it, the chapter draws on the documentary and archival data described in Chapter 5, including esports media coverage and community discussion, which situate the teams' practices within their reception. The systematic coding indicates the scale of this second body: 1,244 applications of the institutional work codes across 1,115 records, distributed across creation (388), maintenance (383), and disruption (473); 14,059 invocations of the competitive, entertainment, and

community logics and their tensions; 4,289 legitimacy judgments divided between granting (2,341) and contestation (1,950); and 9,950 applications of the reception categories, among them 828 records of explicit cross-case comparison. These counts describe the volume of coded material, and volume is all they describe. The quoted discussion establishes that the teams' practices were noticed, classified, and argued over in the field, without measuring how far the model diffused. My claims are calibrated to that line: that a practice became an object of public evaluation is directly observed, while the claim that such evaluation shifted the field's expectations is an interpretation of the observed pattern and is presented as one.

The chapter is organized around the three forms of institutional work. It begins with *creation*, where the teams demonstrate the viability and shape of a new organizational form and the field takes up the category in its own talk. It turns to *disruption*, where the teams render inherited assumptions about competitive organizing contestable, including two episodes in which the disruptive mechanism worked against the pattern. It concludes with *maintenance*, the subtler work through which the teams preserve competitive logic's core even as they disrupt the practices conventionally bundled with it. Within each form, the analysis moves from the teams' own practice outward to the field's response, attending throughout to how hybridity enables the work and how transparency makes it field-consequential.

B. Creating Institutional Arrangements

Content teams create new institutional possibilities through demonstration. They enact an organizational form that prevailing assumptions had rendered unviable, and they do so visibly enough for others to observe, evaluate, and imagine adopting it. They accomplish this without establishing rules or securing formal recognition. I trace this creation work

through four movements: the founding articulations through which the teams defined the form, its propagation across the field, the field's uptake of the category in its own discourse, and the community's participation in the creation itself. The founding subsection focuses on the two purpose-built cases. The Ruddy Sack appears under propagation because its creative claim is that the form can extend to an existing organization.

1. Defining the Form at Founding

Los Ratones defined the form explicitly at its inception, and the announcement video preserves the definitional move verbatim:

> Caedrel: [The question] was, how do we make a team that's competitive but also really fun for you guys [twitch chat], and good content to be able to watch. We didn't want to make a team with five ex-pro players that would just win the league, I think that's a bit boring. We didn't want to make a team that was five content creators, because they might not be competitive and lose, that's a bit boring. We wanted a team that was competitive and fun. So for that reason, one of the main things that's going to be happening next year is all of our scrims will be public. [...] If we scrim an LEC team, for example, they probably will request us to not stream the scrims, but the majority of what we will do will be public. So how did the Ratones get formed? I mean, they're all just like homies, you know, they're all like friends, which was like a really awesome way to start off.
>
> (Los Ratones founding announcement, November 15, 2024; video xurF-Nko9sw, 1:36–2:32)

The articulation directly enacts institutional creation. Caedrel names the two templates already available in the field, the all-professional roster and the all-creator roster, rejects each according to what it lacks, and constructs a third possibility from elements of both. The transparency commitment follows in the same articulation, framed as an organizational principle whose boundary is already specified: public by default, private where opponents require it. Even the closing reference to friendship contributes to the definition by grounding the roster in the relational quality that the community would later treat as an authenticity warrant. Caedrel's earlier consideration of a creator-based league modeled on the Kings League further situates Los Ratones within a broader field of experiments combining content creation and competition, of which the content team became one resolution.

Near Airport's founding announcement makes the creation work still more explicit because it names the institutional gap the team intends to fill. In the March 20, 2025 video announcing the team's entry into the North American Challengers League, Doublelift described the purpose in field-level terms: the team sought to "change the standard for how League of Legends teams interact with their fans," while characterizing the prevailing state of professional League of Legends content as "stale." The team committed to streaming nearly all of its scrims to provide what it framed as authentic behind-the-scenes access to how a team improves and communicates.

This is institutional creation presented as deliberate intervention. Near Airport diagnosed the existing arrangement as deficient and positioned its own practice as the remedy. The diagnosis carried particular weight because it came from Doublelift, one of the

most decorated players in North American competitive history, whose standing lent authority to the critique of established content norms.

2. Propagation Across the Field

The Near Airport's founding provides direct evidence of the form's propagation mechanism. The content-team model traveled by reference, with later actors constructing their projects through explicit citation of earlier ones. This citation extended from the team's first public moment to its last. In the launch video, Doublelift identified Los Ratones as the model for the interconnected community Near Airport hoped to build. In the June 2025 retrospective, the players again described the project as having been conceived by Spica in direct inspiration from Los Ratones.

This is the demonstration-based creation theorized in Chapter 3: a visible organizational model becomes a template that subsequent actors invoke when constructing their own projects. One case in this study was therefore explicitly built on the example of another, identified as a template at founding and reaffirmed as the project's origin in retrospect. This cross-case citation provides direct evidence of diffusion, not just parallel emergence.

The audience independently registered the same template relationship. In discussion surrounding Near Airport's withdrawal, one commenter characterized the project as "DL trying to chase the Los Ratones hype but failed to mimic the success" (Reddit, June 2025). Although dismissive, the assessment is analytically useful because it interprets one team through the template of another. Los Ratones had become the reference case against which subsequent adoptions were evaluated. The form's diffusion was therefore legible in the field's comparative vocabulary as well as in the adopting team's self-description.

The Ruddy Sack extends the creative claim along another dimension by demonstrating that the form is available to existing organizations as well as purpose-built projects. Los Ratones and Near Airport were assembled around transparency from their inception. The Ruddy Sack instead organized a spectacle-forward content identity around an established competitive infrastructure, with IWillDominate framing the project as an effort to restore an "old school," high-intensity sensibility to the League of Legends content ecosystem.

This variation has two institutional implications. It broadens the population of actors for whom the form appears attainable, and it demonstrates that the form admits internal variation. Los Ratones treated transparency primarily as a condition of authenticity; The Ruddy Sack treated it more centrally as a vehicle for theatrical production. Such variation expands the repertoire from which field actors can select when adapting an emerging template.

Propagation also appeared in field discourse as prescription before it appeared as imitation. Within a month of Los Ratones' founding, community discussion had generalized the case into a call for adoption, with commenters hoping that "more retired pros that are loved by the people follow their lead" (Reddit, December 2024). By February 2025, the model's visible returns were being invoked prescriptively against particular organizations. Discussion of a franchised team's practice stream "reaching 15,000 viewers," for example, framed the result as an opportunity that other teams should pursue. By autumn, the prescription had hardened into criticism of the leagues themselves, with commenters asserting that if the major leagues "actually gave a crap about viewership they would take some notes" (Reddit, September 2025). This audience discourse advocated adoption on the

demonstrating team's behalf. Near Airport's founding then completed the circuit. Community discussion described the new team as directly "inspired by Los Ratones" (Reddit, May 2025), incorporating the second case into the first case's demonstration.

3. Field Uptake of the Category

The archival data show the creation work registering in the field's classificatory discourse, where the category acquired a name, membership criteria, and eventually a canonical narrative. Community members treated "content team" as a recognizable organizational type whose boundaries could be policed. One widely engaged formulation drew that boundary explicitly:

> u/AdequatelyMadLad: It's not a "content team" if no one wants to watch the content you make and also there's barely any content because you don't scrim and get eliminated immediately. LR and Nord are content teams. They take the game seriously, get good results, act like humans on stream and therefore people actually want to watch them.
>
> (Reddit comment, March 24, 2025, on coverage of the Ruddy Sack roster departures)

The definition performs two forms of institutional work. It shows the category circulating as a recognized organizational type, and it specifies membership criteria that bind entertainment value and competitive seriousness together, reproducing in vernacular terms the hybrid claim advanced in the founding announcements. Its placement adds an enforcement function. The criteria appear in a thread reporting The Ruddy Sack's roster collapse and are used to police the category's boundary against a struggling instance.

Nor was the formulation idiosyncratic. Two weeks earlier, an independent commenter on an unrelated thread had drawn nearly the same boundary, arguing that a team

without watchable content was not a content team (Reddit, March 2025). The recurrence of the criterion across threads indicates that the field had absorbed it as part of the category's meaning.

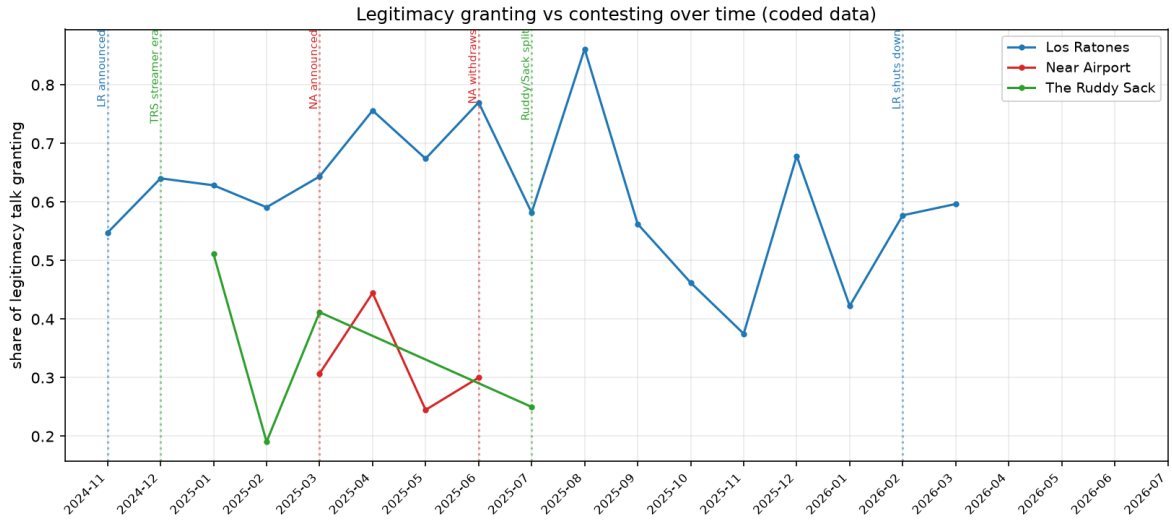
Press coverage gave the category broader public certification and, eventually, narrative form. Within months, coverage moved from describing an experiment to certifying a class, declaring that "stream teams have emerged as a legitimate and exciting format" and citing Los Ratones' continental results as the demonstration (esports press, March 2025). Earlier analytical coverage had already articulated the form's central claim: that the model "maintains competitive integrity and brings its viewership along for the ride" (esports press, December 2024). Community discussion performed similar certification in the vernacular, asserting that no team "taking proplay seriously" had previously combined content and professional play at this level (Reddit, February 2025). By the team's ending, uptake had developed into canonization. Commenters proposed adapting the Los Ratones story into a sports film and observed that its appeal lay in "the fact that it actually happened" (Reddit, February 2026). A category that begins as an experimental description and ends as a shared narrative has progressed toward cultural-cognitive institutionalization, and the archival record captures that progression.

The uptake was nevertheless uneven. Coded legitimacy judgments quantify the asymmetry. In Los Ratones' founding month, granting narrowly exceeded contestation, with 75 granting and 62 contesting judgments. Near Airport's founding month ran more than two to one toward contestation, with 31 granting judgments and 70 contesting judgments. Across the cases' lifespans, the granting share was 56 percent for Los Ratones, compared with 30

percent for Near Airport and 38 percent for The Ruddy Sack. The category propagated through explicit reference, but legitimacy did not travel with it.

Figure 7.1

Share of Coded Legitimacy Judgments Granting Legitimacy, by Team and Month



Note. Judgments coded LEG-GRANT as a share of all coded legitimacy judgments. Dotted lines mark key organizational events.

The content of Near Airport's founding-month contestation is as revealing as its volume because the field challenged the case on the dimension its ending would later confirm. The dominant criticism concerned commitment. Commenters objected that the founders would "immediately talk about backing out" (Reddit, March 2025), insisted that "playing pro actually does require commitment," and framed the team's qualifier entry as "messing up the qualifier for more serious teams." The June dissolution statement later identified the same constraint: high-level competition required a full-time commitment that the members could not provide. Reception therefore operated as a real-time institutional assessment that anticipated the case's trajectory. I return to the implications of that anticipation for the community's evaluative role in the maintenance analysis.

At Los Ratones' dissolution, the community narrated the form's history in the terms established at its founding. A thread addressed "for those mourning" by restating the founding question: whether a team could reach the highest competitive level while carrying what commenters called the transparency handicap. Proposals for "Los Ratones the Movie" circulated as the ending was incorporated into a tellable story (Reddit, February 2026). A form whose founding problem is recited at its ending has entered the field's institutional memory.

The category also remained consequential in institutional practice after the originating organization dissolved. When most of the Los Ratones roster re-formed in March 2026 as Witchcraft and received the EMEA Masters slot that fourth-seeded Bulldog Esports had expected to hold, Bulldog co-owner Alex Jolly protested publicly:

> Nice as an NLC owner to find out the day of the announcement, one of the four NLC EMEA slots will be going to 4 LR lads and a misogynist [identified in press coverage as a reference to Bwipo (Sacco, 2026)]. All those morals about Leagues gg [Leagues.gg, operator of the NLC] and not playing go out the window when they offer you a way to play in the Saudi Blood Money Cup [the Esports World Cup qualifier].
>
> (X, March 2026)

The protest operates in three institutional registers. The first is *procedural*: an incumbent owner learned "the day of the announcement" that a qualification slot had been reallocated. This is a grievance about how organizers treated traditional organizations relative to teams whose audiences gave them bargaining power, a framing also emphasized in the article covering the dispute (Sacco, 2026). The second register is *classificatory*. Jolly

refuses to name the successor organization, referring to it instead as “4 LR lads and a misogynist.” The wording withholds from Witchcraft the organizational standing that the slot allocation presupposed. The third register is *moral*. The protest alleges that the group’s stated principles concerning the league operator disappeared once a route to the Saudi-funded qualifier became available. It thus turns the field’s authenticity vocabulary, examined in the maintenance analysis, against the form’s inheritors. An incumbent organization’s protest against accommodations extended to an instance of the form indicates that the category had entered the field’s classificatory and regulative practices. Organizations do not contest privileges attached to forms that lack institutional recognition. The timing reinforces the point: the grievance followed Los Ratones’ dissolution and targeted its successor arrangement, showing that the category remained institutionally active after the organization that had established its template was gone.

Professional commentary extended this uptake into explicit theorizing. On February 2, 2026, ten days before the team’s dissolution and at the height of its LEC run, former professional player and LCS analyst Joshua Leesman devoted an emergency podcast episode to explaining why Los Ratones’ defeat of G2 had registered as a cultural moment (JLXP, ep. 127, February 2, 2026). The episode performed creation work from outside the organization by constructing a lineage the team could not establish for itself. Leesman compared Los Ratones with the streamer-founded organizations of the field’s early era, TSM and CLG, framing the content team as the recovery of an organizational arrangement that professional esports had lost, not an anomaly without precedent. He distinguished the model from adjacent approaches to fan-building by contrasting it with KCorp and Movistar KOI. The historical referents had also left the field only recently. CLG dissolved into NRG in April

2023, and TSM sold its league position that September, thirteen months before Los Ratones' founding (Madison Square Garden Sports Corp., 2023; "TSM Officially Leaves LCS," 2023). The lineage therefore recovered an arrangement that the franchise economy had eliminated the previous season.

The episode also identified the form's mechanisms and converted its demonstration into prescription. Leesman described the concentration of viewership in Caedrel's co-streamed channel as a "central hub" for the field's audience. He identified the streaming of scrims, reviews, and solo queue as the basis of attachment and contrasted the resulting sense of a grounded collective project with organizations experienced as a corporate "cog in the machine." He further credited the team with restoring consequence to regular-season regional play that established franchises had devalued and called on the LEC and LCS to support the kind of connection Los Ratones had built. Commentary of this kind relays demonstration to the field's governing institutions. The teams, lacking governance access, enact the model. Credentialed observers translate that enactment into historical lineages, causal mechanisms, and normative claims addressed to actors who possess such access. In the vocabulary of institutional work, third parties theorized on the form's behalf. This relay is one means through which an organizational model advanced from a position without regulative authority can acquire standing in the field's prescriptive discourse.

4. The Community as Party to the Creation

The creation work documented above recruited more than an audience. It recruited a constituency that understood itself as a party to the project. The community logic through which that constituency operated is visible in the coded reception, with its own vocabulary and norms. Identification discourse shows the form generating attachments that conventional

organizations in the field had not. Commenters reported that they had "never used to follow" the individual players but now did (Reddit, March 2025), that the league's teams had "lacked the personalities I can care about" while, with Los Ratones, "win or loose, ima be a fan" (Reddit, January 2025), and, at the ending, that "these players were why I fell in love with the game" (Reddit, February 2026). This is the vocabulary of community logic: belonging, care, and durable commitment, not support contingent on results.

The discourse also contained explicit normative claims about what the form made possible. One commenter argued that hearing the team's full communication during games and reviews was "how supporting an esport team should feel like" (YouTube, January 2025). The statement transforms one team's practice into a standard for fandom more generally, extending the creation work on the form's behalf. The teams likewise addressed the community as a party to whom they owed an account. Los Ratones, for example, prefaced an organizational announcement by insisting that its delay was "never out of disregard for our fans" (Reddit, April 2025). The language positioned the community not merely as an audience but as a constituency whose standing required acknowledgment. The legitimacy of this community logic was itself contested. Critics dismissed the team's following as "a parasocial internet mob, rather than a sports fanbase" (Reddit, February 2026) and urged organizations to "cultivate an actual fanbase" instead. The contest is analytically significant. A logic that opponents feel compelled to challenge is institutionally active. The dispute over whether the content team's community constituted a fanbase or a mob was part of the field-level negotiation opened by the form's creation.

Across the three cases, creation work proceeded through the cumulative legibility of practices that others could observe, evaluate, and adopt. It was conducted from a position

that combined formal competitive standing with little authority to alter the field's arrangements directly. The teams demonstrated, respectively, that the hybrid form could be deliberately constructed between established templates, positioned as a remedy to a diagnosed institutional deficiency, and adapted to existing organizations in varied forms. Each demonstration derived credibility from the sanctioned competition in which it occurred. Two patterns indicate that the creation work registered beyond the organizations themselves. Internally, one of the three teams was explicitly built on the example of another. Externally, the field's discourse came to classify organizations, police the category's boundaries, prescribe adoption, and narrate the form's history. Together, these patterns show demonstration becoming an institutional template.

C. Disrupting Institutional Arrangements

If creation work establishes that a new form is possible, disruption work unsettles the assumptions that had made the form appear impossible. Content teams disrupt two established arrangements in competitive esports: the norm that *strategic secrecy* is a precondition of competitive success, and the assumption that *competitive excellence and audience engagement, competitive logic and entertainment logic, stand in necessary tension*. Both disruptions arise from the hybridity that enabled creation work. They operate negatively by demonstrating that an inherited constraint is not as necessary as the field had assumed. I trace these two disruptions, a negative case that reveals the mechanism's symmetry, the dissolutions through which the teams specified the form's limits, and an episode in which the field's central institution pushed back.

The presumed trade-off between competition and entertainment was not merely an analytical abstraction. It operated as an evaluative grammar in the field's own discourse and

appeared at multiple levels of analysis. Commenters stated its economics directly, observing that content creators "get more views by being entertaining in solo queue" than by playing for a serious team that streams scrims (Reddit, June 2025). They applied it to individuals by contrasting what a player might select "for content" with the constrained champion choices of professional competition (Reddit, December 2024). They also applied it at the field level, conceding that Los Ratones likely did not make the region stronger while granting that, "for a casual viewer," the team was "hype and engaging" (Reddit, February 2026). The same grammar structured audience expectations, as when one commenter insisted that a team should "at least be competitive alongside the content" and rejected the claim that losses did not matter because the project was primarily content (Reddit, January 2025).

Disruption in this domain did not occur through direct argument against the trade-off. It occurred by repeatedly confronting the field with evidence that did not fit it. The teams supplied continuous occasions on which audiences applied the inherited grammar to anomalous cases, and the grammar's own users registered the mismatch. In this way, an assumption that had functioned as settled knowledge became an open question.

1. Disrupting the Norm of Strategic Secrecy

Los Ratones' disruption of strategic secrecy operated through a specific evidentiary structure. The prevailing assumption holds that a team that reveals its preparation gives opponents the means of its defeat. The team's competitive results during its EMEA Masters run inverted that expected consequence. Opponents had access to strategies developed openly on stream, yet those strategies remained effective. The demonstration resembled the competitive equivalent of an athlete announcing the play and executing it anyway, a practice

for which Larry Bird was known (Kohan, 2023).[1] The demonstration carried evidentiary force because it occurred within the field's sanctioned competitive circuits, where the secrecy norm makes its prediction and where titles certify performance. Exhibition play would not have subjected the assumption to the same test.

The disruption lies not simply in the team's success but in what that success makes more difficult to sustain. Superior skill could explain why Los Ratones won despite being transparent, but it could not by itself explain why opponents failed to convert access to openly developed strategies into a decisive competitive advantage. Informational access therefore did not produce the consequence predicted by the secrecy norm. The case does not merely supply an exception to a correlation; it challenges a causal assumption.

The archival record shows the demonstration being taken up as an argument against the norm itself. Community discussion repeatedly evaluated the scrim-information trade-off, weighing what transparent teams surrender in strategic concealment against what they gain through visibility. The secrecy norm also became the object of direct challenge:

> u/tbwynne: Teams need to wake up and understand that their players are a brand and they need to put that brand out there. Stop hiding behind this curtain of secrecy and expose the players and the game. This is the key to esports being succesful, allow fans to be part of the team by you know, being in the room where it happens.
>
> (Reddit comment, January 16, 2025)

[1] The analogy holds at the level of logic, disclosure followed by successful execution, though the scale differs: Bird's disclosures concerned single plays in the moment, while Los Ratones exposed an entire preparation process over months.

The demand reverses the norm's evaluative vocabulary. Secrecy becomes "hiding," a practice that conventional organizations must justify, while exposure becomes an obligation. A norm that had functioned as an unstated precondition now required explicit defense in the field's own discourse. This is disruption registering in vernacular form.

The team's principal extended the practice of disclosure to the information organizations typically treat as most sensitive. Caedrel publicly reported Los Ratones' LEC scrim record, 45 wins and 64 losses across 109 scrims, revealing the exact category of competitive information that the secrecy norm exists to protect. Such episodes do not eliminate the norm. They shift its status from presumed necessity to contestable claim, which is the characteristic effect of disruptive institutional work in an emerging field where the arrangement was never formally codified.

2. Disrupting the Boundary of Competitive Activity (Near Airport)

Near Airport disrupts a different arrangement, the line demarcating what counts as legitimate competitive esports activity. By incorporating in-real-life content and disclosing the texture of organizational life, including the early acknowledgment that the team won roughly one in ten of its first scrim games and required morale management to continue, Near Airport extended competitive organizing into terrain conventionally treated as outside the competitive frame. The team's own framing made the disruptive intent explicit: in naming established content as "stale" and committing to unfiltered access, Near Airport positioned its practice against the prevailing norm of polished professional presentation. The recurring community question of whether such content is "still esports," where it appears, registers the boundary as contested. Near Airport did not resolve the question in its favor. Its

disruptive contribution was to force the question into the open, converting a tacit boundary into an explicit object of field-level dispute.

3. The Symmetry of Demonstration: A Negative Case (The Ruddy Sack)

The disruptive mechanism is symmetrical: transparency supplies the field with evidence regardless of whether that evidence favors the organization producing it. A negative case from The Ruddy Sack illustrates this dynamic. Following the team's elimination from the Winter competition in February 2025, streamed internal interactions involving the player Humzh became the focus of sustained community criticism directed at the coaching principal. Commenters characterized the material as a "How to Bully masterclass live" and organized their interpretation around the community-wide tag #FREEHUMZH. One coded instance shows the tag functioning as an interpretive frame within the elimination discussion itself:

> u/aPatheticBeing: #freehumzh Although also Yamato drafting is suspect af - somehow they have like 4/5 losing matchups on both sides? I wonder if RS wins w/ wunder too tho - no way he goes 2-8 when given the counter in game 5 right
>
> (Reddit comment, February 2025)

The comment demonstrates the frame's reach. The tag appears first, establishing the context through which the subsequent competitive assessment is interpreted. What follows concerns drafting, matchup preparation, and a substitute player's plausible performance. Criticism of conduct and competence therefore travels under the same interpretive banner. What secrecy might have contained as rumor, transparency rendered documented, timestamped, and replayable. The community used that evidence to hold a professional

coach accountable to standards of conduct, sustaining criticism of YamatoCannon's professional standing well beyond the originating episode.

The coded legitimacy judgments register the episode's cost. In January 2025, discussion of The Ruddy Sack was divided almost evenly between legitimacy granting and contestation, with 23 granting judgments and 22 contesting judgments. In the month of elimination, the granting share fell to 19 percent, with 8 granting judgments compared with 34 contesting judgments. This was the largest single-month shift in the coded record, and the team's legitimacy never durably recovered. The demonstration mechanism thus operated at full strength in the unfavorable direction, transforming a month of visible dysfunction into a persistent reputational fact.

The contestation also operated through both of the form's constituent logics. On the competitive side, commenters questioned coaching competence and effort, describing one principal as "not even close to coach material" and doubting whether another "feels like he's trying his hardest" (Reddit, February 2025). On the entertainment side, the same discussion devalued the product through explicit cross-case comparison, concluding that "the content isn't even as good as Los Ratones." A hybrid form can be contested through either logic; in February, The Ruddy Sack was contested through both simultaneously. The field's template case served as the benchmark, and the same comparison-based evaluative infrastructure that had legitimated the form was turned against this instantiation of it.

The case matters for the disruption analysis in two respects. First, it shows that the demonstration mechanism through which content teams perform institutional work does not distinguish between competence and dysfunction. Whatever the transparent organization enacts becomes available as field-level evidence. Second, it shows the field converting the

team's transparency into an enforcement resource, using broadcast practice to police professional conduct in ways that opaque organizations make more difficult. Transparency built legitimacy for Los Ratones by demonstrating competence; here, it damaged legitimacy by documenting dysfunction. The mechanism remained the same. Its effect depended on what the organization made visible.

4. Dissolution as Specification of the Form's Limits

The dissolutions deepen the analysis of disruption and carry particular evidentiary weight because they are documented, dated, and articulated in the organizations' own public statements. When Near Airport dissolved, its June 16, 2025 announcement identified the structural condition the team had been unable to resolve. The players described what they called the "all-in" reality: competing at the level they sought required full professional commitment, while their existing lives, including streaming careers, personal obligations, and, for one member, ongoing schooling, could not accommodate that demand. The announcement therefore did more than acknowledge failure. It publicly specified the form's binding constraint in the organization's own terms.

The Ruddy Sack's ending produced two distinct diagnoses. The first located the failure in members' competitive commitment; the second located it in the organization's economic model. Following the team's elimination from the NLC playoffs, IWillDominate described the season as a "failed project" and attributed the outcome to players who *lacked a "unified drive to improve and win together."* He stated that any future effort would require members who were "genuinely bought in and passionate about the competitive process, rather than focusing on brand recognition or individual fame." When the organization itself split on July 14, 2025, the *economic condition* was named publicly:

r/ SeaworthinessLucky65: Ruddy and The Sack are splitting up temporarily, Ruddy will still be an NLC team, The Sack may return later. [post title]

DonJake explains this was largely due to financial reasons and streamer teams not being a big enough incentive for teams that aren't Los Ratones, so they will be doing a Community Fund experiment to try to give the fans more control of the org. The owners and staff are all on good terms, there is no big drama. https://x.com/TheRuddySack/status/1944772947014480254. [post content]

(Reddit post, July 2025)

Whatever ambiguity remains in the wording, the explanation performs several forms of institutional work simultaneously. First, it names “streamer teams” as an organizational class, showing that the category circulated among organizational principals as well as audiences. Second, it identifies an economic scale condition for the form’s viability, alongside the Community Fund experiment through which the organization had attempted, unsuccessfully, to mobilize audience resources to sustain the model. Third, it positions Los Ratones as the exceptional case for which the incentive structure remained viable, articulating in economic terms the same comparative hierarchy that audiences had applied to Near Airport.

The field’s reception of the dissolutions differed in ways that further specify the form’s limits. Near Airport’s dissolution ended the field’s attention almost immediately. Coded legitimacy judgments about the team, no more than one-third of which had been granting during its existence, fell to a single judgment in the month after its withdrawal. Collected discussion likewise declined from 1,556 records in the founding month to 40 by

July. Los Ratones' dissolution produced the opposite pattern. February 2026 generated the largest single-month concentration of discussion in the corpus, with 20,861 collected records, and its legitimacy discourse leaned toward granting: 647 granting judgments compared with 474 contesting judgments, for a granting share of 58 percent, above the case's lifetime average. One dissolution was an exit the field barely registered; the other became an institutional event around which the field convened. This asymmetry indicates that the demonstration effects of the form scale with the attention infrastructure each instantiation has built.

The granting judgments that dominated the February discussion drew on the vocabulary of competitive logic. Commenters described the trajectory as moving "from a meme team to a near 500 record" in Tier 1 competition, concluded that the team had "proved they could compete at the highest level," and interpreted its run as a lesson for the league itself, arguing that the team "showed LEC what real esport should be about" (Reddit, February 2026). Even the remaining contestation proceeded on competitive terms, discounting the achievement on the basis of roster pedigree rather than challenging the legitimacy of the organizational form itself. The pattern is consistent with the maintenance analysis: at the form's ending, the field granted legitimacy by certifying its competitive substance, indicating that the disruptive surface had not displaced the competitive logic beneath it.

The field also conducted its own postmortem, partly in parallel with and partly in advance of the organizations' accounts. Los Ratones' dissolution had been anticipated during the admission contest. One objector warned that if the league granted the team a place and it subsequently disbanded, "you just fucked over owners" who had paid for theirs

(Reddit, November 2025). The dissolution therefore entered a discourse that had already modeled its possibility. Once it occurred, community discussion independently converged on the economic diagnosis. Commenters asked what the team's fans could contribute "that adds up to 1mil a year" (Reddit, February 2026), concluded that the arrangement "wasn't sustainable," tracked the members' subsequent trajectories, and framed the loss at the level of the field as "a shame for the fans and esport in general." The convergence is analytically significant. The form's limiting conditions had become legible to the field before the organization named them, and the dissolution statements confirmed, with organizational authority, a diagnosis that the field's distributed sensemaking had already produced.

Taken together, the dissolution statements publicly identify three dimensions along which the integration of competitive and entertainment logics can become unsustainable: member capacity, captured in Near Airport's account of the "all-in" reality; member orientation, captured in IWillDominate's diagnosis of brand focus displacing competitive drive; and organizational economics, captured in DonJake's account of the model's scale condition. A dissolution that identifies its own structural cause does more than mark the end of an organization. It alters the field's understanding of the form by specifying the conditions under which the form can hold and those under which it fails. Continued success would leave those conditions largely implicit.

5. The Field's Counterwork: The LEC Episode (Los Ratones)

Los Ratones' trajectory provides an episode in which the field actively maintained its existing arrangements against the new hybrid form. When Los Ratones received and accepted an invitation to compete in the LEC, the institutional conditions of that circuit required the team to cease publicly streaming scrims because LEC opponents would not

consent to having shared preparation broadcast. In the October 2025 update and the February 2026 dissolution video, Caedrel characterized the circuit as "closed," recounted merger negotiations with tier-one organizations that could not be discussed under nondisclosure agreements, and stated that he would not recommend the streamer-team model to others because of the structural exhaustion and exposure it imposed.

This episode shows the disruptive form encountering the field's resistance through its formal institutional machinery. The invitation was itself an admission decision of the kind that constitutes the regulative apparatus content teams cannot access from below, while the confidential merger negotiations show the form being processed through the field's established, nontransparent organizational channels. The episode thus reveals an asymmetry of position within a shared formal structure. The content team could disrupt the secrecy norm through public demonstration, but once it sought entry into the field's central competitive institution, that institution determined the conditions of participation. Those conditions required Los Ratones to abandon the practice that had defined the form. The episode therefore contains both the disruption's recognition and its limit: the form was institutionally legible enough to earn an LEC invitation but sufficiently incompatible with the institution's established arrangements that accepting the invitation meant ceasing to operate as a content team in the constitutive sense.

The reception record identifies the invitation as the most contested moment in a case otherwise characterized by comparatively strong legitimacy granting. The invitation, extended in late October 2025, generated the most sustained legitimacy contest of the team's lifespan. October produced 569 coded legitimacy judgments, the highest volume outside the dissolution period, while the granting share fell to 46 percent. The dataset contained 9,745

records for the month, a level of discussion otherwise reached only during the case's final two months. As the debate continued, the granting share fell to its lifetime minimum of 38 percent in November before rebounding to its highest monthly level in December. The field's counterwork is therefore visible in two forms: the institutional conditions attached to admission and the two-month legitimacy contest that accompanied the content-team form's entry into Tier 1 competition.

The arguments advanced during that contest identify what the field understood to be at stake. Objectors framed Los Ratones' invitation as a violation of the league's established investment order, protesting that existing organizations had "paid millions" for their places while the rules were "changed . . . just to get LR" into the league. Others treated the invitation as a category error concerning commitment, arguing that the team "invests in their own brand, not on the league" and that it was not worth it to "kill your product to make a streamer team join" (Reddit, October and November 2025). These objections did not dispute the team's competitive quality. They instead concerned admission criteria, league economics, and the boundaries of membership. The conflict therefore occurred at the level of the field's constitutive rules, which is where the counterwork account locates it.

6. Summary

Across the three cases, disruption operates by rendering inherited assumptions contestable and, in the dissolution cases, by specifying their limits. Hybridity is again the enabling condition: a single-logic competitive team has no entertainment commitment whose tension with competition it could expose, and a single-logic entertainment organization makes no competitive claim whose secrecy norm it could violate. Only an organization accountable to both logics can disrupt the boundary between them, and only

such an organization can, in dissolving, name the boundary's location. The negative case adds a caution the pattern alone would obscure: the disruptive power of demonstration belongs to the mechanism, and it can be turned against the demonstrator, because no organization owns it.

D. Maintaining Institutional Arrangements

Creation and disruption are the conspicuous forms of institutional work. Maintenance is the quieter form, and in the case of content teams it clarifies what kind of organizations they are. Content teams retain competitive esports' core commitments. They disrupt specific assumptions, secrecy and the competition-entertainment trade-off, while maintaining the competitive logic's substance: that winning is the operative measure of success, that expertise is earned and demonstrable, and that competitive seriousness is a condition of legitimacy. This simultaneity distinguishes a content team from a team that has traded competition for entertainment, and the maintenance work keeps the disruption legible as a competitive claim. I trace the maintenance work in five ways: through the teams' own assertions of competitive primacy, the community's enforcement of each configuration, the persistence of competitive substance when transparency was withdrawn, the authenticity currency in which the field priced it all, and the configurational differences that explain the cases' varying stability.

1. Asserting Competitive Primacy Amid Disruption

Defenders of existing arrangements spelled out what they believed the form threatened, and their arguments specify the institutional content being maintained. The most direct defense concerned practice secrecy as a sacred space, expressed in the field's own idiom: "the locker room is sacred and streamed scrims simply arent as effective" (Reddit,

March 2025). The statement combines a normative claim about organizational privacy with an empirical claim about competitive performance. A second defense was economic. One commenter warned that additional high-visibility competition elsewhere would mean that "the LEC broadcast basically looses a significant amount of apeal to sponsors" (Reddit, March 2025), thereby defending the league's centralized attention economy. Both defenses unfolded through public argument because defenders, like disruptors, possessed no direct control over the form beyond persuasion. They also identified the same arrangements that the form had rendered contestable: closed preparation and centralized attention. Maintenance and disruption therefore appeared as opposing positions within the same field-level argument, conducted in the same venues and over stakes that both sides defined in similar terms.

The teams maintained competitive logic most visibly at moments when it would have been easiest to relax. Near Airport's founding announcement made this maintenance explicit even as it disrupted established content norms. After criticizing conventional esports content as stale, Doublelift emphasized that although the project would be streamed and would generate content for the players' channels, its "ultimate goal is competitive success." Pobelter similarly described the project's appeal as the return of having something "on the line" after the routine of solo queue. The team asserted competitive primacy in the same announcement through which it introduced its entertainment innovation. Maintenance and disruption were therefore enacted together, not in sequence.

TFBlade's reformulation of his playing identity, examined in Chapter 6, performed similar maintenance at the individual level. By subordinating an individually entertaining solo-queue style to the demands of team play, against an archived record that allowed

audiences to measure the concession, he reaffirmed a competitive standard at the very moment when his entertainment-derived identity might otherwise have prevailed.

2. Community Enforcement of the Announced Configuration (Near Airport)

Maintenance also operated through the community's role as a legitimating logic, which is where the three-logic configuration provides explanatory leverage beyond a two-logic account. When Near Airport's players publicly committed to a celebratory stream contingent on competitive achievement, community members treated that commitment as evidence of competitive seriousness rather than as content alone. The community thus enforced the competitive standard by holding the team to an aspiration it had articulated through an entertainment format.

A negative case from the same team shows this enforcement operating in the opposite direction and clarifies what the community maintained. When the team's roster decisions moved it toward more conventional competitive staffing, part of the audience objected that it was abandoning its constitutive commitment:

> @Levi14AFC: I thought this was a content team first/ being competitive was just a byproduct of their nature? I watch Near airport for the great well-known funny personalities, not for this fake "na talent" gimmick man. disappointing. the subs had to be sneaky, meteos, qtpie, etc..
>
> (Youtube comment, 2025)

The objection demands greater fidelity to entertainment logic, reversing the more common pattern in which audiences press content teams toward competitive seriousness. Together, the two episodes show that the community policed the hybrid configuration announced at the team's founding, not the competitive pole alone. Audiences held Near

Airport to its competitive aspirations when those aspirations were expressed through entertainment, and they held it to its entertainment identity when it moved toward conventional competition.

Community logic therefore legitimated the combination by enforcing fidelity to the announced configuration from whichever side the team departed. In doing so, the community sustained the hybrid form itself rather than either constituent logic in isolation. This is what makes community a legitimating force within the configuration described in this dissertation, not merely a participatory one. Maintenance work was distributed across the organizational boundary: the team articulated the configuration, and the community helped sustain it.

3. Maintenance Beneath Transparency (Los Ratones)

A further instance of maintenance work emerges where transparency itself is removed. When Los Ratones entered the LEC and the cessation of scrim streaming withdrew the transparency that had constituted the team's public identity, what persisted was the competitive substance. The shared vocabulary, the established coordination norms, and the coaching culture all remained operative, and the team produced a competitive turnaround, winning five of its final six games before finishing the split in ninth place, without the transparent practice that had developed those capabilities.

This episode demonstrates the separability of what content teams maintain from what they are known for. Transparency is the disruptive and creative surface of the form; competitive logic is the maintained substance beneath it; the substance proved the more durable. A team that had performed competitive seriousness only as content would have had little to fall back on when the content apparatus was removed. That Los Ratones'

competitive capabilities survived the withdrawal of transparency indicates that competitive logic had been genuinely maintained throughout, sustained as substance where it might have existed only as display.

4. Authenticity as the Field's Evaluative Currency (Los Ratones)

Running beneath the enforcement of these configurations was a more general currency through which the field valued the form: authenticity. The coded authenticity judgments, drawn principally from discussion of Los Ratones, show authenticity legitimating both competitive and entertainment logics simultaneously. On the competitive side, audiences inferred sincerity of effort from visible practice. A coach conducting solo queue VOD reviews on an off day, for example, was described as "in it for the love of the game" (Reddit, February 2026). Visible emotion likewise became a basis for attachment, with one commenter tracing their support to seeing "how much Caedrel cared" after the team's first win. On the entertainment side, the same evaluative standard privileged unproduced access. Commenters praised the team's "independent and raw content" in contrast to the manufactured character of earlier organizational media (Reddit, March 2025) and accepted visible failure as part of its appeal because "not everything always goes well, but that's real life" (YouTube, January 2025). One judgment captures the full span of this evaluation:

> u/rgtn0w: For the success itself? Yes I agree, but I'm not really talking much about the success of the numbers itself, there's no deniability that the sense of "Grassroots" "community based" the "rawness" of some of the things cuz they stream everything, all of that works together to form a sense of

community like no other esport org would ever have and whether intentional or not it has had massive impact on the growth.

Was Caedrel the most succesful co-streamer in the EN side of things? Absolutely. But did LR help even more and more and more to the success of "Caedrel"? Absolutely. I don't even have to look, Caedrel's average numbers have absolutely gone up significantly since LR started for a good reason

(Reddit comment, March 31, 2025)

This judgment evaluates the organizational model as a whole. It identifies grassroots standing, community orientation, and rawness as valued qualities; locates their source in the team's practice, "cuz they stream everything"; and presents the result as a form of community unmatched by other esports organizations. Authenticity thus performs the legitimating work required by the three-logic configuration. It converts transparency from a structural feature of the organization into evidence that its competitive effort, entertainment value, and community orientation are genuine.

Authenticity also policed the form against drift and remained a source of suspicion. As professionalization advanced in late 2025, audience commentary urged the team to "go back to their roots" and asserted that "letting everyone be, is what made LR, LR" (YouTube, October 2025). Here, authenticity was invoked against the very competitive ascent that the same audience celebrated. Transparency also supplied the evidence through which such suspicions were pursued, as when a player's pause during a streamed session was examined frame by frame for signs of outside communication (Reddit, March 2025). Nor was authenticity available only to the form's supporters. It circulated across the field and could be mobilized by opponents, as in the Bulldog co-owner's protest examined in the creation

analysis, which accused the form's inheritors of abandoning their stated principles when opportunity arose.

Authenticity therefore operates as a conversion mechanism among the logics. It makes competitive commitment entertaining and entertainment credible; it is judged through evidence made available by transparent practice; and its policing function holds the organization to the standard of being what it publicly presents itself to be. Closed organizations, whose internal processes remain unavailable for comparable scrutiny, are not subjected to the same demand.

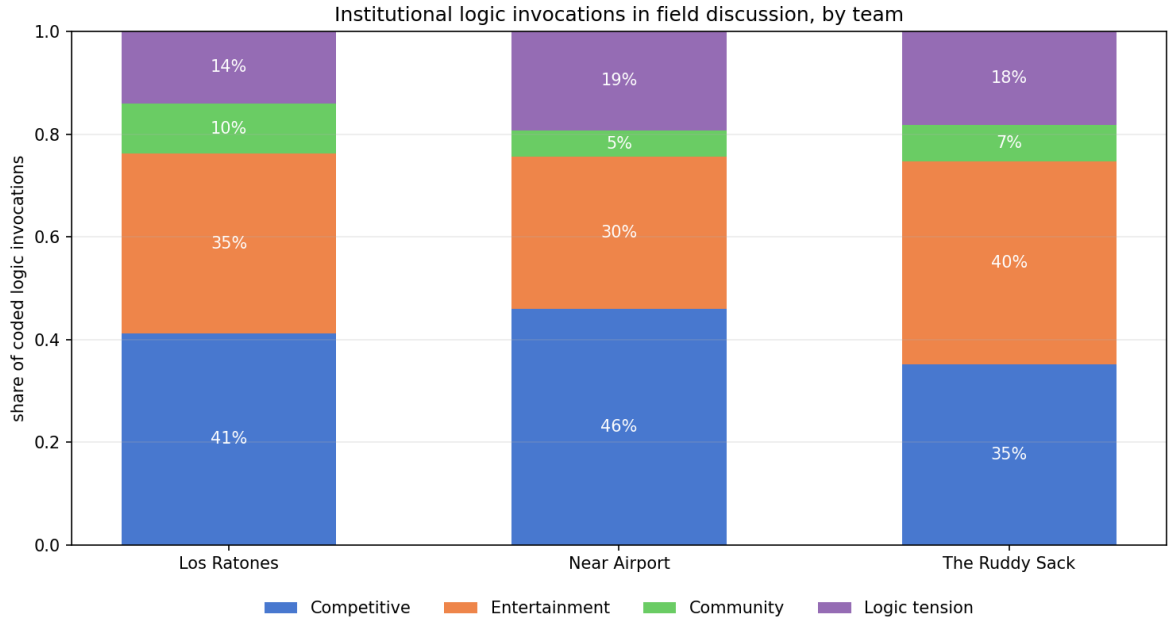
5. Configurations Compared

Across the cases, maintenance work is selective and unfolds alongside disruption. The configuration vocabulary of hybrid organizing (Besharov & Smith, 2014) helps explain why the cases differ in stability. Los Ratones approaches an aligned configuration in which competitive and entertainment logics reinforce one another and a community logic legitimates their combination. This alignment helps explain why its competitive substance persisted even amid institutional disruption. The Ruddy Sack tends toward a contested configuration in which entertainment operates through competition but periodically comes into conflict with it. This tension is evident in the breakdown before playoffs, the streamed dysfunction that the community recast as evidence of unprofessionalism, and IWillDominate's eventual conclusion that brand orientation had displaced competitive drive. Its maintenance of competitive seriousness was consequently less secure. Near Airport occupies an intermediate position. Competitive logic was asserted clearly at the team's founding and subsequently policed by the community, but the structural conditions the team could sustain provided insufficient support for it in practice.

The field's discourse closely reflects these configurations. Coded logic invocations in discussions of Los Ratones lean competitive, with 41 percent classified as competitive and 35 percent as entertainment, while also carrying the highest share of community-logic invocations among the three cases, at 10 percent. Discussion of The Ruddy Sack leans entertainment, at 40 percent compared with 35 percent competitive, consistent with its spectacle-forward orientation. Near Airport is framed most strongly in competitive terms, at 46 percent, while also producing the highest share of explicitly tension-oriented discussion, at 19 percent. This pattern is consistent with a case in which competitive ambitions and structural constraints remained visibly at odds. Audiences, in other words, discussed each team in terms that corresponded to its announced configuration. This provides reception-side evidence that the configurations were institutionally legible and subject to audience enforcement. Figure 7.2 presents these distributions.

Figure 7.2

Institutional Logic Invocations in Field Discussion, by Team



Note. Shares of coded logic invocations (LOG-COMP, LOG-ENT, LOG-COMM, LOG-TENSION) across each case's full lifespan. Logic tension denotes records coded as explicitly framing the competitive and entertainment logics in conflict.

The comparative practices through which the community evaluated and enforced these configurations functioned as an everyday classification system. Coded comparison talk shows audiences distinguishing among recognizable organizational models and expecting coherence between them. This expectation appears most explicitly when one commenter advised a struggling organization to commit to one established model or the other because "doing neither just seems pointless" (Reddit, March 2025). These classifications also carried genealogies. Commenters traced streamer-team models "through Kameto" and other founder figures (Reddit, February 2026), located distinctions precisely, as in the claim that "that's where the difference between LR and KC/MKOI is," and drew on benchmarks outside the region by comparing the flagship team's dominance to a second-tier version of the game's great dynasties (Reddit, June 2025). The configuration vocabulary used analytically in this chapter was therefore also operative in the field itself. Audiences classified the cases, evaluated them against those classifications, and used the template case as a benchmark for subsequent entrants. In the absence of a formal certifying body, maintenance work proceeded through these comparative judgments.

Creation, disruption, and maintenance therefore formed a single configured stance that each team enacted differently. Those differences help explain how durably each case maintained the competitive logic shared across all three.

E. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined how content teams engage in institutional work through their hybrid organizational practices. I found that the same practices that constitute team-level adaptation also function, when conducted transparently, as creation, disruption, and maintenance of institutional arrangements in the emerging field of competitive esports. Table 7.1 summarizes the findings by form of institutional work.

Table 7.1

Summary of Findings: Institutional Work Through Hybrid Organizing

Form of institutional work	Key findings	Named concepts and mechanisms	Illustrative episodes and field response
Creation	The teams create institutional possibilities through demonstration, holding no governance access; the field takes up the category in classificatory talk, prescription, press certification, and eventual canonization; the community is	Demonstration-based creation; propagation by reference; category boundary-policing; adoption advocacy; the theorizing relay	creation; propagation by reference; category boundary-policing; adoption advocacy; the theorizing relay Founding announcements defining the model (LR, NA); adoption advocacy and "inspired by" attributions in community talk; press

	recruited as a party to the project with its own normative vocabulary; dissolution itself specifies the form's limits, confirming a diagnosis the field's distributed sensemaking had anticipated		certification of the format and its narrative canonization; reception asymmetry at the foundings (56 vs. 30 percent granting shares); dissolution retrospectives and the field's parallel post-mortems (NA, LR); incumbent protest at the successor's accommodation (X, March 2026)
Disruption	The norm of strategic secrecy and the assumed competition-entertainment trade-off are rendered contestable; the trade-off operates as a live evaluative grammar in the field's own talk,	Evaluative grammar of the trade-off; symmetry of demonstration; dissolution as specification of limits; the field's counterwork	Streamed scrims against the secrecy norm, with live broadcast of usable preparation carrying the disruptive claim; the field's own articulations of the trade-off applied to counter-evidence; audiences demanding

	applied to individuals, organizations, and the field; two counter-pattern episodes bound the mechanism; the field's central institution counters directly, setting admission terms that require the constitutive practice's surrender		entertainment over competitive seriousness (negative case, NA); the February 2025 legitimacy collapse, from near parity to 19 percent granting (negative case, TRS); LEC admission conditioned on ceasing scrim streaming, with a two-month legitimacy contest at Tier 1 entry (LR)
Maintenance	Competitive logic's substance is preserved beneath the disruptive surface; the community enforces each team's announced configuration from both directions, prices the form in an	Competitive primacy assertions; configuration enforcement; maintenance beneath transparency; authenticity as evaluative currency; comparison as	Competitive turnaround after withdrawal of transparent practice (LR); authenticity judgments certifying sincerity and rawness while policing drift (LR); community enforcement from both

	authenticity currency that certifies both logics at once, and operates comparison as an everyday classification system; defenders articulate the maintained arrangements in public argument	classification system; aligned, contested, and intermediate configurations	directions (NA); the field's configuration vocabulary and coherence norm; logic shares mirroring announced configurations (Figure 7.2); secrecy and attention-economy defenses stated in the field's idiom

Note. LR = Los Ratones; NA = Near Airport; TRS = The Ruddy Sack. Forms follow Lawrence and Suddaby (2006); all three cases exhibit each form. Terms in the named-concepts column are defined at first use in the corresponding sections.

The teams create new possibilities by demonstrating the hybrid form, positioning it between existing templates and against diagnosed deficiencies, with one case in this study built directly on the example of another. The field's uptake of the category is legible in audience boundary-work, incumbent contestation of the accommodations the form came to command, professional theorizing, and the narratives through which the community assimilated the form's endings. They disrupt the assumptions that strategic secrecy is necessary and that competition and entertainment cannot integrate, and in dissolving, they specify the conditions under which that integration fails, naming them along the distinct dimensions of member commitment, member orientation, and organizational economics.

They maintain competitive logic's core throughout, evident where Los Ratones' competitive capabilities outlasted the transparency that produced them, and the community's enforcement of each team's announced configuration, from both directions, shows the maintenance work extending beyond the organizational boundary. Two negative cases bound these claims: audiences sometimes demand entertainment where the teams offer competitive seriousness, and transparency sometimes destroys legitimacy through the same mechanism by which it elsewhere builds it. Across all three forms, hybridity supplied the content of the institutional work and transparency supplied its reach, in whichever direction that reach cut.

The analysis also revealed the form's institutional limit. The content team is legible enough to the field to earn an LEC invitation, yet incompatible enough with the field's central competitive institution that accepting the invitation required abandoning the constitutive practice. This collision between the form and the field's established arrangements, like the dissolutions that named the form's binding constraints, points beyond institutional work as such to the recursive relationship between team-level practice and field-level structure. How that recursion operates, through the integration points specified in Chapter 4, is the subject of Chapter 8.

VIII. Chapter Eight: The Recursive Constitution of Team Adaptation and Institutional Work

A. Chapter Introduction

The two preceding chapters examined esports content teams at two analytical levels. Chapter 6 analyzed team-level adaptation, showing how the four phases of adaptive work are reshaped when they unfold under radical transparency. Chapter 7 analyzed institutional work, showing how the same visible practices create, disrupt, and maintain arrangements in the emerging field of competitive esports. This chapter addresses the third research question by integrating the two levels. It examines how *institutional pressures shape adaptation triggers and processes*, and how *public adaptation practices subsequently reshape institutional norms*, the structuration process through which teams both draw upon and transform the institutional structures that enable them.

The chapter applies the framework developed in Chapter 4 directly. That framework specified four integration points through which team practices and institutional structures recursively constitute each other: *adaptation as institutional work, institutional pressures as adaptation triggers, team transparency as institutional visibility,* and *institutional hybridity as team innovation*. Two of these run from the team to the institution, and two run from the institution to the team. The framework further proposed that these integration points operate through transparency and hybridity as interdependent modalities, and that their interdependence should be observable across the phases of the adaptation cycle. This chapter presents the findings for each integration point in turn, then examines the interdependence of the modalities in operation, including the limiting case in which the modalities were separated.

As in the preceding chapters, the observational record supplies the primary evidence, with the episodes established in Chapters 6 and 7 furnishing the team side of the recursion; the coded archival material described in Chapter 5 documents the field's side at scale: the transparency modality was coded 2,493 times and the hybridity modality 1,388 times; the four affordances together received 1,894 applications, led by visibility (1,088) and persistence (390); institutional triggers of team adaptation were coded 475 times; and enacted cross-level interactions, in which a team practice and a field response meet within a single record, were coded 376 times, with team-to-field crossings (205) somewhat outnumbering field-to-team crossings (168). Complete recursive loops captured within a single record were rare, appearing only three times, which is consistent with the chapter's analytical strategy: the recursion is established by connecting crossings documented separately, and no claim rests on the full cycle surfacing in any one place.

A closing section draws the findings together as an answer to the third research question. Because the recursion under examination connects material analyzed separately in Chapters 6 and 7, this chapter necessarily refers back to episodes established there. It does so to specify the mechanism connecting the levels, with the episodes themselves left where those chapters established them.

B. Adaptation as Institutional Work: Team Practices as Structure-Building

The first integration point holds that, when conducted transparently, team adaptation processes simultaneously function as institutional work. In most instances, this integration required no separate institutional act by the team. The teams did not first adapt and then undertake a distinct effort to influence the field. Rather, the same broadcast scrim

constituted adaptation at the interaction level and demonstration at the structural level, and field audiences interpreted it in both terms.

1. Adaptive Practice as Public Demonstration

The demonstration mechanism's operation is easiest to see in the one sequence where every step is independently documented. In March 2025, Los Ratones' streamed practice coincided with the regional league shattering its viewership records, and the field's governing body responded within the same month by announcing a trial permitting top-tier teams to stream their own practice matches, a change the field's press narrated explicitly as a response to what the form had demonstrated. No representative of the teams sat in the meeting where that trial was decided; the practice itself, circulating as evidence of what practice transparency produces, was the only advocate present. The sequence shows the first integration point's defining property in isolation: the institutional work was complete before any institutional actor acted, because the demonstration had already changed what the field's decision-makers knew to be possible and profitable, and the formal decision merely registered it.

The evidence for this integration point rests on the double function of ordinary adaptive practice. When Los Ratones conducted streamed review sessions, the sessions served the team's learning phase, and at the same time established for the watching field that strategy development could occur in the open. When Near Airport disclosed in its early weeks that the team was winning roughly one in ten scrim games, a strikingly poor rate for a professional roster, and was as a consequence actively managing morale, the disclosure was situation assessment conducted publicly, and it simultaneously demonstrated to the field what an honest diagnostic register in a competitive organization looks like. Neither team

performed an additional institutional gesture beyond the adaptive practice itself. The institutional work was the adaptive work, made consequential by its visibility.

This double function explains a pattern that would otherwise appear puzzling: the teams' most institutionally consequential acts were rarely their most deliberate ones. The founding announcements analyzed in Chapter 7 were intentional articulations of the form, but the ongoing demonstrations that gave those articulations substance, the daily scrims, the streamed reviews, and the visible corrections, were undertaken to solve immediate competitive problems. Institutional influence accrued as a byproduct of adaptation, the relationship the first integration point anticipated.

2. From Demonstration to Template

Field media functioned as the relay that converted circulating practice into institutional narrative, and the coded press record shows the translation advancing in steps. Coverage first registered the practices as a format question, then as a legitimacy question, whose certifying move survives in the record:

> In 2025, "stream teams" have emerged as a legitimate and exciting format in competitive League of Legends. Caedrel's "Los Ratones" has already demonstrated it by securing a Top 4 finish in the EMEA Masters just months after formation. Now, Doublelift—one of the most influential figures in the League community with over 1.8 million Twitch followers—is stepping up to form his team and bring a fresh approach to NA's esports landscape.
>
> (Sheep Esports, March 2025; Chocat, 2025)

The passage certifies a class on the evidence of one member's demonstrated results, which is the relay's translation in a single sentence: interaction-level practice, converted into

a category claim addressed to the field. Coverage then advanced to a structural question, reading the LEC Versus format change as potentially "the beginning of deeper integration between ERL and LEC" (EGamersWorld, October 2025), and by the ending the press had inverted the dependency entirely, asking "whether the LEC can offset the loss of the Los Ratones audience" (Esports Chart, March 2026) and documenting the viewership decline that followed. A practice stream cannot address the field; the relay could, and the press record shows it carrying the demonstration from novelty through legitimacy to structural consequence, which is the pathway through which interaction-level practice reached actors who never even watched a scrim.

Demonstration became structure when subsequent actors drew on it as a template. Chapter 7 documented that Near Airport was conceived in explicit inspiration from Los Ratones and that the audience independently interpreted Near Airport through the Los Ratones template. The integration point specifies the mechanism beneath that documentation: through their visibility, the interaction-level practices of one content team became a structure-level resource that organized the founding of another, which that team then reproduced and varied through its own visible practice. Structuration's duality of structure is directly observable here, and the founding statements supply it as direct observation, where field-level pattern alone would have supplied it only as inference. Professional commentary extended the template's reach: the podcast analysis examined in Chapter 7 explicitly positioned Los Ratones as a model the field's central leagues should learn from, converting the team's adaptive practice into prescriptive discourse addressed to actors with governance authority (JLXP, ep. 127, February 2, 2026).

3. The Separation of Template and Resource Base

The propagation carries a qualification that the cases also document: the template circulated independently of the conditions of its success. What diffused was the visible practice, the streamed scrims, the disclosed deliberations, and the announced hybrid identity, while the resource base that sustained the original remained untransferred. The engagement record quantifies the gap: Los Ratones' median official video drew 8,019 engagements against 445 for Near Airport and 1,995 for The Ruddy Sack, and the median Twitter post about the team drew 751 engagements against 88 and 152, respectively. The template that circulated was identical in visible form across the cases, but the attention economy underneath it differed by an order of magnitude, and the two teams operating below the threshold both concluded, in their own public diagnoses, that the form did not pay for itself at their scale.

Actors on both sides of the field named this condition. DonJake's explanation of The Ruddy Sack's split attributed the decision to streamer teams "not being a big enough incentive for teams that aren't Los Ratones" (Reddit, July 2025), an insider's economic diagnosis. The professional commentary examined in Chapter 7 judged the Los Ratones iteration a convergence of circumstances unlikely to be replicable, locating a specific untransferred resource in the concentration of the field's viewership within Caedrel's co-streamed channel (JLXP, ep. 127, February 2, 2026). The recursive reproduction of the form is therefore partial by construction. Visibility transmits the template's practices while leaving its economics behind, and the dissolution of both adopting cases within months of founding indicates that the transmissible and the sustaining components of the form are distinct.

The field's governing body eventually cited the demonstration in its own institutional voice. The invitation that brought Los Ratones into the LEC grounded the admission explicitly in demonstrated proof, stating that the team had "proven themselves" over an incredible season and that the league would "like to invite them" (LoLEsports, October 2025). An admission decision is the most formal act a field's regulative apparatus performs, and here its stated rationale was the record that transparent practice had accumulated: the first integration point extended furthest when the demonstration was converted into the official justification for changing the form's structural position.

C. Institutional Pressures as Adaptation Triggers: Structure Shaping Interaction

The second integration point holds that institutional pressures function as adaptation triggers for content teams. The cues that initiate adaptive cycles therefore arise from the immediate competitive task and from the team’s broader institutional environment. Content teams face a triggering environment substantially wider than that modeled in the adaptation literature because audiences, platform and commercial arrangements, and competitive institutions all generate conditions that teams must assess and address.

1. Audience Expectations as Adaptive Pressure

he audience operated as a continuous source of adaptation triggers, and its participation extended well beyond attention. Community members audited teams’ execution-phase communication against competitive standards. Circulated criticism of Crownie’s repeated in-game calls, for example, subjected a specific coordination practice to public evaluation. Audiences also moved from auditing to co-design by circulating proposals for alternative scrim formats that reached the teams as suggestions about how practice should be organized. Adaptation under these conditions occurs before an audience

that evaluates execution, itemizes deficiencies, and proposes revisions. Teams' situation-assessment and plan-formulation processes consequently absorbed audience input as a routine feature of the adaptive environment. Audience participation in mediated production has a scholarly lineage of its own, which I take up in the concluding chapter's directions for future research.

The community's enforcement of each team's announced configuration, documented in Chapter 7, operated as a similar adaptive pressure. Near Airport's audience objected when the team's roster decisions moved it toward conventional competitive staffing, while also holding the team to competitive aspirations it had articulated through an entertainment format. These institutional expectations entered the adaptive cycle as cues that the team had to interpret and address. The bona fide group perspective anticipates this dynamic: the audience becomes a constitutive participant in the adaptive process, entering the same loop it observes.

The coded trigger inventory shows how concretely institutional conditions entered adaptive cycles. Sponsorship obligations and schooling removed two Near Airport starters from a competitive week, an absence the team announced matter-of-factly as the result of "prior sponsorship commitments" (YouTube, April 2025). A commercial arrangement thus operated directly as a personnel trigger. Audience pressure ran alongside it, and its limits were negotiated publicly. When community discussion called for a player to be benched, the team's principal refused, stating that "they will not bench their friends" (Reddit, May 2025). The response drew a boundary around the audience's influence while still adapting to the pressure by publicly addressing it. Los Ratones encountered parallel triggers from competitive institutions. These ranged from the early prohibition on streaming scrims

against LEC teams to the practice-partner problem of its Tier 1 period, when established teams reportedly "left them in the lurch" as scrim partners (Reddit, January 2026). Each trigger originated in the institutional environment but entered the team's adaptive process through concrete decisions about personnel, scheduling, or practice.

2. Accountability Without Hierarchy

One structural feature of this triggering environment warrants separate attention. The cross-channel accountability sequence examined in Chapter 6 shows that transparency flattened the distribution of accountability ordinarily produced by organizational hierarchy. In conventional organizations, seniority often provides some insulation from public scrutiny. Transparent practice weakens that gradient. Doublelift, despite his position as Near Airport's founder and the most decorated competitor on the roster, remained subject to the same visibility conditions as the newest substitute. His missed meeting and its consequences were as available for audience interpretation as any other member's conduct. Transparency at the structural level therefore reshaped the distribution of accountability at the interaction level by reducing the insulation that formal authority ordinarily provides. The adaptation triggered by the episode proceeded under these flattened conditions. This identifies a feature of transparent organizing that adaptation research, largely developed in settings with firmer team-environment boundaries, has not adequately anticipated.

Audience auditing extended both to individual members and to forms of conduct that the teams had not explicitly presented as open to evaluation. When two Near Airport members missed the review session following a heavy loss, community discussion recorded the absences by name (Reddit, May 2025), performing attendance monitoring that would ordinarily belong to management. When a Los Ratones player paused unexpectedly during a

streamed session, commenters examined the moment for evidence of impermissible outside communication (Reddit, March 2025), conducting integrity surveillance on material the team itself had broadcast. The flattening of accountability thus operated in two directions. It reached past organizational rank to individual members, and it extended into categories of conduct, including attendance, integrity, and effort, that closed organizations ordinarily reserve for internal governance. Star status provided no exemption. Indeed, members with the largest individual followings often received the most granular scrutiny because their conduct produced the greatest volume of publicly available material.

3. League and Commercial Conditions as Triggers

The league-side triggers also have a pre-history that locates the form itself inside a prior field-level change. Community discussion attributed the form's viability to the regional leagues' liberalization of streaming rules:

> u/DeirdreAnethoel: Yeah the ERL streaming rules changes was colossal and none of this would be possible without it [referring to the success of LR at drawing an audience]. This is also why they should be cautious about promoting to tier 1 even if the opportunity manifests itself, because LEC rules haven't changed. (Reddit, January 2025)

The observation clarifies the integration point's directionality. Before the teams' practices exerted pressure on the field, a regulatory change created the conditions under which constitutively transparent competition could exist. Field participants recognized this enabling role. The recursion documented in this chapter therefore did not begin with the teams alone. It began with a structural opening that the teams occupied, amplified, and

eventually pressed against. Structure enabled an interaction that subsequently placed pressure on structure.

Competitive institutions generated the cases' most consequential triggers. The clearest example is Los Ratones' entry into the LEC. Accepting the invitation required the team to cease public scrim streaming, and the team had to reorganize its practice regime, content production, and members' working rhythms around a closed preparation environment. This adaptive cycle was initiated not by an immediate task-performance cue but by an institutional condition attached to participation. The team accepted those terms because the invitation fulfilled the competitive logic it had maintained since its founding. Tier 1 competition was the aspiration toward which its claims of competitive seriousness had consistently pointed. Preserving scrim transparency by declining the invitation would therefore have subordinated that aspiration to the team's entertainment and visibility commitments, contradicting the competitive primacy it had asserted throughout. An institutional structure thus reached directly into the team's constitutive practice and forced its reformulation. This is the second integration point operating in its strongest form.

Commercial and structural conditions triggered adaptation in the other cases as well. The Ruddy Sack's March 2025 shift from its streamer roster to developmental players followed elimination from the Winter competition, a trigger produced by the competitive institution's schedule and stakes. Its Community Fund experiment was an adaptive response to the economic pressure that DonJake later identified in the dissolution account. Near Airport's members repeatedly confronted the tension between the professional commitment demanded by competitive institutions and the streaming careers, schooling, and personal obligations that structured their existing lives. The dissolution announcement eventually

named this tension as the “all-in” reality. Across the cases, adaptive cycles were therefore initiated by pressures originating in competitive, commercial, and platform arrangements as well as by cues arising from the task itself. Institutional structure did not merely constrain adaptation from outside. It entered the adaptive process as a source of the conditions teams had to notice, interpret, and address.

D. Team Transparency as Institutional Visibility: Practice Becoming Demonstration

The third integration point holds that transparency transforms team processes into institutional demonstrations through the platform affordances of visibility, persistence, editability, and association. All four affordances participated in converting practice into demonstration. This conversion frequently exceeded the teams’ control, and field attention concentrated most heavily on the moments over which the teams exercised the least control.

1. Visibility and Persistence in Operation

The *visibility* operated through both enabling and constraining effects. Its *enabling* effect appears in the audience’s own language:

> u/Efficient-Average910: bro i think the actual 4 pro players and worlds finalists and multiple lec champion know what to do rather than 99.9% of people who are seeing scrims of kinda pro team for the first time.
>
> (Reddit, January 2025)

The comment registers novelty as the affordance's institutional effect: what the viewer reports seeing for the first time is a category of organizational activity— professional preparation—that visibility alone moved into public view. Audiences named the developmental spectacle directly, valuing the ability to watch the team "talk about there [sic] plays and see them improve," while field press analyzed the same practice as the driver of

viewer interest, observing that showcasing the practice process meant some viewers "learn something new" while others simply watch professional work happen (EGamersWorld, December 2025).

On the *constraining face*, visibility was actively managed at its known danger points, with coverage noting that Los Ratones cut the stream's feed during drafting so "the audience can't see anything" (PC Games, December 2024), and it generated second-order costs the team could not manage, most consequentially in the Tier 1 period when prospective practice partners were reportedly deterred because established teams are "paranoid about leaking drafts" (Reddit, October 2025). Visibility operated simultaneously as the form's core asset and as a standing tax on its competitive relationships, and both operations ran through the same affordance.

Visibility made team processes available to field-level interpretation in real time, and persistence extended that availability indefinitely. The Near Airport conflict over a missed team meeting unfolded across the founder's stream, the coach's concurrent stream, and subsequent Reddit and VOD circulation, an internal organizational moment becoming a distributed, multi-site event open to simultaneous interpretation by audiences applying different evaluative frameworks. Persistence then converted the episode into a permanent field resource: the VOD archive allowed retrospective viewing, quotation, and re-litigation long after the interaction itself had ended.

Persistence also operated on individual careers. TFBlade's archived solo-queue record, examined in Chapter 6, let audiences measure his reformulated team identity against his prior style with archival precision, so that his adaptation was evaluated against a persistent public baseline no conventional athlete carries. And persistence armed the

enforcement dynamic documented in Chapter 7: the streamed interactions that generated the community's criticism of The Ruddy Sack's coaching were available as documented, timestamped, replayable evidence, which is what allowed the criticism to be sustained and organized rather than dissipating as rumor.

The persistence affordance appears in the coded material as an audience practice with its own evidentiary conventions. Community discussion of Los Ratones routinely cites the archive with timestamp precision, directing readers to where a disputed moment "starts at 1:18:32" on a specific day's stream (Reddit, March 2025), and treats the archive's formal properties as information in themselves, as when the length of an uploaded practice video was read as revealing the series result before anyone had watched it (Reddit, May 2025). Audiences also manage the archive's temporal surplus deliberately, choosing unspoiled viewing of preserved sessions. Persistence, in these uses, is infrastructure the field actively operates: the archive functions as a citable evidence base for accountability talk, and its metadata alone carries competitive information the teams never chose to disclose.

2. Editability and Association in Operation

Editability marks the boundary between the content team form and the field's earlier disclosure practices. The founder-led organizations of the field's first era, introduced in Chapter 3, published internal life as edited documentary content, disclosure resting on editability, with the organization curating after the fact what audiences could see. Content teams inverted this profile: their disclosure was live and persistent, with editorial mediation reduced to the decision of what to stream at all. The comparison shows that the institutional force of content team transparency depended on this affordance configuration.

Edited retrospective disclosure generated attachment without constituting a claim about how a competitive organization could operate, since what it revealed had already been selected for revelation; live persistent practice carried the claim precisely because selection was minimal. Where the teams did exercise editorial control, as in Caedrel's decision to disclose the LEC scrim record in aggregate after broadcast had ceased, the disclosure itself became a demonstrative act, extending transparency by editorial means into a period when the live affordances were unavailable.The coded material adds the audience's half of the editability story, which operates as a continuous editorial negotiation. Viewers of Los Ratones' uploads thanked the team for "fixing the minimap" in review broadcasts (YouTube, January 2025), requested synchronization edits, praised timestamped game segmentation and the anti-spoiler construction of uploads (YouTube, May 2025), and acknowledged the labor involved in stitching post-scrim material across the players' individual streams. The same audience policed curation's limits from both sides: a removed video was undone by its own redundancy when "the whole segment" survived in another upload (Reddit, December 2024), persistence overriding attempted retraction, consistent with the framework's account, and viewers flagged when an exciting play had been "edited out" of an upload (YouTube, June 2025), holding curation accountable for what it omitted as well as what it altered. Editability in this form is therefore neither deletion, which the archive defeats, nor unilateral framing: it is a curation standard co-produced with the audience, negotiated request by request, and the negotiation itself is one more channel through which the field participates in the team's communicative practice.

Association structured how the demonstrations reached the field. The teams' practice did not circulate through neutral channels; it traveled through the founders' personal

platforms and the communities associated with them, most consequentially the concentration of League of Legends viewership within Caedrel's co-streamed channel, which the professional commentary examined in Chapter 7 described as the central hub of the field's audience. Association bound the teams' organizational content to existing networks of attention, the founders' followings, the dedicated community subreddit, the co-streaming ecosystem, and this binding is what gave the demonstrations their reach. It is also what made the reach unequal across cases, since association scales with the founder's existing network, a point that connects directly to the template-resource separation identified above.

3. The Field's Attention Structure

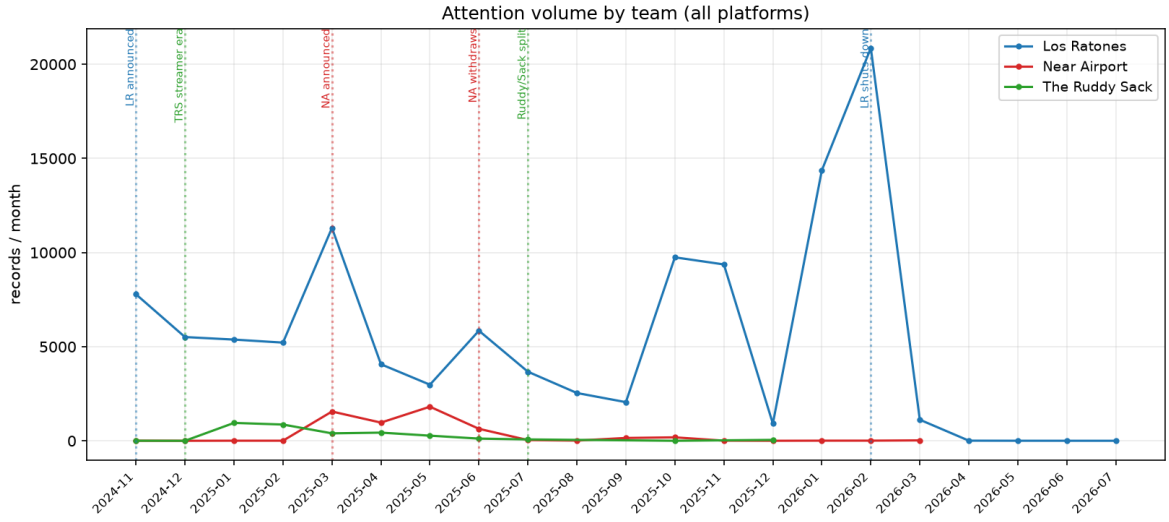
The archival data corroborate at the level of attention volume that the conversion of practice into demonstration exceeded team control. For Near Airport, the month containing the streamed conflict generated more collected discussion than the month of the team's founding, and across the cases, endings out-drew foundings: the dissolution periods produced the largest attention volumes of each team’s lifespan. The field attended most intensely to the moments the teams controlled least, breakdowns and endings, so the material through which the form circulated was disproportionately the material that escaped organizational management.

The precise volumes sharpen the point. Discussion of Los Ratones peaked in the dissolution month at 20,861 collected records, nearly triple its founding month (7,781) and more than double the LEC-invitation month (9,745), so the field's maximum attention attached to the moment the form specified its own limits. Near Airport's attention evaporated instead of peaking, falling from 1,556 collected records in its founding month to 40 within a month of withdrawal, and The Ruddy Sack's attention peaked at its January and February

crisis months (951 and 865 records), with no competitive result ever drawing an equivalent volume. None of these attention structures was chosen by the teams; each was produced by the field's response to what visibility had already made available. Figure 8.1 presents the monthly volumes.

Figure 8.1

Monthly Discussion Volume by Team Across All Platforms



Note. Collected records per month from the cleaned corpus. Dotted lines mark key organizational events.

The attention structure also outlived the form, and its persistence is measurable as institutional residue. Within weeks of the dissolution, field press was asking "whether the LEC can offset the loss of the Los Ratones audience" and documenting opening-weekend viewership "dropping significantly" against both prior benchmarks (Esports Chart, March 2026). An organization whose absence registers as a measurable problem for the field's central institution has left a structural trace: the attention infrastructure the form built exited with the form, and the field's own analysts treated the resulting gap as a condition the league must now manage. The third integration point, in this final observation, runs past the

organization's lifespan, with the visibility the form created becoming, in its withdrawal, a pressure on the institution that had set the terms of its entry.

This is the condition Reischauer and Ringel (2023) term *unmanaged transparency*, operating here as the third integration point's ordinary state, with nothing failing when it appears. Interaction-level practice became structure-level consequence outside any deliberate institutional channel; meaning, reputation, and accountability were dispersed across the field in forms the originating team could not recall or revise. Transparency, on this evidence, is a modality in a strong sense: it actively conditioned both the practice and its reception, and it did so partly beyond the organization's control.

E. Institutional Hybridity as Team Innovation: Structure Enabling Novel Practices

The fourth integration point holds that hybridity enables teams to draw on multiple institutional logics in creating novel practices. The finding is that the teams' most distinctive practices were logic-spanning by design, that the three-logic configuration generated innovations a two-logic account would not predict, and that adjacent organizational forms holding hybridity without constitutive transparency produced systematically different innovations, which locates the boundary of the integration point.

1. Multi-Purpose Practice Formats

The teams' core practice formats served multiple logics simultaneously. A streamed scrim was both competitive preparation and an entertainment product; a broadcast review session combined team learning with audience education; and players' solo-queue sessions supported individual skill development while also producing content. These formats were innovative in the specific sense that neither parent logic contained them independently. Conventional competitive teams do not broadcast their preparation, while conventional

entertainment channels do not organize content around genuine competitive improvement. Only an organization drawing on both logics could construct practices in which the same activity served both purposes. This integration was deliberate, established in the teams' founding commitments and sustained through their operating routines.

The field recognized and named the multi-purpose accomplishment in its own evaluations:

> u/TheSearchForMars: Caedrel DIDN'T find quick success though. He spent years getting better at the game until he was good enough to go pro, transitioned into casting and built a personal brand, continued to foster that brand through co-streaming and then leveraged the accumulated fame and industry connections to bring together a team of like-minded individuals who shared his goals and then executed on them. He struck the perfect balance of try hard professionalism with goofy marketability and has been rewarded by created [sic: creating] a team that has seen unprecedented success both commercially and professionally. None of that was a shortcut.
>
> (Reddit, October 2025)

The judgment integrates the two functions in a single formulation, presenting professionalism and marketability as qualities held in deliberate balance. Elsewhere, audiences rejected the streamer-team stereotype by concluding that the roster had "proven themselves" as "a good combo" in "a competitive environment" (Reddit, March 2025). This recognition of the format's dual function supports the integration point. Audiences did not interpret the practice streams as entertainment interrupting preparation or preparation

diminishing entertainment. Their evaluative vocabulary instead valued both functions within the same activity.

The multipurpose structure nevertheless had a visible capacity limit, which the Tier 1 period exposed in the individual who most fully embodied it. Community discussion concluded that the founder could not sustain general management, co-streaming, and match-day coaching “simultaneously” (Reddit, November 2025). Multipurpose formats economize on activity by allowing one practice to serve several logics, but the LEC period revealed the limit of that economy. When the institutional environment multiplied the demands placed on each role faster than the format could absorb them, the individual who had integrated the logics became the point at which they began to compete.

The multipurpose format also disciplined the adaptation conducted through it. Because practice served an audience as well as a competitive objective, the teams’ adaptive work had to remain publicly legible. This requirement contributed to the communicative capabilities documented in Chapter 6, including articulating diagnoses aloud, narrating changes in plans, and conducting corrections in terms the audience could follow. Hybridity therefore shaped the texture of adaptive interaction itself, producing an institution-to-team effect through the design of everyday practice.

2. Logic-Spanning Innovations

The innovation with the largest field-level footprint was the co-streaming arrangement through which the form's audience experienced official competition. By the form's final split, field analysis was reporting that "co-streamers now represent the core source of viewership" for the league's broadcasts and that audience attention had shifted "toward personality-driven coverage" (Esports Chart, February 2026). This is a logic-

spanning innovation whose span crossed the organizational boundary entirely: a format the form pioneered for holding its community through competition became the dominant distribution channel for the field's own product, reorganizing the league's broadcast economics around personalities the league does not employ. The arrangement has analogues in traditional sport, where athletes' own media presences increasingly market the leagues that employ them; here the analogue is scaled past marketing to the point of carrying the league's distribution itself. Hybridity, at this scale, stops being a property of one organization's practice and becomes a property of the field's infrastructure, the widest-reaching instance of the fourth integration point in the data.

Beyond the core formats, the cases generated innovations that combined logics in more pointed ways. The Ruddy Sack staged a kayfabe rivalry with Los Ratones, importing a theatrical convention from entertainment into sanctioned competition in the manner of combat sports' staged pre-fight antagonism, and the staging culminated in a genuine playoff meeting between the two teams in May 2025, a direct cross-case event in which manufactured narrative and real competitive stakes coincided. Near Airport's players committed to a celebratory stream contingent on competitive achievement, expressing a competitive aspiration in an entertainment register, a combination the community then enforced as documented in Chapter 7. The Ruddy Sack's Community Fund attempted to convert community logic into an organizational resource base, mobilizing audience support as revenue in an effort to sustain the form's economics. And at the individual level, TFBlade's reformulation of his playing identity was an innovation forced by hybridity: a role solution that reconciled an entertainment-derived personal brand with team-competitive requirements, worked out in public.

These innovations share a structure. Each takes a practice, resource, or identity native to one logic and redeploys it inside another, and each was possible only because the organization was accountable to both logics at once. The three-logic configuration matters here: community logic was the medium through which several of the innovations operated, as the audience enforced the celebratory-stream commitment, funded the Community Fund, and consumed the kayfabe rivalry as knowing participants.

3. Innovation at the Form's Boundary

Organizational forms adjacent to the cases locate the boundary of this integration point. Karmine Corp and Movistar KOI, introduced in Chapter 3, are streamer-founded organizations sustaining competitive and entertainment logics with communities that actively legitimate the combination, and both reached the LEC and succeeded at the field's top level. Their innovations, however, run through a different channel: mass live events, formalized ultras supporter culture, celebrity-anchored launches, and corporate accommodation, all built around competitive operations that remain closed. Hybridity without constitutive transparency produced innovation in the organization's relationship to its audience while leaving its competitive practice conventional. The content teams' innovations, by contrast, were innovations in competitive practice itself, because transparency made practice the site where the logics met. The comparison indicates that hybridity determines that novel practices will emerge, while the modality configuration determines where they emerge, which is the finding that carries forward into the analysis of interdependence below.

4. The Integration Points Across the Three Configurations

The four integration points have been documented most extensively through Los Ratones, whose scale generated the richest record, and the comparative evidence shows that all four operated in every case while their intensity varied with configuration and attention infrastructure. The first point, *adaptation as institutional work*, operated at Near Airport through the same mechanism at smaller reach: the team's diagnostic disclosures, from the pre-season win-rate admission onward, functioned as demonstrations of what the form demands of returning veterans, and the field read them exactly that way, folding the case into the template's demonstration. At The Ruddy Sack the point operated symmetrically in the unfavorable direction, with visible dysfunction becoming field-level evidence, which establishes that the integration point is indifferent to the valence of what it transmits.

The second point, *institutional pressures as adaptation triggers*, differentiated by configuration in the type of pressure each case absorbed. Los Ratones' triggers arrived predominantly from the league side, culminating in the admission conditions themselves; Near Airport's arrived from the commercial and biographical structure of its members' lives, with sponsorship and schooling reaching directly into rosters; and The Ruddy Sack's arrived from the audience side, where the entertainment demand documented as a negative case in Chapter 7 pressed against competitive investment. Each configuration, in other words, selected its own dominant trigger channel, and the channels correspond to the logic each configuration foregrounded.

The third point, *transparency as institutional visibility*, is where scale mattered most. The conversion of practice into demonstration is mediated by attention infrastructure, and the engagement asymmetry documented above means that materially identical practices, a

streamed scrim, a public review, a candid disclosure, produced institutional visibility differing by an order of magnitude across the cases. The integration point held everywhere; the scale of its effects did not, and that difference is the mechanism behind the template-resource separation.

The fourth point, *hybridity as team innovation*, localized innovation differently in each case. Los Ratones innovated inside competitive practice itself, in the formats this section has documented; The Ruddy Sack innovated in spectacle and financing, from owner-perspective broadcasting to the community fund experiment; and Near Airport innovated in the presentation of professional life, extending the form into the veteran-lifestyle register. Hybridity determined in every case that innovation would occur; the announced configuration determined where. Read together, the comparison indicates that the four integration points are properties of the form, not of its flagship, and that configuration and scale determined how strongly a recursion common to all three cases operated.

F. The Interdependence of Transparency and Hybridity in Operation

Chapter 4 proposed that transparency and hybridity operate as interdependent modalities whose combined operation creates the recursive dynamics characteristic of content teams, and that this interdependence should be observable across the adaptation phases. The findings bear the proposal out, and they add a limiting case that the framework could anticipate only abstractly: an episode in which the modalities were separated and the form did not survive the separation.

1. Interdependence Across the Adaptation Phases

Stated at the level of the adaptation phases, the joint necessity runs as follows. *Public diagnosis (situation assessment)* is institutionally consequential only because the diagnosing

organization claims hybrid standing, since a pure entertainment channel's self-assessment would be content and a closed team's would be private *Formulation practices* such as principled abstraction circulate as templates only because transparency exposes them and hybridity marks them as belonging to a form others might adopt. *Execution* under stakes becomes classification material for the field only because both evaluative frames attend to it. And *public learning*, up to the dissolution retrospectives, reads as institutional testimony, not programming, only because the organization doing the learning is understood to be simultaneously a competitor and a broadcaster. At every phase, subtract either modality and the double function collapses into a single-purpose activity with no cross-level consequence, which is the phase-level statement of the co-equality thesis that the limiting case also supports.

During *situation assessment*, hybridity created diagnostic complexity, since the teams assessed their situations against competitive position, audience engagement, and commercial viability simultaneously, and transparency made those multidimensional assessments public. Near Airport's early acknowledgment of its poor scrim record and morale management is the clearest instance: an assessment shaped by multiple success criteria, conducted where the field could see it, becoming a demonstration of hybrid diagnostic practice in the act of being an assessment.

During *plan formulation*, the interdependence produced the formulation practices documented in Chapter 6. Principled abstraction, deferred specification, and channel switching exist because planning content had simultaneous competitive and audience-facing consequences: hybridity meant the plan served multiple goals, and transparency meant its articulation was itself consequential. A planning discussion conducted in these registers

demonstrated to the field that strategic development could occur in the open, while its careful calibration demonstrated equally that transparency has an internal grammar, not an absence of discretion.

During *plan execution*, the teams performed for two evaluative frames at once, executing competitive strategy while remaining legible to an audience, and the audience audited the execution itself, as the criticism of call repetition shows. Execution norms that aligned competitive and communicative demands were the adaptive solution, and their visible operation was, again, a demonstration.

During *team learning*, review sessions extracted lessons under observation, converting the most private phase of conventional team adaptation into public pedagogy, and the disclosure of the LEC scrim record extended learning's publicity even after live broadcast had ceased. Learning under these conditions served the team's improvement and the field's education simultaneously, with the attendant risk, realized in the negative case examined in Chapter 7, that what the field learns from a team's visible interior may damage the team’s standing as easily as build it.

Across all four phases, the pattern is uniform: hybridity supplied the multiplicity of purposes and evaluative frames, transparency supplied the public consequentiality, and neither alone would produce the phenomenon. A transparent single-logic team would demonstrate competence without advancing a contestable claim about organizational form; a private hybrid would navigate its logics without the navigation becoming available as a model. The interdependence is a finding, not a theoretical preference, since the empirical analysis shows each modality failing to account for the phenomenon without the other.

2. The Limiting Case: Separation of the Modalities

The field had anticipated the separation long before the league imposed it. When LEC qualification first became imaginable for Los Ratones in early 2025, community discussion predicted that "the LR we know right now will cease to exist if they go LEC," anticipating "no more public scrims" and sharply reduced content (Reddit, February 2025), a forecast of modality separation issued two seasons before the invitation. The prediction's accuracy is less important than its existence: the field's participants understood transparency as constitutive of the form rather than incidental to it, and they understood the incumbent league's conditions as incompatible with that constitution, well before either proposition was tested. When the test came and the form did not survive it, the outcome matched an expectation the field already held, an indication that the interdependence of the modalities was recognized within the field itself, not imposed by this study's framework.

The LEC episode separated the modalities and thereby displayed their interdependence from its limiting side. By the time of the invitation, Los Ratones had won all three NLC splits and the first two EMEA Masters titles of 2025, a record that made it the most decorated organization in the regional tier, and the circuit framed the invitation in exactly those terms: the announcement described the LEC Versus invitations as reserved for the EMEA Masters Summer champions and "the most consistent, top-performing team across the year," and as "earned through competitive excellence within the ERL ecosystem" LoLEsports, October 2025). Field press granted the same reading, describing the team as leaving the NLC "through the front door" (Sheep Esports, November 2025). The competitive record, in short, was never the disputed term. What the field contested was the pathway. When the format became public in early October, established organizations objected that

they had paid over $20 million for franchise slots the invited teams would occupy without cost, an open letter warned that eliminating the league's exclusive character would undermine its economic balance, and the owner of one franchised organization stated that "the new format was completely made to let Los Ratones play in LEC" (Esports News, October 2025). The controversy thus registered the entanglement this chapter has traced: the field constructed a merit-framed pathway whose existence observers attributed to the team's audience value, and the announcement itself yoked the two registers, citing competitive excellence while inviting the team to "bring their energy and hype to Berlin" (the entertainment logic) The conditions of admission then enforced a separation the form had never made, upholding the competitive institution's norms by requiring the surrender of the team’s broadcast practice that had produced both the record and the audience. Field commentary during the LEC run registered the same entanglement from the other side, treating the engagement surrounding the team's defeat of G2 as itself an object of analysis and explaining it through personalities, access, and restored regular-season stakes as much as through competitive placement (JLXP, ep. 127, February 2, 2026).

What followed the separation completes the finding. With transparency withdrawn, the hybridity persisted as an internal condition, the team still carried its entertainment identity and community, and the competitive substance survived, as Chapter 7's maintenance analysis showed. But the conjunction that had made the team's practice institutionally consequential was gone: closed preparation generated no demonstrations, the adaptive work no longer reached the field, and within one split (the multi-week season segment around which competitive play is organized) the team disbanded, with its principal declining to recommend the model to others. The field's formal structure admitted streamer-founded

organizations through three documented routes: purchase of a franchise slot in Karmine Corp's case, merger into a slot-holding company in KOI's, and invitation conditioned on ceasing the constitutive practice in Los Ratones' case. Only the third route required the organization (Los Ratones) to stop being what it was, which locates the incompatibility in transparency as a practice, not in the streamer-founded form as such. The form's institutional success and its constitutive dissolution were the same event, and the episode demonstrates, more directly than any continuing case could, that the content team exists only in the conjunction of its modalities.

G. Answering the Third Research Question

Across the cases, institutional conditions shaped team adaptation (RQ3a), while publicly visible adaptation contributed to changes in the field (RQ3b). The regional leagues' relaxation of restrictions on practice streaming created space for teams to combine competitive preparation, content production, and audience engagement. As these practices accumulated across streams, social media, and press coverage, they became public demonstrations of an alternative organizational form. Subsequent field-level responses included temporary extensions of scrim-streaming permissions and the introduction of a competitive format capable of accommodating aspects of the teams' model. Yet the conditions of entry into that format separated elements of transparency and hybridity that had previously operated together, and the organizational form did not persist under those conditions.

The archival record contains 205 team-to-field crossings and 168 field-to-team crossings. These are coded instances in which influence traversed the levels in the stated direction: a team practice entered field discourse, or a field-level pressure registered in team

practice. Team-to-field crossings appeared primarily through repeated streams, disclosures, and public demonstrations. Field-to-team crossings more often took the form of discrete interventions, including rule changes, format decisions, and conditions of entry. Team influence therefore accumulated gradually, whereas institutional influence was often exercised through more episodic and consequential decisions.

Three journalistic accounts independently traced substantial portions of this sequence. Two connected Los Ratones' streamed practices and increased league viewership with the subsequent trial permitting LEC teams to stream scrimmages (esports press, March 2025). A third connected the team's contribution to NLC viewership, the introduction of the LEC Versus tournament, and its later dissolution (esports press, March 2026). These accounts corroborate the cross-level relationships identified through the chapter's coding and comparative analysis.

hree properties characterized the recursion. First, the institutional effects of public adaptation depended on audience reach and the infrastructures through which attention circulated. Second, the exchange was asymmetric in process: teams influenced the field through the accumulation of visible practices, while the field responded through episodic interventions. Third, the effects of those practices continued after the organizations themselves had dissolved. Rule experiments, audience expectations, and debates over broadcast value remained part of the field after the teams' departure.

The findings answer the third research question by showing how institutional pressures entered team adaptation as triggers and constraints, and how publicly visible adaptation subsequently became a resource for institutional change. Audience expectations and public scrutiny generated recurring adaptive pressures, while competitive and

commercial institutions produced more consequential interventions. These included The Ruddy Sack's economically motivated roster pivot and the LEC conditions imposed on Los Ratones. Hybridity shaped the teams' responses by allowing competitive, commercial, entertainment, and community objectives to be addressed through the same practices.

Once made public, those practices became available for imitation, evaluation, and incorporation into later field-level decisions. Other teams adopted elements of the model, journalists and community members incorporated it into their accounts of the field, and participants used it in debates over competitive secrecy, streaming, and audience access. Visibility also made failed adaptations available for public evaluation and institutional enforcement. League rules, tournament formats, platform infrastructures, and existing organizational templates shaped the teams' practices; those practices then entered field discourse and informed the conditions under which later adaptation occurred.

The limiting case further shows that transparency and hybridity were interdependent within this organizational form. When league requirements prevented them from operating together, the public demonstrations diminished and the model ceased to operate in its constitutive form.

H. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings for the third research question, organized through the four integration points specified in Chapter 4. Table 8.1 summarizes the findings by integration point.

Table 8.1

Summary of Findings: The Recursive Constitution of Adaptation and Institutional Work

Integration point	Mechanism found	Illustrative evidence

Adaptation as institutional work	The same visible practice functions at both levels with no separate institutional act; the field's press relays demonstration into narrative, and the governing body eventually cited the demonstration as its admission rationale	Streamed reviews as public demonstration; the March 2025 rule-trial sequence; press relay from format to legitimacy to structural consequence; the invitation's stated rationale (LR)
Institutional pressures as adaptation triggers	Audience, platform, league, and commercial pressures supply continuous triggers within an accountability structure hierarchy does not stratify, and the form itself rests on a prior field-level rule change	Sponsorship and schooling as personnel triggers (NA); audience auditing of attendance and integrity; league conditions and the scrim-partner problem (LR); the streaming-rule liberalization as the form's structural precondition
Team transparency as institutional visibility	All four affordances convert practice into demonstration; conversion throughput scales with attention infrastructure, producing order-of-magnitude differences from identical practices; the attention structure concentrates on	Visibility's enabling and constraining faces (LR); persistence as the audience's evidence infrastructure; editability as negotiated curation; engagement asymmetries; the measured

	unmanaged moments and persists as institutional residue after the organization ends	viewership gap after dissolution
Institutional hybridity as team innovation	Hybridity enables multi-purpose formats with visible capacity limits and logic-spanning innovations whose location varies by configuration; the largest innovation reorganized the field's own broadcast infrastructure	Multi-purpose scrim formats and their Tier 1 capacity ceiling (LR); innovation localized in competitive practice (LR), spectacle and financing (TRS), and professional-life presentation (NA); co-streaming as the field's dominant distribution channel
Modality interdependence	Transparency and hybridity are jointly necessary at every adaptive phase; their separation is the limiting case, anticipated by the field's own folk theory, and the form did not survive it	Phase-level joint-necessity analysis; the February 2025 audience prediction of separation; the league condition and the organizational outcome that followed

Adaptation functioned as institutional work without any separate institutional act, and its demonstrations propagated as a template that traveled without its resource base. *Institutional pressures* triggered adaptation from the audience, the platform economy, and

the field's competitive institutions, under an accountability structure that hierarchy did not stratify. *Transparency* converted practice into demonstration through all four platform affordances, with the field's attention concentrating on unmanaged moments. *Hybridity* enabled multi-purpose formats and logic-spanning innovations whose site, in competitive practice itself, distinguished content teams from adjacent streamer-founded forms. The *interdependence of the two modalities* was observable across all four adaptation phases and was evident from its limiting side by the episode in which their separation ended the form.

With this chapter, the dissertation's empirical findings are complete: Chapter 6 answered the first research question at the team level, Chapter 7 answered the second at the field level, and this chapter has answered the third by specifying the recursion that joins them. Chapter 9 steps back from the findings to discuss what they mean, revisiting the theoretical model in their light, drawing out the study's implications for theory and practice, and acknowledging its limitations and the research directions it opens.

IX. Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusion

A. Summary of the Study and Findings

This dissertation examined esports content teams, organizations in competitive League of Legends that broadcast their practice sessions and internal operations while pursuing tournament success. I asked how teams adapt when their work is radically transparent, how their transparent hybrid practices constitute institutional work, and how transparency and hybridity function as the modalities linking team-level adaptation and field-level institutional work. I followed three cases from their foundings to their endings, November 2024 through March 2026: Los Ratones, a European team that treated transparency as organizational philosophy and rose from a national league to the LEC before disbanding in February 2026; Near Airport, a North American team founded in explicit inspiration from Los Ratones that withdrew after a single split; and The Ruddy Sack, a spectacle-forward project built on an established organization's infrastructure whose first iteration ended with the departure of its founding figures. My primary evidence was systematic observation of streamed team activity together with the teams' own published record of foundings, updates, and dissolutions, supplemented by a large body of documentary and archival data capturing how the teams' practices were received across community platforms and the esports press: a cleaned corpus of 121,468 records, from which I flagged 31,472 for close reading and made 38,603 code applications against the study's codebook under the verification design described in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6, summarized in Table 6.1, answered the *first research question*: under radical transparency, adaptation itself is reconstituted. Watching these teams work, I found capabilities that exist because the work is visible: diagnostic talk calibrated for internal and

public audiences at once, formulation practices such as principled abstraction and channel switching that manage what planning reveals, execution norms aligning competitive and communicative demands, and learning conducted as public pedagogy. The archive's persistence extended every phase. It gave the teams organizational memory, and it imposed a recursive accountability in which past practice remains permanently available for reinterpretation.

Chapter 7, summarized in Table 7.1, answered the *second research question*. The same practices functioned as institutional work performed from a distinctive position: the teams were formally embedded in the field's competitive structure while holding no governance authority within it. They created institutional possibilities by demonstrating the hybrid form, and I traced the field taking up the category in its own classificatory talk, incumbent counter-positioning, and professional theorizing. They disrupted the norm of strategic secrecy and the assumed trade-off between competition and entertainment, and in dissolving, they specified the form's limits along the dimensions of member commitment, member orientation, and organizational economics. They maintained competitive logic's substance throughout, with the community enforcing each team's announced configuration from both directions. Two negative cases bounded my account: audiences sometimes demanded entertainment where the teams offered competitive seriousness, and transparency sometimes destroyed legitimacy through the same mechanism by which it elsewhere built it.

Chapter 8, summarized in Table 8.1, answered the *third research question* by showing the two levels recursively constituting each other through the four integration points specified in the theoretical framework. Adaptation functioned as institutional work without any separate institutional act; institutional pressures from audiences, platforms, and

leagues triggered adaptation under an accountability structure that hierarchy did not stratify; transparency converted practice into demonstration through all four platform affordances; and hybridity enabled multi-purpose formats and logic-spanning innovations located in competitive practice itself. I could observe the interdependence of transparency and hybridity across all four adaptation phases, and its limiting side arrived when the LEC's conditions separated the modalities and the form did not survive the separation.

B. Revisiting the Theoretical Model

Chapter 4 proposed a structurational account, presented in Figure 4.1, in which team adaptation occupies the level of interaction, institutional arrangements occupy the level of structure, and transparency and hybridity operate as co-equal, interdependent modalities connecting the two. The cases supported that architecture and pushed back on it in five places, four sharpening relationships the framework anticipated and a fifth it did not anticipate. These refinements, together with the scope conditions stated later in the chapter, are the outputs the theory-elaboration design described in Chapter 5 was built to produce.

First, the model anticipated that *demonstration* would be the mechanism through which team practice acquires institutional consequence. It was, and it was symmetrical in a way I had not built in. Demonstration transmitted whatever the transparent organization enacted, competence and dysfunction alike: The Ruddy Sack's streamed internal conflict became the field's evidence against its own coaching principal, and the community organized that evidence into sustained professional criticism. I now treat demonstration as directionally neutral. Transparency guarantees that practice becomes field-level material, and the valence of the consequence depends entirely on what the practice contains. The

refinement matters because it removes any implication that transparency is a legitimacy strategy. On my evidence, it is a condition under which legitimacy is continuously at stake.

Second, the model anticipated *template diffusion*, and the cases specified a boundary condition: the template travels without its resource base. Near Airport reproduced Los Ratones' practices while commanding roughly a twentieth of its per-video engagement, and actors inside the field and professional observers alike named audience scale as the form's binding economic condition. Demonstration-based diffusion, I conclude, transmits the visible components of an organizational model, its practices, formats, and announced identity, while the associational resources that sustain the model, in this case the founder's network position, stay behind. The model should therefore assign the two halves of demonstration to different affordances: visibility governs what a practice displays, association governs how far and to whom the display travels, and an adopter inherits the first without the second. A template acquired by watching arrives stripped of the network that made it worth watching.

Third, the model treated the *community as the legitimating logic* in the three-logic configuration, and the cases sharpened what the community legitimates. The audience rewarded neither competitive seriousness nor entertainment value in the abstract. What it enforced was fidelity to the configuration each team announced at its founding: it pressed Near Airport toward competitive seriousness when the team framed its aspirations as entertainment, and back toward its entertainment identity when it drifted into conventional competitive staffing. Community logic, I argue, operates less as a third parallel preference than as a configuration-enforcing mechanism, and that is how hybrid arrangements can be externally stabilized in a field with no formal apparatus for certifying them.

Fourth, the model asserted the *co-equality of the modalities* on theoretical grounds, and the cases let me test the assertion from three directions. Adjacent streamer-founded organizations hold hybridity without constitutive transparency, and they produce a recognizably different form, innovating in audience relations while keeping competitive practice closed. The field's first-era organizations held editorial disclosure without the live hybrid claim, and they generated attachment without advancing an organizational model. The limiting case supplied a direct observation: when the LEC's conditions removed transparency while hybridity persisted, the recursion documented in Chapter 8 stopped and the form ended. Neither modality accounts for the phenomenon without the other, and the cases holding each modality alone are why I refuse to rank them.

Fifth, the cases forced a refinement the model never anticipated: the *organization's lifespan and the form's institutional career run on different clocks*. Los Ratones kept generating institutional consequences after it ended, in the measurable gap its audience left in the league's viewership, in the community's canonization of its story, retold as a completed narrative, and in the co-streaming infrastructure that persisted as the field's distribution model. I now read the model's two levels (team and field) as temporally asymmetric. Interaction-level processes end when the organization ends, while the structural traces of its institutional work, attention infrastructures, categories, narratives, and rule changes, persist and continue to condition the field. A structurational account of new organizational forms needs both time scales, because the form's most durable effects may register only after its instantiations are gone.

Across the five refinements, the theoretical architecture held. The four integration points—communicative adaptation as institutional production, institutional pressures as

communicative triggers, visibility as communicative infrastructure, and hybridity as communicative integration work—describe distinguishable empirical processes, and I could observe each one in the cases. The structuration logic organizing them earned its place, because the duality of structure, which researchers ordinarily reconstruct after the fact, ran here in plain sight (between team and field), preserved in the archive that transparency itself produced.

C. Theoretical Implications

The study speaks to five research streams: team adaptation theory, institutional work theory, organizational transparency research, hybrid organizing theory, and the structurational and communicative study of institutions. The contributions follow directly from the refinements above, and I take the streams in turn.

To *team adaptation theory*, I bring evidence of teams adapting under conditions the theory's foundational assumptions exclude. The four-phase model was developed for settings in which adaptive sensemaking is internally bounded, interaction is ephemeral, and performance is evaluated against task-specific criteria. Content teams violate all three assumptions, and adapting under their conditions required capabilities the literature has not needed to name: principled abstraction and deferred specification in formulation, execution norms aligning competitive and communicative demands, frontstage and backstage managed through register and channel where conventional organizations use walls, and learning practices designed for observation. The *bona fide group perspective* is extended in turn. Audiences, competitors, and platforms participated constitutively in adaptation, and the auditing and co-design episodes I documented show that participation reaching into the adaptive process itself. The flattened accountability finding names a structural consequence

of permeable boundaries the perspective has not previously specified: visibility does not respect hierarchy, so transparent teams distribute accountability in ways conventional organizations do not.

To *institutional work theory*, I bring a mode of institutional work conducted by actors formally embedded in a field's competitive structure while holding no governance authority within it, whose influence runs through demonstration and circulation among audiences and media, and whose demonstrations draw credibility from the sanctioned competition in which they are staged. This specifies how institutional work proceeds in the normative and cultural-cognitive registers when the regulative register is closed to the actor, and it identifies the relay through which such work reaches governing institutions: third-party theorizing by credentialed observers who translate enactment into lineage, mechanism, and prescription. The dissolutions extend the theory further. Disbandment, I found, can itself function as institutional work, a public reflexive act through which a form's conditions and limits are named for the field. And the template-resource separation adds a boundary condition on demonstration-based diffusion that the literature, which has more often theorized such diffusion than documented it, has not articulated.

To *organizational transparency research*, I bring the finding that transparency in constitutively transparent organizations routinely exceeds management, and exceeds it most at the moments of highest field attention. The transparency-secrecy nexus and the concept of unmanaged transparency operated here in a setting where transparency is the organizing principle itself, and my attention-volume findings give the concept an empirical signature: the field's engagement concentrated on breakdowns and endings, the moments least subject to organizational control, so the material through which a transparent organization circulates

is disproportionately the material it did not manage. The symmetry finding completes the contribution. Transparency built legitimacy by demonstrating competence and destroyed it by documenting dysfunction through the identical mechanism. I read this as positioning transparency as a condition organizations inhabit, one whose consequences outrun any reputational calculation, and it complicates any prescriptive literature that treats disclosure as a trust technology.

To *hybrid organizing research*, I bring a three-logic configuration, competitive and entertainment logics structuring production with community logic supplying the legitimating force, that differs from the social-commercial hybrids the literature has concentrated on. The legitimating force is also a delegitimating one. The same evaluative operation that granted standing withdrew it, and the granting shares across the three cases, 56 percent for Los Ratones against 30 percent for Near Airport and 38 percent for The Ruddy Sack, register both faces of the operation in a single measure. The configuration-enforcement finding specifies what the community was doing: it assessed and sustained the compatibility of the other two logics, holding each organization to its announced configuration from whichever side it departed. That extends the configurational vocabulary of hybrid organizing to arrangements stabilized by external constituencies that internal governance does not command. The comparison with adjacent streamer-founded forms adds one more specification: hybridity determines that novel practices will emerge, while the organization's modality configuration determines where they emerge, in audience relations for closed hybrids and in competitive practice itself for transparent ones.

Finally, to the *structurational and communicative study of institutions*, I offer an unusually direct empirical illustration. The duality of structure is ordinarily an analytical

inference, reconstructed from interviews and documents after the fact. In these three cases it was a matter of public record, because the same transparency that constituted the organizations preserved every crossing between interaction and structure in a citable archive. The study thereby operationalizes the microfoundational agenda in institutional theory (Bitektine & Haack, 2015): I could observe thousands of individual legitimacy judgments and watch them aggregate into the field-level validity the theory posits. Further, it extends work on legitimacy in digital media (Etter et al., 2019) by showing evaluations that were consequential online as well as expressed there, feeding admission decisions, configuration enforcement, and the form's ending. And the modalities themselves proved to be communicative accomplishments. Transparency and hybridity existed in these cases only as ongoing practices of talk, framing, disclosure, and format design, which locates the structuration process concretely in communication and gives the model's connecting tissue an observable substance.

1. Scope Conditions of the Form

The findings let me state the conditions under which the content team form is viable: five conditions anchored in the case evidence that revealed them, and a sixth, temporal, condition that I hold more tentatively. The first is *member availability*. The form demands full-time professional commitment, and Near Airport's dissolution showed that partial commitment fails structurally, with the practice-schedule gap the team disclosed translating directly into the competitive gap it could not close. The second is *member orientation*. Individual identities must be subordinated to a collective competitive project, and The Ruddy Sack's first iteration showed that a roster organized around personal brands can be coached while resisting, on this evidence, durable integration. The third is *audience scale*.

The form's economics run through attention, with sponsorship value rerouted through the audience the practice assembles, and the order-of-magnitude engagement differences across my cases mark a threshold below which, in the words of one of the field's own principals, the incentive is not big enough. The fourth is *founder position*. The template's practices transfer while the associational resources that made the flagship's demonstration reach the whole field, a founder occupying a central relay position in the attention economy, remain behind, so adopters begin with the form's costs and only part of its returns. The fifth is *institutional accommodation*. The form requires governance conditions that permit constitutive transparency, and the limiting case established that where entry to higher competition is conditioned on surrendering that transparency, admission ends the form it admits.

The sixth condition is *temporal*, and I state it with less confidence than the five above. The form emerged into a specific conjuncture, after the regional leagues liberalized practice streaming and as the field's viewership shifted toward personality-driven co-streamed coverage, and part of its attention economics may have been novelty rent that later instantiations cannot collect. I cannot separate the form's durable appeal from its debut effect, and the scope conditions should be read with that uncertainty attached.

Table 9.1 summarizes the conditions and each case's standing on them. The conditions interact, and failing a single one proved sufficient to end an instantiation: Los Ratones satisfied the first four and dissolved on the fifth; Near Airport failed the first while operating below the audience-scale threshold, with the remaining conditions untested; The Ruddy Sack failed the second while holding institutional accommodation it never had occasion to strain. Stated this way, the scope conditions give the three endings a theoretical

payoff. They specify, for any prospective instantiation or any adjacent field, which questions to ask before the form is attempted, and they predict that instantiations failing different conditions will fail in recognizably different ways, a prediction the three cases already exhibit.

Table 9.1

Scope Conditions of the Content Team Form Across the Three Cases

Condition	Los Ratones	Near Airport	The Ruddy Sack
Member availability: full-time professional commitment	Satisfied throughout by a full-time roster	Failed; the disclosed practice-schedule gap became the competitive gap	Untested as a binding condition; the ending ran through orientation
Member orientation: individual identity subordinated to the collective project	Satisfied; individual identities held to the collective project	Untested at withdrawal	Failed; a personal-brand roster resisted durable integration
Audience scale: attention sufficient to sustain the form's economics	Satisfied at flagship scale (median video engagement 8,019)	Below the named threshold (median 445, roughly a twentieth of the flagship)	Intermediate (median 1,995); never the binding constraint
Founder position: associational reach	Satisfied; the founder's relay position carried	The template arrived without the flagship's reach	Held in part through the founders' established networks

that carries the demonstration	demonstrations field-wide		
Institutional accommodation: governance permitting constitutive transparency	Failed at the LEC, where admission required surrendering transparency	Accommodated in the NACL and untested beyond it	Held; never had occasion to be strained
Temporal conjuncture (provisional): post-liberalization, co-streaming-era attention	Emerged at the conjuncture's opening; debut effect inseparable from durable appeal	Followed the debut, with novelty rent plausibly diminished	Contemporaneous with the flagship; the same uncertainty attached

My home discipline of Communication frames what unifies these contributions. Each of the five streams is advanced by the same underlying communication move: treating adaptation, institutional work, transparency, and hybridity as accomplished in observable talk, formats, and platformed interaction. The adaptive capabilities of Chapter 6 are communicative capabilities, from calibrated diagnostic registers to the naming practices that turn diagnosis into shared vocabulary. The institutional work of Chapter 7 proceeds through announcement, demonstration, reception, and relay, with no lever available to the teams other than communication. The modalities of Chapter 8 are sustained communicative arrangements whose withdrawal ended the form. What this study offers organizational

communication, then, is a case in which the constitutive role of communication requires no assertion against a materialist alternative, because in constitutively transparent organizations there is no organizational backstage where the real work could be hiding: the communication that can be observed is the organization that exists.

D. Methodological Contribution

The study also carries a methodological contribution that is separable from its substantive findings. What I hope the design demonstrates is that a fully unobtrusive, comparative, corpus-scale qualitative study of organizational life is now feasible where organizations are constitutively public. I combined systematic observation of practice, the organizations' complete published record, and a six-figure reception corpus without eliciting a single datum from a participant, which eliminates reactivity and recall bias at the acknowledged price of restricting my claims to public self-presentation. The design extends the netnographic approach I adopted in Chapter 5 (Kozinets, 2020) beyond its home in community and consumer research: netnography can support the study of formal organizations themselves when their operations and their reception are both conducted through online spaces and public archives.

The scale of the undertaking deserves plain statement, because the compressed procedural prose of Chapter 5 understates it. I assembled, cleaned, and documented a multi-platform corpus of 121,468 records spanning streamed video, community forums, social media, and the esports press across each case's full lifespan, founding through ending; flagged 31,472 records for close reading through transparent retrieval instruments; made 38,603 code applications against a codebook I developed through four documented versions; and preserved every stage, from collection scripts to individual exclusion decisions.

Conceptualizing, collecting, managing, coding, and verifying evidence at this scale took up a substantial share of the dissertation's work, and the demonstration that one interpretive researcher can carry it responsibly is part of what the study contributes.

The analytical architecture shows how computational assistance can be incorporated without surrendering interpretive authority. Retrieval was computational, through transparent lexical dictionaries supplemented by semantic similarity to guard against vocabulary the dictionaries could not anticipate. Coding was model-assisted under the codebook, with every application carrying its supporting span and rationale. Verification was layered: an independent audit pass, my adjudication of disagreements, blind validation coding, and the standing rule that I verify every quoted item at its source. The auditability principle, under which no record is silently discarded and every exclusion, dictionary, and decision is preserved in the working record, exists to support my own verification and my committee's scrutiny, and I state its limits as plainly as its value. The underlying corpus and several procedural instruments will not circulate as open materials, because platform terms constrain redistribution and the records aggregate contributions from identifiable community members, so the study stops short of dataset-level replicability. Its checkability lives at the level of the claim: every quoted item carries a public citation that any reader can follow to the source, and Chapter 5 describes the design's logic, staged retrieval, model-assisted coding under a codebook, and layered human verification, in enough detail for other researchers to build their own instantiation suited to their own setting. Computation widened what I could responsibly claim to have examined; the verification architecture kept the interpretive warrant where qualitative epistemology requires it to remain, with me.

E. Practical Implications

The findings carry implications for the actors who populate this field (founders and organizations, esport leagues and publishers, platform and community stakeholders, sponsors and commercial partners, current and prospective members of such teams). I offer them with the caution appropriate to a study of these three cases, all of which have dissolved at various points during my observation.

For *founders and organizations* contemplating the content team form, the findings identify the conditions the dissolutions named. The form demands full professional commitment from members whose existing careers may not accommodate it, an orientation toward collective competitive improvement over individual brand, and an audience scale sufficient to sustain its economics, a scale the evidence suggests does not travel with the template. A prospective founder can copy the practices. My cases show that the copyable practices were never the binding constraint. The symmetry finding adds a governance implication: an organization that broadcasts its practice has committed to being judged on whatever that practice contains, including its conflicts, and should build its internal conduct standards accordingly, because the persistence of the archive converts every internal failure into permanent, citable public evidence.

For *leagues and publishers*, the findings document both the value the form generated and the institutional friction it encountered. The form produced engagement of a kind the field's central competitions have struggled to generate, restored consequence to regional play, and drew professional calls for the leagues to support such connection, yet the field's admission conditions required the form to surrender its constitutive practice at the door. The three documented entry routes pose the design question concretely: whether competitive

institutions can construct participation conditions under which preparation transparency is possible, for instance through consent structures among willing opponents, instead of treating the incompatibility as fixed. Chapter 7 showed that the invitation's value rested on the form's audience more than on its results, which implies the leagues already recognize what the form delivers. The unresolved question is whether their structures can accommodate how it delivers it.

For *platform and community stakeholders*, the findings underline that audiences in this field are participants in organizational life. Communities enforced configurations, audited practice, proposed formats, funded experiments, and policed professional conduct with evidence the organizations themselves supplied. Anyone designing community infrastructure, from team-adjacent subreddits to co-streaming arrangements, is designing part of the organizational system itself, and I mean that literally: the audience appears inside the adaptation cycle of Chapter 6 and inside the maintenance work of Chapter 7.

For *sponsors and commercial partners*, the findings reframe what a content team sells. Conventional esports sponsorship prices competitive prestige. A content team delivers something different: a documented, high-attachment relationship between an audience and an organization whose daily work that audience watches, closer in kind to the audience assets of professional wrestling or long-running reality competition formats than to a conventional sports property. The engagement asymmetries reported in Chapter 8 show how unevenly that asset is distributed across instantiations. Partners evaluating the form should therefore price the audience infrastructure ahead of the roster or the trophy case, should expect their association to be evaluated by the community in the same authenticity currency that governs everything else the team does, and should recognize that the archive works on

them too, since a partnership entered publicly is exited publicly, with the reasoning subject to the field's interpretation.

For *current and prospective members of such teams*, the findings describe what joining the form entails at the level of the individual career. The compressed professional apprenticeship the flagship provided was real and publicly certified, with each player's season-long development itemized in the organization's own retrospective and adjudicated in the field's discussion. The same visibility that accelerated development also produced a permanent, citable record of every setback, recurrence, and conflict. Members of transparent teams should expect their working selves to be archived, their effort and sincerity to be continuously priced in the field's authenticity judgments, and their individual brands to stand in documented tension with the collective project, since the cases show that tension, unresolved, is one of the form's failure modes. The form offers development, visibility, and attachment that conventional organizations cannot match. Its price is a working life conducted on the record.

F. Limitations

Several limitations bound these contributions. The study is qualitative and interpretive, and its claims concern how the phenomena operate, leaving questions of frequency, statistical significance, and generality aside. This suits the research questions, which are questions of process and mechanism, but it carries the consequence that the analysis does not establish the prevalence or cross-context generality of the patterns it identifies.

The study's evidence consists entirely of naturally occurring public material: streamed practice, the teams' published statements, and the documentary and archival record

of their reception. As noted above under methodological contributions, this unobtrusive design captures organizational life as it was actually conducted and avoids the reactivity of researcher-elicited accounts, and it means that participants' understandings are accessed only as they chose to articulate them publicly. Private deliberations that never reached a stream or an announcement, and interpretations the members held but did not voice, lie outside the study's reach, and claims about participants' perspectives are accordingly claims about their public self-presentation.

The archival evidence concerning field-level reception, while collected systematically, supports claims about observed uptake and consistent interpretation, stopping short of measured adoption across the field. The three cases were selected for theoretical variation, not representativeness, and two dissolved during the study period, with the third disbanding shortly after its top-tier debut. The endings proved analytically generative, providing compressed evidence of the form's conditions and limits, and they also mean that the study observed the form substantially through its difficulties. A content team that achieved durable institutional establishment might exhibit dynamics this study could not capture. Finally, the field itself is young, publisher-governed, and platform-dependent, so the findings' transfer to transparent organizing in other industries is a question for research, not an assumption.

Two further limitations attach to the computational elements of the design. The model-assisted coding was audited through an independent second-model pass over a random 15 percent sample of the coded records, with code-level agreement of 62%; agreement was highest for concretely descriptive code families, reaching roughly 83 to 84%, and lower (35-40%) for higher-inference families (the audit procedure and results are

reported in Chapter 5). The coded figures in the findings chapters should therefore be read as descriptions of the corpus the pipeline produced, with descriptive families carrying more evidentiary weight than interpretive ones. The qualitative claims of this dissertation were developed through direct reading of the underlying material and do not rest on the coded counts, and any analysis that did draw on them would need to weight code families by their audited agreement. The second limitation concerns the descriptive instruments, which carry their documented weaknesses, from the sentiment lexicon's unreliability on gaming vernacular to the retrieval orientation of the flagging procedure, which is why the study confined those instruments to contextualization and sampling and located its evidentiary weight in verified close reading. The division of labor was designed for exactly this contingency: if the audit shifts the coded distributions, the descriptive context adjusts while the mechanism claims, grounded in verified episodes, stand or fall on their own evidence.

G. Future Research

These limitations point where further work should go. Research incorporating participant accounts, gathered through interviews with members of content teams or of the organizations that observe them, could examine how the public self-presentations I analyzed relate to members' private understandings, and whether the adaptive capabilities identified in Chapter 6 are experienced as deliberate strategies or emergent accommodations. Netnography's own methodological trajectory supports this pairing, since the approach I extended in Chapter 5 was built to combine archival immersion with participant engagement (Kozinets, 2020). The diffusion I documented internally invites systematic research on how content team practices travel across the field, including whether the separation between

transmissible practices and untransferred associational resources holds across subsequent adoptions, and whether adopters who hold comparable network positions fare differently.

The recursive mechanisms identified here could be examined in other transparent organizational forms, from open-source software projects to public-building companies and organizations that broadcast internal decision-making, testing whether the four integration points and the modality interdependence are specific to competitive content teams or characteristic of constitutively transparent organizing more broadly. The configuration-enforcement role of community invites study wherever external constituencies stabilize hybrid arrangements. And the durability question remains open: whether the content team is a transitional form that the field's established institutions ultimately absorb or exclude, as the LEC episode might suggest, or a model that reshapes field-level expectations over a longer horizon than I could observe. The professional commentary examined in Chapter 7 posed that question to the field directly; longitudinal research can pose it empirically.

Comparisons with other transparent forms of organizing clarify these scope conditions, provided they are drawn carefully. Open-collaboration projects, including open-source software and Wikipedia, institutionalize comprehensive process transparency as a field norm. Their working processes are publicly archived and have become objects of systematic study in their own right (Neupane et al., 2026), while their governance literature documents forms of auditing, archive-based accountability, and configuration policing similar to those identified here (O'Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). What these projects generally lack is an entertainment logic. Their audiences consist primarily of contributors and users. Although Wikipedia editing disputes may attract observers interested in their drama, spectatorship remains peripheral to the enterprise: entertainment does not organize the work,

and organizational revenue does not depend on sustaining audience attention. This comparison separates the mechanics of transparency from the attention economy that supported the content-team cases. It also brings out a distinction anticipated by the definition of radical transparency. In open collaboration, process transparency is already a field norm, so the evidentiary and disruptive dynamics produced here by departure from established norms are less likely to arise. Build-in-public startups similarly disclose organizational processes, but they do so primarily before audiences of customers and investors. This orientation limits the evaluator-spectator role and the authenticity judgments evident in the content-team cases. Competitive fields adjacent to esports, including chess streaming and speedrunning, combine transparency and entertainment more closely, but generally at the level of individual performers, not formal organizations. The content team's distinctiveness therefore lies in combining constitutive transparency with logic-plural hybridity at the level of a formal organization embedded in a sanctioned competitive structure. The mechanisms identified in this dissertation should transfer to other settings in proportion to the extent that they share this conjunction of conditions.

Comparative field research would also test how governance environments condition the form. The two leagues in this study differed in structure and in their accommodation of transparent participants, and the cases' trajectories differed with them. Systematic comparison across regions, and across publisher-governed against federation-governed esports, could establish how much of the form's viability is set by the institutional environment and how much by the organization's own conditions.

The audience side of the phenomenon warrants study in its own right and connects to an established scholarly lineage. Hayward (1992) documented soap opera audiences

influencing serial production before the internet provided them with a shared venue; Baym (2000) showed how such audiences could develop into durable and observable online communities; Tofler et al. (2019) identified web-series audiences as gatekeepers in script development and commissioning; and Cao et al. (2026) traced micro-drama production organized around real-time viewer feedback. The cases examined here extend this trajectory from audiences shaping cultural texts to audiences participating in organizational life as auditors, co-designers, and enforcers of organizational configurations. Research centered on these communities could examine how members understand and experience these roles, what distinguishes communities that sustain attachment through failure from those that convert visibility into punishment, and how authenticity judgments are formed, negotiated, and revised through community discourse.

The methodological design also opens several directions for future research. The corpus could support quantitative extensions of questions addressed qualitatively in this dissertation, including event-structured analyses of how legitimacy judgments respond to institutional developments, measurements of how named practices diffuse across field organizations, and formal comparisons of reception across configuration types. Such designs also raise methodological questions of their own. Future research could compare model-assisted retrieval with traditional sampling in terms of coverage and bias and examine how auditing and adjudication procedures should scale as computational assistance becomes increasingly common in qualitative research.

H. Conclusion

This dissertation began from a phenomenon that existing theory addressed only in parts: organizations that compete while broadcasting the competition's preparation, that

entertain while pursuing competitive excellence, and that do both before audiences who evaluate and circulate everything they see. Following three such organizations from founding to ending, I found that their transparent practices functioned simultaneously as team-level adaptation and field-level institutional work, that the two levels recursively constituted each other through specifiable integration points, and that transparency and hybridity operated as co-equal, interdependent modalities whose conjunction defined the form and whose separation ended it.

Before closing, the dissertation's novelties bear listing in one place, because they are distributed across nine chapters and their combination is itself part of the contribution. The study examined a novel empirical context: an organizational form, the esports content team, that had not previously been the object of systematic organizational research and that joins constitutive transparency to three-logic hybridity in a formal organization embedded in a sanctioned competitive structure. It integrated four theoretical frameworks, team adaptation theory, institutional work theory, institutional logics and hybrid organizing, and platform affordances, within a single structurational model, not piecemeal. It worked at two levels of analysis and made the recursion between them its central object, instead of holding one level constant to study the other. It drew on an unusually wide range of naturally occurring data, from 152 hours of streamed practice observation and the teams' complete published record to a cleaned archival corpus of 121,468 records spanning four platforms and the esports press, collected without eliciting a single datum from a participant. It combined manual and computational analysis in a layered design, human observation and coding of practice alongside dictionary-based retrieval, semantic supplementation, and model-assisted coding under a codebook, with human verification at every stage. And it followed three

comparative cases of the form from founding to ending, so that the form's limits, and not only its operation, came into view. Each element has precedent; their combination in a single study of a single phenomenon does not.

The content team proved to be a strategic site for observing something most organizations keep hidden: the recursive constitution of organizational practice and institutional structure, rendered visible and preserved in the archive by the radical transparency that defined the form. The teams adapted in public, and their adaptation became the field's material. The field's conditions reached back into their practice, and in the end set the terms the form could not survive. That the form named its own limits on the way out, in dissolution statements specifying where commitment, orientation, and economics give way, is perhaps its most distinctive institutional legacy. Organizations rarely explain themselves this thoroughly. These did, because for them the explaining and the organizing were the same activity.

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Appendix A: Observational Codebook for the Team-Level Analysis

This codebook documents the analytic codes and phase-anchored categories developed from the field note corpus (over fifty session entries, November 2024 through February 2026) for the team-level analysis reported in Chapter 6. Analytic coding stayed close to the teams' talk, retaining in vivo labels where teams named their own practices. I then consolidated the analytic codes into five categories by relating each phase's recurring practices to the condition of transparent performance they manage. Tables A.1 through A.5 present the codes by category. Anchoring instances cite the session date recorded in the field notes; all quoted phrases were captured verbatim in the notes and verified against the archived video-on-demand record.

Category 1: Public Diagnosis Work

Phase: situation assessment. Condition managed: diagnosing the team's own state and the competitive situation before audiences and opponents.

Table A.1

Analytic Codes for Public Diagnosis Work (Situation Assessment)

Analytic code	Definition	Anchoring Instance
comfort disclosure	A member states their own confidence or comfort with a champion or role as diagnostic input to a collective decision	Repeated comfort check-ins with substitute support Kelpo during draft discussions (NA vs UCI scrim block, April 3, 2025)
self-quantification	The team discloses its own performance metrics,	Pobelter's disclosure of a roughly ten percent scrim win rate in pre-season (NA

	including unflattering ones, as shared diagnostic material	founding announcement, March 2025); IWillDominate's running disclosure of scrim records against named opponents (TRS)
opponent-model talk	Public reasoning about the opponent's likely picks, tendencies, or intentions	Pre-game discussion of NNO's likely champion selections and their implications (LR, November 26, 2024)
information camp (in vivo)	Routing early resources to generate information about the opponent before committing to a plan	Caedrel's instruction to start at raptors as an "information camp" to locate the enemy jungler before committing to a lane swap (LR)
dual-register explanation	The same diagnosis articulated in technical terms for the team and accessible terms for the audience	Pre-game preparation talk moving between technical assessment and accessible framing (LR, November 26, 2024)
exposure-risk talk	Assessing what the act of public assessment itself reveals to opponents	Open discussion of whether opponents were watching the team's stream during champion select, and the decision to refocus on play (NA vs Winthrop playoffs, May 24, 2025)

Category 2: Protected Formulation

Phase: plan formulation. Condition managed: planning collectively without creating commitments that observation makes exploitable.

Table A.2

Analytic Codes for Protected Formulation (Plan Formulation)

Analytic code	**Definition**	**Anchoring Instance**
principled abstraction	Plans articulated as portable principles rather than as specific tactical commitments	"When you open the map, commit to a unified side"; "your first objective after a fight is to define the next step" (LR reviews)
deferred specification and channel switching	Sensitive formulation moved to lower-visibility channels or sessions, particularly before official matches	Announced practice of keeping selected sessions ahead of major matches private (LR, from founding announcement onward)
patch reading	Plans rebuilt from an environmental or rule change originating outside the team	Session organized around new-season objective priorities and Voidgrubs strength, with unconventional picks tested against the changed conditions (LR vs Nord, January 6, 2025)
comfort-versus-optimal negotiation	Openly traded choices between champion	Deciding between Yone and Jayce against Aatrox by checking players'

	comfort and draft optimality	comfort rather than asserting the standard answer (NA vs UCI, April 3, 2025)
contingency reformulation	Plans reorganized in real time around personnel change	Formulation shifted onto Pobelter and Doublelift around substitute jungler Armao's champion pool (NA vs CCG block); competitive week formulated around two substitutes (NA roster announcement, April 28, 2025)
capability-based draft philosophy	Draft strategy derived from candid collective self-assessment of what the team plays well and badly	Agreement to discard setup-heavy compositions the team acknowledged playing badly (TRS, February 18, 2025)

Category 3: Coordination Discipline

Phase: plan execution. Condition managed: executing coordinated action under sustained observation.

Table A.3

Analytic Codes for Coordination Discipline (Plan Execution)

Analytic code	**Definition**	**Anchoring Instance**
commit-immediately rule (in vivo)	Once a play is opened, all members commit fully and at once, even to a suboptimal	Rule established in review after the team was caught split during a

	play, to avoid being caught between decisions	Baron setup (LR, November 25, 2024)
present-tense communication	Coordination talk restricted to the current situation and next step rather than narration of past events	Interruption of "pointless commentary," players narrating past events during ongoing fights (TRS, April 2025)
grouped-play prescription	Explicit norms for coordinated five-player movement against isolated individual play	"Holding hands"; critique of "homeless" playstyle where players lack a clear collective objective (LR)
overcommit correction	Recognizing a lost situation and disengaging rather than forcing a play that cannot be won	Guest coaching critique of over-committing to disadvantageous fights when a teammate is caught (LR, Bwipo session, December 2024)
spell-state tracking	Continuous factual call-outs of resource states during fights	"Sera flash," "no flash" tracking during a high-stakes team fight (TRS)
performance-context identity claim (stage team, in vivo)	Asserting that the team's execution materializes under match conditions rather than in practice	Self-labeling as a "stage team" after disclosing an 0 and 7 scrim record (TRS)

execution-under-compromise	Maintaining established execution norms when the plan itself has been visibly damaged	Playing out the series after the accidental Anivia lock-in, including a mid-series strategic pivot and a decisive fifth game (NA vs Winthrop, May 24, 2025)

Category 4: Learning on the Record

Phase: team learning. Condition managed: extracting lessons candidly in public with a persistent archive.

Table A.4

Analytic Codes for Learning on the Record (Team Learning)

Analytic code	**Definition**	**Anchoring Instance**
coach self-inclusion	The coach applies the session's accountability standards to themselves before the team	"Yeah, int less" (LR, November 25, 2024)
accountability-appreciation sequencing	Direct critique paired within the same session with structured positive recognition	Gratitude exercise concluding the session in which Nata's communication was directly criticized (TRS, April 2025)
habit naming (solo queue urge, in vivo)	Condensing a recurring diagnosed failure into a shared term available	Naming of the "solo queue urge," the habit of pushing one extra wave instead of resetting (LR, November 25, 2024)

	for shorthand correction	
rule extraction	Reviews concluding in an articulated principle for subsequent application	Post-game reviews formulating principles from identified breakdowns, documented across all three cases
endpoint retrospective	Learning conducted at the scale of a season or the organization itself at an ending	Dissolution retrospective articulating the full-commitment lesson (NA, June 16, 2025); season conclusion broadcast reconstructing the arc, assigning accountability, and drawing model-level lessons (LR, February 12, 2026); "failed project" post-mortem (TRS)
archive-anchored accountability	The persistent record invoked to hold members to prior commitments or to document recurrence	Repeated documentation of Baus's coordination challenges across sessions (LR); planned public release of scrim results after the split (LR)

Category 5: Visibility Boundary Work

Cross-phase. Condition managed: the line between what practice makes visible and what it withholds, actively maintained as part of adaptive work.

Table A.5

Analytic Codes for Visibility Boundary Work (Cross-Phase)

Analytic code	**Definition**	**Anchoring Instance**
observation acknowledgment	The fact of being watched enters team talk explicitly	Moments recorded across the corpus in which being observed visibly entered team activity, per the observation protocol
audience-directed pedagogy	Talk formulated to make professional reasoning legible to viewers	Accessible framings of diagnostic logic in pre-game talk (LR); developmental framing of comfort disclosures (TRS, January 2025)
disclosure boundary talk	Explicit articulation of what stays private and why	Private sessions ahead of major matches (LR); disclosure of the existence of merger talks while respecting NDA limits (LR, February 2026)
planned record release	Commitments to convert withheld practice into public record on a schedule	Commitment to publish full scrim results after the split ends (LR, February 2026)

Notes on Use

The five categories are the constructs analyzed in Chapter 6, where public diagnosis work appears as situation assessment under the dual-audience diagnostic problem, protected formulation encompasses principled abstraction and channel switching, coordination discipline organizes the execution norms, learning on the record organizes the debrief practices and endpoint retrospectives, and visibility boundary work corresponds to the transparency-secrecy management analyzed across phases. Analytic codes were applied at the level of the timestamped observation; categories were applied at the level of the adaptation episode. Twenty-nine analytic codes are documented here; in vivo codes retain the teams' own language.

Appendix B: Computational Codebook for the Team Adaptation and Institutional Transformation in Content Teams

This codebook operationalizes the study's theoretical framework for coding team-produced and circulation data. Code families reflect the framework's levels and linkages: team-level adaptation codes (TA) apply primarily to team-produced material; field-level codes (IW, LOG, LEG, REC) apply primarily to circulation evidence; modality and affordance codes (MOD, AFF) apply across both; cross-level codes (CL) capture enacted interaction between the levels, grounded in the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984). Any unit may receive multiple codes. Every code entry follows the same structure: a definition with its literature grounding, the markers that warrant application, and a boundary note distinguishing the code from its nearest neighbors.

Terminology discipline: visibility is reserved for the platform affordance (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Treem & Leonardi, 2013) and for the visibility regime framework (Flyverbom, 2019); transparency refers to the organizational practice of deliberately leveraging affordances to make internal operations publicly accessible (Albu & Flyverbom, 2016). Psychological safety is treated as theoretical context and is not coded.

Unit of analysis: for Reddit posts and comments, YouTube comments, and tweets, the unit is the full item. For news articles and transcripts, the unit is the paragraph or turn of talk; a single article may yield multiple coded units.

TA - Team Adaptation (Burke et al., 2006; Marks et al., 2001)

The four-phase adaptive cycle: situation assessment, plan formulation, plan execution, and team learning, unfolding within and between performance episodes (DeChurch & Haas, 2008; Marks et al., 2001; Waller, 1999). Attribute for all TA codes:

timing = in-task (during active performance) or between-task (transition periods); in circulation data, always second-order (see conventions). Phases are iterative and may co-occur within one unit.

TA-SA Situation Assessment. Recognizing that current circumstances have changed and understanding why a response is necessary (Burke et al., 2006). Markers: cue recognition statements ("their jungler hasn't shown in a while"); situational awareness sharing ("anyone see the ADC's position?"); anomaly detection; collective interpretation of environmental signals, including patch changes, meta shifts, roster problems, and audience feedback treated as an information stream. Boundary: assessment identifies and interprets the changed situation; once talk turns to what to do about it, code TA-PF instead or additionally.

TA-PF Plan Formulation. Translating assessment into intended courses of action (Burke et al., 2006; Mathieu et al., 2000). Markers: goal specification ("our goal is to stall until late game"); strategy proposals ("let's run a 1-3-1"); evaluation of alternatives; resource identification and role assignment; contingency anticipation ("if they ban it, we pivot to..."). Boundary: formulation is prospective talk about intended action; directives issued during execution belong to TA-PE, and evaluations of completed action belong to TA-TL.

TA-PE Plan Execution. Enacting plans while monitoring their effectiveness through coordination, mutual monitoring, and backup behavior (Burke et al., 2006; Marks et al., 2001). Markers: coordination commands ("engage NOW"); reactive adjustments ("abort, fall back"); backup behavior and mutual performance monitoring; the running commentary of executing while evaluating whether the plan is working. Boundary: execution talk is concurrent with performance; in circulation data it appears almost exclusively as second-

order description of the team's coordination (audience comms critiques), which is coded but never treated as first-order evidence.

TA-TL Team Learning. Extracting lessons from adaptation experiences and updating the collective knowledge base (Burke et al., 2006; Edmondson, 1999; Oertel & Antoni, 2015). Markers: performance recaps ("at 20 minutes we were ahead, then we lost two teamfights"); explicit lesson extraction ("main lesson: better vision control when ahead"); formal or informal debriefs; public self-criticism paired with commitments to change. Boundary: learning implies change to shared knowledge; a momentary in-game adjustment is TA-PE, and a recap without any extracted lesson is description, which may warrant no TA code.

TA-TRIG Adaptation Trigger. The prompting event of an adaptation episode (Burke et al., 2006). Markers: the identified prompting event, with the trigger source recorded in notes: game environment (patch, meta), competitive field (opponent behavior, results), roster or personnel availability, or institutional pressure. Institutional pressures are triggers in their own right, reflecting the institutional complexity in which hybrid organizations operate (Greenwood et al., 2011): league and publisher rules, sponsor expectations, community norm enforcement, and conflicts among logics can each initiate adaptation and should be recorded as such rather than folded into background. Boundary: TA-TRIG marks the identified prompt; the team's interpretation of it is TA-SA, and field commentary about pressures without any team response in view codes LOG or REC-FIELD instead.

IW - Institutional Work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006)

Purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions, performed through mundane everyday practice as much as deliberate projects (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Smets et al., 2012). For content teams this work operates largely through the visibility of organizational practice and through narrative (Zilber, 2009). Code both the teams' actions and field actors' performances of the same work: a journalist theorizing why the model succeeds is doing creation work in circulation. Record the subform in the subform/component attribute.

IW-C Creating. Establishing new organizational forms, practices, roles, or norms (David et al., 2013; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Subforms with markers: advocacy (mobilizing support for the model: "more leagues should want teams like this"); defining (specifying what counts as a content team or as legitimate practice within the form); constructing identities (articulating new roles such as the player-creator, or narrating what this team is: founding videos, owner-voice roster framings); theorizing (articulating cause-and-effect or moral accounts of why the model works: "a clear and repeatable formula for audience growth"); changing normative associations (recasting practices once considered unprofessional as appropriate). Founding announcements and launch coverage are prime IW-C sites. Boundary: creation work builds the new arrangement; celebrating or defending an arrangement already established shades into IW-M valorizing, and audience recognition of the form without normative construction is REC-MODEL.

IW-M Maintaining. Reproducing and defending existing institutional arrangements, whether of the traditional field or of the new form once established (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Subforms with markers: enabling (creating supports and rules that sustain practice);

policing (enforcing standards: credential challenges, professionalism critiques of principals); deterring (raising costs of deviant practice); valorizing and demonizing (celebrating exemplars, castigating violators); mythologizing (founding stories and histories that consolidate legitimacy, a narrative mode of institutional maintenance, Zilber, 2009: "Los Ratones the Movie," retrospectives that fix the narrative); embedding and routinizing (folding the new practice into ordinary schedules, formats, and expectations). Boundary: maintenance presupposes an arrangement to preserve; the same celebratory talk is IW-C when the form's standing is still being established, and simple positive evaluation without normative enforcement is LEG-GRANT.

IW-D Disrupting. Undermining established institutional arrangements (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Subforms with markers: disconnecting sanctions (detaching rewards and penalties from existing practice); disassociating moral foundations (severing a practice from its taken-for-granted moral grounding); undermining assumptions (exposing the contingency of what seemed necessary: "if hiding scrims made no difference I don't see why all teams do it"). The core disruption in this study is the challenge that broadcast practice poses to the assumed necessity of competitive secrecy, a challenge to the field's information-control arrangements (Bernstein, 2012); it is usually incremental and demonstrative rather than confrontational. Boundary: disruption targets the institution's foundations, and the unit must perform the undermining rather than describe discontent. Discursive performance counts: asserting the contingency of what seemed necessary, severing a practice from its moral grounding, or detaching sanctions is disruption work even in a comment. Reporting weak incentives, rebutting a claim, criticizing a team's performance (LOG or LEG territory), or expressing nostalgia for prior arrangements performs nothing and is at most REC-FIELD.

LOG - Institutional Logics (Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)

The framework specifies three logics. Competitive and entertainment logics organize production; community logic mediates legitimacy and evaluation, a configuration characteristic of organizations embedded in participatory digital fields (Cunningham et al., 2021; Heidenreich et al., 2022). There is no separate commercial logic in this framework: talk about money, sponsorship, or economic viability is coded to the logic whose viability it evaluates (viewership economics under entertainment; sustainability through engagement, membership, and normative standing under community; prize and salary economics under competitive). Code a logic when its value criterion is substantively invoked as the standard of evaluation or the basis of action, whether or not the logic is named.

LOG-COMP Competitive logic. Value criterion: winning, skill, and strategic excellence (Thornton et al., 2012, on field-specific instantiations of logics). Markers: evaluation through results, rankings, and qualification ("they finished 4th with 40% of the scrims"); demands for practice discipline and preparation ("guys who want to scrim five days a week"); skill benchmarking against reference teams; competitive integrity concerns. Boundary: naming a match or score in passing does not invoke the logic; the criterion must be doing evaluative or motivational work in the unit.

LOG-ENT Entertainment logic. Value criterion: audience engagement, narrative, personality, immediacy, and affective connection; includes viewership economics. Markers: evaluation through watchability and content value ("I don't know a single player, it doesn't feel content team anymore"); personality-driven appeal; production and format choices justified by viewer experience; viewership numbers as success measures. Boundary: mere mention of streaming or videos does not invoke the logic; entertainment value must serve as

the standard, and audience evaluation grounded in belonging or reciprocity belongs to LOG-COMM.

LOG-COMM Community logic. Value criterion: legitimacy and authority grounded in shared identity, belonging, and mutual recognition (Cunningham et al., 2021; Heidenreich et al., 2022; Parry, 2019). Markers: audience input into organizational decisions (polls, chat deliberation, votes on rosters, names, designs); recognition of community members as stakeholders rather than consumers; transparent communication framed as owed to the community; cultivation of belonging through shared rituals and insider knowledge; community evaluation, sanctioning, and normative judgment of team conduct; participatory commitments honored or breached; sustainability through engagement and membership. Community logic conditions the viability of hybrid arrangements; it does not organize competitive labor. Boundary: enthusiasm from a fan is not community logic, and neither is impact talk or we-framing by itself. The logic is invoked when belonging, reciprocity, or participatory standing operates as the evaluative criterion, or when a participatory practice recognizing community members as stakeholders (votes, polls, deliberation the team solicits or honors) is described or enacted. Authenticity judgments without either ground are REC-AUTH.

LOG-TENSION Logic tension/blending. Explicit trade-offs or integration across any pair or all three logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014), including the triadic form in which production tensions between competitive and entertainment logics are adjudicated by community evaluation. Markers: either-or framings ("take it seriously or just be a content team"); time and resource allocation dilemmas; integration claims ("proper coaching is the actual content people want"). Convention: co-code each constituent logic

substantively invoked. Boundary: the mere co-presence of two logics in one unit is not tension; the unit must pose their relationship as trade-off, conflict, or deliberate integration.

LEG - Legitimacy (David et al., 2013; Suchman, 1995)

Legitimacy is the generalized perception that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within socially constructed systems of norms and beliefs (Suchman, 1995); for new organizational forms it must be actively constructed against the templates of an existing field (Battilana et al., 2009; David et al., 2013). In this framework legitimacy work is triadic: standing is demonstrated against competitive norms (skill, results, integrity), entertainment norms (viewership, cultural relevance), and community norms (authentic engagement, honored participatory commitments). Record the basis of every LEG code in the subform/component attribute as competitive, entertainment, or community; multiple bases may be recorded when the text invokes them. LEG codes apply only when the unit renders or reports a judgment whose object is the team's or the form's standing, appropriateness, viability, or right to its position (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Tost, 2011). No surrounding dispute is required: an endorsement grants standing whether or not anyone is contesting it. What the floor excludes is evaluation whose object is performance quality rather than standing; such units code the logic supplying the criterion, most often LOG-COMP.

LEG-GRANT Legitimacy granting. Field actors treating the team or the content-team model as appropriate, viable, professional, or exemplary. Markers: endorsements by established organizations or figures; favorable comparison to traditional teams; merit-based defenses of position ("they won last EMEA's so it is clear why they can go in"); skeptic conversion narratives ("why Los Ratones proved me wrong"). Boundary: the test is the

object of the judgment. Praise of a play, a result, or a video evaluates performance and codes LOG-COMP or LOG-ENT; granting requires the judgment to concern the team's or the form's standing, appropriateness, viability, or right to its position, as in endorsements, merit-based defenses of position, and treating the model as a viable kind. Evidence marshaled for a claim about a third party does not place the case team's standing in view.

LEG-CONTEST Legitimacy contestation. Challenges to appropriateness, viability, or the team's right to its position. Markers: category denial ("not a real team"); viability predictions grounded in the form ("it was a matter of time till they get bored and leave"); slot-occupancy objections ("taking up an ERL spot and not trying to win"); procedural challenges to how position was obtained; credential and professionalism challenges to principals where standing is at stake. Boundary: the same object test applies. Criticism of performance or direction whose object is quality of play or content codes LOG or MOD-HYB; contestation requires the challenge to concern standing, category membership, viability, or right to position. Hostile tone alone is not contestation, and fan abuse or hatewatching described without a standing claim is out of the family.

MOD - Modalities (Giddens, 1984)

Transparency and hybridity are the two modalities through which team-level interaction and field-level structure are linked in this framework, in the structurational sense of modalities as the means through which interaction draws on and reproduces structure (Giddens, 1984).

MOD-TRANS Transparency modality. The organizational practice of deliberately making internal processes observable, and its consequences. Transparency is distinct from the affordances it leverages: it is a strategic organizing choice about which practices to make

visible, to whom, and for what purposes, and it actively reshapes practices, roles, and norms rather than merely revealing them (Albu & Flyverbom, 2016; Flyverbom, 2019). Components (record in subform/component): infrastructure, where platform affordances make bounded team practices observable, persistent, and portable to field-level audiences (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Treem & Leonardi, 2013); and performance, where adaptation is conducted as public performance, with strategic framing, selective disclosure, managed timing, and cultivated audience relationships (Christensen & Cheney, 2015; Goffman, 1959; Ringel, 2019). Markers: streamed scrims, drafts, and reviews as practice; disclosure decisions and their reasoning; information trade-off talk (opponents learning strategies; Bernstein, 2012, on the costs of observability); reputational consequences of visible conduct; audiences citing streamed practice as their evidence base ("from watching their scrims"). Boundary: the fact that content exists on a platform does not invoke the modality; the making-observable of internal process, or its consequences, must be at issue. Consequences that cross levels (a field actor acting on what visibility revealed) additionally take a CL code.

MOD-HYB Hybridity modality. The multiple-logic constitution of the team and the communicative integration work it requires (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Battilana et al., 2015; Besharov & Smith, 2014). Subforms (record in subform/component): identity work (negotiating what the team is across logics: "content team first" versus competitive project; Pratt & Foreman, 2000); boundary work (drawing or contesting lines among competitive, entertainment, and community domains); justification work (defending arrangements by appeal to a logic's worth; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2021); organizing innovation (practices serving multiple logics simultaneously, such as audience votes on organizational decisions

or streamed evaluative practice; Jay, 2013, on innovation from hybrid tension). Markers: dual-identity evaluations; scheduling and obligation conflicts among logics; category drift complaints. Boundary: a single logic invoked alone is LOG; MOD-HYB requires the multiplicity itself, or its management, to be in view. Trade-off framings co-code LOG-TENSION.

AFF - Platform Affordances (Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Evans et al., 2017)

Affordances are technical capabilities of platforms, distinct from the organizing practices they enable (Albu & Flyverbom, 2016). In this framework, visibility and persistence constitute the foundational conditions through which transparency is produced, while editability and association shape how transparency is enacted and how visible practice circulates; all four are coded wherever they perform explicit analytical work in the unit, meaning the affordance's operation, use, or consequence is part of what the unit is about rather than merely the medium through which the unit exists.

AFF-VIS Visibility. The capability that enables dispersed audiences to observe organizational practices in real time, transforming traditionally private activities such as training, coordination, and reflection into publicly observable performances (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Markers: watching practice live as an activity ("sat in on the scrims"); simultaneous observability to multiple stakeholders; accountability pressure attributed to being watched; explicit awareness of the observability boundary ("you don't know what anything looks like off stream"). Boundary: every stream is technically visible; code only when observability itself is remarked, used, or consequential. The organizational practice of making processes observable codes MOD-TRANS; AFF-VIS marks the capability operating in a specific instance.

AFF-PER Persistence. The capability by which performances remain accessible after the moment of production, through archived streams, recorded videos, chat logs, and subsequent commentary that can be revisited, circulated, and recontextualized over time, producing durable records of both organizational behavior and its public interpretation (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Markers: retrospective viewing ("went back and watched every single scrim"); archived material invoked as evidence in disputes; resurfacing of past moments to renew attention or accountability; recontextualization of archived practice in later debates. Boundary: the existence of a recording is not persistence at work, and neither is ordinary use of archived media (checking a VOD, citing view counts); code when endurance enables something (re-engagement, evidence, accountability, recontextualization) in the unit.

AFF-EDIT Editability. The capability to shape how practices are presented and understood, through real-time framing, conversational repair, and post-stream explanation as well as revision and removal, enabling organizations to govern how transparency is enacted rather than simply exposing unmediated action (Albu & Flyverbom, 2016; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Markers: framing and repair talk around visible practice ("let me explain what that call was"); post-stream explanation videos; contrasts between edited and live presentation; noticed cuts ("the edit tries to trim it"); deletions invoked in accountability disputes; self-correction for accuracy ("edit: reworded to avoid misinformation"). Boundary: the fact that a video was produced does not invoke editability; code when the shaping, revision, framing, or removal of presentation is remarked or consequential.

AFF-ASSOC Association. The capability that links people to people and people to content, creating networks of relationships and information flows; association connects

visible practices to broader discussions across platforms, situating moments of team activity within ongoing narratives, comparisons, and debates that stabilize or contest their institutional meaning (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Markers: cross-platform and cross-community circulation labor (fan translations, clip threads); tagging, quoting, and linking that binds actors, content, or communities; visible practice being situated within a larger running narrative or debate through connective activity. Boundary: replying or posting in a community is ordinary platform use; code when the connecting itself carries the unit's significance.

REC - Reception and Circulation

REC codes capture what audiences, media, and field actors say about the teams and the organizational form: the discursive uptake through which institutional work circulates and new forms are interpreted, compared, and evaluated (David et al., 2013; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Zilber, 2009). These categories were developed for this study's circulation data and are treated as operational reception categories rather than imported constructs. REC codes classify commentary; enacted consequences across levels are coded CL (see the boundary note at the family's end).

REC-MODEL Model recognition. The organizational form topicalized as a category: defined, characterized, evaluated, or held accountable (David et al., 2013, on the categorization of new forms). Markers: naming the form as a distinct kind ("the streamer team space"); criteria talk ("it's not a content team if no one wants to watch the content"); typologies among instances; holding a team to its announced category ("wasn't that the plan?"). Boundary: incidental use of the label without topicalization does not qualify; comparisons among named cases code REC-COMPARE.

REC-COMPARE Cross-case comparison. Explicit comparison among the focal cases, or between a case and traditional organizations. Markers: template framings ("like Los Ratones: mostly serious with a bit of flavor"); emulation judgments ("chasing the Los Ratones hype"); contrastive explanations of divergent outcomes ("LR works because the fanbase is more invested"). Boundary: comparing players' individual careers is not case comparison; the organizational instances must be the comparanda.

REC-ADOPT Adoption and emulation talk. Diffusion of the form discussed: advocacy that others adopt it, forecasts of spread, and reports of actual imitation. Markers: "more teams should be imitating this"; observations of proliferation ("there will be 3 or 4 content teams in the league"); characterizations of a founding as emulation of a prior case. Boundary: adoption talk concerns the form spreading to other actors; praise of one team's model without diffusion in view is LEG-GRANT or REC-MODEL. Enacted imitation by an identifiable organization codes CL-TF.

REC-DISS Dissolution and transition sensemaking. Accounts of why a team ended, pivoted, or lost its founders, and what the ending means for the form's viability. Markers: causal accounts ("they didn't have the ability to schedule, so they disbanded"); incentive explanations; post-mortem verdicts, whether elegiac or hostile; continuation scenario-building after an ending. Boundary: reporting that an ending occurred is description; sensemaking requires an account or an implication drawn.

REC-AUTH Authenticity evaluation. Judgments of genuineness versus manufacture, central to how audiences evaluate organizations whose product is visible practice (Christensen & Cheney, 2015). Markers: "raw, unscripted, uncensored" claims and their assessment; "fake," "forced," "for the cameras" charges; conversion narratives

grounded in perceived realness; interpersonal genuineness as a draw ("you can tell they feel positively toward each other"). Boundary: liking content is not an authenticity judgment; neither is discomfort about parasocial attachment, nor a motive or viability claim (passion project, not in it for the money) absent a genuineness assessment. Genuineness or its absence must be the criterion. Where belonging or reciprocity grounds the judgment, co-code LOG-COMM.

REC-FIELD Field-level implication. Claims about consequences for the wider esports field. Markers: league-structure argumentation occasioned by the teams (relegation, slots, qualifier design); organizational-economics analyses (slot valuations, sustainability of the form); publisher and league conduct debates tied to the cases; ecosystem forecasts. Boundary: general esports talk without connection to the cases or the form is out of scope entirely; REC-FIELD requires the implication to be drawn from or occasioned by them.

CL - Cross-Level Interaction (Giddens, 1984; McPhee & Zaug, 2000)

CL codes capture enacted interaction between the team and field levels: the observable crossings through which interaction draws on, reproduces, and alters structure (Giddens, 1984), and through which organizational communication constitutes institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Weick et al., 2005). The boundary against REC is consequential and strict: commentary about a team is REC; CL requires evidence that something moved between levels, meaning a team engaging field input or pressure, a field actor acting on team practice, or a sequence connecting the two. CL codes are expected to be rarer than REC codes and correspondingly valuable; when in doubt between REC and CL, code REC.

CL-FT Field-to-team enactment. Field-level input, evaluation, or pressure demonstrably entering team-level process (Greenwood et al., 2011, on organizational responses to institutional complexity). Markers: teams citing community reaction, league rules, sponsor expectations, or media coverage within their own deliberation or explanation ("we saw the thread"; "because of the streaming rule we scrim ERL teams"); adoption or explicit consideration of audience-proposed practices; roster, format, or schedule changes attributed to field pressure; community votes whose outcome the team implements. Boundary: a fan suggestion by itself is REC plus MOD-TRANS performance; it becomes CL-FT when the team engages it. Institutional-pressure triggers identified in team material co-code TA-TRIG.

CL-TF Team-to-field enactment. Team-level practice demonstrably acting on field-level arrangements or actors (Smets et al., 2012, on practice-driven institutional change). Markers: other organizations changing behavior in response to a team's practice (refusing or seeking scrims because they are streamed; imitating formats); league or publisher rule discussion or decisions occasioned by a team's practice; a team's disclosures becoming field evidence (published scrim records cited in field debate); founding and dissolution communications explicitly addressed to the field's arrangements. Boundary: audiences discussing a team's influence is REC-FIELD or REC-ADOPT; CL-TF requires an identifiable field actor or arrangement acted upon.

CL-LOOP Recursive sequence. An evidenced sequence in which team practice circulates, the field responds, and the response returns as changed conditions for the team or its successors: the full recursive movement through which structuration proceeds (Giddens, 1984). Markers: units narrating or documenting such sequences end to end (practice

streamed, rule invoked, partners adjusted; model demonstrated, imitators founded, comparison pressure returning to the original). Boundary: CL-LOOP requires the return leg; a single crossing is CL-FT or CL-TF. These units are rare and should be memoed in full.

Coding conventions

Assignment discipline. A code is assigned only when its inclusion criteria are met on explicit textual evidence in the unit or its immediate thread context, with the supporting span recorded. Boundary notes name the neighboring code to check when a criterion fails; most near-misses belong to a neighbor rather than to no code. Units that plausibly satisfy a code only through inference the text does not make explicit are not assigned that code; they are flagged for researcher review with the candidate code and a note on what is uncertain. Uncertainty is thus resolved by redirection, flagging, or non-assignment, never by assigning a code tentatively. This discipline prefers under-coding to over-coding; flagged units form a reading list for interpretive review, not coded data.

Scope rule. All codes apply only when the unit concerns the case teams or the content-team organizational form. Adjacent esports drama, general game discussion, and community chatter are out of scope regardless of theoretical resonance; such units receive no codes.

REC-MODEL floor. The organizational form must be topicalized, not merely named in passing.

LEG floor (granting and contesting alike). LEG codes apply only when the object of the judgment is the team's or the form's standing, appropriateness, viability, or right to its position; no surrounding dispute is required. Record the triadic basis. Judgments of performance or direction stay in LOG and MOD territory.

LOG-TENSION convention. When LOG-TENSION is coded, also code each constituent logic substantively invoked, including community logic where audience evaluation adjudicates a production tension.

Structural talk occasioned by the form. Arguments about league and field design prompted by the content teams' presence code REC-FIELD even when a team is peripheral to the argument.

TA codes in circulation data are secondary and second-order. Applied only when the team's own adaptation behavior is explicitly and substantively described, always marked second-order, never treated as first-order adaptation evidence. Description qualifies; prescription does not: an observer recounting an observed change in the team's approach is second-order description, while advice about what the team should do, criticism of a failure to adapt (at most TA-PE second-order as execution critique), and analysis of opponents receive no TA code. First-order TA evidence comes from team-produced observational material.

Affordance threshold. AFF codes apply only when the affordance performs explicit analytical work in the unit.

REC versus CL. Commentary about the teams is REC; CL requires an enacted crossing between levels. When in doubt, code REC.

Multi-case units. Units whose substance is comparison across cases or field-level positioning, including by rival traditional organizations, are tagged team=multiple.

Mapping to the integrated model

The framework's four linkages are evidenced as follows. Communicative adaptation as institutional production (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Weick et al., 2005) is evidenced by TA

codes in team-produced material together with MOD-TRANS, showing adaptive communication functioning as institutional meaning work; the constitutive flows (membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination, institutional positioning) may be noted where clearly identifiable. Institutional pressures as communicative triggers (Greenwood et al., 2011) is evidenced by TA-TRIG with institutional-pressure sources, by LOG codes operating within assessment and formulation, and by CL-FT where the pressure's entry into team process is enacted in the unit. Visibility as communicative infrastructure (Albu & Flyverbom, 2016; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Treem & Leonardi, 2013) is evidenced by MOD-TRANS infrastructure with the AFF codes, by REC codes showing bounded practices circulating as field-level performances, and by CL-TF where circulation demonstrably acts on field actors or arrangements. Hybridity as communicative integration work (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014) is evidenced by MOD-HYB subforms and LOG-TENSION, with organizing innovations as observable outputs. CL-LOOP units evidence the full recursive movement and anchor the cross-level analysis.

Appendix C: Candidate-Identification Instruments

This appendix documents the two instruments used in the first stage of the computational pipeline to identify candidate records for coding: the lexical dictionaries and the semantic supplement. The first stage served a screening function. Its purpose was to flag records that might warrant one or more codes, and flagging determined only which records entered the model-assisted coding stage; every code assignment reported in this dissertation was made in that subsequent stage under the codebook's decision rules and confidence requirement described in Chapter 5. A first-stage flag therefore carries no analytical weight of its own.

Lexical Dictionaries

Candidate identification began with keyword dictionaries covering the 29 code families in the codebook, derived from the codebook's operational markers. Each dictionary consists of regular-expression patterns matched case-insensitively against record text, and a match flagged the record as a candidate for that family. Patterns were written for recall over precision, since false positives could be discarded at the coding stage while unflagged records would have escaped review. The dictionaries were kept deliberately compact: each pattern serves as a high-precision anchor for its family, and systematic vocabulary gaps were measured through a recall audit and addressed by the semantic supplement described below.

Records shorter than 40 characters were not scanned. The floor is a pragmatic screening decision of the kind text-as-data scholarship treats as consequential and therefore documents explicitly (Denny & Spirling, 2018; Grimmer & Stewart, 2013): it excludes fragments too brief to constitute codable units, such as single-phrase reactions and emoji-only replies, and excluded records remain in the corpus rather than being discarded. Flagged

records were ordered by the number of candidate families they carried, so the densest records received coding and review attention first. Table C.1 reproduces the dictionaries in full. The patterns are surface markers: each targets vocabulary through which the family's phenomenon is commonly expressed, and the middle column characterizes the language each lexicon was built to catch.

Table C.1

Lexical dictionary patterns by code family

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
AFF-ASSOC	Connective-tie vocabulary: community spaces, collaborations, tagging, shared platforms	\bquote ?tweet; \btagg?ed\b; \bcollab; \bcommunity\b; \bsubreddit\b; \bdiscord\b
AFF-EDIT	Content-modification vocabulary: editing, deletion, re-	\bedit(ed|s|ing)?\b; \bdeleted?\b; \bre-?upload; \bscripted\b; \bcut (out|from) the (video|vod)\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
	uploading, scripting	
AFF-PER	Record-and-archive vocabulary: VODs, clips, receipts, rewatching	\bvod(s)?\b; \bclip(s|ped)?\b; \breceipts?\b; \barchive[ds]?\b; \bre ?watch
AFF-VIS	Observability vocabulary: practice watched live, on camera, on stream	\bwatch(ed|ing)? (them|the) (scrim|practice|draft); \blive on stream\b; \bon camera\b
CL-FT	Field-to-team influence markers: audience or league input taken up in team conduct	\b(we|the team|they) (saw|read|listened to) (the)?(thread|reddit|chat|comments|feedback)\b; \bbecause of the (rule|streaming rule|league|sponsor)\b; \b(fans?|chat|community|viewers?) (voted|vote|decided|chose)\b.*\b(and|so|we|they)\b; \btook (the|that) (suggestion|feedback|advice)\b; \blistening to (the)?(fans|community|chat)\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
CL-LOOP	Chained-consequence constructions linking an event to a team response	\bwhich (led to|meant|forced)\b.*\b(they|the team|los ratones|near airport|ruddy)\b; \bin response\b.*\b(adjusted|changed|adapted)\b
CL-TF	Team-to-field influence markers: team practices registering in field conduct	\b(refuse[ds]?|won'?t|stopped) (to)?scrim\b; \bscrim partners?\b; \b(other)?(teams?|orgs?) (are)?(copy|imitat|follow)(ing|ed)?\b.*\b(format|model|approach)\b; \b(riot|league|lec|nlc|nacl) (rule|ruling|decision|changed|announced)\b.*\b(because|after|response)\b; \bcited (the|their) (scrim record|numbers|stats)\b
IW-C	Founding and novelty vocabulary: new models, firsts, pioneers, blueprints	\bnew (model|era|way|kind of (team|org))\b; \bfirst (team|org) to\b; \bpioneers?\b; \bfound(ed|ing)\b; \bannounc; \bproves? (that|you can)\b; \bblueprint\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
IW-D	Challenge vocabulary aimed at existing arrangements: secrecy, closed practice, the old model	\bsecrec[y]?\b; \bbehind closed doors\b; \bhiding\b.*\b(scrim|strat|comms|info|practice); \bold (model|system|way)\b; \bwhy (do|would) (teams|orgs)\b; \bdon'?t need (a|an|to)\b.*\b(org|coach|secrecy)
IW-M	Standards-upholding vocabulary: professionalism, propriety, tradition	\btradition(al)?\b; \bstandards?\b; \bproper\b; \bthe right way\b; \bstill (a)?(real|competitive)\b; \bprofessional(ism)?\b
LEG-CONTEST	Delegitimating vocabulary: dismissals of standing, viability, or seriousness	\bnot a real\b; \bjust (a)?content\b; \bcircus\b; \bclown (show|team|org|fiesta)\b; \bwon'?t last\b; \b(team|org|project) is doomed\b; \bgimmick\b; \bcash grab\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
LEG-GRANT	Legitimacy-conferring vocabulary: recognition of professional standing	\bthey('re| are) professionals?\b; \bpaid to compete\b; \breal (team|esports|org)\b; \blegit(imate)?\b; \bprofessional\b; \bfuture of esports\b; \bbetter than (most|actual|real) (lec|lcs|pro) teams\b
LOG-COMM	Community-logic vocabulary: belonging, fan input, loyalty; also retrieves economic-viability talk (see note)	\bcommunity\b; \bfans? (vote|voted|poll|decide|input|chose)\b; \bchat (vote|poll|decide); \bwe (the)?(fans|community)\b; \bstakeholders?\b; \bbelong(ing)?\b; \bparasocial\b; \bloyal(ty)?\b; \binsider\b; \bviewers? (deciding|decide|input)\b; \bowe[sd]? (it to)?(the)?(fans|community|viewers)\b; \bsponsor(s|ship)?\b; \bmonetiz; \brevenue\b; \bmerch\b; \bsalar(y|ies)\b; \bfunding\b; \bunsustainab
LOG-COMP	Competitive-logic vocabulary: winning,	\bwin(ning|s)?\b; \brank(ed|ing)?\b; \bqualif; \bskill\b; \bcompetitive\b; \bserious(ly)? (about)?(the game|scrims)\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
	ranking, skill, qualification	
LOG-ENT	Entertainment-logic vocabulary: content, viewers, humor	\bcontent\b; \bentertain; \bviewers?\b; \bfunny\b; \bmemes?\b; \bstream(s|ing|er)?\b.*\b(fun|laugh|joke)
LOG-TENSION	Logic-conflict constructions opposing content and competition	\b(content|memes?) (over|vs\.?|versus) (winning|comp); \btake (it|scrims|the game) serious; \btryhard(ing)?\b.*\bcontent\b; \bsellout\b
MOD-HYB	Hybrid-form vocabulary: naming the combined content-competitive organization	\bboth\b.*\b(content|entertain).*\b(comp|win); \bcontent team\b; \bhybrid\b; \bstreamer team\b; \bcreator (team|org)\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
MOD-TRANS	Openness vocabulary: transparency, public process, showing everything	\btransparen; \bopenness\b; \bopen book\b; \bshow(ing|s)? (everything|the process|scrims)\b; \bpublic(ly)?\b.*\b(scrim|review|draft|meeting)
REC-ADOPT	Adoption and imitation vocabulary: copying or urging uptake of the form	\b(every|more|other) (team|org)s? (should|will|need to)\b; \bcopy(ing)? (this|the) (model|format)\b; \bfollow(ing)? (their|the) lead\b
REC-AUTH	Authenticity-judgment vocabulary: genuine versus manufactured conduct	\bauthentic\b; \bgenuine(ly)?\b; \bfake\b; \bforced\b; \bmanufactured\b; \bfor the cameras?\b; \breal(ness)?\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
REC-COMPARE	Cross-organization comparison constructions among the cases and their imitators	\blos ratones\b.*\b(near airport|ruddy); \bnear airport\b.*\b(los ratones|ruddy); \bruddy\b.*\b(los ratones|near airport); \b(like|copy(ing)?|version of|inspired by)\b.*\b(los ratones|near airport|ruddy)
REC-DISS	Dissolution vocabulary: disbanding, endings, sustainability of the form	\b(wants? to (continue|compete again)|won'?t retire|until a statement)\b; \bdisband(ed|ing)?\b; \bshut(ting)? down\b; \bend of\b; \bfolded\b; \bwhy (they|it) (failed|ended|died)\b; \bunsustainab; \brip\b
REC-FIELD	Field-structure vocabulary: leagues, franchising, slots, the	\bfranchis; \bnon-franchised\b; \bslots?\b.*\b(league|lec|lcs|nlc)\b; \b(lec|lcs|lta|riot|publisher)\b.*\b(should|need|will|change); \besports (industry|ecosystem|economy)\b; \borg (model|economics|economy)\b; \btier ?2\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
	esports economy	
REC-MODEL	Form-as-template vocabulary: the content team model as a nameable object	\bcontent team\b; \bnew model\b; \bthe (lr|los ratones) (model|format|formula)\b; \bfuture of (esports|league|pro play)\b
TA-PE	Execution vocabulary: in-game calls, engagement, aborting, shot-calling	\bengage\b; \bfall back\b; \babort\b; \bexecute[ds]?\b; \bcall(s|ed|ing)? (it|the play|shots)\b; \bshot ?call
TA-PF	Planning vocabulary: strategies, game plans,	\b(game ?plan|strategy|strat)\b; \bwe (should|need to|could) try\b; \bdraft (plan|idea|strategy)\b; \bour goal is\b; \bsplit push\b; \bwin condition\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
	win conditions	
TA-SA	Diagnostic-noticing vocabulary: reading the game, scouting, sensing that something is off	\bnot working\b; \bsomething('s| is) (wrong|off)\b; \bnotice[ds]?\b.*\b(meta|patch|enemy|opponent); \brecogniz; \bread the (game|map)\b; \bscout
TA-TL	Learning vocabulary: reviews, debriefs, lessons, what was learned	\b(review|debrief|post ?-?game|vod review|retro)\b; \blesson\b; \bwhat we learned\b; \bnext time we\b; \bmistake[s]?\b.*\b(learn|fix|improve); \bimprove[ds]?\b
TA-TRIG	Adaptation-trigger vocabulary: patches, meta	\bpatch \d; \bmeta (shift|change)\b; \broster (change|swap|move)\b; \bnerf(ed|s)?\b; \bbuff(ed|s)?\b

Code	Lexicon targets	Patterns
	shifts, roster changes	

Note. The lexicon-targets column characterizes the surface vocabulary each dictionary was constructed to detect; construct definitions appear in the codebook. Patterns are case-insensitive regular expressions: \b marks a word boundary, ? marks an optional element, (a|b) marks alternatives, and .* marks intervening text within a record. Patterns appear in their order in the flagging instrument. LOG-COMM includes economic-viability vocabulary (sponsorship, revenue, salaries, funding) as a retrieval decision; such records were coded to whichever logic the record evaluates, per the codebook.

Semantic Supplement

Keyword matching misses records that express codable phenomena through pronouns, allusion, or argument instead of distinctive vocabulary; a recall audit of unflagged material found roughly one in seven substantive unflagged comments of this kind. A second identification pass therefore supplemented the dictionaries. Every unflagged record of at least 60 characters was embedded with a local sentence-embedding model (all-MiniLM-L6-v2, from the sentence-transformers library), alongside each code family's definition and marker text drawn directly from the codebook, and each record was scored by its highest cosine similarity to any family. The top 3,000 records by this score were added to the candidate pool, each assigned to its best-matching family. Selection by ranked budget, in place of a similarity threshold, made the added reading load a chosen quantity and concentrated precision where subsequent coding attention would fall; selection scores

ranged from .64 at the top of the ranking to .36 at the budget cutoff. Each added record carries a provenance tag recording its similarity score, and from that point forward semantically retrieved candidates were treated identically to dictionary-flagged ones. The supplement operated additively, expanding candidate pools without removing any dictionary-flagged record.

Appendix D: Glossary

1. **Backing (recalling).** Returning to base to heal and purchase items, temporarily surrendering map position and lane resources.
2. **Camps.** Groups of neutral jungle monsters, such as Raptors and Krugs, that grant gold and experience when cleared.
3. **Champion.** One of the playable characters in League of Legends. Each champion has a distinct set of abilities, strengths, and weaknesses, and each player controls a single champion for the duration of a game. Teams select their champions during the draft.
4. **Champion pool.** The set of champions a player or team can play at a competitive standard. Drafts constrain and deplete it, and a narrow pool is a competitive liability because opponents can ban or play around it.
5. **Champion select.** The client interface in which the draft is conducted. A "lock in" finalizes a pick and cannot be reversed.
6. **Clip.** A short excerpt of a live broadcast captured through platform tools and shared across social media. Clipping is a primary mechanism through which moments from team streams circulate to audiences beyond the live viewership.
7. **Clown fiesta (in vivo).** Player slang for chaotic, uncoordinated play in which neither team executes a coherent plan.
8. **Comfort pick.** A champion a player performs reliably on; the opposite of an experimental or forced pick.
9. **Co-streaming.** A broadcaster streaming their own live commentary over an official match broadcast to their own audience, extending the reach of the competition through the co-streamer's community.

10. **Creep score (CS).** A performance metric tracking the number of minions and neutral monsters a player has defeated to accumulate gold. High CS per minute indicates efficient resource management, and the metric is a standard diagnostic in performance review.
11. **Dive (divable).** Attacking an opponent under the protection of their defensive turret. A player is "divable" when positioned so that opponents can secure the kill despite the turret's damage.
12. **Draft (pick-and-ban).** The alternating phase before each game in which teams remove champions from availability (bans) and select their own five (picks). Draft decisions both reveal and conceal strategic intentions, making the phase a focal site for information management.
13. **EMEA Masters.** The continental championship in which teams from the region's national leagues compete; the highest title available below Tier 1.
14. **ERL (EMEA Regional Leagues).** The officially recognized national and regional leagues, such as the NLC, that sit below the LEC in the region's competitive pyramid.
15. **Escape ability.** A movement ability, most often the summoner spell Flash, used to exit danger. Forcing an opponent to use it creates a later kill window because the ability has a long cooldown.
16. **Fake flex (in vivo).** A draft tactic in which a team signals an apparently specific plan for a champion's role assignment to generate false expectations. Where principled abstraction withholds specificity to protect tactical options, the fake flex uses apparent specificity to mislead opponents about actual intentions.

17. **Fearless draft.** A series format in which champions played in earlier games of a series cannot be selected again by either team, shrinking the available pool as the series progresses and rewarding roster-wide champion depth.
18. **Franchising (franchised league).** A league structure in which member organizations hold permanent slots purchased from or granted by the publisher, with no promotion or relegation between seasons. Because Tier 1 leagues such as the LEC are franchised, teams in lower leagues cannot ascend through competitive results alone.
19. **Holding hands (in vivo).** Coaching shorthand for tightly coordinated five-player movement in which members stay connected and act as a single unit; the prescribed remedy for a "homeless" playstyle.
20. **Homeless (in vivo).** Coaching shorthand for players moving on the map without a clear collective objective (see Holding hands).
21. **Information camp (in vivo).** A starting jungle route chosen to generate information about the opponent's position before the team commits to a plan.
22. **Int.** Shortened from "intentionally feeding"; dying to opponents through avoidable risk-taking, which grants them gold and momentum.
23. **Jungle pathing.** The route a team's jungler, the role assigned to the map's neutral territory, takes through that territory. Anticipating the opponent jungler's pathing is a core diagnostic task because it enables a team to predict ambushes and contest objectives.
24. **Kill participation.** A performance metric expressing the share of a team's kills in which a player earned the kill or an assist; used to assess how involved a player is in coordinated plays.

25. **Lane swap.** Reassigning lane positions, typically between the top and bottom lanes, to gain matchup or map advantages. Because swaps depend on surprise, they are especially vulnerable to observation.
26. **LEC.** The League of Legends EMEA Championship, the Tier 1 franchised league for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.
27. **LEC Versus.** A tournament format announced in October 2025 that brought invited regional league teams into competition with LEC organizations, with invitations tied to competitive achievement in the ERL ecosystem. The format was contested by franchised organizations because invited teams gained Tier 1 access without purchasing franchise slots.
28. **Macro play.** In gameplay talk, map-level strategy concerning objectives, rotations, and resource allocation, as distinct from the mechanical execution of individual engagements (micro play). This gameplay sense is separate from the dissertation's analytical use of micro and macro levels.
29. **Matchup vulnerability.** The weakness of a champion or lane pairing against its direct opponent.
30. **Meta.** The aggregate of strategic conventions, champion valuations, and play patterns that the community treats as the strongest available way to play under the current patch. The meta emerges outside the explicit rules of the game and shifts continuously in response to developer updates and strategic innovation by professional teams.
31. **Minion wave.** The recurring groups of computer-controlled units whose management structures lane play. "Pushing one more wave" delays a reset (see Solo queue urge).

32. **NACL.** The North American Challengers League, the Tier 2 development league in North America; the league in which Near Airport competed.
33. **Neutral objectives.** High-value monsters on the map, such as Baron Nashor, dragons, and Voidgrubs, that belong to neither team and confer team-wide advantages when killed. Contesting them structures mid- and late-game strategy.
34. **NLC.** The Northern League of Legends Championship, the ERL covering the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, and Ireland; the league in which Los Ratones and The Ruddy Sack competed.
35. **Overstaying.** Remaining in an advanced position to gain additional resources past the point of safety.
36. **Patch.** A periodic update the developer distributes to all players. Patches fix software bugs, adjust competitive balance by modifying the relative strength of champions and items, and add new content. Because each patch can shift the meta, patches function as recurring adaptation triggers for competitive teams.
37. **Publisher.** The company that develops and owns a game, in this case Riot Games. In esports the publisher controls the intellectual property, the competitive ruleset, and in many cases the leagues themselves, which concentrates governance authority to a degree unusual among sports fields.
38. **Roles (positions).** The five standard positions, top, jungle, mid, ADC (attack damage carry), and support, that structure rosters and drafts. Each player specializes in one role.
39. **Scrim.** A practice match against another team, conventionally held in private. Content teams stream sessions that other organizations treat as confidential.

40. **Solo queue.** The individual ranked ladder, in which players enter matches alone and optimize individual performance. Habits formed there can undermine coordinated team play.
41. **Solo queue urge (in vivo).** The team's name for the habit of pushing one additional minion wave for resources when the situation calls for recalling; a recurring diagnosed failure condensed into shared shorthand for correction.
42. **Split.** One segment of a competitive season. Leagues typically run multiple splits per year, each ending in playoffs.
43. **Stage team (in vivo).** A team's self-description claiming that its true level of execution materializes under match conditions and is understated by its practice results.
44. **Stream sniping.** Watching an opponent's live stream to gain competitive information about their plans in real time; the paradigmatic competitive risk of streamed practice.
45. **Substitute.** A temporary replacement player. Substitution reorganizes drafts around the replacement's champion pool.
46. **Teleport (TP).** A summoner spell that transports a champion across the map after a delay, enabling cross-map plays such as flanking an ongoing engagement.
47. **Tier 1.** The top level of franchised competition, such as the LEC. The regional and development leagues below it, such as the NLC and NACL, are Tier 2 (see Franchising).
48. **Turret (tower).** A defensive structure that attacks approaching enemies. Turrets anchor each lane, and destroying them opens the map (see Dive).
49. **Vision control.** The strategic management of map information through wards, placed items that reveal areas otherwise hidden by the fog of war. Superior vision allows a team to track enemy movements and act on information dominance.

50. **VOD.** Video on demand; the persistent archived recording of a stream or match, which enables retrospective review by teams, audiences, and opponents alike.