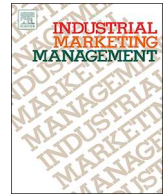




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Research paper

Collective engagement in organizational settings

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ABSTRACT

Customer engagement has emerged as a central concept in marketing. Despite extensive scholarly investigations and managerial interest though, considerations of customer engagement and emotional connections in business marketing have been scant. Researchers tend to focus on individual-level engagement, which is conceptually inadequate to address the inherently multi-actor nature of business-to-business marketing. Therefore, this article introduces the concept of collective engagement, highlighting both its characteristics and the conditions for its emergence. The resulting theoretical framework, with ten propositions, outlines the multidimensional nature of collective engagement, including its multiplicative aggregation, multidirectional valence, phenomenological and shared properties, emotional and institutional interdependence, and emergence in dynamic and multichannel settings. Collective engagement also offers a mechanism for considering emotions in business marketing, a topic that thus far has been largely ignored by the prevalent rational choice paradigm. Thus, this article contributes a systematic, coherent conceptualization of collective engagement and advances the theoretical domains of customer and actor engagement in particular and business-to-business research in general, while also suggesting a detailed research agenda.

1. Introduction

Customer engagement has emerged as a central concept in marketing, commonly viewed as a customer's elevated cognitive, emotional and behavioral disposition toward brands or firms (e.g., Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011). Marketing literature has thus far primarily examined customer engagement in business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts. Recent research indicates that engagement is also highly relevant in business-to-business (B2B) contexts (e.g., Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Reinartz & Berkmann, 2018; Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, this issue; Youssef, Johnston, AbdelHamid, Dakrory, & Seddick, 2018), however this research is only emerging and the existing understanding on engagement by organizational actors remains embryonic.

The current, consumer-focused marketing research tends to treat engagement as an individual-level phenomenon (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, Dalela, & Beatty, 2016). Indeed, while researchers have acknowledged engagement even in multi-actor contexts and through multi-actor perspectives (e.g., Li, Juric, & Brodie, 2017), such research continues to define, treat and study engagement as an individual's property. In this paper we argue that this view is insufficient for conceptualizing engagement (see also Nunan, Sibai, Schivinski, & Christodoulides, 2018), particularly in organizational contexts: recent

organizational and occupational psychology research (e.g., Costa, Passos, & Bakker, 2014; García Buades, Martínez-Tur, Ortiz-Bonin, & Peiro, 2016; Schneider, Yost, Kropp, Kind, & Lam, 2017) suggests that engagement may also be a *collective* construct. The prevalence of the collective manifests in common organizational concepts like work teams (e.g., Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998), the buying center (e.g., Johnston & Bonoma, 1981), and the usage center (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp, & Wilson, 2016, Huber & Kleinaltenkamp, 2019). Moreover, many organizational examples anecdotally demonstrate the relevance of engagement on a collective level: Consider joint innovation projects in which employees from the customer and supplier firms work within and across internal and external organizational units. Throughout such projects, their interactions, thoughts, and enthusiasm for the innovation ideally coalesce, with significant potential influences on overall project success.

This variety of individual actors interacting within or across company boundaries in organizational settings makes it highly pertinent to gain a clear understanding of collective engagement. In turn, focusing only on engagement by individual actors risks ignoring key behavioral aspects that arise from the inherent social embeddedness of actors and that are key for shaping the success of firms and interfirm relationships (Schneider et al., 2017). Moreover, neglecting engagement as a

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Table 1
Literature review: illustrative engagement studies in a B2B-context.

Authors	Focus
Beckers, van Doorn, & Verhoef, 2018	This paper investigates the value-related consequences of firm-initiated customer engagement behaviors. In doing so, the authors use shareholder evaluations of the public announcements of such initiatives across contexts to better understand firm value consequences of customer engagement campaigns.
Beckers et al., 2018	This paper provides an overview of online community engagement across B2B and B2C environments. The authors conclude that outcomes of community engagement are largely understood at the individual level, even in B2B settings and point toward the potential upwards influence of individual actors on other actors.
Brodie, Fehrer, Jaakkola, & Conduit, 2019	This paper elaborates a broadened definition of actor engagement in networks. The authors systematically develop the conceptual domain of actor engagement with implications across research fields and contexts, albeit at individual actor level.
Chirumalla, Oghazi, & Parida, 2018	This paper advances knowledge about social media engagement strategies, with the aim of facilitating the marketing-R&D interface for improved NPD performance. The authors shed light on the role of social media and respective social engagement strategies that benefit manufacturing companies.
Gill, Sridhar, & Grewal, 2017	This paper focuses on assessing return on engagement initiatives across contexts. In doing so, the authors provide and test a framework to examine the potential benefits of engagement initiatives, in this case through a B2B mobile app that manufacturers provide to engage their buyers.
Gopalakrishna, Malthouse, & Lawrence, 2017	This paper examines the relationship between engagement and intention to attend the next show and intention to purchase from exhibitors in a B2B tradeshow context. The authors propose and test a conceptual model of customer engagement as a dynamic process, while collecting data from attendees before and after the show.
Grossberg, 2015	This paper looks at technological mechanisms and analytical tools that firms that leverage in B2B contexts to enhance customer engagement.
Guesalaga, 2016	This paper builds on the assumption that social media can meaningfully contribute to personal selling and sales management. The authors leverage interactional psychology theory to test a model of usage of social media in sales, while studying individual, organizational, and customer-based factors.
Hollebeek, 2017	This paper investigates the interface of customer engagement in social media in B2B settings. The authors provide an integrative perspective, considering a B2B customer's investment of resource in supplier interactions through B2B engagement platforms.
Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019	This paper examines engagement behavior in B2B settings through the concept of customer referencing. The authors highlight the role of customer referencing and its contribution to value creation on a network level, thereby shedding light on how influencing behavior operates in multi-actor contexts.
Kumar & Pansari, 2016	This paper considers employee engagement and customer engagement simultaneously. The authors provide an integrative framework that investigates the influence of employee engagement on customer engagement, while factoring in various boundary conditions and contextual circumstances.
Leek, Houghton, & Canning, 2017	This paper studies the use and impact of Twitter in a B2B context. The authors seek to understand the type of Twitter content that enhances engagement in terms of likes, retweets and comments. In doing so, the authors also consider conditions that render Twitter messages more or less effective across contexts.
Lehtinen, Aaltonen, & Rajala, 2018	This paper explores by way of a process model how and why firms engage and disengage external stakeholders and their contributions to product systems. In doing so, the authors provide implications for literature on stakeholder management and business practice.
Li et al., 2017	This paper centers on multi-actor engagement as a dynamic process and considers how it evolves in actor networks. While the authors challenge the conventional dyadic perspective, they provide empirical insights into the dynamics of multi-actor engagement at individual level and offer a foundation for future research.
Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti, Palo, & Baumann, 2016	This paper demonstrates that 'sustained purposeful engagement' among a set of B2B practices plays a significant role for a firm's ability to co-create and capture value. The authors highlight implications for developing co-creation capabilities and practices.
Nunan et al., 2018	This paper sheds light on the relevance of social media for value creation, with specific reference to B2B engagement. The authors conclude among other things that B2B engagement unfolds across various platforms and that group-level involvement rather than just individual-level involvement is essential.
Pitt, Plangger, Botha, Kietzmann, & Pitt, 2017	This paper extends the limited knowledge on brand engagement in a B2B context. The authors study how employees engage with B2B brands on social media, while providing a conceptual framework that considers theory of word choice and verbal tone to better assess content of engagement observations.
Prior & Marcos-Cuevas, 2016	This paper brings together research on value co-destruction and the role of actor engagement behaviors. In the context of the aerospace industry, the authors first highlight ways in which actor perceptions of value co-destruction form and then describe nine actor engagement behaviors that shape value co-destruction experiences.
Reinartz & Berkmann, 2018	This paper conceptually explores engagement in B2B contexts. The authors consider various properties of B2B markets, to then discuss implications for customer engagement. In doing so, the authors emphasize the notion of partner engagement as an extension of customer engagement to better reflect the complex nature in B2B markets.
Vivek et al., 2016	This paper acknowledges a scholarly focus on customer engagement in B2C contexts and highlights the need to further study the phenomenon in B2B settings. To do so, the authors introduce a conceptual framework around the notion of B2B partner engagement and its implications.
Youssef et al., 2018	This paper seeks to better understand the phenomenon and value of customer engagement in B2B settings. To do so, the authors provide a conceptual framework that considers customer equity as relevant outcome of engagement while examining the role of customer satisfaction, commitment, and involvement as potential antecedents.

potential collective-level phenomenon significantly limits explanatory and predictive qualities of engagement theorizing, given that individual-level engagement does not sufficiently account for collective characteristics and dynamics among groups of actors. Hence, extant theoretical limitations and increasing understanding of engagement in organizational settings requires extending this concept to collectives.

In response, we start with the recognition that the collective engagement of a multitude of individuals, acting as buyers or users of industrial goods or services (but also those in other organizational settings, such as cross-organizational innovation teams and multi-vendor construction or consulting projects), determines value creation,

as well as critical relational outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment, word of mouth, and loyalty. This notion of *collective engagement* refers to *multiple actors' shared cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dispositions, as manifested in their interactive efforts devoted to a focal object*. In this sense, our definition of collective engagement goes beyond the specific notion of work team engagement, which only pertains to a group of firm employees who pursue a specific, common work task. This expanded conceptualization reflects the argument presented herein that engagement theory demands more collective-level considerations. Such approaches are particularly relevant in organizational contexts that inherently comprise multiple actors and thus cannot avoid being

influenced by collective engagement states and interactive experiences. With this foundation, we seek to address two main research questions:

- (1) How can engagement be conceptualized as a collective phenomenon in organizational contexts?
- (2) Which conditions facilitate the emergence of collective engagement in organizational contexts?

Answering these questions establishes a detailed conceptualization of collective engagement in organizational settings. In our effort to advance understanding of both the characteristics and conditions for the emergence of collective engagement in organizational settings, we draw on organizational and institutional theory, in addition to engagement theory as a foundation. To provide explication and related conceptual contributions (MacInnis, 2011), this paper provides a comprehensive conceptual framework, specified through ten propositions that lay the conceptual foundation for collective engagement and encourage continued conceptual and empirical investigations of collective engagement in business. In particular, with our consideration of the affective component of engagement, we highlight the relevance of emotions in an organizational context. The resulting perspective on B2B settings thus overcomes the long-held but inaccurate assumptions that emotions have little effect in such contexts (Kemp, Borders, Anaza, & Johnston, 2018; Youssef et al., 2018). Overall, we provide a more holistic view of and advanced foundation for engagement theory, as well as B2B and organizational theory.

With a critical review of literature on customer and actor engagement in the next section, we delineate the concept of collective engagement in organizational settings by specifying our proposed definition of the concept, its dimensions, and its properties. We also theorize about the antecedents of collective engagement and how it emerges. Finally, we outline theoretical and managerial implications of our analyses, as well as clear directions for further research.

2. Customer engagement

In recent years, engagement, or the “state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed or engrossed in something” (Higgins & Scholer, 2009, p. 102), has attracted increasing interest from various domains: for example, marketing and service research (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Van Doorn et al., 2010), organizational and occupational psychology (Costa et al., 2014; García Buades et al., 2016; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Tyler & Blader, 2003), and educational sciences (Reeve, 2012; Schaufeli, Martínez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Scholarly and practitioner interest in customer engagement stems from the realization that people seek interactive, cocreative experiences in both consumer and business environments (Brodie et al., 2011; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vivek et al., 2016). This expanded recognition and theoretical and managerial development of the concept largely result from its ability to drive positive firm outcomes (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

Extant marketing literature thus offers several views of customer engagement, including (1) a singular focus on behavioral manifestations of interactivity between a consumer and a firm or brand, beyond purchase (e.g., Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010); (2) considerations of dispositions or psychological states, as manifested in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014); or (3) combinative approaches that feature both the disposition to engage and the act of engaging in an interactive process (e.g., Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmman, Maglio, & Nenonen, 2016). Moreover, studies continue to treat engagement as an individual-level phenomenon, even when considering multi-actor contexts and perspectives (see Table 1 further below). Finally, studies confirm that customer engagement at the individual level can be both positively and negatively valenced, or even be complex and

obscure (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Li et al., 2017).

Across these concepts, a common perspective suggests that customer engagement requires an interactive experience between a focal engagement subject (or actor) and a focal engagement object (or resource) (Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). For example, Brodie et al. (2011, p. 258) define customer engagement as “a psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships.” Furthermore, customer engagement constitutes an important managerial construct, due to its beneficial outcomes at both individual (Marbach, Lages, & Nunan, 2016; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012) and organizational (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) levels. However, to date the assumption in extant research is that engagement is based on an individual's disposition and/or engagement activity rather than potential collective or shared experiences.

Further, customer engagement is commonly conceptualized according to three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014) (several authors also include a fourth dimension – social; Hollebeek et al., 2019; Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, & Morgan, 2014). *Cognitive engagement* refers to the degree of absorption in or concentration on an engagement object, reflecting the degree of interest the actor has in interacting with it (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2014). It is defined here as a focal actor's disposition to devote mental concentration to an interaction with or use of a focal resource. *Emotional engagement* relates to the feelings, enthusiasm, and dedication invoked by the engagement object (Brodie, Ilić, Jurić, & Hollebeek, 2013; Vivek et al., 2014). *Behavioral engagement* implies actors' voluntary resource contributions, focused on the engagement object, though it also may go beyond what is fundamental to the relationship and arise in the interaction with the focal object or other actors (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010).

3. From customer engagement to actor engagement

Extant literature on customer engagement mostly details dyadic links between a consumer and a brand (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014), and only a few studies have looked into engagement dynamics in multi-actor settings (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Li et al., 2017). In response to calls to clarify engagement in multi-actor business contexts (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) and to acknowledge the reciprocal, social, and collective nature of engagement (Chandler & Lusch, 2015; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Li et al., 2017; Verleye, Gemmel, & Rangarajan, 2014), more recent developments broaden the notion beyond dyadic consumer–firm relationships or engagement by specific firms' employees (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Such advances have promoted the concept of *actor engagement*, which Storbacka et al. (2016, p. 2) define as “both the disposition of actors to engage, and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within the institutional context provided by a service ecosystem” (see Table 1). This definition recognizes that engagement may occur through all sorts of resource integration processes that take place in various types of service ecosystems. The notion of actor engagement thus broadens the scope of engagement, beyond customer–provider dyads, and recognizes the complex span of actors in service ecosystems, including employees, suppliers, distributors, government, the media, and other publics (Brodie, Fehrer, Jaakkola, Hollebeek, & Conduit, 2016; Chandler & Lusch, 2015; Storbacka et al., 2016; Li et al., 2017; Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, this issue).

Overall, an examination or (re)conceptualization of the engagement concept in B2B marketing settings is rather rare, apart from notable exceptions, which are listed in Table 1. These studies demonstrate the relevance of engagement in B2B marketing contexts, but do not fully problematize the nature and potentiality of the individual-level concept for explaining collective phenomena in B2B. Nunan et al. (2018, p. 34) in this context acknowledge that “[...] B2B engagement exists across multiple platforms and is dependent on group-level rather than

individual-level forms of involvement”, while calling for a conceptualization and operationalization of customer engagement in B2B interactions to overcome related theoretical challenges.

We posit that the concept of actor engagement can capture engagement in organizational environments, which encompass multiple types of actors, but its conceptual scope needs to be extended beyond the individual level. Organizational activities take place through interactions among various individual and organizational actors, resulting in complex buying and usage situations. For example, purchasing and implementing a software system to support financial management within an organization involves many employees across different departments and functions and likely even extends to external actors, such as suppliers, customers, chartered accountants, and tax authorities. These individual actors all are parts of the usage center for the specific software (Macdonald et al., 2016); that usage center comprises all resource integrators that might draw on the focal resource (i.e., software) for their usage processes (Kleinaltenkamp, Plewa, Gudergan, Karpen, & Chen, 2017). Usage processes refer to sequential or concurrent series of resource-integrating activities, through which resource integrators apply available resources to reach their intended goals (Cova & Dallı, 2009; Eichentopf, Kleinaltenkamp, & Van Stiphout, 2011; Pfisterer & Roth, 2015).

In business settings, interactions and collaborations of individual actors from different organizations also take various forms, for example through customer–supplier relationships, co-innovation projects (e.g., Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012), multi-vendor construction or consulting projects (e.g., Günter, 2016), or strategic alliances (e.g., Hoetker & Mellewigt, 2009). In all these contexts, both individual and organizational actors cocreate value across organizational boundaries by integrating resources with other individual and organizational actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). They also may contribute resources to facilitate shared, collective goals at an organizational or even industry level (Epp & Price, 2011; Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, this issue), moving beyond the direct functions of such relationships (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014).

Thus, extant engagement literature offers variable perspectives on engagement, in terms of their scope and focus, which we list and relate to each other in Table 2. This overview indicates that while previous marketing research has conceptualized engagement in multiple ways, all conceptualizations are consistent in that they are purely at the individual actor level, be it as a customer, an employee or an actor in general. Even research that has considered multi-actor contexts such as networks or systems (e.g., Li et al., 2017) has yet to advance a theoretical understanding that does justice to engagement as a potential collective phenomenon. This is particularly relevant in B2B contexts where usually groups of actors engage.

4. Impact of individual engagement on other actors

In this paper, we argue that in organizational settings, individual engagement may develop into collective dispositions and engagement activities. According to Chandler and Lusch (2015), actors' engagement activities depend on their social connections with other actors and the roles that link them. For example, various users of a software system, working in different departments of a firm, likely exhibit unique manifestations of their engagement with the software, depending on their departmental affiliation, hierarchical position, responsibilities, personal background, education, expertise, mood, team spirit, and so on. Engagement behaviors are observable by other members of the collective, so they in turn affect others' perceptions of the focal actor or resource. Depending on these perceptions, other members of the collective may be willing to learn and adapt, leveraging the input they gain from the initial focal actor, or they may suffer confusion or resentment. These positively or negatively valenced reactions should then alter the other actors' engagement dispositions, subsequent interactions, and behaviors (Alexander, Jaakkola, & Hollebeek, 2018). Through such mechanisms, engagement induces dynamic interaction and resource integration

patterns within each respective collective.

Research that focuses on behavioral manifestations of engagement emphasizes the direct impact of individual engagement on a surrounding service system (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). In consumer settings for example, focal actors display two primary types of behaviors: (1) actions that support the engagement object (e.g., product, brand), and (2) actions that influence other actors' perceptions or behaviors toward the engagement object, such as through word of mouth (Brodie et al., 2013; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Kumar et al., 2010; Sharma & Conduit, 2016). Accordingly, we predict that actor engagement affects resource integration processes between (1) the focal actor and the focal resource, (2) the focal actor and other actors in the service ecosystem, and (3) other actors and the focal resource (Alexander & Jaakkola, 2016), in a dynamic sense.

First, engaged focal actors interact with the focal resource, with heightened mental and emotional intensity, leading them to invest more resources (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2019). An engaged user (focal actor) thus might invest time and effort to learn how to use new project management software (focal resource), find ways to adapt it to fit the individual usage context, and ask for information to facilitate this adoption.

Second, both the focal actor and other individual actors may influence one another, through positive and motivated behaviors, displays of emotions, or emotionally charged verbalizations (García Buades et al., 2016). Through their behaviors, actors can influence other actors' preferences or knowledge of the focal resource or potentially mobilize them to act in a particular way, relative to the focal resource (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010). For example, engaged actors may try to convince other users of the benefits of the new project management software or urge coworkers to boycott it.

Third, by influencing the opinions and activities of other members of a collective, engaged actors affect the resource integration between those other actors and the focal resource (Alexander & Jaakkola, 2016; Huber & Kleinaltenkamp, 2018). Those who receive personal endorsements from engaged actors may be more willing and able to adopt new project management software for example, such that they invest their own time, knowledge, and effort resources to leverage the focal software resource (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, this issue). By displaying engagement behaviors, actors can motivate others to achieve common outcomes, provide a sense of meaning for tasks, and encourage focus and concentration on joint tasks (Torrente, Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2012). Such interpersonal influences stem from “social comparison, empathy, proximity, and contact frequency” (García Buades et al., 2016, p. 598), as shared among the members of the respective collective. We argue further that such interactions may not only result in changes to individual engagement dispositions and behaviors but also facilitate the emergence of *collective engagement* among the various members—that is, engagement at the collective level.

5. Characteristics of collective engagement

According to our definition of collective engagement, we posit that collective engagement consists of some minimum level of collective cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dispositions, as well as collective behaviors by the actors. Thus, *collective cognitive engagement* entails shared focused attention on fulfilling tasks, such as when the various members of the collective have difficulty detaching from their shared activities, talk about these activities even during breaks, or ignore other interactions when fulfilling their tasks. *Collective emotional engagement* may be manifest in a shared, strong involvement in task fulfillment and a shared “sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge while doing so” (Costa et al., 2014, p. 418). Finally, evidence of *collective behavioral engagement* likely involves high levels of collective energy, joint effort invested in task fulfillment, and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011).

Table 2
Definitions of engagement in previous marketing research.

Scope of engagement	Focal engaging actor(s)	Different types of actors	Multi-actor	Collective actors
All activities	Individual customers Customer engagement: “active interactions of a customer with a firm, with prospects and with other customers, whether they are transactional or nontransactional in nature” (Kumar et al., 2010, p. 297)			
Beyond-purchase activities	Customer engagement behavior: “the customer’s behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 254)	Actor engagement behavior: “an actor’s voluntary resource contributions that focus on the engagement object, go beyond what is elementary to the exchange, and occur in interactions with a focal object and/or other actors. (Alexander et al., 2018, p. 6)	Partner engagement: “a partner’s volitional behavior toward any other stakeholder in the value chain affecting the focal firm’s business, including both direct (purchase-related) but mainly indirect (referral, influence, knowledge) behaviors” (Reinartz & Bertmann, 2018, p. 251)	
Disposition and behavior		Employee engagement: “the level of connectedness of employees with the customers and the attitude and behavior of the employees toward the firm” (Kumar & Pansari, 2016, p. 500) Actor engagement: “both the actor’s disposition to engage, and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within a service ecosystem” (Storbacka et al., 2016, p. 3009)	Multi-actor engagement: “Drawing on Storbacka et al. (2016), we define multi-actor engagement as “both the dispositions of actors to engage, and the activities of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration” (p. 3009). Actors with various dispositions enter the network, engage with one another in diverse activities of resource integration (Chandler & Lusch, 2015) and service experience co-creation (Jaakkola et al., 2015) [...]” (Li et al., 2017, p. 738)	Collective engagement: Multiple actors’ shared cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dispositions, as manifested in their interactive efforts toward a focal object (this study)
Psychological state/disposition	Customer engagement: “psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships.” (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 258)			

Table 3
Dimensions of collective engagement.

Engagement dimension	Definition derived from research	Example manifestations, individual level	Example manifestations, collective level	Conceptualization of collective engagement dimensions ^a
Cognitive	Absorption in or concentration on an engagement object, reflecting the degree of interest the actor has in interacting with it (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2014)	A user pays attention to instructions for how to use a new IT system and perceives its usefulness.	Members of an innovation project group concentrate fully on their task, talk about it even on breaks, and develop joint understanding of its importance.	Multiple actors' shared disposition to devote positively or negatively valenced attention toward the focal resource.
Emotional	Feelings, enthusiasm, and dedication invoked by the engagement object (Brodie et al., 2013; Vivek et al., 2014)	A user feels delighted or frustrated when using a new IT system.	Members of an innovation project group share inspiration and enthusiasm regarding the innovation.	Multiple actors' shared disposition to exhibit a positively or negatively valenced affective response to the focal resource.
Behavioral	Resource contributions focused on the engagement object, arising in interaction with the focal object and/or other actors (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010).	A user invests particular effort to learn the use of the new IT system and helps others use it too.	Members of an innovation project group devote joint effort and persistence to task fulfillment and promote the innovation among others outside the project group.	Multiple actors' shared positive or negative disposition to devote time, energy, knowledge, or other resources to the focal resource and to influence other actors' perceptions and activities toward it.

^a The collective engagement dimensions represent nonlinear or multiplicative combinations of individual dimensions.

Starting from the definitions and examples of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement at the individual level, Table 3 summarizes our conceptualization of collective engagement dimensions and provides illustrative examples for such.

As Table 3 demonstrates, all three dimensions of engagement are relevant across both individual and collective engagement states. This specification stands in sharp contrast to recent conceptualizations of engagement in B2B contexts that suggest that “given the multiperson nature of B2B relationships and the higher degree of formalization, individual psychological states are less relevant as well as more difficult to measure and aggregate” (Reinartz & Berkmann, 2018, p. 251). Similarly, Vivek et al. (2016, p. 54/55) assume that “B2B markets are inhabited by more rational buyers with less emphasis on the emotional dimension [...]. Therefore, the role and importance of emotions in B2B engagement is likely to differ from that in consumer context.” However, while we acknowledge that emotional engagement dispositions (similar to cognitive ones) might be difficult to measure, we do not consider them any less relevant; emotions are undeniably important drivers of human behavior (Pekrun, 1992). Accordingly, we argue that individual-level conditions, including actors' emotions, provide microfoundations for collective-level conditions (Foss, 2011; Salvato & Rerup, 2011) and are critical in B2B contexts. Recent calls to integrate emotions into organizational research argue that extant theory devotes insufficient attention to the emotional influences that shape actors' enactments of organizational or collective practices (e.g., Felin, Foss, Heimeriks, & Madsen, 2012; Moisander, Hirsto, & Fahy, 2016; Voronov & Vince, 2012). Researchers acknowledge the role of emotions and the idea of collective emotional energy (e.g., Collins, 2005), which might motivate or hinder action. Such considerations are especially relevant in situations in which multiple individuals interact, such that they watch and respond to others' behaviors (e.g., Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005; Wallbott & Scherer, 1986). Accordingly, to delineate the conceptual scope of collective engagement, we propose the following:

Proposition 1. Engagement is both an individual- and a collective-level phenomenon.

Proposition 2. Collective engagement comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

Because collective engagement is always perceived by an individual actor (e.g., focal actor), perceptions of a collective engagement are not necessarily equivalent across the collective, not least because the delineation of the collective relies on the focal actor's perceptions (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2017). In this sense, individual actors might believe that they belong to a certain collective and experience the respective collective engagement as linked to their own, yet others might not include these actors in the respective collective. Perceptions of collective engagement are likely to differ between those who see themselves as inside the collective and those who do not feel attached to it. Still, spillover effects of collective engagement can occur. For example, satisfaction with the performance of one's favorite football team, resulting from perceived engagement on the field, has a crucial effect on fans' own engagement and job performance (Gkorezis, Bellou, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Tsiftsis, 2016). The levels of collective engagement perceived by individual actors, inside or outside of the collective, may differ, both for the aggregated assessment of collective engagement and for its three dimensions (cognitive, emotional, behavioral). A participant in an internal B2B sales training session might be surprised and impressed by the levels of emotional or cognitive collective engagement among colleagues during the training; a sales trainer who has run many training sessions in various contexts might have a very different perception of these levels. The rise of digital training and online seminars without any physical co-presence implies ever increasing potential for distinct perceptions of collective engagement. These considerations result in the following proposition:

Proposition 3. Collective engagement reflects an individual's

perception of the degree to which engagement is shared across actors.

Because collective engagement results in a shared state or shared behaviors across the collective understanding, such engagement requires consideration of the respective behaviors of all members of the particular collective, as well as their interactions (Costa et al., 2014). Unlike individual actors' engagement, collective engagement cannot be attributed to a single person. It is a phenomenon that inherently refers to a multitude of actors who display the same or similar attitudes or behaviors. This collective engagement is more than the sum of individual actors' engagement dispositions and behaviors. It reflects the aggregate of multiple actors' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement dispositions and behaviors, which are amplified by interactions of these members of the collective and “manifests at a higher level” (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000, p. 55). This aggregate construct of collective engagement is not simply a composition, which would imply the combination of various actors' engagement dispositions and behaviors through addition or averaging. Rather, it is a compilation, representing a nonlinear or multiplicative combination of the components (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). The individual actors who perceive collective engagement in turn value the observable experiences of the entire collective and base their judgments on more or less the same cues that influence that very collective (Costa et al., 2014). However, this shared view does not mean that all members of the collective always or completely engage or behave in precisely the same way. Rather, collective engagement refers to engagement dispositions and behaviors that are shared by focal actors.

Proposition 4. Collective engagement is more than the sum of its parts, reflecting a multiplicative rather than a summative aggregation of individuals' engagements to the collective level.

Similar to individual actor engagement (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014) but unlike work team engagement (Costa et al., 2014), collective engagement may be both positively and negatively valenced. That is, collective engagement can be low—such as when decreasing revenues lead a team supervisor to issue abusive comments to the team, causing members to respond with reduced work motivation, limited persistence, and little pride in their work (Costa et al., 2014)—but also may be negative. If a firm owner plans to enter into a joint venture with another company, but the proposed business model does not convince leading salespeople, they may develop a negative disposition toward the project and fear for their future careers, which might drive negative (though still potentially highly engaged) behaviors. Such negative engagement with the joint venture project also might spill over to people from other departments and result in negative engagement manifestations such as the resignation of important staff that in turn could endanger the very existence of the company. It should be noted that, following Proposition 3, collective engagement, independent of whether it is positive or negative, is perceived by a focal actor at any level within or in contact with the collective. Our fifth proposition thus holds:

Proposition 5. Collective engagement can be perceived as positively or negatively valenced.

6. Conditions for the emergence of collective engagement

Because collective engagement may not emerge even if individual engagement is evident, the question arises: What facilitates this process of emergence that “results in new properties that are more than the sum of their constituent parts alone” (Taillard, Peters, Pels, & Mele, 2016, p. 2972)? In general, institutions, as the “set of rules governing interpersonal governance” (North, 1990, p. 70), shape human interactions, such that these “humanly devised rules, norms, and beliefs ... enable and constrain action and make social life at least somewhat predictable and meaningful” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 11). On a higher level,

institutional arrangements are “interrelated sets of institutions that together constitute a relatively coherent assemblage that facilitates coordination of activity” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 8). Institutions and institutional arrangements thus establish contexts that provide rules, norms, and practices for both individual actor engagement (Alexander et al., 2018) and collective engagement.

According to Scott (2014), three institutional pillars establish rules. First, the *regulative pillar* encompasses formal rules, such as laws, contracts, conventions, and other formal regulations. To ensure that actors' behaviors match specific standards, these regulative institutions impose legal or formal sanctions, so behaviors mainly are driven by self-interest; the actors fear the negative consequences they would suffer if they failed to behave according to the rules. Second, a *normative pillar* relies on norms and values to establish rules. The negative consequences of a behavior that breaks with these norms might involve social disadvantages that actors expect if they act inappropriately. Thus, actors follow normative rules because they feel an internal commitment and perceive social expectations to act in a certain way to avoid social sanctions. The underlying values and norms then constitute standards against which existing behavior or structures can be compared and evaluated. Third, a *cognitive pillar* consists of sets of beliefs based on actors' perceptions and individual views of reality. These beliefs, opinions, and ideas result from information processing activities, such as determining which information deserves attention, how it will be encoded and organized into memory, and how it will be interpreted. Actors' behaviors then result from the degree of “taken for grantedness” they develop with respect to an engagement object or to other members of a collective.

In line with research on shared intentionality (Taillard et al., 2016) and institutional (mis)alignment (Karpen & Kleinaltenkamp, 2018), we anticipate that the impact of a certain institutional setting on collective engagement will be greater if the distinct institutional elements are more closely shared, reflecting the collective interpretations developed by actors at some specific point in time. For example, a more closely shared view among a cohort of new hires—about work hour expectations or the general do's and don'ts established by institutional norms in the workplace, such as organizational cultural and working time regulations—should enable that cohort to thrive in its collective engagement. By contrast, if individual members of the cohort have different perceptions of appropriate arrival or departure times (as often occurs in cross-cultural teams, for whom the normative definition of a common work day differs significantly), it is less likely that the cohort develops collective engagement.

The influence of such institutions on actors' engagement dispositions and behaviors also should be stronger when each individual actor identifies with the specific reference group represented by the collective (Alexander et al., 2018; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). This type of identification relies on an actor's ego involvement, that is, the “motivational state induced by an association between an activated attitude and some aspect of the self” (Johnson & Eagly, 1989, p. 293). Individual actor engagement toward a collective should increase when that actor identifies more with the collective (Alexander et al., 2018). To the extent that other members of a collective perceive individual engagement behavior in relation to a common engagement object, it could also contribute to the development of collective engagement. In turn, collective engagement may not emerge, for instance, if the engagement states of the various actors of the respective collective are too diverse, if there are no supporting institutional structures that would support collective engagement or if there are only weak bonds and little interaction between the individual actors.

Describing individual actors' engagement, Bowden, Conduit, Hollebeek, Luoma-aho, and Solem (2017) argue that social contagion allows engagement to transfer among actors with different engagement foci. Similarly, Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1994) and Torrente, Salanova, and Llorens (2013) describe emotional contagion as the mechanism underlying work team engagement. Moreover, empirical

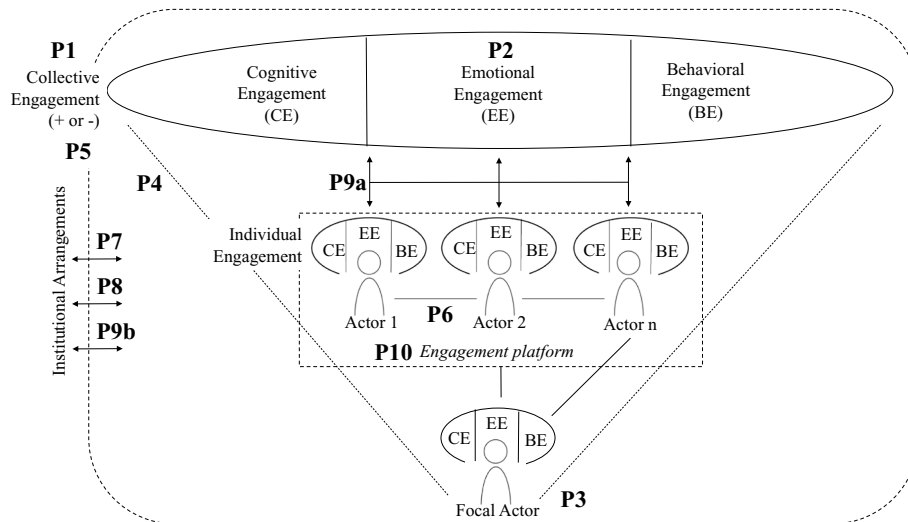


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework for properties and emergence of collective engagement.

studies of work team engagement indicate that energetic behaviors boost collective engagement (Costa, Passos, & Bakker, 2016). Costa et al. (2014) further propose that team engagement results from interpersonal processes for managing affect and conflicts and motivating others. These contributions emphasize affective dimensions, with the recognition that emotions not only stem from institutional settings but also influence those institutions, through interactive behaviors (Scheer, 2012). Emotional considerations are “not simply ... individual, psychological reactions but ... intersubjective, collective experiences” (Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001, p. 283). This insight appears in limited management research that acknowledges that cognitive awareness of the need to improve a current institutional setting is insufficient to evoke change, because actors maintain some emotional investment in the existing institutional order (Calhoun, 2001). That is, a “cognitive investment in institutional order may not be enough to ensure that individuals will work to maintain it ... [reinterpreting] a boundedly rational cognitive miser to a more integrated human being whose passions and desires are not reducible to the pursuit of rational interests” (Voronov & Vince, 2012, p. 59). Similarly, collective engagement has the potential to change institutional orders through its emotional dimension:

Proposition 6. Collective engagement results from interactive experiences across actors, for which emotional contagion is important.

Proposition 7. The level of collective engagement increases when the respective institutional setting is better aligned.

Proposition 8. Collective engagement is influenced by and influences the institutional order or institutional arrangements.

Over time, different levels of collective engagement may trigger new expectations; for example, a certain (even unexpected) level of effort by a group of employees of the customer firm that contribute to a solution provider's innovation process might alter the normative institutions in that setting. That is, other actors' efforts at time 1 might shape behavioral expectations at time 2, from the solution provider's perspective. Similarly, customers' engagement levels might affect how the solution provider interprets the business situation, which might prompt changes in cognitive institutions across the organization and the customer relationship. Over time, emerging institutions need to be realigned and relationships renegotiated, in line with Scott's (1981) argument that institutionalization is a social process. Through engagement, or its lack, actors gradually reinforce or change institutions and institutional arrangements in context, which eventually affect other actors' engagement (Alexander et al., 2018). As Proposition 8 implies,

various actors should come to accept the shared definitions and understandings of reality through their repeated actions and assignments of similar meanings, so they contribute to the (re)formation of institutions and institutional arrangements (Taillard et al., 2016). Because the actor constellations and the interactions among actors change and evolve over time, collective engagement cannot be a static factor. In contrast, it fluctuates, and its level at any particular point in time will determine further changes in actors' activities, their interactions, and their engagement (Costa et al., 2014; Li et al., 2017).

Proposition 9. Collective engagement is a dynamic phenomenon that features interdependence across levels, actors, and time, such that (a) individual actors shape the valence and intensity of collective engagement, and vice versa, and (b) institutional arrangements shape the valence and intensity of collective engagement, and vice versa.

Finally, collective engagement might emerge not just when individual actors are simultaneously physically present but also when the members of a certain collective are virtually linked through an engagement platform, like a software system or organizational process. For example, specialists in charge of a firm's global product procurement might work together across countries and languages to achieve common savings goals. Typically, to make these arrangements and decisions, they do not meet in person but rather communicate via email or conference calls. Nevertheless, they may develop a common enthusiasm for the actions they take to achieve their common goals. In predicting that collectives that collaborate only virtually can develop collective engagement toward a focal object, we also emphasize the potential influence of the degree of virtuality. If a vast multitude of individual actors only cooperate through e-mail, text exchanges, and teleconferences, without ever meeting face-to-face, this collective is more virtual than a team that also has regular face-to-face meetings. Similarly, a collective of people located in multiple continents and time zones is more virtual than one whose members are located in the same city or region (Cohen & Gibson, 2003). Engagement platforms, such as conferences or strategy days, may bring the collective together for a short period of time, which should influence their collective engagement, both during that time and subsequently.

Proposition 10. Collective engagement can arise in collectives that are simultaneously physically present, as well as in those that connect virtually through some engagement platform.

Fig. 1 illustrates the developed propositions for collective engagement: Following recent research in marketing as well as in organizational and occupational psychology, our basic Proposition 1 states that

in organizational settings engagement is not only an individual- but also a collective-level phenomenon. Mainly referring to literature in organizational and occupational psychology, [Proposition 2](#) claims that, like individual engagement, collective engagement also comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The degree to which engagement is shared collectively is, as reflected in [Proposition 3](#), always based on the perceptions of the respective focal actor who is experiencing the behaviors of a collective of actors, regardless of whether this focal actor is a member of this collective or not. This collective engagement is different from each of its dimensions as it is more than the sum of these parts. As presented in [Proposition 4](#), collective engagement is thus rather a nonlinear or multiplicative aggregation of individuals' engagements to the collective level. Further, as outlined in [Proposition 5](#), we assume that collective engagement can both be positively and negatively valenced.

Following these basic propositions on the characteristics of collective engagement, the subsequent propositions refer to the conditions for its emergence. Here, [Proposition 6](#) states that, based on interactive experiences across actors, emotional contagion is the underlying mechanism for the occurrence of collective engagement. Given the importance of institutions and institutional arrangements for actors' perceptions as well as behaviors, [Proposition 7 and 8](#) refer to the relationships between the emergence of collective engagement and the institutional setting surrounding the specific actors. Consequently, [Proposition 7](#) assumes that the level of collective engagement increases if the relevant institutional elements are shared or aligned. In addition, reflecting the duality of structure and agency, [Proposition 8](#) poses that collective engagement is not only influenced by the institutional setting but that it itself also influences this institutional order. Furthermore, as collective engagement may vary over time, [Propositions 9a and 9b](#) make statements on the dynamics of the construct. Here, we not only assume that individual actors shape the valence and intensity of collective engagement, and vice versa ([9a](#)), but also that institutional arrangements shape the valence and intensity of collective engagement, and vice versa ([9b](#)). Finally, reflecting the increasing importance of virtual engagement platforms, [Proposition 10](#) proposes that collective engagement cannot only arise in situations in which the members of a collective are physically present but also in those situations in which actors are connected virtually through an engagement platform.

7. Discussion and implications

7.1. Theoretical implications

In line with our research questions, our aim was to enhance understanding of customer engagement as a collective-level phenomenon that reflects the actual nature of business contexts. In addition to conceptualizing collective engagement, along with its characteristics and the conditions for its emergence, we establish a theoretical framework with 10 propositions that specify its multilevel and multidimensional nature, multiplicative aggregation, multidirectional valence, phenomenological and shared properties, emotional and institutional interdependence, and dynamic and multichannel means of emergence. We thus do not only advance the theoretical domain of customer engagement, but also make a significant case for a closer consideration of emotions in B2B marketing. In line with recent team and management research, we assert that actor engagement, and particularly its affective dimension, provides a means to integrate emotions in B2B theorizing.

Multi-actor settings and their consequences have always attracted business research attention, especially that devoted to B2B marketing—as indicated by the vast literature on decision-making processes, team building and behavior, conflict management, and negotiations. In B2B marketing studies, researchers address collective phenomena such as the buying center and, more recently, the usage center. Yet ultimately, these various conceptualizations persist in considering individual actors and their positions in a collective (e.g., roles in the

buying center) rather than capturing the collective and their collective behaviors. For example, various attempts to determine group preferences ([Brinkmann & Voeth, 2007](#); [Choffray & Lilien, 1978](#)) or capture influences of networks of actors ([Johnston & Bonoma, 1981](#)) have not gained widespread acceptance in either science or practice. Although they offer theoretical brilliance and persuasiveness, they lack explanatory power, because their empirical verifiability remains limited. In addition, they rely too much on an idea of more or less rational actors who decide and act, free of emotions. In a related stream, current research on usage centers might take affective elements into account, but it looks primarily at the role of individual actors and the implications for the behavior or value creation of others, rather than focusing on the behaviors of actual collectives as a whole ([Huber & Kleinaltenkamp, 2018](#), [Huber & Kleinaltenkamp, this issue](#)). In contrast, we consider collective engagement because of its important potential contribution to clarifying various behaviors in organizational settings.

Our theoretical framework offers several notable implications for B2B research. Engagement research continues to address collectively oriented concepts, such as the buying or the usage center, and our conceptualization of collective engagement could function as a bridge for actors across these concepts. Furthermore, our conceptualization of collective engagement provides a platform for more phenomenologically and (inter)subjectively oriented concepts, considering the relevance of a focal actor in determining the existence, valence and extent of collective engagement. This view of engagement regards it as both a collective phenomenon and a property of individuals. Engagement thus has the potential to constitute a bridging concept for multilevel theorizing, with the manifestations and outcomes of engagement are evident on both the individual and collective level. Moreover, similar to the characteristics of brand gestalt ([Diamond et al., 2009](#); [Tierney, Karpen, & Westberg, 2016](#)), collective engagement can be “understood as the product of a complex system, [...], whose component parts are in continuous interplay and together constitute a whole greater than their sum” ([Diamond et al., 2009](#)). In other words, collective engagement also has a “gestalt” that refers to an “organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts.” ([Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019](#)). Our proposed conceptualization of collective engagement thus builds a foundation for research that seeks to specify the role and consequences of collective engagement. [Table 4](#) outlines illustrative questions to address.

This research agenda should also integrate the role of emotions in B2B marketing, because “[e]motions are an intrinsic part of institutional work [and collective practices] and have been acknowledged by some scholars—although in a tangential manner” ([Voronov & Vince, 2012](#), p. 60). Collective engagement, with its affective component, provides a unique opportunity to build more emotion-integrative frameworks that reflect the reality of human nature and interactions in business settings. Emotions are manifest across engagement levels and also help explain the interplay among institutions and engagement. Collective (dis)engagement is more likely in contexts in which the institutions provide strong (weak) emotional stimuli, in that it reproduces or transforms such institutions depending on the valence of the engagement and reactions to the institutions. In turn, a stronger consideration of emotions may also help explaining what hinders individual engagement to become collective.

Collective engagement might also operate as an important antecedent of various firm processes and outcomes. For example, co-innovation, in which multiple actors participate in innovation processes, might benefit from greater collective engagement among the involved actors. The emerging collective energy can function as an important catalyst for more stimulating ideation sessions and creative outcomes. Similarly, it could support the diffusion of innovation, such that collective engagement with the focal innovative object might encourage organizational buyers to adopt the new technologies. As such, collective engagement might help cross the chasm between early adopters and early majorities.

Table 4
Research agenda: collective engagement in organizational settings.

Propositions	Proposed research questions
Proposition 1: <i>Engagement is both an individual- and a collective-level phenomenon</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the interplay between individual and collective engagement? 2. How does collective engagement differ across intra- and inter-organizational contexts? 3. What is the role of different organizational and individual actors for facilitating individual vs. collective engagement in organizational and inter-organizational settings?
Proposition 2: <i>Collective engagement comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do the engagement dimensions relate at the collective level? 2. How can collective engagement be measured? 3. What is the role of emotional engagement as a facet of collective engagement in organizational settings? 4. How do other engagement dimensions, such as social or spiritual engagement, transfer to the collective level?
Proposition 3: <i>Collective engagement reflects an individual's (phenomenological) perception of the degree to which engagement is shared across actors.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the individual's perception of collective engagement change over time? 2. What is the role, if any, of observers (i.e., external actors not involved in the collective) in shaping collective engagement? 3. Can collective engagement be understood from a systems perspective as an actual (rather than individual's sense of) collective?
Proposition 4: <i>Collective engagement is more than the sum of its parts, reflecting a multiplicative rather than a summative aggregation of individuals' engagements to the collective level.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can the multiplicative aggregation of collective engagement best be captured? 2. What stimulates the extent to which collective engagement extends beyond the sum of its parts? 3. What role do organizational mechanisms and specific actors (within and across organizations) have on the magnitude of collective engagement?
Proposition 5: <i>Collective engagement can be perceived as positively or negatively valenced.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is required to facilitate a shift in the valence (negative to positive) of collective engagement? 2. What are the drivers for positively vs. negatively valenced collective engagement? 3. How can organizations deal with conflicting valences of collective engagement toward the same focal object? 4. Which mechanisms might align engagement valences and strengthen positively valenced engagement across organizations?
Proposition 6: <i>Collective engagement results from interactive experiences across actors for which emotional contagion is important.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which interaction types are most effective for facilitating the emergence of collective engagement? 2. Do the interactions that facilitate the emergence of collective engagement differ from those that can maintain and increase collective engagement over time? 3. How can organizations facilitate the interactive experiences necessary for collective engagement to occur? 4. What role do various emotional practices play in the emergence of collective engagement in an organizational setting? 5. What hinders individual engagement to become collective? 6. How can conditions hindering the emergence of collective engagement be overcome?
Proposition 7: <i>The level of collective engagement increases when the respective institutional setting is better aligned.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What type of institutional elements are critical to align for increasing collective engagement? 2. How does the influence of institutional alignment on collective engagement change over time? 3. Which characteristics of the collective, task, or organizational relation facilitate the emergence of collective engagement? 4. How can an individual's identification with the collective be facilitated for the benefit of collective engagement? 5. How do differences in institutional settings affect collective engagement in cross-functional teams?
Proposition 8: <i>Collective engagement is influenced by and influences the institutional order or institutional arrangements.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does collective engagement affect organizational culture? 2. How do emotions contribute to the emergence of intermediary or proto-institutions? 3. Which institutional elements affect actors' emotions (most)? 4. Which carriers of institutional elements trigger actors' cognitive/emotional/behavioral engagement? 5. How do emotions affect the interplay of various institutional elements?
Proposition 9: <i>Collective engagement is a dynamic phenomenon that features interdependence across levels, actors, and time, such that (a) individual actors shape the valence and intensity of collective engagement, and vice versa, and (b) institutional arrangements shape the valence and intensity of collective engagement, and vice versa.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Over time, how does the interplay across levels, actors, and time relate to the emergence and evolution of collective engagement? 2. What role do intra- and inter-organizational structures play in the link between the individual and the collective? 3. Which characteristics (of individual actors, the collective, the task, the type of relationship) facilitate collective engagement within and across organizations? 4. How do various social and organizational elements influence the interplay among individual actors, collective engagement, and institutional arrangements?
Proposition 10: <i>Collective engagement can arise in collectives that are simultaneously physically present, as well as in those that connect virtually through some engagement platform.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do physical and virtual social environments, as well as their joint use, differentially facilitate collective engagement? 2. Does the effectiveness of physical and virtual associations differ across contexts (e.g., different organizations, industries), various focal objects, or situations (e.g., innovation process, buying process)? 3. How do the effectiveness of physical and virtual interaction mechanisms change over time?

Collective engagement provides a link to common relationship marketing frameworks too. This phenomenon emerged in part from the theoretical foundation of customer relationship management (Jaakkola, Conduit, & Fehrer, 2018), in which engagement represents an advanced form of the customer relationship (e.g., Kumar & Pansari, 2016), such that the customer interacts with the firm and directly or indirectly provides resources that contribute to the firm's marketing functions and success (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017; Verleye et al., 2014). Relationship marketing underpins much of the discourse about B2B relationships (Gummesson, 2017). Recent advances highlight the dynamic nature of relationship marketing and define a “communal relationship state” as one marked by the highest levels of trust, commitment, and relational norms (Zhang, Watson IV, Palmatier, & Dant, 2016, p. 66). The conceptual framework of collective engagement we propose aligns with these developments and helps expand understanding of the relational constructs and frameworks, to illuminate the nature of buyer–seller, as well as intra-organizational, relationships.

Finally, this study provides a basis for operationalizing collective engagement. Developing appropriate measurements will be the next step toward validating the predicted relationships and affirming the phenomenon's construct (predictive) validity. However, the characteristics of collective engagement mean that the measurement items must relate to the collective as a whole, not its individual members. Individual engagement levels cannot capture the shared nature of each engagement dimensions, much less their aggregation. Approaches to measure teamwork engagement might offer some insight, such as using within-group consensus items that reflect the agreement of various members about the collective's level of engagement, using collectively formulated items (e.g., “we”) (Costa et al., 2014; Torrente, Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2013). Suitable scales will also enable an in-depth empirical examination of conditions facilitating or hindering the emergence of collective engagement across different contexts.

7.2. Managerial implications

With this conceptualization of collective engagement, along with the identification of its characteristics and conditions, we also provide guidance for B2B managers. First, by outlining its characteristics, we provide a framework for managers to recognize collective engagement. In particular, collective engagement is critical for creative tasks such as innovation (Harvey & Kou, 2013). In such work settings, managers must actively evaluate and manage levels of collective engagement. By systematically evaluating and managing collective engagement, they can minimize disengagement, such as lack of responsiveness to other actors (e.g., not answering emails) or resignation from the group. They also might limit negative engagement responses, such as hostility toward other actors or chronic complaining. Although companies such as Marketo have successfully applied sophisticated software tools and big data to track individual-level engagement in B2B contexts, these data points do not reflect the complex networks and meaningful interactive effects among actors (Grossberg, 2015). Thus, managers should continue their efforts to recognize and evaluate the collective nature of engagement.

Second, by delineating the multidimensional nature of collective engagement and providing illustrations of its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, this article suggests ways for managers to influence each dimension. Prior B2B literature offers limited recognition of the role of emotions (Kemp et al., 2018; Youssef et al., 2018); understanding the emotional dispositions of actors will enable firms to manage interpersonal relationships and emotional contagion better, which is imperative for collective engagement. Many B2B brands also seek to engage customers on a more emotional level. For example, Caterpillar's recent brand campaign taps into childhood memories of playing Jenga to highlight the brand's fun and familiarity (Cat® Products, 2014). Among working groups of customers and equipment operators, Caterpillar could employ strategies to reinforce and develop

this emotional engagement with the brand, especially among these actors at a collective level.

Third, our framework outlines conditions for the emergence of collective engagement, so we provide managers with levers for strategically developing engagement among collective groups, both within and across organizations. Collective engagement can extend beyond organizational boundaries, so managers should similarly seek to extend their influence beyond operational borders. Interactive experiences among actors are necessary for the development of collective engagement, so firms should provide opportunities and engagement platforms that facilitate these experiences and thus interpersonal relationships among actors. For example, Intuit, the tax and business accounting software provider that produces QuickBooks and TurboTax, hosts live community forums, called the TurboTax Live Community (Inc, 2018), to gather and share user-generated content such as tips, inspiration, discussions, member stories, and other value-driven, customer-centric content. This vibrant brand community achieves a level of collective engagement that is greater than the aggregated engagement of each member. Virtual engagement platforms are not the only option for facilitating collective engagement; a multitude of activities could provide physical platforms for engagement, such as conferences and social events. These efforts should facilitate stronger social connections and establish emotional and cognitive bonds among actors, constituting engagement.

Fourth, because institutional conditions frame engagement responses and levels, it is critical for organizations to shape institutions in a manner that is conducive to engagement. The more the institutional settings are aligned among actors within the collective, the greater the collective engagement. Organizations should actively seek to influence and manage these institutional arrangements. When Google wanted to create a culture of creativity, it recognized that transparency and freedom would support it, so it mandated that employees spend 20% of their time performing functions outside their normal work tasks, to encourage behaviors that would induce a creative culture (Schrage, 2013). Although they do not directly promote engagement, these institutional conditions likely align the institutional settings and support shared collective engagement. More direct influences on institutional norms associated with collective engagement also are possible, such as sharing stories of collective engagement practices, rewarding behaviors that signal collective engagement, or promoting members who demonstrate the values associated with collective engagement.

8. Conclusion

Extant research offers substantive conceptual and empirical insights into engagement in consumer settings; some recent work also considers organizational contexts (e.g., Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Reinartz & Berkmann, 2018). However, available theorizing is largely limited to an individual-level perspective on engagement, even though organizational and occupational psychology research has clearly demonstrated the relevance of the collective (e.g., work team engagement; Torrente et al., 2012, Torrente, Salanova, & Llorens, 2013, Torrente, Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2013). Both business and industrial contexts offer rich opportunities for conceptualizing engagement at the collective level, due to the inherently multi-actor, interactive nature of the activities that occur within and across organizations.

By developing an initial, comprehensive, conceptual framework of collective engagement in organizational settings, this article makes a unique contribution to engagement literature, especially pertaining to engagement in business settings. The propositions, which we developed by drawing on engagement, organizational, and institutional theories, establish a strong foundation for research efforts that advance the sparse conceptual and empirical understanding of engagement in business settings but also more broadly generate a comprehensive sense of engagement at the collective level, in both B2B and B2C contexts. Despite the significant appeal of the concept of engagement for both

academics and practitioners, its theoretical development and managerial exploitation can be maximized only by clarifying its presence and emergence beyond the individual level.

Building on the propositions that specify the characteristics and conditions for the emergence of collective engagement, Table 4 lists a comprehensive, directed research agenda. Specifically, we note the need for empirical, cross-sectional, and longitudinal investigations of collective engagement to confirm the conceptual predictions we offer. Furthermore, this research agenda places a strong emphasis on the emergence of engagement at the collective level within and across organizations. Drawing on research on work team engagement (Costa et al., 2014), we propose that characteristics of the (1) individual, (2) collective (e.g., size, organizational occupation), (3) task, and (4) interorganizational relation (e.g., customer–supplier, co-innovation project, multi-vendor project, strategic alliance) all are relevant for collective engagement and its emergence as well as for preventing individual states of engagement from developing into a collective one. Empirical tests of these factors should include various industrial settings and B2B contexts. Further research also might capture the dynamics inherent to engagement, across individual and collective levels, among actors, and over time.

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