Business Engagement Practices, Patterns and Outcomes
A case study in the pharmaceutical industry

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2023

Abstract

Introduction

A host of studies has marked research on engagement, most focused on customer engagement, the customer as an end-user (consumer). Although there is a recognized requirement to also discover and understand engagement 'as supplier, manufacturer, retailer, and … actor-engagement' (Chandler and Lusch, 2015, p.4), the literature addressing engagement amongst versatile actors in networks remains fragmented (Brodie, Fehrer, Jaakkola, and Conduit, 2019). Understanding business-to-business engagement (BE) is equally essential to academia and industry since the construct has been theorized to be related to value co-creation processes (Storbacka, 2019). Moreover, BE is a critical construct since it influences the actors' consideration set, dependence on other interacting actors and willingness to pay a premium (Nyadzayo, Casidy and Thaichon, 2020), linking it to financial rewards (Sands, Campbell, Ferraro, and Plangger, 2022).

The definition of business engagement is based on Vivek, Dalela and Ahmed (2021) and Brodie et al. (2019)'s actor engagement. BE is 'a dynamic and iterative process' (Brodie et al. 2019, p.183) generated by episodes of intense interactions that reflect actors' tendencies to invest resources in their interactions, beyond the contractual obligations, with other actors for the benefit of [their] own, interacting actors, as well as others in the service ecosystem.

This research is organised around several questions that are relevant to both marketing and organisational research since the BE concept is related to organisational settings.

- *Question 1 (RQ1): What are the BE practices?*
- *Question 2 (RQ2): What patterns are formed by BE practices?*
- *Question 3 (RQ3): What are the specific outcomes that BE practices and their patterns generate?*

Theoretical Background

This research examines how business-to-business engagement expresses itself in the pharmaceutical industry. Service-Dominant logic (S-D logic) and practice theory are used

to support the research, which is an in-depth case study of a large multinational pharmaceutical company. S-D logic provides a mindset for an integrated understanding of the nature of organisations, markets and society, allowing for a broad understanding of engagement within a network of actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). This permits for research on engagement to be based on dyadic, actor-to-actor relationships but also to include multiple actors, enabling research at the micro and meso level (Breidbach and Brodie, 2017; Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmann, Maglio, and Nenonen, 2016).

Practice theory also informs this research. Social practice theory 'de-centers individuals from analyses, and turns attention towards the social and collective organization of practices' (Hargreaves, 2011, p.80), which makes it very suitable for understanding business engagement resulting from the interaction of businesses. Brodie et al. (2019 p.11) advocate understanding engagement from a practice perspective because 'we need a better understanding of the actions performed by interacting actors'. The 'understandings' element of each practice (Schatzki, 2006) can offer insights into the actions, activities and rules associated with each practice.

Since the initial customer (consumer) engagement conceptualization (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, and Ilic, 2011) engagement research has flourished (Alexander, Jaakkola and Hollebeek, 2018). Research has extended the concept to the broader networks of customers and many other stakeholders (Chandler et al., 2015; Storbacka et al., 2016). However there are just a few B2B empirical studies that are based on dyadic interactions including at the same time different types of actors, other than consumers/ end users (Jonas, Boha, Sörhammar, and Moeslein, 2018).

Methodology and Analysis

Critical realism (CR) is a philosophical approach used in this research to understand B2B engagement. The essence of realism is that, there is a realm of truth, even if our perceptions of it are mediated. Therefore, even if we cannot directly observe reality it still exists and exercises powers, and the observable events are manifestations of invisible mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2013). CR can be a strong foundation for theories of business markets, as it assists in uncovering the properties of business relationships which are based on the assumption that value is created within a service ecosystem (Ehret, 2013). As CR is based on the belief that relationships have causal powers (Peters, Pressey,

Vanharanta, and Johnston, 2013), it is epistemologically appropriate for business-to-business research.

A qualitative research design is used for a case study of a large multinational producer, its distributor in Romania, and the interactions of the distributor with its customers (pharmacies). The analysis examines BE practices generated by the collaboration and interactions between the focal organization with different types of stakeholders. The research includes a manufacturer that is a large multinational company, a distributor and its business customers, pharmacies to understand the patterns of engagement practices. As part of the research design, the data collection is based on direct observations of interactions, in-depth and joint interviews with pharmacists, sales representatives, and sales and marketing representing distributors and a manufacturer in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry. A mini-focus group was conducted to endorse some of the main findings from observations and interviews. The data collection started in June 2018 and ended in February 2020.

The study revealed the existence of three higher-level BE practices: social, cognitive, and transformative, each containing lower-level practices. The study also showed that under the influence of intensity or valence, actors might experience different patterns: rewarding, routine or conflictual BE that leads to value being co-created or co-destructed. These patterns generate for interacting actors specific outcomes.

Research contributions

This research contributes to both theory development. Theoretically, a better understanding of BE viewed from a service ecosystem perspective will address major gaps identified in academic research (Storbacka et al., 2016). The main contribution of this research is related to the insights generated by how BE practices take place, revealing what actors do in practice by looking at dyadic interaction between three parties (pharmacies, a distributor and a manufacturer), recoding also the impact on other stakeholders (patients, doctors, competitors). The research also reveals the patterns of BE practices, namely rewarding, routine and conflictual BE practices and their related outcomes.

The research has managerial implications. From an industry perspective, value co-creation processes and related outcomes can determine which companies will survive.

Insights about BE will help companies to prioritize investments in this area. In addition, firms survive and flourish when engagement exists and is high, as engagement has been found to be related to innovation processes (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014) and better company performance (Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Sands et al., 2022). Therefore, insights about the concept can help managers to develop tactics to increase BE and improve practices that will generate better outcomes for their firms.

Future research

This research broadens the knowledge about BE, by revealing the engagement practices in the B2B settings. Furthermore, the opportunities for future research are also highlighted based on the insights generated.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to say 'Thank You' to my supervisors, Professor Heidi Winklhofer and Associate Professor Linda Peters, who have been exemplary professionals and have had patience and guided me to explore all the unknowns. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Rod Brodie, who, throughout my academic time, since 2003, has been a source of inspiration and a role model. Finally, I am also grateful for the support of two other academic members, Dr Biljana Juric (University of Auckland) and Professor Nicole Coviello (Wilfrid Laurier University), who encouraged me to pursue this PhD programme.

Second, I would like to thank the company I work for, which offered support and endorsed my research. Kris C., who encouraged me during the initial phases of enrolling in my PhD, and more recently Stefanie, with whose help I could complete this work. Stefanie, thank you for giving me the respite and approving an extended leave of absence, but most of all, for your encouragement and energy!

I want to thank for support my colleagues and friends: Mihaela for our discussions about the pharmaceutical industry, Rodica for picking me up when I was about to fall and giving me ideas and material on how to use my brain power, Diana for the philosophical discussions, the energy and inspiration you gave me.

To my friends Alina M. and Cristi A., thank you for the help with sampling and insights about the pharmaceutical industry in Romania and the pharmacists.

I could not have finished if I had not had a moment of respite. Thanks also to my friends Mrs Tudorancea, Miki, and Gabi, who supported me with energy and moments of relaxation and encouragement.

Last, but not least, I want to pay tribute to my family. To my dad, who never got to see the finality of this PhD and my mom, who have always thought of me. To my sister, Diana, for always thinking highly of me. To my son Andre, who has been my biggest supporter and given me moments of much-needed fun. To Lucian, my husband, without whom I could not have started nor completed this work. Over the past nine years, you have made many sacrifices for me to dedicate my time to this PhD. You have also given

me moments of relaxation and joy in my downtime. In my most difficult moments, you have encouraged me and told me I could complete this PhD.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Research Questions

1.1. Research orientation – research on engagement

In the past ten years, engagement has become a highly debated and researched topic in marketing. This interest in engagement has been triggered as the construct has been theorised to be related to value co-creation processes (Brodie et al., 2011a). Engagement between firms creates opportunities for firms to deliver value for the interacting parties and others in the network (Viljakainen et al., 2013b). Business engagement (BE) is a critical construct since it influences the actors' consideration set, dependence on other interacting actors and willingness to pay a premium (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Companies must understand how engagement drives value and how value drives engagement. Recognising the mechanisms and acknowledging this relationship can further help to develop programs and platforms for the benefit of companies and other stakeholders. Enhanced B2B engagement is thought to contribute to improved financial performance and relationship building since it generates dependence and willingness among business actors to pay premium prices (Nyadzayo et al., 2020).

Research on engagement in B2B settings is sparse (Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018), and literature addressing engagement amongst versatile actors in networks remains fragmented (Brodie et al., 2019). Therefore, researchers have called for extending the understanding of actor engagement (Alexander et al., 2018a). However, the dynamics of engagement in B2B settings have received less attention, and theoretical understanding is still fragmented due to the complexity of researching these networks of relationships (Fehrer et al., 2018a, Nyadzayo et al., 2020). To address this gap, this research offers an in-depth study of dyadic B2B relationships embedded within a larger network. The chosen context are dyadic relationships between a distributor's representatives in the pharmaceutical industry and its customers and one supplier. This study acknowledges that these dyadic relationships are formed within the aforementioned network and considers the value being created for other stakeholders in their network.

Most research mainly focuses on the customer as an end-user, engagement with either the product brand or with the firm owning it and consumer-to-consumer or brand community. Moreover, insights into and implications of engagement are predominantly deduced from

consumer-based research (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018), with an understanding of the value in the B2B context being fragmented. While B2C literature is a good reference point, there is a need to get an understanding from the B2B perspective. There are notable differences between consumers and businesses, which calls for this approach. Among these differences, the most significant ones that warrant specific research are the nature of demand and the formalisation of interactions (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018). First, the nature of demand is different, with consumers using the solution for their own benefit, while firms use solutions for the benefit of other customers (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Grewal et al., 2015, Lilien, 2016). This highlights again the importance of understanding interactions that are dyadic but also embedded in the network of relationships with other actors. Second is the fact that in B2B there are specific rules, norms and structures of interactions, while B2C tends to be free from constraints (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Vivek et al., 2015, Grewal et al., 2015). However, there is a need to understand these specific BE rules and norms.

Grönroos and Helle (2012 p.344) recognize the existence of actor (business) engagement as 'two (or several) parties establish business engagement that enables both (or all) parties to gain something'. Engagement between different actors in a service ecosystem facilitates value co-creation (Viljakainen et al., 2013b). Despite the role of engagement in the process of value co-creation, not enough is known about this construct in B2B settings (Chandler and Lusch, 2015, Storbacka et al., 2016). Empirical research on value co-creation frameworks focuses on the B2C context (Lombardo and Cabiddu, 2017). As the research in engagement has mainly addressed the end user, the outcomes have been reported based on this perspective only. However, in B2B settings, the outcomes and goals are different and are specific to each part and to this situation. This is an additional reason to research the specific outcomes of BE in B2B settings.

Most research on engagement, which provides insights into outcomes, originates from customer engagement literature and emphasises the positive outcomes of customer engagement for the firm: financial performance (Van Doorn et al., 2010, Kumar et al., 2010, Kumar and Pansari, 2016), innovation (Grönroos and Helle, 2012), reputation (Van Doorn et al., 2010), value co-creation (Grönroos and Helle, 2012, Vivek et al., 2012, Storbacka et al., 2016), loyalty (Vivek et al., 2012, Hollebeek, 2011a, Brodie et al., 2013),

trust and commitment, (Hollebeek, 2011b, Vivek et al., 2012), customer satisfaction (Ng et al., 2020, Brodie et al., 2013), generation of positive word-of-mouth (Brodie et al., 2013, Vivek et al., 2012). Few studies have focused on B2B settings, also advocating the positive impact of engagement, such as reputation and status gains, market advantage, development of new relationships (Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018), value co-creation and market innovation (Storbacka, 2019), consideration size set, willingness to pay a premium (Nyadzayo et al., 2020), with a high level of BE acting as a buffer against the negative effects, such as relationships, revenues and profitability (Sands et al., 2022). However, there are no studies that empirically outline a list BE practices, the patterns they form, and the outcomes of those patterns in a specific context. The literature explains why business engagement (BE) is important, with some of the authors linking it to financial rewards (Sands et al., 2022, Vatavwala et al., 2022), value co-creation and innovation (Storbacka, 2019). However, little is known about it, with only fragments of evidence supporting the findings. While there is some understanding of B2B engagement and its links to better financial impacts, there is no specific research that details potential outcomes as they emerge in a specific B2B context. Therefore, we must better recognize how firms engage and what are the outcomes of their engagement.

Theoretically, scholarly investigations of the engagement concept are mostly underpinned by service-dominant (S-D) logic (Brodie et al., 2011a, Storbacka et al., 2016, Brodie et al., 2019). S-D logic is a meta-theoretical perspective offering an integrated understanding of the nature of organizations, markets and society. The main ideas of S-D logic relate to the exchange of service for service, in value co-creation processes where actors and networks interact during resource integration processes. S-D logic views actors generically allowing the development of our understanding of exchange systems at different levels of aggregation that includes not only micro interactions but also macro phenomena such as the economy and society (Vargo and Lusch, 2011b). Actors are the consumers or customers, businesses or producers (Vargo and Lusch, 2011b). The generic term, ‘actor’, was designed to enable wider use of theory and other knowledge frameworks, especially in the B2B settings.

Based on the S-D logic perspective, Storbacka (2019) advances the importance of understanding actor engagement (AE) through related practices. In the author’s view, AE

practices are facilitated by dispositions. AE is influenced by rules, norms and practices since it takes place in a situational context that is guided by institutional arrangements. Similarly, the importance of practices directed towards understanding AE and how it influences market shaping has been acknowledged by Fehrer et al. (2020) Although the importance of an actor's practices has been acknowledged, there is no research to detail these practices, the potential patterns they form, or their related outcomes for the interacting actors and other actors in the network.

Relationship marketing was one of the first marketing paradigms to turn the focus from transactions to customers. Relationship marketing emerged as a concept in the 1980s and gained prominence in the 1990s, stresses the importance of building and maintaining long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with targeted customers (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, Ballantyne et al., 2011, Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). Brodie et al. (2011a), Kumar et al. (2010) and Vivek et al. (2012) acknowledge the importance of investigating (business) engagement from a relationship marketing perspective, which highlights the importance of building and maintaining enduring customer relationships that lead to enhanced customer retention outcomes (Grönroos, 2011, Rust et al., 2004).

When researchers embark upon the journey to understand engagement and its outcomes, they also must acknowledge that firms have tools and platforms that enable connectivity with their customers. However, the service ecosystem is complex and relationships between companies require significant resources to sustain. Although, it is important to note that, just because the service ecosystem requires firms to be connected, it does not mean that the firms want to or need to connect with all customers, because organisations have the specific capacity and limited resources. Thus, effective selection of how and with whom they want to engage is critical to companies. This further increases the importance of the need to understand engagement, as firms need to think about everybody, not just one specific dyadic relationship. Although this research looks at the dyadic interaction, it also considers how the other actors in a wider service ecosystem context are impacted.

1.2. Literature gaps

While the engagement construct has previously been used in other fields, in marketing, the concept emerged as a result of technological advancements that enabled the voice of

the customer to be heard and noticed more greatly than before. As a result of this evolution, most of the marketing literature on engagement has focused almost exclusively on customer or consumer engagement, with the construct referring to an individual end-user (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018). In most studies to date, this focus was not made explicit, mainly as it was assumed that there was only individual end-user engagement. However, as the field has evolved, and new theoretical perspectives have been used as a foundation for these studies (namely, S-D logic, institutional theory and network theory), it was acknowledged that engagement applies not only to individual end-users but to all entities or actors involved in service exchange and value co-creation. Although the B2B context is different from business-to-consumer (B2C), empirical research to reveal the difference between BE and customer engagement is needed. Therefore, researchers emphasized the need to explore and understand the engagement of different actors (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Research on the concept of 'business engagement' is inadequate (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018) and is still in an early stage. This fact is not surprising, since generally there is a clear need to generate more research on B2B (Lilien, 2016). Research about the 'customer' as a business is limited to only a few conceptual works. This gap in the literature is also highlighted by Vivek et al. (2015: 53), who mention that 'researchers either assume that business partners are highly similar to end customers or neglect the importance of engagement in business to business relationships'. Understanding and clearly articulating these differences will address an existing gap in the academic and industry bodies of knowledge.

Research gap: disposition.

Initial work on engagement talks about engagement as being linked to both the psychological dispositions and the connections of an actor (Alexander and Jaakkola, 2016, Brodie et al., 2011a, Chandler and Lusch, 2015). As the literature on engagement is centred around individual customer engagement, it is not surprising that even the more recent articles to date also define actor engagement as 'the disposition' or 'act of engaging' (Li et al., 2017). Jonas et al. (2018) define stakeholder engagement as the psychological state, while Li et al. (2018) continue to use the definition based on Storbacka et al. (2016) work that considers engagement to be the disposition of an actor.

Most research, including very recent studies, continues to define actor engagement as a 'disposition' (Brodie et al., 2019, Li et al., 2018), which is often portrayed as a psychological and human-centric concept rather than a business feature. This research provides a departure from the literature on customer engagement by grounding the concept in a business context and defining engagement as the 'tendencies' (Bhaskar, 1997) of the business. This approach facilitates the analysis of BE from a B2B perspective.

Research gap: Engagement dimensions.

Previous research defines actor engagement using the behaviours that go beyond transactions (Alexander et al., 2018b, Van Doorn et al., 2010), involving emotional, cognitive and behavioural elements. Previous literature on customer engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2010, Brodie et al., 2019, Brodie et al., 2015, Brodie et al., 2011a, Brodie et al., 2011b) is based on end-user customer engagement, with researchers agreeing on the fact that engagement is multi-dimensional (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018). However, based on demonstrated differences between customers or end-users and businesses, the literature does not provide any information on the specifics of BE.

Research gap: Practices.

Brodie et al. (2019 p.11) advocate understanding engagement from a practice perspective because 'we need a better understanding of the actions performed by interacting actors'. It is essential to have research that is focused on understanding how businesses operate in practice and which BE practices can provide a subtle perspective on BE, appropriate for B2B settings. The 'understandings' element of each practice (Schatzki, 2006) can offer insights into the actions, activities and rules associated with each practice. Theoretically, a better understanding of BE, viewed from a practice perspective, will address major gaps identified in academic research (Storbacka et al., 2016), starting with its definition and perception of exactly what BE is, how it influences B2B interactions and processes and what the outcomes are.

1.3. Business engagement and research questions

This research partially uses the definition of partner engagement given by Vivek et al. (2015) and the definition of actor engagement given by Brodie et al. (2019). A new definition is proposed in this study:

> *Business engagement (BE) is a dynamic and iterative process generated by episodes of intense interactions that reflect actors' tendencies to invest resources in their interactions, beyond the contractual obligations, with other interconnected actors for the benefit of [their] own, interacting actors, as well as others in the service ecosystem.*

This was prompted by the need to reflect on the specifics of B2B processes. The need to have a new definition of the concept is further detailed in Chapter Two, Section 2.3.

In this research, BE refers it the engagement of individual business-to-business actors. The individual actors' actions are situated in the social context and structures influence them (Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2001b).

This research is organised around several questions that are relevant to both marketing and organisational research since the BE concept is related to organisational settings.

- *Question 1 (RQ1): What are the BE practices?*
- *Question 2 (RQ2): What patterns are formed by BE practices?*
- *Question 3 (RQ3): What are the specific outcomes that BE practices and their patterns generate?*

To provide answers to the above questions the literature on engagement was reviewed. S-D logic and practice theory were used as the theoretical perspectives explaining B2B engagement and its relationship with other constructs identified in this research. In order to understand B2B engagement practices, a practice theory approach (Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2001b) is employed. Practices are organised, temporarily 'unfolding sets of doings and sayings' that are governed by ends Schatzki (2001b, p.29).

1.4. Overview of the research methodology

Critical realism (CR) is a philosophical approach used in this research to understand B2B engagement. The essence of realism is that, there is a realm of truth, even if our perceptions of it are mediated. Therefore, even if we cannot directly observe reality it still exists and exercises powers, and the observable events are manifestations of invisible mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2013). CR views science as concerned with identifying causal mechanisms. CR can be a strong foundation for theories of business markets, as it assists in uncovering the properties of business relationships which are based on the assumption that value is created within a service ecosystem (Ehret, 2013). As CR is based on the belief that relationships have causal powers (Peters et al., 2013), it is epistemologically appropriate for business-to-business research. A CR paradigm has been used for this research, as it can offer detailed causal descriptions of a 'given set of phenomena or events in terms of both the actors' interpretations and the structures and mechanisms that interact to produce the outcomes in question' (Wynn Jr and Williams, 2012, p.788).

This research design adopted a qualitative approach to undertake an in-depth case study of a pharmaceutical distribution company. This study examined BE empirically in the pharmaceutical industry using data generated by implementing a qualitative methodology. This research setting was chosen for multiple reasons. First, based on the definition of BE, in order to understand its practices, there is a need to select an industry known for intense interactions between different actors that have regular contact and where there are personal relationships that are not merely transactional. It is known that distribution in the pharmaceutical industry involves regular and intense interactions. Second, this setting was selected since the researcher has access to this specific industry and distribution, which allowed the researcher to not only conduct interviews with many stakeholders but also observe the interactions between actors. This context might not represent all types of BE, as it does not look at specific interactions enabled by technology. However, the distribution setting in general is known as still delivering significant value for stakeholders in the network.

The data collection is based on interviews about the collaboration and interaction between a central organisation (distributor, through its representatives) and different types of

stakeholders (business customers – pharmacies and a manufacturer), in order to understand the patterns of engagement practices. In addition, from a practice theory perspective, it is important to analyse the interactions among actors who perform particular practices (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016), an aspect that is considered during the data collection for this study, which is also based on field visits of distributors' sales representatives with pharmacists. The observations (direct and participant) were focused on interactions, engagements and face-to-face interviews with pharmacists, sales representatives and sales and marketing representing distributors in the pharmaceutical industry, as well as the focal company. In addition, the research concluded with a mini-focus group. This method was employed to provide validation of the data and insights generated during the above-mentioned interactions.

The process of data analysis aims to reveal repeated patterns, categories or themes (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016). This study involved thematic analysis to uncover BE practices, characteristics and related patterns.

1.5. Contribution of the study – academic and managerial contributions

This thesis examines business engagement and its patterns and related outcomes, aiming to contribute to theory and practice. The research is a forensic view of BE analysing dyadic engagement practices between actors, where there are long-term and ongoing relationships between actors.

1.5.1. Academic contributions

These research findings aim to contribute to theory development. Specifically, the BE concept is anticipated to contribute to the broader body of research on engagement; it uses the S-D logic perspective by revealing how value is co-created between business-to-business actors (BE). From an S-D logic perspective, the said concept reflects the dynamics typifying focal networked agents, including organisations, customers and other stakeholders, which, by virtue of their interactions, establish the co-created value that may contribute to the development of the service ecosystem and its relationships (Vargo et al., 2008). In summary, with its conceptual foundations rooted in interactively generated

value co-creation (Lusch et al., 2010, Gambetti and Graffigna, 2010), engagement is expected to complement scholarly research using S-D logic as the theoretical lense.

Another theoretical contribution of this research is that it proposes a different way of understanding the concept of engagement by looking at practices. To date, there is no empirical research on B2B engagement practices (Jonas et al., 2018); therefore, an understanding of these practices is essential, because 'we need a better understanding of the actions performed by interacting actors' (Brodie et al., 2019 p.11). This empirical research addresses this literature gap by providing specific insights into engagement practices in B2B settings.

Understanding structures and mechanisms of practices is important, as they could lead to different outcomes or values being co-created. The findings of this research can provide specific insights into the outcomes of B2B engagement. Therefore, this research contributes to the body of existing literature on engagement, as it specifies the practices that actors perform together in B2B settings by integrating their resources to co-create value. Recommendations for future studies willing to investigate this aspect in-depth have been provided in Chapter Seven.

1.5.3. Managerial contributions

In addition to scholarly contributions, this thesis also generates several managerial implications. By revealing the specific B2B engagement practices, the research offers practitioners more insights of this emerging concept that they may utilise in the designing of engagement-focused strategies, tactics and activities. Therefore, insights into the concept can assist managers to develop tactics to increase business engagement and improve practices that can generate better results for their firms. Therefore, by gauging firms' engagement with particular suppliers or actors, managers may be able to identify specific areas of their relationships with key actors' strengths and/or weaknesses, and/or take (corrective) action as required. Hence, enhanced customer–firm relationships and organisational performance outcomes are expected from the undertaking of managerial engagement-focused initiatives. From an industry perspective, insights into B2B engagement will help companies to further prioritise investments in this area (Lombardo and Cabiddu, 2017).

The Marketing Science Institute (MSI), a learning organization that connects businesspeople with academic researchers, is actively involved in guiding the development of our discipline in order to achieve higher levels of business performance. MSI's research priorities for 2020–2022 (MSI, 2020-2022) are the issues that leading corporations believe should be dealt with in order to improve business practice through academic research. Senior marketing executives and leading academic researchers have established the following priorities and topics. The first priority of MSI in 2020–2022 is related to customer value, that is, delivering value that customers are willing to pay for. While the questions posed by MSI focus on the consumer, the executives supporting the priorities recognize the need to understand the differences between B2B and B2C. In addition, their next preoccupation is how firms should drive deeper and lasting customer engagement and loyalty with the firm. This research aims to provide some insights into these two topics identified by MSI member companies and academic trustees.

This study contributes also to the area of engagement in business markets by providing more insights into an area of interest for the Institute for the Study of Business Markets (ISBM). The Institute for the Study of Business Markets (ISBM) is a group of people from industry and academic fields, from business-to-business marketing (ISBM, 2022). The ISBM has facilitated in-depth research pertaining to the business marketing theory and practice. The theme of the ISBM research program is as follows: What makes a relationship last long? An additional question put forth by the IBSM is as follows: How do long-term relationships benefit the buyer and the seller? Some answers to these questions are provided by insights related to BE practices, patterns and their outcomes.

Further, additional managerial benefits are expected to accrue from future research, which may employ the proposed engagement across other research settings, as well as explore engagement from a longitudinal perspective, or in different other industries (cf. Chapter Seven).

1.6. Outline of the thesis / thesis structure

This thesis is divided into seven constituent chapters representing the various stages undertaken in the research process, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Chapter Two details the literature related to engagement, both in marketing and other disciplines, concluding with a thorough review of actor engagement and business engagement. S-D logic is the meta-theoretical framework used in this research to understand B2B engagement practices and their implications. Chapter Two provides the argument for using a practice theory approach to address the understanding of B2B engagement. Finally, building on the existing research gaps, the chapter poses the specific research questions that guided this research inquiry. Figure 1 provides an overview of the structure of the thesis.

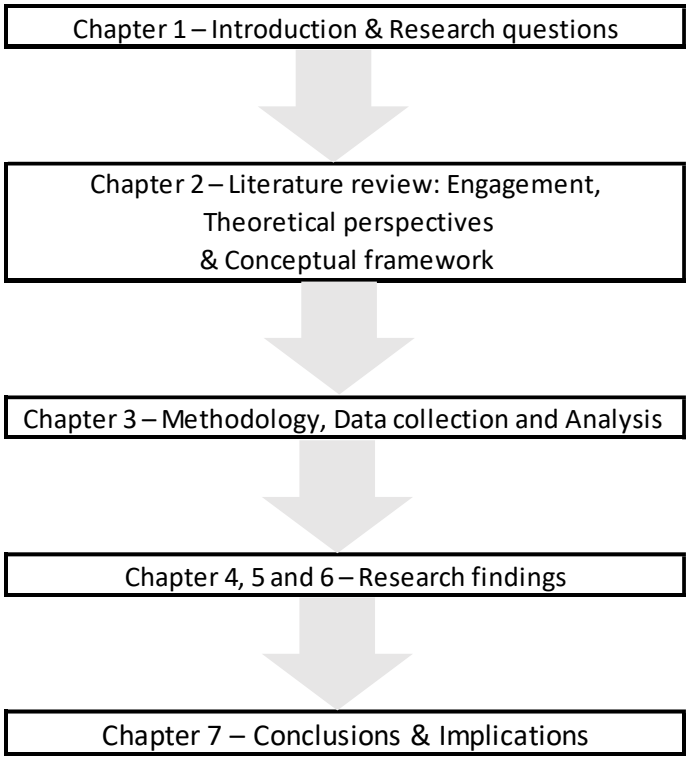


Figure 1. Structure of the thesis

Chapter Three starts with the research philosophy. Driven by the nature of research questions, a qualitative methodology has been selected for this study. The philosophical perspective, namely critical realism (Bhaskar, 1997, Bhaskar, 2013) is briefly outlined with its use justified. This chapter also details the research design and the appropriate methodology. The qualitative research methodology used in this study is based on

participant and direct observations, shadowing, in-depth interviewing and a mini-focus group. These methods were employed to explore the nature and dynamics of BE. In addition, this chapter reviews the analysis undertaken, specifically thematic analysis.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present the study findings resulting from the data analysis. Utilising a practice theory approach, **Chapter Four** reveals the B2B engagement practices, while **Chapter Five** explains the specific B2B engagement attributes, namely intensity and valence. **Chapter Six** builds on the interplay between intensity and valence to uncover B2B engagement patterns and their outcomes.

To conclude, **Chapter Seven** discusses the implications of the research, synthesising its findings and the existing literature on engagement and S-D logic. It identifies key contributions and relevant implications arising from the research, provides an overview of limitations inherent in this research and proposes recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature review - Engagement

2.1. Chapter overview

Chapter Two presents a review of the research work from the theoretical/engagement perspective. It is structured in the following manner. Section 2.2 provides an overview of the theoretical perspective of our understanding of markets to situate the concept of engagement using S-D Logic. Section 2.3. expounds on the evolution of research on engagement before underscoring the existence of fragmented research in various domains. This section also encompasses an overview of the definition of Business Engagement (BE) and extant literature on customer engagement. This is followed by a summary of engagement attributes revealed by the previous research in marketing (Section 2.4). Section 2.5 explicates the anticipated results of engagement. Section 2.6 outlines Practice Theory, as an alternative theoretical perspective, to decipher the concept of BE. Finally, Section 2.7 proposes the research questions and summarises the main literature gaps.

2.2. Theoretical perspective: S-D logic and engagement

This section provides a review of the theoretical perspective that the present study utilizes: S-D Logic.

2.2.1. S-D Logic: Emergence, development and axioms

Before S-D Logic, the predominant perspective was Goods-Dominant Logic. This perspective focused on goods as the main economic offering. Businesses focused on manufacturing and marketing products, and value was often equivalated with the product itself. However, this model faced its limits as the global economy progressed. The shift towards S-D Logic started when scholars and practitioners acknowledged that business had evolved. Therefore, the focus shifted from producing goods to delivering value through service.

The early work ‘Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing’ (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) proposed a shift from the Goods-Dominant logic to what the authors call the S-D logic.

In its early stages, S-D Logic discussed in academic circles was primarily a theoretical framework that challenges the traditional product-centric view. Vargo and Lusch (2004) played a pivotal role in articulating and formalizing its initial propositions and later axioms. Their initial work proposes foundational premises that are focused on service, the underlying basis of exchange, which is the application of knowledge and skills (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2004). S-D Logic proposes that offerings, whether tangible or intangible, are fundamentally service (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

Another shift advanced by S-D Logic is related to value co-creation. In S-D Logic, value is not created by the producer alone but through interactions between producers and customers (Vargo and Akaka, 2012, Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2011, Vargo and Lusch, 2012, Vargo and Lusch, 2014). Therefore, the importance of relationships and collaboration in the value creation process are emphasized. Moreover, S-D Logic acknowledges that value is context-specific and depends on the unique circumstances and needs of each exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Chandler and Vargo, 2011).

Another aspect highlights the criticality of resources in the value creation process. In S-D Logic resources are not only goods or services but also knowledge, skills, and capabilities (Vargo and Lusch, 2011a; Vargo et al., 2004, 2008a; Vargo et al., 2008b). This broadens the concept of resources beyond tangible assets.

The initial work (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) proposes eight foundational premises, that later on were extended to eleven (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The most recent work of the S-D Logic has condensed the eleven 1foundational premises into five axioms (Vargo and Lusch, 2016), which are presented in table 1, followed by a brief description of each axiom.

Axiom #1 states that organisations, markets and society are focused on exchange of service. By service they refer to the application of knowledge and skills which form the fundamental basis of exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Table 1 – S-D logic axioms

Axiom nr.	Axiom
1	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).
2	Value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).
3	All economic and social actors are resource integrators (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).
4	Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).
5	Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo and Lusch, 2016)

The main concepts of S-D logic are the value propositions, value in social context (as opposed to value exchanged, which is a goods dominant perspective) and the co-creation of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2016). The axiom #2 posits that multiple actors, always including the beneficiary, co-create value. This perspective is a shift from traditional econometric view of exchange that placed the goods and manufacturers as being the ones that create value, to the customer being the centre of the value (co)-creation process.

Axiom #3 asserts that all social actors are resource integrators. It implies that value co-creation is liaising actors, in networks. This axiom highlights the fact that the networks and the ecosystem can play a role in determining the value in use, that value co-creation cannot be separated from the existence of multiple actors. That is, the unit of analysis should be the service ecosystem(s) rather than the customer, firm, or the firm-customer dyad (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Additional focus on value is emphasized by axiom #4, from which it can be inferred that value is always decided by the beneficiary. So, even though the enterprise offers value propositions, they are acknowledged based on beneficiary experience with them (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). According to the S-D logic perspective actors can participate in the creation and advancing of value propositions rather than deliver value but. Therefore, value is co-created by involvement of customers in the exchange process. The nature of value is therefore a more longitudinal process that does not stop with manufacturing and ends with the consumption experience (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Axiom #5 brings into attention the institutional perspective that has received little attention in marketing (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). According to the authors institutions and institutional arrangements, which are the "rules of the games" (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p.11), can help our understanding of networks.

While S-D Logic initially emerged within the marketing discourse, its evolution started to influence various disciplines. Management, economics, and even information technology have started more recently to build S-D Logic principles into their frameworks. This multidisciplinary approach showcased the resourcefulness and adaptability of S-D Logic. The S-D Logic constitutes a meta-theoretical 'lens or perspective for viewing the economic world differently' (Vargo, 2011, p.218), as a mindset that ensures an integrated understanding of the inherent nature of today society, markets, and organizations. Over the years, S-D Logic has transformed our understanding of the exchange of value and the role of service in business.

2.2.2. S-D Logic and mid range theory of engagement

The underlying concepts of S-D Logic pertain to the exchange of service, actors and networks, value co-creation processes, and processes of resource integration. Figure 2, built upon the work of Vargo and Lusch (2017), illustrates the concepts and the manner in which they relate to each other.

According to the S-D logic, markets, organizations, and society place the emphasis on exchanging service. Due to the service-focused society, it is necessary to ground practice and marketing theory in service logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). In this context, it is pertinent to note that service exchange denotes 'the process of using one's resources for the benefit of other actors' (Vargo and Lusch, 2018a p.55). Resource integration constitutes a value co-creation process.

The cornerstone of actor-to-actor economic exchange is interactions (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, Lusch and Vargo, 2014), which includes collaborations to provide the involved parties with key benefits (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016). According to Vargo and Lusch (2008), the process of engagement comprises these interactive consumer experiences, co-created with the involvement of other actors. Additionally, the value co-

creation process requires engagement from all actors as it is relational (Brodie et al., 2019).

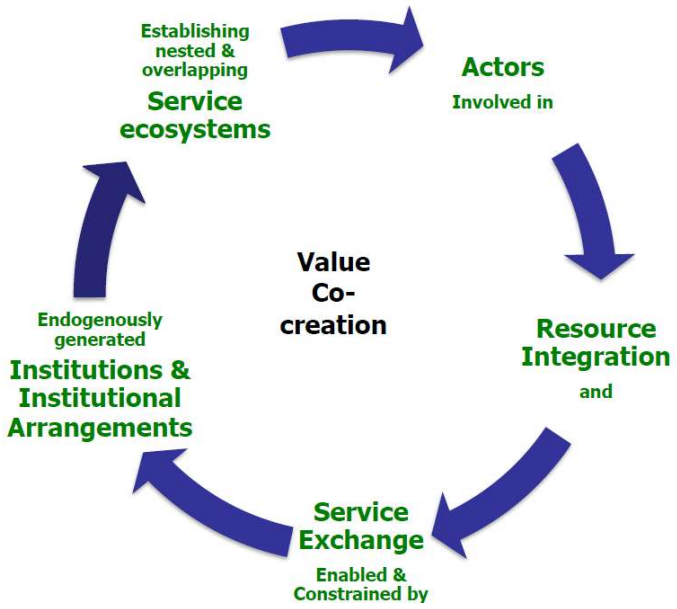


Figure 2. Main ideas of S-D Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2017)

Vargo and Lusch (2016) state that institutions as well as institutional arrangements can facilitate an understanding of vital networks. According to the authors, institutions signify the 'rules of the games' (Vargo and Lusch, 2016 p.11). Interaction takes place when actors participate in an interactive process, using 'shared rules, norms and structures to act or decide on issues related to that domain' (Wood and Gray, 1991: 146). Vargo and Lusch (2016) defined institutional arrangements as 'interdependent assemblages of institutions' (p. 6) or 'cognitive frames, rules and routines' (p. 15) that enable interaction and exchange between actors. Institutions include regulative (rules settings and penalising activities), normative (values and norms) and cultural cognitive (the constitution and interpretation of frames) elements (Scott, 2013). The institutional arrangements 'coordinate the activities of resource integration by shaping the actors' value co-creation behaviour in the service ecosystem' (Vargo and Lusch, 2016 p.5).

S-D Logic provides the needed theoretical perspective to study business engagement. However, the bridge between empirical findings and the grand theory is provided by the

mid range theory of engagement (Vargo and Lusch, 2017, Brodie et al., 2011b). MRT is placed between a specific case and grand theories (Merton, 1968):

> *'Theories that lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, social organization and social exchange' (*Merton, 1968, p.39).

Mid range theories are context-specific to the focused phenomena that provide useful frameworks for empirical observation and models to inform industry practitioners (Lindgreen et al., 2021). Therefore, the mid range theory of engagement enables the development of critical arguments about the importance of engagement in the value co-creation process (Jaakkola et al., 2019).

S-D logic provides the theoretical perspective needed to answer research questions. Specifically, the S-D logic-enabled mindset ensures a cogent understanding of markets, organizations, and society and catalyses a generic consensus surrounding engagement within a set of actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). This approach paves the way for research on engagement to transcend dyadic relationships, to encompass multiple actors, thus allowing for research at the micro-(brand-individual actors) to macro-level (sectors/ category/industries) or meso-(multiple actors) (Breidbach and Brodie, 2017, Storbacka et al., 2016). Moreover, this approach was used because applying SDL as a metatheory to this specific case of pharmaceutical industry in Romania could be too abstract to provide value from the "particular classes of social behaviour" *(*Merton, 1968, p.39). MRT of engagement can link this case and its insights, with MRT of engagement and S-D Logic metatheory. This research responds to Vargo and Lusch (2017, p.17) invitation to develop MRT that can 'encourage evidence-based research […] to better bridge theory and practice'. Specifically, we apply the meta-theoretical perspective of S-D logic in a case study to provide an understanding of business engagement practices. This framework was used in this specific case, with the resulting MRT of engagement building upon, and extending, theory on service ecosystems and actor engagement (Alexander and Kils, 2023, Storbacka et al., 2016).

2.2.3. S-D Logic and value

The concept of value has kindled the curiosity of antique Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle. Signifying the essence of economics, value entails meanings: value in exchange and value in use, which reflects varied views on the concept and how it is created (Frow et al., 2014). The elusive term of value (Lawrence et al., 2013) necessitates further explication as the process of creating value remains under-researched. Value co-creation is a dynamic process (Vargo et al., 2008) that has two sides: value for the supplier and value for the customer, and these two types of value are dependent on each other (Förster, 2009).

The conventional view is premised on centrality around the exchange of goods; this view emphasizes the transactional dimension of exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2011b). Producers and consumers who adopt this approach create value by initiating activities. Value is produced by firms and consumed or destroyed by customers.

S-D Logic views service as the process of doing something with and for someone else, intrinsically as part of a collaborative process (Vargo and Lusch, 2011b, Brodie et al., 2012).. S-D Logic suggests that all business actions should start with understanding the value-creating activities. Accordingly, value is co-created by the reciprocal relationship between beneficiaries and providers by integrating the competencies of employees, customers, firms, governmental agencies, and other entities (Gupta and Lehmann, 2005). The extant literature considers value as a jointly created outcome formed via the interaction of resources (Vargo et al., 2008). Value co-creation is based on actors that exchange service for service, which, in turn, is premised on the process of resource integration (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Gummesson and Mele, 2010). Notably, value is always determined by the beneficiary (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Customers need the processes of developing, designing, manufacturing, and delivering resources to create value; therefore, in a B2B context companies play the role of a value facilitator in value (co)creation (Vargo et al., 2008).

Value proposition, is seen as ‘a dynamic and adjusting mechanism for negotiating how resources are shared within a service ecosystem’ (Frow et al., 2014 p.340). A service ecosystem refers to a value configuration that consists of exchange parties along with their

networks that contribute to value co-creation directly and indirectly (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). These are linked via the acceptance, proposition, and evaluation of value (Vargo et al., 2008). Spohrer and Maglio (2008) point out that a focal firm can only make value propositions and denote the mechanism to determine the expectations for value-in-use Vargo and Lusch (2008).

Vargo et al. (2008) stress the interactive contributions of value propositions. As dynamic linkages between the company and its customers/suppliers (Normann and Ramirez, 1993), value propositions help the focal firm liaise with suppliers based on opportunities (Lusch et al., 2010). According to Frow et al. (2014), value propositions play a key role in sustaining relationships. Firms benefit from 'engaging in interactions to build long-term relationships' in a service ecosystem where actors are engaged in a continuous process of searching, selecting, and negotiating value propositions offered to them (Frow et al., 2014 p.332). The role of a value proposition within a service ecosystem needs to be further researched, as value propositions perform an important role in the value co-creation process that takes place through interactions between suppliers and customers (Frow et al., 2014, Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003).

Value literature has explored conditions necessary for successful value co-creation, with an emphasis on strong relationships. The non-transactional behaviour of engagement concerns the relationships between actors involved in an exchange with governmental organisations, firms, customers, and other stakeholders (Kowalkowski et al., 2012). According to recent S-D work, value co-creation occurs against the backdrop of dynamic and intricate network structures (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). According to prior research, customers contribute resources within their networks by means of engagement (Maglio and Spohrer, 2013, Vargo and Lusch, 2011b). Hence, it can be surmised that engagement behaviours impact the process of value co-creation at the level of the service ecosystem (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014, Schau et al., 2009), given that engagement helps create value for parties (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Overall, the ultimate basis of business is reciprocal value co-creation for all parties through business engagement (Grönroos and Helle, 2012).

The literature is replete with myriad viewpoints on value co-creation (Kohtamäki and Rajala, 2016), connecting it to the experience co-created by customers and suppliers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). These experiences include cognitive, tangible, and social issues (Kohtamäki and Rajala, 2016) that would be useful for both the beneficiary, the suppliers, and others in the network. This is because the exchange entails a mutually-rewarding relationship between the actors that engage with each other to accomplish an overlapping objective that is beyond the reach of any singular actor (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

2.2.4. Value destruction

One of the S-D Logic main idea is the value co-creation process. Value co-creation is this process of interaction and exchange in an attempt by actors to achieve benefits (Vargo and Lusch, 2018a, Vargo and Lusch, 2018c). Yet, positive outcomes are not always created by these processes. As a result we witness the appearance of studies indicating the existence of value (co-)destruction (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011, Plé and Cáceres, 2010, Sands et al., 2022) and highlight scarcity of research on this term (Echeverri and Skålén, 2021). While the literature points to the existence of value (co-)destruction, the researcher feels the term is misleading as it creates the idea that value (co-)destruction is the opposite of value co-creation. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges the existence of value destruction. Additionally, as actors do not have the same ends, and they damage the other actor differently, the term ‘co’ is not appropriate.

According to Echeverri and Skålén (2011), value (co-)destruction is the collective value destruction by customers and providers. Thus, value destruction is unilateral and value co-destruction is interactional (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016). Value destruction is shown to lead to a decline in an actor’s well-being or a reduction in value (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011, Plé and Cáceres, 2010). Nevertheless, there is an absence of alternate means of expressing outcomes of value destruction (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016: 535).

Resources and/ or practice misalignment, resource deficiencies, process misalignment, and absence of resources or practices/misuses drive the value destruction (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016, Vafeas et al., 2016). Value destruction is ascribed to the gradual heterogeneity in service delivery (Makkonen and Olkkonen, 2017, Echeverri and Skålén,

2011). It is formed when actors incongruently activate the interacting parties' elements, such as teleoaffective structures/procedures/understanding/purposes (Razmdoost and Mills, 2016). Value destruction has been more recently researched empirically, with just a few studies undertaken in the B2B settings. Echeverri and Skålén (2011) was one the first empirical studies that acknowledged the empirically the existence of value destruction. More studies followed and described the tensions of value co-creation and value destruction and their dynamics (Becker et al., 2015), the two perceptions, namely net deficits and goal prevention, that lead to actor's perceptions of value destruction and a description of the behaviours that impact actor experiences with value destruction (Prior, Cuevas (2016). The literature also details the factors, activities and specific behaviours that lead to value being diminished (Vafeas et al., 2016, Herfort et al., 2022, Engen et al., 2021), and the fact that the boundary complexity between collaborating actors might lead to risk for value destruction (Uppström and Lönn, 2017). Makkonen and Olkkonen (2017) argue that interaction episodes and the interplay between resource integration and service ecosystem generate different outcomes: value co-creation, value not being co-created, and value destruction. Järvi et al. (2018) outline eight reasons for value destruction and the negative outcomes that are observed. Empirical research reveals that value co-creation and value destruction are not exclusive or opposite (Cabiddu et al., 2019), with start-up companies benefiting even when value destruction takes place (Hasche and Linton, 2018). In more recent research Corsaro (2020) and (Schulz et al., 2021) describes what happens to value appropriation when value destruction takes place. Pathak et al. (2020) argue that actors' opportunistic behaviours, technological disruptions and changes in business model led to value destruction.

2.3. Research on engagement

In the last ten years, engagement has emerged as a marketing subject area that is heavily argued about and studied thoroughly. Research from other domains, such as organizational behaviour or educational studies, has impacted work on engagement within the Marketing discipline. Marketing researchers' interest in the subject of engagement has risen quickly as a result of the Marketing Science Institute's list of priorities for 2014–

2016 and the unique attention it has received in practice and consultancy. The concept of engagement has been viewed as a promising link that could aid in generating particular outcomes for the actors involved. Although the MSI stressed that end-user engagement was the main goal, academic interest in firm engagement has recently emerged. Vivek et al. (2018) and Vivek et al. (2021) underline that B2B engagement should be viewed differently from B2C engagement by researchers.

2.3.1. Appearance of the engagement concept

Other academic fields, like management, organizational behaviour, pedagogical studies, and psychology, have all investigated the engagement construct. The majority of the topics that have been studied are those that concern workers, institutions, students, and the academic world.

Early work by Kahn (1990 p.694) describes employee engagement as '[…] people employ and express themselves physically (which is the behavioural component), cognitive, and emotionally during role performance.' According to Kahn, engagement is a contextual construct because it is influenced by psychological factors and the nature of the workplace. Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 2164) define engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption.' Vigour is thought of as the behavioural aspect of engagement and refers to the amount of energy and resilience engaged by the worker (Schaufeli, 2013). According to Menguc et al. (2013), commitment mirrors the cognitive aspect of engagement, while absorption, or focused attention and positive immersion in one's job, mirrors the emotional aspect.

Academic experts have also focused on school and student engagement. Early research has established student engagement idea as a complex entity with behavioural, emotional, and cognitive components (Skinner and Belmont, 1993). In a later study Fredricks et al. (2004) further asserted that student engagement is a multi-faceted construct that includes behavioural engagement (based on the idea of positive conduct, participation, and involvement), emotional engagement (which include positive and negative reactions), and cognitive engagement, which is associated with the willingness to invest and exert the commitment to master skills.

Advertising or media engagement was one of the earliest engagement concepts to be identified and studied in marketing. The term ‘Consumer engagement with the medium’ (p. 23) was used by Bezjian-Avery et al. (1998) to acknowledge the presence of this idea in marketing. The concept has been studied in several media, including TV, print, and online, and has been given various names, including viewer engagement (Mooradian et al., 2008), audience engagement, the emotional connection (Steele et al., 2013; Siefert et al., 2009), or media engagement (Kilger and Romer, 2007). The concept has been defined as being actively and pleasurably drawn into the plot presented by the commercial as engaging with media material (Wang and Calder, 2009) or as being drawn into the narrative world of media (TV).

Additional studies on consumer commercial engagement show that ‘consumer ad interaction’ is generating consumer emotional ad content engagement (Siefert et al., 2009). An ‘emotional engagement’ model has been developed that demonstrates how powerful brands can be built without the need for the intense levels of attention that conventional advertising typically demands. ‘Engagement’ has been defined as ‘the amount of subconscious 'feeling' going on when an advertisement is being processed’ (Heath, 2009).

The term ‘consumer engagement’ in the context of advertising refers to consumer engagement, particularly end-user engagement, with the message. In this field, the concept of engagement has changed from the customer being absorbed into the emotional engagement and more current work to incorporate the emotional side, as well as cognitive, personal, and behavioural facets.

With the development of new technologies and the Internet, the subject and knowledge of community participation started to appear in the marketing literature. These trends gave customers the chance to band together and build communities (of consumption). Since the community members have a high level of involvement and loyalty toward the brand or the company and offer helpful feedback and referrals, these communities have caught the eye of practitioners as well as academics. These brand communities may present chances for marketing, innovation management, and customer service management tools if they are correctly managed (Zaglia, 2013).

A conceptual model of how various facets of consumers' ties with the brand community affect their intents and behaviours has been developed and estimated in earlier work (Algesheimer et al., 2005). The authors show how affiliation with a brand community has advantages, such as increased community engagement. According to Abdul-Ghani et al. (2011), online consumer-to-consumer (C2C) engagement is defined as 'the consumer's ongoing attention to an object of consumption, such as a website or a brand' (p. 1060).

Scholars have advocated the idea of 'brand engagement' as a concept in relation to brands as part of this marketing field. The development of a scale to quantify the construction of engagement has been the primary focus of positivist research on engagement since its inception. To quantify a brand engagement, Sprott et al. (2009) constructed an eight-item scale. The research on brand engagement conducted by Goldsmith et al. (2014) builds on the findings of Sprott et al. (2009) with a research goal that is centred on measuring brand engagement.

2.3.2. Customer engagement (CE) research

There have been a few significant stages in the development of the marketing field of customer (consumer) engagement. The first stage was when the idea of consumer engagement first became popular. Bowman and Narayandas (2001) were among the first to use the term, linking customer attitudes and technology to consumers' active engagement with and aggressive pursuit of information from businesses. Furthermore, Jones et al. (2001) also mentioned trust and confidence constructs as being fundamental to all business relationships and having an impact on consumers' engagement with the retail market (Keller, 2001).

The second stage was established by a few key publications by Van Doorn et al. (2010), Kumar et al. (2010), and Brodie et al. (2011a). The term 'customer engagement behaviour' (CEB), developed and discussed by Van Doorn et al. (2010), is described as 'the customers' behavioural manifestation toward a brand or organisation, beyond purchase, stemming from motivational reasons' (p 253). For CEB, the writers take a behavioural viewpoint.

Although Kumar et al. (2010) defined customer engagement (CE) in a manner that is compatible with Van Doorn et al. (2010), they contend that it should also cover non-transactional components of interactions with customers. Customer engagement value (CEV) is a key customer value indicator that includes both customer lifetime value (CLV) from transactions and non-transactional activities (such as referral, influencing, and cognitive/knowledge) introduced by Kumar et al. (2010).

Brodie et al. (2011a) posit that customer engagement (CE) is a multifaceted idea with elements of emotion, cognition, and behaviour. Although the term 'client' has a broad definition in this work, it was likely used to refer to specific end users, as in the first stage. 'A psychological condition that results from interactive, co-creative customer interactions with a focal agent/object (such as a brand) in focal service relationships,' according to the definition of CE. According to Brodie et al. (2011a p. 260), it takes place within service relationships that jointly produce value under a specific set of context-dependent variables, resulting in a range of CE levels. In a nomological network that governs service interactions, CE 'plays a major role... It is a multifaceted notion subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of important cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions.' (Brodie et al. 2011a p. 260) This emphasis on establishing dimensions shows the distinct direction of research to support additional research for scale development. According to Vivek et al. (2012, p.133), customer engagement (CE) is defined as the 'intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offers and/or organisational activities.' The authors contend that cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social components all contribute to CE. Customers' experiences and feelings are referenced by the cognitive and affective aspects of engagement, whilst behavioural and social aspects focus on participation in exchange settings.

The conceptual work by Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) offers a summary of Customer Engagement Behavioural (CEB) manifestations. The concept based on Brodie et al. (2011a) serves as the foundation for the authors' work, and they link CEBs to value generation beyond transactions by the focal customer and firm, and other parties within the service ecosystem. The authors propose four different forms of CEBs based on prior

research. First, the activity is known as co-developing, which was described as ‘consumer contributions of resources, including knowledge, skills, and time, to help the focal firm's development of its offering’ (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014 p. 255). Second, influencing behaviour refers to consumer ‘contributions of resources like expertise, experience, and time in order to influence other actors' attitudes, preferences, or information regarding the target firm’ (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014 p. 256). This conduct significantly reduces the likelihood that other clients will contact the focal company. Additionally, for the target organisation, this behaviour is crucial because customer-generated content (assuming the customer reviews are positive) is the only effective form of communication. Customer contributions of resources, including labour, time, expertise, and skills to the main firm's offering that go beyond what is essential to the transaction are known as augmenting behaviour (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014 p. 254). The final CE component is called mobilising behaviour, and it refers to customer ‘contributions of resources, including relationships and time, to encourage other stakeholders to take action in support of the focal firm’ (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014 p. 256).

2.3.3. Engagement – Broadening the scope

Due to the multitude of goals of previous empirical work, the development of the concept of engagement has taken several diverse paths. For instance, research to establish ‘dimensions’ of engagement has been hard due to attempts to develop quantifiable assessment scales. Confusion and conflicts have also resulted from the focus on ad/brand/community participation. Despite the achievements noted above, researchers still felt that a broader knowledge of engagement was necessary, which led to the third stage of engagement research.

The research into the domain of engagement is primarily based on consumers or end users, with the exception of conceptual papers that take a wider view; little information and insight are produced by B2B customer research (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018). The focus of prior research was on the subject (i.e., consumer/end-user/customer) or subject-object relationship (i.e., the relationship between the subject and the object of engagement, such as brand or advertising etc.), thus lacking insights about engagement as

a process that can involve multiple actors' (Brodie et al., 2011a). The concept of customer or consumer engagement is limited to an individual, and it does not convey the complex nature of business-to-business engagement, truths that scholars have recently acknowledged, despite the rising and now consistent body of knowledge in this area.

Brodie et al. (2011b) were the first to advocate for the need to expand the definition of 'customer' engagement to include 'actor' engagement. A result, after 2014, other scholars joined the cause. There was a recognised need to learn about engagement beyond just customer engagement, including 'as supplier, manufacturer, retailer, and provider-and, more generally, actor-engagement as well' (Chandler and Lusch, 2015: 4). Ultimately, this required adopting a 360-degree multi-stakeholder perspective (Finsterwalder, 2018), which also included other non-human actors like machines and different combinations of humans and devices (Storbacka et al., 2016).

The theoretical frameworks used in the research, specifically S-D Logic, have highlighted the need to expand the scope of customer engagement to actor engagement. These theoretical viewpoints concur that there is interaction occurring in networks, service ecosystems, and with numerous actors. The service ecosystem was referred to as a 'complex, self-adjusting system of resource integrating actors' by Vargo and Lusch (2016, p. 10). Therefore, in order to understand BE research needs to focus on multiple actors.

According to Chandler and Lusch (2015), an actor's relationships and psychological dispositions both influence audience engagement. Actor engagement (AE) is described by Storbacka et al. (2016) as both the intention of actors to engage and the behaviour of doing so within the institutional context offered by a service ecosystem. Utilizing the definition offered by Storbacka et al. (2016) which is viewed as a disposition, and the act of engaging (Li et al., 2017, Li et al., 2018), further sheds light on actor engagement. The authors argue against the dyadic approach to investigating AE, which is also promoted by Alexander et al. (2018a). According to the other authors in recent studies, actor engagement (AE) must be understood at the micro, meso, and macro levels, taking institutions, institutional settings, and agency into account.

One of the earliest studies in B2B settings (Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018) employed the definition of ‘customer engagement’ from Brodie et al. (2011a). The authors' empirical study focuses on consumer engagement behaviour and how it manifests as referencing, as well as how it affects value generation and value consequences for the interacting players.

According to Jonas et al. (2018, p.402), based on consumer engagement research by Brodie et al. (2011a), stakeholder engagement is a ‘psychological state that occurs by virtue of stakeholders throughout an interactive process within a specific service ecosystem’. The authors underline the multidimensionality of the engagement concept, given that they based their definition on consumer engagement. The authors acknowledge the behavioural, cognitive, and emotional elements of stakeholder participation. Furthermore, the authors added to the engagement literature by revealing information regarding the causes of stakeholder engagement based on a single case study.

Reinartz and Berkmann (2018) underline in their work that the majority of research has been solely focused on the consumer or end user (B2C context). Furthermore, the authors contend that because the B2C and B2B industries are so unlike, applying the CE concept to partner engagement is not a good idea. The authors present some conclusions and suggestions for researching partner engagement based on these disparities. One result is that because B2B demand is derived from other people, it must be evaluated in the context of a firm's network as a whole. The level of formalisation is a significant distinction between B2C and B2B. The availability of a formal process and precise rules for interaction are implications of the formalisation component for B2B engagement. A significant amount of engagement is present in B2B transactions, which is another difference between B2B and B2C. The inference is that there are more ‘natural’ chances for participation in B2B that attempt to better one's own and/or a partner's circumstances.

Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2019) and Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2021) examine collective engagement. The authors suggest the dimensions of collective engagement (i.e. behavioural, cognitive and emotional dispositions) based on prior engagement literature, including the business-to-business literature, and build on prior research. ‘A user pays

attention to instructions,' as an example of one of the manifestations, exemplifies how the cognitive dimension of engagement is defined as absorption in or concentration on an engagement object. The authors then go on to define the behavioural dimension of collective engagement as resource contributions centred on an engagement objective generated through interaction and provide the following example: 'A user puts significant effort to learn the use of the new IT…' (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019, p. 16).

Drawing on S-D Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2016), Brodie et al. (2019) emphasize the critical need to shift from dyads to networks and from customer engagement to actor engagement. Following a review of work related to engagement, the authors propose five propositions for the actor engagement domain. The first foundational proposition describes AE as an actor disposition that results through interactions with other actors to contribute resources above and beyond the scope of basic service exchange (Chandler and Lusch, 2015, Storbacka et al., 2016, Kumar and Pansari, 2016). The second proposition put forth by Brodie et al. (2019) place a strong emphasis on actor disposition and the network component of participation (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014, Li et al., 2018, Fehrer et al., 2018). The 'disposition' component of actor engagement, however, has its roots in consumer engagement. The importance of AE being a multifaceted notion with interactions between disposition and behaviour (Kumar and Pansari, 2016, Chandler and Lusch, 2015) is stressed by Brodie et al. (2019) once more in their third proposition. It is critical to remember that AE is coordinated through common practices and connected to platforms that can benefit different network actors (Breidbach and Brodie, 2017, Storbacka et al., 2016). The fourth proposition states that AE occurs in a situational setting that is governed by institutional arrangements, rules, norms, leading to different AE intensities and valence. The fifth proposition states that shared practices lead to AE. This article is important foundational piece for BE research, as it provides some strong insights about engagement: link of engagement to S-D logic, engagement as a process and practice.

Storbacka (2019) emphasizes the significance of comprehending AE through congruent practices. The authors contend that dispositions facilitate AE practices. Fehrer et al.

(2020) have also highlighted the value of practices for comprehending AE and how it affects market formation. New institutional arrangements are created as a result of the interaction of AE inclinations, the institutional framework, and new network behaviours, which shapes markets (Fehrer et al., 2020).

The research by Ekman et al. (2021) aims to comprehend business actor participation by taking both behaviours and emotions into account. The authors expand upon Brodie et al. (2019) definition of actor engagement, paying particular attention to disposition and how it affects the production of various business actor engagement (BAE) forms. Ekman et al. (2021) assert in their study, which is based on a qualitative analysis of dyadic data, that BAE has two dimensions: behavioural and emotional aspects. Since the authors combine the behavioural and cognitive dimensions into one dimension, this is the first study in which the difficulties of separating dimensions are evident.

Vivek et al. (2021) encourage academics to concentrate on partner engagement, which is generated by inter-organizational relationships, in their most recent research. To shed light on the nature of PE and comprehend its triggers—environmental and relational determinants—the authors employ dyadic data. It has been suggested that research on understanding engagement should focus on community engagement and broader viewpoints (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2021, Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019). The studies found that collective engagement was greater than the total number of individual engagements. The same behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions characterise the collective engagement.

2.3.4. Engagement: Differences between engagement forms

Initial research in different fields, detailed in section 2.3.1, such as employee engagement (Kahn, 1990, Schaufeli, 2013, Schaufeli et al., 2002), school and student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004, Skinner and Belmont, 1993) advertising and media (Bezjian-Avery et al., 1998, Kilger and Romer, 2007, Wang and Calder, 2006) or community engagement (Algesheimer et al., 2010, Algesheimer et al., 2005) have demonstrated the existence of different forms of engagement (e.g.). These works constitute the starting point and the

foundation for the further development of the concept of brand engagement (Sprott et al., 2009, Goldsmith et al., 2011) and then consumer engagement.

Starting with Van Doorn et al. (2010) article, the field witness the evolution of customer engagement, with object of engagement being the brand or the company. The focus of these works, that are detailed in the table 2, remained on consumer. The main findings generated by these works points out to the multi-dimensionality of engagement construct that is central to service system. Customer engagement is based on behaviours beyond purchase and is characterised by intensity and valence.

Table 2 - Selected customer engagement works

Area	Articles	Definition of Customer engagement	Contribution to engagement area	Implications for BE
Customer (consumer) engagement	Van Doorn et al. (2010)	CEB = the customers' behavioral manifestation toward a brand/ firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers' (p254).	CE Behaviors have: 1. Valence (+ or -) 2. Form and modality (can be expressed in different forms: money, time) 3. Scope: temporal and geographic	Multi-dimensionality of engagement construct Engagement is behaviour beyond purchase Central to service system Characteristics: Valence and intensity
	Kumar et al. (2010)	Build on Van Doorn et al. (2010) definition of CE but emphasize the value that CE creates for the focal company.	CE helps co-creation of monetary value, recommendations and influencing others, help development/ service improvement.	
	Brodie et al. (2011a)	CE is a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships.	CE - five propositions: 1. CE is a psychological state 2. CE occurs within a dynamic, iterative process 3. CE is central to ecosystem 4. CE is multidimensional construct 5. CE has different levels	
	Vivek et al. (2012)	Engagement is "intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/ or organizational activities…"	Engagement elements: Cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social elements	
	Alexander and Jaakkola (2016)	As per Brodie et al (11) definition, CE is psychological state that results from interactive experiences between a customer and a focal agent or object (i.e. Brand/ firm). The authors focus on behavioral manifestation of CE (CEB).	Aligned with Brodie et al (2011) above 4 types of CEBs: 1. Co-developing behavior 2. Influencing behavior 3. Augmentation behavior 4. Mobilizing behaviour	

Despite of these advancements, researchers pointed to the need of understanding of engagement more broadly, which lead to enlarging the scope engagement by including all

actors in the service ecosystem. Actors are anyone in the service ecosystem, human or non-human, individual or collective actors, firms or employees, other governmental or non-governmental entities that are involved in the service ecosystem (Storbacka et al., 2016).

The actor engagement literature has been based on customer (consumer) engagement works. Therefore, actor engagement is a multidimensional construct (Chandler and Lusch, 2015, Brodie et al., 2019) that includes the behaviours beyond the purchase (Alexander et al., 2018a). AE is critical to service ecosystems (Brodie et al., 2019) and is generated during the interactions and resource integration processes (Brodie et al., 2019, Alexander et al., 2018a, Storbacka et al., 2016). The evolution from customer engagement to AE also witnessed some changes: while CE is a psychological trait, AE represents the disposition of an actor (Storbacka et al., 2016, Chandler and Lusch, 2015, Li et al., 2017, Li et al., 2018, Fehrer et al., 2020, Brodie et al., 2019). A significant evolution of AE over CE represents the emphasis on institutions. AE is facilitated or constrained by institutions, norms and rules (Brodie et al., 2019, Alexander et al., 2018a, Fehrer et al., 2020, Storbacka, 2019, Storbacka et al., 2016). AE is also context dependent being characterised by valence and intensity (Brodie et al., 2019, Alexander et al., 2018a, Alexander et al., 2018b, Li et al., 2017, Li et al., 2018). This broadened perspective of actor engagement works are further detailed in the table 3.

Table 3 - Selected actor engagement works

Area	Articles	Definition of actor engagement	Contribution to engagement area	Implications for BE
Actor engagement	(Chandler & Lusch, 2015)	Engagement is based on both the connections of an actor and the psychological disposition of an actor.	Five properties of engagement 1. Temporal connections (external); 2. Relational connections (External); 3. Future dispositions (internal); 4. Past dispositions (internal); 5. Present dispositions (internal)	Expansion of the construct to include all entities not only customers Multi-dimensionality of engagement construct
	(Storbacka et al., 2016)	Actor engagement is the actor disposition to engage and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within the institutional context of a service ecosystem.	Conditions for actor engagement: 1. The engaging actors & their resources 2. existing of engagement platforms	
	(Li, Juric, & Brodie, 2017)	AE is both the actor's disposition to engage, and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within a	Challenged the dyadic perspective on studying AE. It reveals the iterative nature of AE. Components of process: actor's connections, engagement properties and outcomes.	

		service ecosystem (Storbacka et al., 2016).		Engagement is behaviour beyond purchase Engagement is based on disposition Central to service system Characteristics: Valence and intensity Engagement is facilitated and constrained by Intuitions, norms and rules
	(Li et al., 2018)	AE definition from Storbacka et al. (2016) definition (above).	Antecedents of AE are individual factors & network factors. Propositions that link psychological dispositions to engagement valence.	
	(Alexander et al., 2018; Finsterwalder, 2018)	AE is seen as an actor's voluntarily resource contribution 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.	Argumentation of the need to broaden the concept of customer engagement to include all actor-to-actor engagements in service ecosystem, and go beyond the micro-level, to macro and meso level. AE linked to institutions & institutional contexts, agency.	
	(Brodie et al., 2019)	AE is a dynamic and iterative process that reflect actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in service ecosystem.	Five foundational propositions: F1: AE reflects an actor's disposition, which occurs by connections with other actors, to provide resource contributions beyond what is elementary (transactional) to service exchange. F2: AE emerges in a dynamic and iterative processes, where its antecedents and consequences affect actor's dispositions and network connections. F3: AE is a multi-dimensional concept, subject to the interplay of dispositions (emotional and/ or cognitive), behaviors and the level of connectedness among actors. F4: AE occurs within a specific set of institutional contexts, generating differing AE intensities and valence over time. F5: AE is coordinated through shared practices that occur within engagement platforms.	
	Storbaka (2019)	Review all important, but lean on Alexander et al. (2018), above.	AE practices are facilitated by dispositions. AE is influenced by rules norms and practices since it takes place in an in situational context that is guided by institutional arrangements.	
	Fehrer et al (2020)	Based on Brodie et al. (2019, p.2) AE definition.	The interplay of AE dispositions, within the institutional context, and new behaviours throughout the network result in new institutional arrangements (shaping markets)	

In parallel with actor engagement works, there are scholars that argue the need to understand the specific actors' engagement: stakeholder (Jonas et al., 2018), collective engagement (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2021, Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019), partner (Vivek et al., 2021, Vivek et al., 2015), and business (Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018, Ekman et al., 2021, Sands et al., 2022). These perspectives of specific set of actors are further detailed in the table 4 below.

Table 4 - Selected specific actor engagement works

Area	Articles	Definition of actor engagement	Contribution to engagement area	Implications for BE
Specific forms of actor engagement	(Vivek et al., 2015)	B2B Partner engagement is episodes of intense inter-organizational resource and social exchange between two independent or interdependent business entities directed toward common outcomes.	The research argues the need to focus on specific actor: business. It presents one side of engagement. However, it does not capture the two-way interaction.	The argument emphasizes the importance of researching very specific actors as the construct is context dependent.
	(Jonas et al., 2018)	Stakeholder engagement is the psychological state that occurs by virtue of stakeholder experiences throughout an interactive process within a specific service ecosystem.	Presents the specific antecedences (individual &organizational) Friendship, common experiences, self-representation, trust, common goal, resource dependency, level of hierarchy, institutional arrangements, local proximity.	
	(Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018)	No definition of business actor engagement but of business engagement behaviours which are customers' resource contributions beyond what transactional activities.	The research focused on understanding referencing, as BAE behaviour manifestation, and how it affects value creation in business networks. One the 1st empirical B2B research on Business Actor Engagement.	
	(Reinartz & Berkmann, 2018)	Partner engagement as "partner's volitional behavior towards any other stakeholder in the value chain affecting the focal firm's business, including direct (purchase related) but mainly indirect (referral, influence, knowledge) behaviors.	The authors argue that the concept of customer engagement should be extended to partner engagement in order to reflect the complexity and network character of value chains in business markets. Typology of partner engagement behaviors in business markets is presented.	
	Kleinaltenkamp et (2019)	Research is based on Storbaka et al (2016) definition of AE. Collective engagement is 'multiple actors' shared cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dispositions (p12). Engagement is the disposition to engage and the act of engaging	BE requires an understanding of collective engagement. Collective engagement is more than the sum of the individual engagements. It contains cognitive, behavioural and emotional dimensions.	
	Kleinaltekamp et (2021)		Research focuses on the interplay between dispositions, behaviours, and emerging practices of multiple actors that facilitate institutional change.	
	Ekamn et al (2021)	Uses Brodie et al 2019 definition of AE: AE is a dynamic and iterative process that reflect actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in service ecosystem.	BAE has two dimensions: behavioural/ cognitive dimension and emotional dimension. First B2B study in which there is difficult to separate behaviour from cognitive dimensions.	
	Vivek et al. (2021)	Uses the same definition of previous research (see Vivek et al., 2016)	Explicit research on BE. PE is triggered by environmental determinants (perceived threats and potential opportunities) and relational determinants (dependence	

			asymmetry, commitment, bounded reality and trust).	
	Sands et al. (2022)	No definition provided. Authors build on Brodie et al. (2011) customer engagement definition.	Empirical quantitative research that is focused on level of customer engagement and the negative effects of service failure. Explicit research on BE, that emphasizes the existence of High vs. low engagement	

2.3.5. Defining business engagement (BE)

As detailed in the literature review, engagement has been defined in many different ways, although the essence remains the same. Although research on engagement has evolved over time, the definitions of the engagement concept do not converge. Additionally, while the body of research is expanding, the trend remains to create conceptual works. As a result, while some authors (see Reinartz and Berkmann (2018) and Brodie et al. (2019)) advance some typologies of engagement beyond customer engagement (CE), the characteristics of engagement are not grounded in empirical research.

Most of the marketing literature on engagement focuses almost exclusively on customer or consumer engagement, with the construct referring to an individual end-user (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018). Previous work conceptualises customer engagement as a behaviour (Van Doorn et al., 2010, Kumar et al., 2010), a psychological state (Brodie et al., 2011a, Alexander and Jaakkola, 2016), a high-intensity participation (Vivek et al., 2012), or disposition (Hollebeek, 2011b). The literature converges on the facets of customer engagement, namely the cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social facets or elements (Vivek et al., 2012, Brodie et al., 2011a).

A few conceptual works have attempted to broaden the scope of engagement to include a multitude of actors. Chandler and Lusch (2015, p.10) talk about engagement as being 'based on both the connections of an actor and the psychological dispositions of an actor'. Actors are seen as humans, 'machines and various combinations of humans and machines' (Storbacka et al., 2016, p.3008). In their work, actor engagement is also seen as 'the disposition to engage and the activity of engaging' in an interactive process of resource integration' (Storbacka et al., 2016, p.3008). However, using the term engagement as a verb to explain the concept might not be a good way to provide insights into the concept. This approach can explain the authors' acknowledgement of the lack of definitions and

understanding of the concept that exist to date. Storbacka et al. (2016) aimed to provide the framework for analysing actor engagement. Although, the validity of the framework is questionable since the foundation, that is, a solid definition and understanding of the concept is missing. The literature on engagement is centred around individual customer engagement, and therefore, the more recent articles to date also define actor engagement as 'the disposition' or 'act of engaging' (Li et al., 2017). Jonas et al. (2018) define stakeholder engagement as a psychological state, while Li et al. (2018) continue to use the definition based on Storbacka et al. (2016) work in which engagement is seen as the disposition of an actor.

The conceptual work by Brodie et al. (2019) offers an insightful perspective and strong foundation for this BE research, yet there are still several unanswered questions. For instance, it is unknown whether the engagement patterns of all actors are comparable, therefore we cannot treat them equally. The term 'customer engagement' has, however, been broadened because it did not capture the particularity of other actors. Customer engagement (customer as an end user), a fairly specialised construct in the engagement area, has evolved into a generic entity known as an 'actor.' Vivek et al. (2015) have highlighted the fact that although there has been some progress in understanding engagement as an end-user (C2C or B2C), the steps towards understanding how businesses engage their business customers are still lacking in academic literature. Vivek et al. (2015: 53) emphasise the error of extending the phrase 'customer engagement' generically to all client groups, including end users and business customers. The authors note that 'researchers either believe that business partners are extremely comparable to end customers or disregard the significance of engagement in business-to-business partnerships,' highlighting the need to understand a specific actor's engagement, specifically business engagement.

Additionally, we can acknowledge that the definition and essence of the concept of engagement are tied to disposition, and this perspective has been propagated from customer (individual) engagement. As a result, it is legitimate to ask ourselves if we should fully assimilate the concept of a disposition to engage.

In the field of Human Resources Management studies, in a work about employee engagement and work engagement, Schaufeli (2013) presented empirical evidence demonstrating that individual engagement can be 'a psychological state rather than a dispositional trait' (Schaufeli, 2013 p. 14). The author clearly states that 'engagement is a unique construct that can be differentiated … from personality dispositions' (Schaufeli, 2013 p. 2).

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'disposition' as an individual-related, 'prevailing tendency, mood, inclination or temperamental makeup'. The Google dictionary states that disposition is 'a person's inherent qualities of mind and character; an inclination or tendency'. If disposition is an individual trait, then how can we apply it to an actor (i.e. machine, business/firm, governmental organization) or anything other than an individual actor? Would it be legitimate?

As the philosophical paradigm of this thesis is critical realism (CR)[1], it will be useful to understand 'disposition' from a CR perspective. In his work, Bhaskar (1997) talks about the need to analyse disposition as tendencies on three tiers: possibility, exercise and actualization (Hartwig, 2015); according to them, dispositions are 'tendencies possessed but unexercised, tendencies exercised but unactualized and tendencies exercised and actualized in a particular outcome' (Bhaskar 1997, p.140). Throughout Bhaskar's work, disposition is considered as power, from the perspective of whether causal powers may be applied or not (Hartwig, 2015). A tendency is causal powers exercised, operating in open, as well as closed systems. The causal mechanism 'may refer to either powers or a tendency or both. Powers, tendencies and mechanisms are instantiated in structures' (Hartwig, 2015, p.475).

The tendencies that Bhaskar defines can be seen as powerful tendencies, that is, they consist of an persistent predisposition (Pinkstone, 2005). Since tendencies are the 'characteristic ways of acting or effects of mechanisms' (Lawson, 1997, p.22), we might expect those generative mechanisms with 'an enduring and pervasive time–space extension to be expressed in tendencies that themselves possess an enduring and pervasive

[1] A detailed description of Critical Realism is provided in Chapter Three.

time–space extension (Hartwig, 2015, p.747). This aspect is important for BE since the construct is related to an enduring power or tendency.

For critical realists, 'powers' is a term used for the 'properties of structure or generative mechanisms that account for their tendential behaviour' (Hartwig, 2015, p.616). Analysing further the concept of 'powers', Mingers (2014) described it as 'the ability of a system to produce a particular effect in a particular context or in interaction with some other system'. Continuing his ideas, the author makes the connection between the system and its specific properties that are emergent from the structure (components and relations) of the object (Mingers, 2014). Considering the aforementioned arguments, the term adopted in this study for BE is 'powers' or 'tendency', not 'disposition', reflecting the fact that actors exhibit behaviours beyond contractual agreements.

Vivek et al. (2015, p.56) definition of partner engagement can help to look at engagement in B2B settings. The authors define B2B partner engagement as 'episodes of intense inter-organizational resource and social exchange between two independent or interdependent business entities directed toward common outcomes'.

Brodie et al. (2019, p.2) define actor engagement (AE) as 'a dynamic and iterative process that reflect actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in service ecosystem', generated by the need for improvement of one or more parties involved in the process. This definition can be used for BE by replacing the word 'disposition' with something more appropriate for B2B. The need for this replacement is based on the fact that dispositions refer (only) to the psychological state of an actor. The replacement term should include the availability of the actors' resources (time and energy) at the moment of interaction and reflect the fact that behaviours of actors that go beyond contractual agreements.

Combining the above definitions, the following definition of BE has been used in this research:

> ***BE is a dynamic and iterative process generated by episodes of intense interactions that reflect actors' powers or tendencies to invest resources, beyond***

the contractual obligations, in their interactions with other connected actors for the benefit of own, interacting actors as well as others in the service ecosystem.

2.3.6. BE attributes: Intensity and valence

Following the acknowledgement of consumer engagement as having dual valence, researchers (Van Doorn et al., 2010) have looked at both sides of engagement valence, positive and negative, researching them empirically (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014, Bowden et al., 2017, Naumann et al., 2017, Azer and Alexander, 2020, Naumann et al., 2020, Do et al., 2021, Rahman et al., 2022, Islam and Rahman, 2016) but also advancing conceptual frameworks (Van Doorn et al., 2010, Ng et al., 2013, Do et al., 2019) and linking them to different outcomes, both tangible (Rahman et al., 2022) and intangible (Naumann et al., 2020).

Researchers have generated insights primarily into the business-to-consumer context (Sands et al., 2022) and more of the positively valenced engagement despite recent research highlighting the potential for positive, as well as negative valence, in customer engagement (Dolan et al., 2015, Juric et al., 2015, Hollebeek and Chen, 2014). The existence of negatively valenced engagement has been more recently acknowledged, as most of the research has been concentrated on the positive, rewarding engagement. Van Doorn et al. (2010) posit that engagement behaviours can be both positive and negative. Since then, most, if not all, studies explicitly on negative engagement have been conducted in B2C settings. Negatively valenced engagement exists in the form of disengagement, or passive engagement, which is exhibited when consumers detach themselves from an exchange or negative engagement of consumers with the brands (Naumann et al., 2017, Azer and Alexander, 2020). These researchers posit the importance of examining positive and negative engagement as separate constructs, as they have different drivers, antecedents and outcomes (Naumann et al., 2020, Azer and Alexander, 2020).

In addition to accepting that engagement has valence, research has also acknowledged the fact that engagement has intensity (Gambetti et al., 2012, Vivek et al., 2012, Brodie et al.,

2013, Fehrer et al., 2018b, Azer and Alexander, 2020, Ng et al., 2020), which impacts how customer engagement unfolds (Azer and Alexander, 2020, Fehrer et al., 2018b).

The theoretical perspective of S-D logic focuses on the existence of networks and exchange, which is based on the idea of interactive and dynamic value co-creation between different actors (Vargo, 2015, Vargo and Lusch, 2011a, Vargo and Akaka, 2012, Vargo and Lusch, 2011b, Lusch et al., 2010). Following this, the field of engagement also evolved and started to consider other actors as capable of generating engagement. Storbacka et al. (2016) propose the existence of entities that have been labelled as 'actors', including not only customers but also firms or public actors that come together and interact with each other. Following Storbacka et al. (2016) conceptual papers, research on AE has mainly focused on emphasizing the iterative nature and dynamics of engagement (Li et al., 2017), with just a few studies focusing on valence (Li et al., 2018, Li et al., 2021) and no study, to the best of the author's knowledge, on intensity.

The research articles that discuss engagement characteristics drawing from consumer settings and generic actor engagement research are further detailed in Table 5 below.

Table 5 - Customer (consumer) engagement (CE) and actor engagement (AE) attributes

Author(s), Year	Research type	Engagement attributes	CE/ AE – Definition / Comments
Van Doorn et al. (2010)	Conceptual	Valence	CE: Acknowledges the existence of positive, as well as negative engagement behaviours.
Vivek et al. (2012)	Empirical	Intensity	CE: 'Customer engagement is the intensity of an individual …' (p.133)
Gambetti et al. (2012)	Empirical	Intensity	CE: 'A dynamic and process-based concept evolving in intensity…' (p.659).
Brodie et al. (2013)	Empirical	Intensity	CE: Consumer engagement is 'A context dependent … characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes' (p.107).
Hollebeek and Chen (2014)	Empirical	Valence (focus on negative)	CE: Consumers' positively/negatively-valenced brand engagement drives different consequences. Negatively valenced brand engagement exploring consumers' positively and negatively valenced engagement towards a brand, including triggers and consequences
Juric et al. (2015)	Empirical	Valence (Negative customer engagement)	Negative customer brand engagement: an overview of conceptual and blog-based findings.

Dolan et al. (2015)	Conceptual	Negative customer engagement behaviour	Research highlights the engagement behaviours that customers exhibit on social media, including negative engagement.
Islam and Rahman (2016)	Empirical	Magnitude (high, low) Valence	CE: Customer engagement 'varies in direction (positive/ negative) and magnitude (high/ low)…' p.2019
Bowden et al. (2017)	Empirical	Valence (Negative)	CE: Positively and negatively valenced consumer engagement – consequences for brand and Online brand community Explore the negative consumer engagement with multiple objects in online brand communities.
Naumann et al. (2017)	Empirical	Valence Negative engagement (and Customer disengagement)	CE: Research uncovers the meaning and conceptual dimensions of disengagement and negative engagement in conjunction with positive engagement. Customer disengagement and negative engagement are directed at the focal service organisation object. Engagement valences (positive, disengagement, negative) are interrelated.
Lievonen et al. (2018)	Conceptual	Valence (Negative)	Negative stakeholder engagement online in the context of organizations and brands. Affective, cognitive and behavioural engagement dimensions. Categories of negative engagement are proposed (inactive, active and malicious).
Fehrer et al. (2018a)	Empirical	Intensity	CE: Authors acknowledge intensity. Engagement behaviour must overcome a certain intensity threshold to unfold its effect.
Do et al. (2019)	Conceptual	Valence	CE: Determinants of negative engagement behaviours, including disengagement
Azer and Alexander (2020)	Empirical	Intensity Valence (Negative - Customer Negative engagement behaviour (Influencing)	CE provides a view of negative customer engagement NVIB influencing behaviour. Focus on customer engagement negative influencing behaviour (NVIB) in an online context. Cognitive and emotional dimensions trigger different forms of NVIB. The authors use semantic tools to detect the intensity levels of NVIB.
Do et al. (2019)	Conceptual	Valence (Negative customer engagement)	The paper advances determinants of negatively valenced customer engagement (customer perceived justice and negative disconfirmation)
Brodie et al. (2019)	Conceptual	Valence (Negative Actor engagement behaviour)	The valence of engagement refers to whether an actor's disposition toward an engagement object (such as a brand) is positive or negative. Unfavourable reviews and complaints are negative AE behaviours.
Ng et al. (2020)	Conceptual (review)	Valence Intensity	CE: Valence may be as positive or negative. Intensity is defined as the level of strength (passive, non-engaged, disengaged)

Naumann et al. (2020)	Empirical	Valence (Negative)	CE positive and negative engagement and relationship with involvement (ante) and word-of-mouth (consequence; WOM) Affective, cognitive and behavioural engagement dimensions. Involvement is a moderate driver of negative engagement. Negative engagement impacts WOM.
Do et al. (2021)	Empirical	Valence (Negative)	CE looks at negative customer engagement through cognition (thoughts); Provides an understanding of negative customer engagement through cognitive expression (unfavourable thoughts of customers: a sense of injustice, incompetence, irresponsibility, distrust and cynicism)
Rahman et al. (2022)	Empirical	Valence (Negative)	CE provides a view of the impact of negative customer engagement on financial performance The number of negative customer engagement incidents negatively impacts brand equity and, therefore, financial performance.
Li et al. (2018)	Conceptual	Valence	AE. Engagement valence in actor networks
Li et al. (2021)	Empirical	Valence (Negative)	AE. Authors conceptualize, develop and validate a negative actor engagement scale for online knowledge-sharing platforms.

In their conceptual work, Reinartz and Berkmann (2018) and Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2019) acknowledge the existence of intensity. Sands et al. (2022) quantitative research demonstrates that a high level of customer engagement acts as a buffer against the negative effects of service failure. Although the authors do not mention intensity, they measure customer engagement (B2B) as being either high or low, which corresponds with intensity. However, Sands et al. (2022) conclusion is based on an implicit assumption that valence is positive. Based on qualitative research, Ekman et al. (2021) proposed a framework for business engagement, including testable propositions, and outlined engagement intensity with its levels (low, moderate and high Intensity) measured with respondents' usage of the firm's application. The authors posit that engagement intensity is ‘the result of a combination of strategic fit and interaction characteristics’ (Ekman et al., 2021: p.189).

Valence exists as the engagement attribute in conceptual works within the B2B context (Vivek et al., 2015, Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019). More recently, in empirical work, Ekman et al. (2021) measured valence using emotions (Valences: Positive - Attractiveness and Negative - Aversion) and stated that valence is

the result of an experience that is based on relationships between actors. Vivek et al. (2021) qualitative research also reveals the partner engagement valence that is defined by the affective quality of engagement (positively or negatively) and posits that negative engagement episodes do not always lead to a negative outcome. The authors bring forward the idea that the overall valence of engagement influences future collaboration, rather than a specific positive or negative episode. Vatavwala et al. (2022) empirical qualitative study focuses on disengagement in B2B. The authors draw on negative consumer engagement literature and propose a framework for understanding disengagement (negative valenced engagement) and its outcomes: seller loss (financial and reputation, and competitor growth), customer loss (increased switching costs) and value destruction. Vatavwala et al. (2022) draw their research framework from consumer, or generic actor, literature and qualitative research, despite the research being conducted in B2B settings.

Another B2B study in which engagement is linked to negative valence was conducted by Sands et al. (2022). The authors argue that B2B engagement research is limited, the insights being drawn from B2C research, with the research of service failure (that leads to negative valence) being scant (Sands et al., 2022). In their quantitative research, Sands et al. (2022) also draw on consumer research. The scales used in their study are based on cognitive dimension (I often think about the brand), affective (I feel positively about the brand) and activation, as a replacement for behavioural dimension (the brand is my favourite brand to use among…). This research highlights the difficulty to separate affective (I feel positively…) from behavioural (… it is my favourite brand to use). Also, B2B research acknowledges the rationality involved in the decision-making process. It means that any feeling like 'I feel...' is mostly based on the brand/partner being able to deliver specific outcomes, which implies a behavioural component. In addition, any affective (I feel …) is based on a cognitive thought, which is the other engagement dimension. In addition, this study is based on self-reported taxonomy (high versus low engagement), which is based on the overall relationship between the focal actor and its partner. This research is looking at more granular data, that is, at episodes. The conclusion drawn by authors is that high levels of business engagement (the high levels in the above research do not differentiate between positive and negative, including most probably

positive valenced engagement) acts as a buffer against the negative effects of service failure (Sands et al., 2022).

The research articles that address business engagement attributes are further detailed in Table 6 below.

Table 6 - Business engagement literature - BE attribute(s)

Author(s), Year	Research type	Engagement attributes	Definition/ Comments
Vivek et al. (2015)	Conceptual	Valence	Business-to-business partner engagement is characterized by valence exhibited during interaction episodes between the parties. Acknowledged construct, not a specific focus on it.
Reinartz and Berkmann (2018)	Conceptual	Valence Intensity	Authors acknowledge partner engagement (B2B) having intensity and valence Acknowledged constructs.
Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2019)	Conceptual	Valence Intensity	Focused on collective engagement. Authors acknowledge CE as having valence and intensity.
Ekman et al. (2021)	Empirical	Valence Intensity	Generated a taxonomy of business actor engagement (BAE)
Vivek et al. (2021)	Empirical	Intensity Valence	Partner engagement is defined as 'episodes of intense …exchange between two independent entities' PE has valence (negative and positive)
Vatavwala et al. (2022)	Empirical	Valence	Authors propose a framework for customer disengagement in B2B negative engagement, disengagement and outcomes
Sands et al. (2022)	Empirical	Intensity	Authors focus on the interaction between customer engagement (B2B) and service failure. Intensity (high, low) is the strength of customer engagement.

2.3.7. Outcomes of engagement

In order to succeed, firms must engage customers in a two-way relationship, that is, an interactive one (Kumar et al., 2010, p.297). Grönroos and Helle (2012 p.344) consider the existence of actor (business) engagement as 'two (or several) parties establish business engagement that enable both (or all) parties to gain something'.

Van Doorn et al. (2010) mention the advanced consequences of customer engagement behaviour, namely customer gains (attitudinal, identity, emotional, physical/ time, cognitive,), firm gains (reputational, financial, competitive, regulatory, product, employee) and others (economic surplus, consumer welfare, social surplus).

Vivek et al. (2012, p.133) posit that value is one of the main consequences of customer engagement (CE), while Storbacka et al. (2016) argue that value cannot be created without actor engagement (AE). Most engagement research that provides insights into outcomes originates from the customer engagement literature. The current study emphasises the positive outcomes of BE, including financial performance, value co-creation, loyalty, trust and commitment, customer satisfaction and generation of positive word-of-mouth (WOM).

The few studies of BE in a B2B setting, also advocate the positive impact of engagement, such as reputation and status gains, market advantage, development of new relationships (Jaakola et al. 2018), value co-creation and market innovation (Storbaka 2019), consideration size set and willingness to pay a premium (Nzyado 2020).

Table 7 - Summary of outcomes of positive engagement – select pertinent prior studies

Article	CE / AE / BE	Positive/ negative E	Outcomes
Van Doorn et al. (2010)	CE (generic)	+	Gains for the customer: cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, physical/ time, identity Impacts on the firm: financial, reputational, regulatory, competitive, employees' performance Impact on others: consumer welfare, economic surplus, social surplus, regulation, cross-brand, cross-customer
Kumar et al. (2010)	CE	+	Customer lifetime value (sales), customer referral value (referencing), customer influencer value (influencing others), customer knowledge value (knowledge value)
Hollebeek et al. (2011a)	CE	+	Customer loyalty, trust, commitment, satisfaction
Grönroos and Helle (2012)	CE	+	Consequences: Mutual innovation; Aligning processes, resources, competencies; and Incremental value
Vivek et al. (2012)	CE	+	Value, Trust, affective commitment, WOM, Loyalty (brand and community)
Brodie et al. 2013	CE	+	Customer loyalty and satisfaction, trust and commitment, connection/ emotional bonding, customer empowerment
Jsaakola and Alexander (2014)	CE	+	Value for all participants in the service ecosystem (focal customer, the interacting firm and other stakeholders)
Vivek et al. (2015)	PE	+	Related constructs: Relational: Collaboration, Trust, Commitment, Dependence asymmetry Service ecosystem factors: Environmental dynamism, Business opportunity
Kumar and Pnasari (2016)	CE	+	Firm performance

Storbacka et al. (2016)	AE	+	Value co-creation.
Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos (2018)	BE	+	The research focused on understanding referencing and how it affects value co-creation in business networks. Impact seller: reputation and status, accessing new markets, developing new relationships Reference customer: Improved status, Compromised market advantage, reputation boost vs damage, market development
Beckers et al. (2018)	CE	+	Abnormal stock return, value co-creation, impact on cash flow, increasing/ decreasing risk
Storbaka (2019)	AE	+	Value co-creation, Market innovation
Nyadzayo et al. (2020)	BE	+	Consideration set size, dependence and willingness to pay a premium
Ng et al. (2020)	CE	+	Customer's outcomes: Satisfaction, Trust, Loyalty, Purchase intention, WOM Firm: Customer lifetime value (Sales), Customer rereferral value (referencing), Customer Influencer value (Influencing others), Customer knowledge value (Knowledge value)
CE= customer engagement, AE= Actor engagement, PE = Partner engagement, BE = Business engagement			

However, the body of empirical work highlighting the outcomes of negative engagement in B2B settings is limited. In B2B settings, Sands et al. (2022) highlight that BE can act as a buffer when there is a service failure. Based on qualitative research, Vatawala et al. (2022) advocate the outcomes of negative engagement, namely a decline in revenue, loss in reputational and competitor's growth.

Table 8 - Summary of outcomes of negative engagement mentioned in prior studies

Article	CE / AE / BE	Outcomes
Hollebeek and Chen (2014)	CE	Brand attitude, WOM
Juric et al. (2015)	CE	More losses (increased dissonance) Negative impact on brand equity, reputation, financial results, relationship, switching behaviour
Naumann et al. (2020)	CE	Word-of-mouth (WOM)
Rahman et al. (2022)	CE	Negative impact on brand equity and financial performance
Sands et al. (2022)	BE	High levels of BE act as a buffer against the negative effects (relationships, revenues and profitability)
Vatavwala et al. (2022)	BE	Firm impact: Decline in firm performance, reputation loss, competitor growth; Customer impact: switching costs Value destruction & reforms

2.4. Using practice theory and practice to examine BE

According to practice theory, action can be understood only in relation to practices (Bourdieu, 1977). Practice theory can lead to deeper accounts of action in context

(Hargreaves, 2011), which is very valuable for this research. So, from the perspective of practice theory, when researching interaction between actors the most important point is to observe practices (Schau et al., 2009, Warde, 2005). The practice theory approach advocates investigating of activities and individuals' social practices rather than studying individuals. Using the practice theory approach, the researcher should take practices as the central unit of analysis rather than practitioners (Weenink and Spaargaren, 2016, Nicolini, 2012), making it appropriate for BE research.

2.4.1. Practice theory

All formulations of practice theory are based on the idea that social life is made of social interactions through which people make and transform their world and themselves (Spaargaren et al., 2016) by using tools, discourse, and their bodies (Nicolini, 2012). Practices are defined as combinations of mental frames, technology, artifacts, discourses, symbols and values (Schatzki, 2006), and behaviours that include practical activities, acts, and interpretations or talk (Warde, 2005) that are 'shared, routined, ordinary ways of doing and saying, enacted by knowledgeable and capable human agents …' (Spaargaren et al., 2016 p.25).

Understanding and representing practice requires the implementation of two steps. The first stage is to zoom in on the practice, to immerse yourself in it, and to get a full experience of what it feels like to be a participant in it (Schmidt, 2016). The investigation of practices must always start by zooming in through immersion in the action. Only once the actual local accomplishment of a real-time practice is appreciated 'from within,' so to speak, can one proceed to zoom out, which is the second step, by making sense of the data collected, identifying connections, and trailing them Nicolini (2012). Researchers can only develop practical expertise and insider knowledge and skills in regard to the nature of the activities, their regulations, and consequences by actively engaging throughout the practices under study (Schmidt, 2016). The investigation can be done by following the actors and by observing human or non-human actors and their daily activities of weaving connections (Czarniawska, 2007).

Practice theory informs this research. As social practice theory shifts attention from individuals to the social and collective organisation of practices (Hargreaves, 2011),

practices become the object of research (Weenink and Spaargaren, 2016). As the practice theory approach specifically focuses on norms, arrangements, infrastructures, and so on rather than on individual beliefs and choices, it is well suited to understanding business engagement resulting from the interaction of businesses. Practice theory is the chosen approach for conducting business engagement research since it can help understand how social relations and context impacts the functioning of social practice. Additionally, practice theory is ideal for business engagement since the practice itself, rather than the individuals who perform it or the social structures that provide the background for it, becomes the unit of analysis (Hargreaves, 2011).

Creating and sharing experiences is accomplished via interactions. Practices are developed, transferred, and enacted by practitioners (Reich and Hager, 2014). As a result, from a practice theory perspective, it is also important to attend to the interactions of actors who perform particular practices (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016). Therefore, representing and understanding BE practices require, among other things, that researchers zoom in on the patterns of relationships among human individuals. This process of understanding requires using a qualitative methodological approach. This approach is indispensable for conducting research about practices, as it can reveal rich detail of practices and the way they unfold (Schmidt, 2016).

2.4.2. Anatomy and physiology of practices

Practices are ordered, momentarily emerging sets of sayings and doings that are controlled by ends (Schatzki, 2001b). A practice's structure can be described in terms of the numerous notions that outline its aspects. When activities are arranged and connected by understanding, rules, normative ends, and effectiveness, it is assumed that they relate to practice. Schatzki, (2002) and Schatzki (2010) contend that social practices are made up of interconnected sayings, deeds, and physical setups. There are three elements to practice, or what Schau et al. (2009) defined as ‘practice anatomy’: (1) understandings, knowledge of what to do or say, including skills or know-how; (2) procedures: explicit rules, principles, and instructions; and (3) teleoaffective structures, or engagements that are purposes or ends that are emotionally attributed to people as they are committed to them (Schau et al., 2009, Duguid, 2005, Schatzki, 2001a, Warde, 2005).

By looking at practices' organising principles: practical and general understandings highlighted through activities performed by the interacting actors, rules, and teleoaffective structures, researchers can get an understanding of practices (Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2001b, Schatzki, 2005, Schatzki, 2006).

The term 'practical understanding' describes the capacity to carry out practice-related tasks. Learning how to accomplish something, recognising that something, and responding to that something are the foundations of practical understanding (Schatzki, 2001b). Through their practical understanding, two professionals can be connected, enabling them to both recognise the same practice (Lammi, 2018). General understanding serves as another organising principle. The entire significance of a practice is formed by its general understanding, which places the specific activity in the context of a bigger picture.

> '*...the sense of common enterprise, concern, and fate that is central to people forming a commune also helped compose these practices' organization.*' (Schatzki, 2001b, p.86).

The entire significance of a practice is formed by the general understanding of that activity, which places the specific practice in a larger context (Lammi, 2018). To put it another way, professionals engaged in similar practices may come to share a common knowledge, and with this knowledge comes a shared insight of what is prudent to do.

According to Schatzki (2001b, p.79), rules are 'clear statements, principles, precepts, and commands... that direct people to execute desirable behaviours.' Giddens (1979) perspective provides context for this study because rules cannot be established. There is tacit knowledge of the rules that can be used in practice. Giddens believes that these unwritten, impractical norms fulfil the same function as expertise. A rule must be such that action is taken in accordance with it for it to structure a practice (Lammi, 2018).

Indeterminate teleoaffective structure is to be acknowledged, which Schatzki elaborates on by saying:

> *'The indefiniteness (of practice) is partly due to the indefinite variety of circumstances in which any practice is carried out and partly due to the fact that*

> *there are always more projects, tasks, and even ends that participants can acceptably carry out (e.g. novel ones hitherto untried or unconceived; the limits here are those of participants' imaginations).'* (Schatzki, 2001b, p.83)

According to Schatzki (2001b), practices have a variety of valid and desirable aims. The affective component suggests that a practice allows a professional to feel various emotions or moods (Lammi, 2018). Additionally, Schatzki (2001b) makes the case that, occasionally, even endpoints are difficult to understand because we are unaware of the desired ends.

Practices overlap, crisscross, and interconnect; this is a feature of practices (Schatzki, 2001b) Some activities may be combined with others in order to better understand them in complexes, while others may overlap and lack distinct limits (Schatzki, 2001b, Shove et al., 2012). A practice may also be dependent on other practices in order to survive (Shove et al., 2012; Lammi 2018). A practice rarely exists in isolation; rather, it is part of a web of practices (Lammi 2018). As practices no longer function independently and are dependent on one another, this convergence can be seen as what was once referred to as 'physiology' (Schau et al., 2009). To conclude, practices, through their doing and sayings, as well as through their rules and expected ends can generate an understanding of what businesses do in practice. These practices that result from interactions and generate BE can provide an insightful perspective of actor engagement (Storbacka, 2019, Storbacka and Nenonen, 2021, Brodie et al., 2019).

2.5. Literature gaps and research questions

Firms engage and start interacting in an attempt to gain something (Grönroos and Helle, 2012). Interaction is the foundation of BE that takes place in the service ecosystem and is guided by institutions, organisational structures and practices (Battilana, 2006, Vargo and Lusch, 2016). These practices take place as actors interact and engage. The manifestations of the BE can be observed through its related practices. The attributes of BE, intensity (Brodie et al., 2019, Vivek et al., 2015) and valence (Brodie et al., 2019, Li et al., 2018), have an impact on processes and their outcomes. When interaction takes place, under different BE intensity and valence levels, BE practices unfold; resources are integrated by interacting actors and value is co-created (Frow et al., 2014) with businesses achieving

their outcomes. These outcomes serve as the triggers for a new cycle of business engagement processes (Brodie et al., 2019). However, there are situations when BE leads to value destruction (Azer and Alexander, 2020, Rahman et al., 2022), with negative outcomes for the affected parties.

2.5.1. Interaction and BE

Interaction processes can provide insights into how and why customer–supplier relationships begin and flourish in B2B markets (Guercini et al., 2015, Håkansson et al., 2009). The interaction process is also critical, as there is no business engagement without interaction. These concepts being interrelated is evidenced by the research on business-to-business markets that have pointed to the existence of highly engaged business relationships between firms (La Rocca et al., 2016).

Interaction and service-for-service exchange, and therefore BE, can only be comprehended by observing institutional components such as rules, laws, regulations, practices and shared beliefs of acceptable business practices in combination (Hartmann et al., 2018). Despite recent acknowledgements of practices for understanding actor engagement (Storbacka, 2019, Storbacka and Nenonen, 2021, Brodie et al., 2019), there is limited or no research on what businesses do in practice and the practices that result from interactions and generate BE. As a result of the literature review and identified gaps, the first question is:

Question1 (RQ1): What are the BE practices?

The convergence of literature is related to the dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011a) or elements (Vivek et al., 2012) of customer engagement. Previous research emphasised that customer engagement is a multidimensional concept that includes emotional, cognitive, behavioural (Brodie et al., 2011a) and social elements (Vivek et al., 2012). The affective and cognitive facets of engagement refer to the customers' feelings and experiences, while behavioural and social elements describe participation in exchange situations. Recent and broader actor engagement conceptual work also highlights the multidimensionality of the concept, which includes emotional, cognitive and behavioural elements and the level of

connectedness among actors, though behavioural elements refer to activities that go beyond the contractual agreements.

As a result of actor engagement literature from customer engagement research, there is no empirical evidence on how these two constructs are similar or different. Furthermore, recent research indicated the difficulty to separate behaviour from cognitive engagement dimensions, as highlighted in section 2.2.4. Additionally, despite the acknowledgement that B2B is different from B2C (Vivek et al., 2021, Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018), there is no literature that highlights how B2B and B2C engagement differ.

2.5.2. BE Practices: Attributes and BE patterns

Prior research has pointed to the existence of increased intensity of collaboration (Ploetner and Ehret, 2006) or 'periods of more intense episodes of interaction than others' (Ford et al., 2008 p.90). It has been argued that inter-organisational interactions can increase in intensity; coalitions can form; information and value can be exchanged and an awareness of a common enterprise can be developed (Lawrence et al., 2002). These researches were conducted at a time when the concept of actor engagement was not prevalent in the marketing literature. As a result, the intensity was assimilated into interaction. In more recent research, Vivek et al. (2015) pointed to the existence of intensity and linked it in their research to engagement. In their early work, Vivek et al. (2012) described engagement as being the 'intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organisation's offerings and/or organisational activities…'. Vivek et al. (2015) argued that B2B partner engagement specifically referred to engagement as 'episodes of intense inter-organisational resource and social exchange…' (Vivek et al., 2021, p.476). In addition, Brodie et al. (2019) advanced a proposition that recognises engagement as having an intensity that fluctuates over time.

Previous research in consumer engagement acknowledged that it has valence. In their research, Van Doorn et al. (2010) were the first to describe customer engagement behaviour as having positive to negative valence.

Li et al. (2018) posit that actor engagement valence can shift between positive, negative and ambivalence and is triggered by engagement objects and value propositions of other

actors in the network. The actor engagement behaviour is determined by actor's engagement valence. While the research clearly identifies valence as being related to engagement, the concept is defined as 'the actor disposition to engage and the activity of engaging …' and links psychological dispositions to engagement valence, which is anchored in consumer (end-user) engagement rather than business engagement. Brodie et al. (2019) proposed that actor engagement takes place and is influenced by institutional contexts, impacting actor engagement valence and intensity over time.

Despite acknowledgements of these two constructs, intensity and valence, and their importance, there is no evidence of their interplay and their impact on BE practices. This research aims to answer the following question:

Question 2 (RQ2): What are the patterns of BE practices?

2.5.3. S-D Logic, value co-creation, resource integration and BE

It has been recognised that firms should not interact with other firms just to communicate or negotiate. They should have a deeper level of engagement since the greater engagement of a company in a specific interaction will generate larger (positive) impacts on its own activities and resources as well as on the company overall (Vatavwala et al., 2022, Ford et al., 2008).

S-D Logic literature suggests that through the exchange and integration of resources such as skills, information and knowledge, called operant resources, value is co-created by multiple actors (Vargo and Lusch (2011b). The resource integration process includes the methods through which resources are integrated and used by actors (Edvardsson et al., 2014). Integration is a 'continuous process' (Peters et al., 2014, p. 6) that requires processes, actions, activities and collaboration (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). However, there has been 'little effort made to date to provide a clear and detailed definition of … resource integration' (Peters, 2018 p.349), highlighting the need to further understand the process itself. There are insufficient insights about the resource integration processes and the ways that the activities of resource integrators are coordinated and adjusted to each other (Edvardsson et al., 2014, Plé, 2016, Peters et al., 2014b).

Actors, in exchange for their resources, should be able to integrate resources that are offered in exchange by other actors. Therefore, in these exchanges actors do not provide value, but only potential value or value preposition. For example, a medical brace producer provides a potential value of healing a joint pain and does not provide value by producing these products. If the resource 'brace' can be and is integrated by other actors with their set of resources (e.g. pharmacists' knowledge of medical conditions and what is appropriate to heal them), then this value is realised. The realisation of value is depending on the receiver, which is the pharmacist or patient in this example. Vargo and Lusch (2008) defined this as follows, 'Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary'. This means that the actor who decides if the intended outcome is realised is the same actor who interacts in resource exchange with the goal of value co-creation.

BE literature is based on customer engagement research. Hence, the outcomes of engagement are very much anchored in this end-user perspective. The outcomes of engagement, or value generated, are word of mouth (WOM), service improvement, increased value for a firm (Kumar et al., 2010), commitment, loyalty, customer satisfaction, trust, value co-creation (Brodie et al., 2011a), affective commitment, WOM, loyalty, brand community engagement (Vivek et al., 2012), mutual innovation, aligning processes, resources, competencies and incremental value, such as an increase in profits, revenue and cost savings (Grönroos and Helle, 2012).

Literature in organizational behaviour also adds that interaction and relationships have an impact on end-customer satisfaction (Daugherty *et al.*, 2006). While effective collaboration between firms can increase financial performance (Abosag and Naudé, 2014, Mitrega et al., 2012, Palmatier et al., 2007), there is a dark side of collaboration (Heirati et al., 2016) that impacts the value-generating process (Vatavwala et al., 2022, Sands et al., 2022).

As a result of the literature gap that has been built on the customer as an end-user engagement, and the need to understand the patterns that unfold in B2B settings and their

impact, there is a need to know what value is being generated. Understanding BE patterns that lead to specific outcomes is a useful insight into existing knowledge.

Based on the identified gap in the literature, the following research question is derived:

> ***Question 3 (RQ3): What are the specific outcomes that BE practices and their patterns generate?***

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The chapter is divided into eight sub-sections. In the first section (Section 3.2), the researcher's position relative to this research is detailed. This is followed by Section 3.3, in which the philosophical perspective adopted for this research, namely critical realism, is outlined. The ontological and epistemological perspectives and the relationship with the concept of reflexivity in BE research are detailed; the role of reflexivity in this research is also included. Section 3.4 details the case study selection and justification. Section 3.5 talks about research design and protocol. Section 3.6 further details the data analysis, while Section 3.7 proposes the criteria for evaluating the research quality. Section 3.8 concludes the chapter by providing a brief summary of Chapter Three.

3.2. Researcher position in the BE research project

Before venturing into the details of data collection and analysis, a brief overview of my background is needed to provide the transparency required for this qualitative project.

This PhD research is the result of a personal motivation to better understand and apply to my work the insights generated by this research, but mostly to contribute to the advancement in the academic field of engagement.

This research is inspired by both the past and present. About 20 years ago, I started as a sales representative for the biggest pharmaceutical distributor in Romania. I left the industry, moved overseas, and pursued my master's degree studies, after which I worked abroad in the research industry. About 15 years ago, I joined the big multinational company that is part of this case study and worked for some time for the business unit, which is part of the pharmaceutical industry.

The difficulty to carry out a research project in an eastern European country – in this case, Romania – has been acknowledged by Ivanova-Gongne et al. (2018). The historical communist period during which the people and society were under the pressure of being very cautious about who and what they could talk about has led to difficulty to do research

or conduct interviews (which in itself has negative connotations, as it is directly recognised as a method of historical oppression). Ivanova-Gongne et al. (2018) article highlights the need to include personal relationships and connections as part of sampling, to overcome some of the barriers to data collection.

I have chosen the pharmaceutical industry for the following reasons:

- I have access owing to my previous roles; this unusual access can contribute to a more profound understanding of the said phenomenon (Yin, 2013);
- I am familiar with the field, as well as the language, problems and specific issues. Only by being involved in a network can a researcher get an understanding of the network itself (Ellis et al., 2006).
- People working in this field are highly educated and, thus, would be able to better articulate abstract thoughts.
- The medical field carries out immense clinical research; this aspect facilitates research in general.

As there are no specific guidelines regarding research involving an organisation (Tietze, 2012), only by applying reflexivity throughout can the researcher ensures a credible piece of research (Silverman, 2013). Given my background detailed above, the below aspects need to be addressed with regard to this research:

1. **Studying own organisation**. While the case study includes the organisation I work for, I have had limited connection with the field itself. When I started my PhD, I worked in a different business unit. After that, I had an assignment that involved partially dealing with the pharmaceutical industry. Since 2020, my responsibilities have been related to data analytics and insights into the healthcare industry. However, although partially connected to the industry, I have some degree of detachment since the fieldwork was completed when I was part of a different business unit operating in a different industry. In addition, the organisation I work for does not exert any pressure on me to share the details of my research or modify its content.

2. **Using accumulated knowledge**. I have 9 years of direct and indirect involvement in the pharmaceutical industry, and this might raise the issue of potential bias. However, it is impossible to void the mind of my previous knowledge, and I intend to make use of it to bring up other possibilities of meaning (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). While collecting data, I adapted my interviewing style at times to encourage the interviewees to be open, who sometimes shared their personal experiences at workplaces, as a way to eliminate the discomfort around me, an outsider (Finlay, 2002). Also, I openly explained to the interviewees that I had to ask specific questions as if I knew nothing about the field. This helped me to get the distance from my previous 'know-how'. I had to constantly alternate between being an insider and an outsider.

Reflexivity throughout the research is important to protect the quality of a project. The reflexivity adopted in this research is epistemic reflexivity, coined by Johnson et al. (2003). Epistemic reflexivity allowed the inclusion of my knowledge and accepted that my social location impacts the outcomes of the research and that there will always be more than one valid version of any research. The contextual intersecting relationships between the participants and myself (reflexivity) are described to increase the credibility of the findings, as well as deepen the understanding of this work (Dodgson, 2019).

3.3. Critical realism (CR)

Researchers should explicitly state their approach and articulate the basis on which their empirical or conceptual work is carried out. Explaining the philosophical assumptions that serve as a basis for research provides stronger support for the process of theorising and development of the theory (Peters et al., 2014a), which is or should be the main objective of any academic research.

For critical realism, (social) structures are the centre of enquiry, as they play a role in generating human agency (Hartwig, 2015). Social structures and generative mechanisms are contained in the real domain, or the stratum of reality that is hidden and not observable (Bhaskar, 2013). These structures allocate resources and authority to different people within a social setting, which in turn facilitates or restricts the actions they can implement. These actions create events in the actual domain, the second stratum of reality. The actions people implement might lead to replication of these structures back in the real domain or

alteration of those structures. There are events that take place, but no one observes. If an event is noted, it means it occurs in the third stratum of reality, also called the empirical domain. Generative mechanisms are entities that are part of the real domain and explain why observed and non-observed events take place (Blom and Morén, 2011). Generative mechanisms are only partially based on empirical observations, but we can only make inferences from them using analytical tools (Blom and Morén, 2011), as they are not observable. Mechanisms, causal mechanisms and conditions are not observable (Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011) and can be uncovered from empirical data through retroduction (Bhaskar, 2013, Thapa and Omland, 2018). Retroduction is based on the researcher's ability to identify and hypothesise select aspects of social events and based on an empirical investigation make assumptions about social structures, causal powers and generative mechanisms (Hu, 2018). Retroduction moves from 'the manifest phenomena of social life, as conceptualised in the experience of the social agents concerned, to the essential relations that necessitate them' (Bhaskar, 1979, p. 32). Retroduction is a creative research process in which researchers may develop or propose multiple explanations (Wynn Jr and Williams, 2012). Using retroduction the researcher should recognize the contextual conditions for a particular causal mechanism to have an effect and to generate the empirical observed aspects (Fletcher, 2017).

For critical realists, agency is initiated from within a social structure, and it has as outcome an effect on the respective structure. Human agency is based on social structures are rules and resources that can restrict or facilitate the actions people can implement and may include the policies, traditions, culture and procedures (Anderson, 2020). They are intangible and a part of the 'real' domain and, therefore, not observable. For critical realists, structures are rules and resources, but they can also be the system of human relations (Hartwig, 2015). Structures provide us with the means, ability, and particular form in which we act in social life (Buch-Hansen, 2005). The specific social structures derived in this study using data from interviews are contractual terms, individual capabilities of interacting actors, informal and formal rules and the actor's culture and the existence of resources. The procedures and rules applicable to BE are further detailed as part of BE practices (please see Section 4.2.).

The outcomes of these mechanisms depend on the particular contextual conditions under which they operate. These are also further explained by using existing research-generated knowledge and exemplified in this research using the data collected. All these contextual conditions have been generated through a deductive approach using existing literature. The specific contextual conditions identified by Anderson (2020) and used in this study are the willingness of actors to provide support, resource dependency between actors, the existence of a strong relationship, trust and common goal and a shared understanding of how to communicate and work. These contextual conditions are further exemplified in the below sections using empirical data.

Critical realism, adapted from Anderson (2020) and Morton (2006), is represented below in Figure 3.

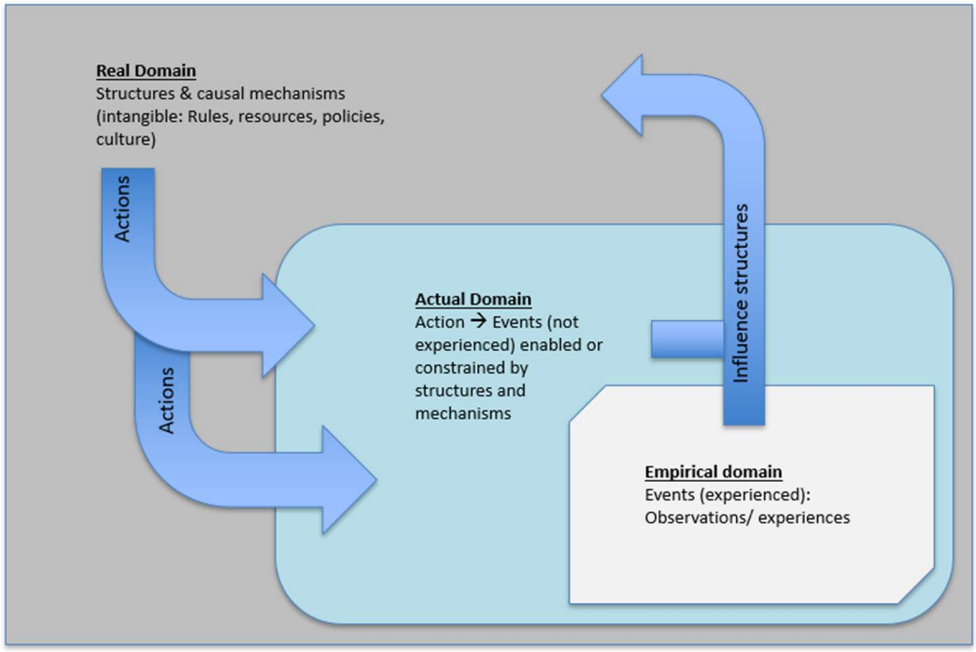


Figure 3. Reality in Critical Realism

In the business world, there are specific conditions under which engagement can occur: trust, commitment and dependence (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Palmatier et al., 2007). In addition to the ones above, Jonas et al. (2018) empirical research provides empirical evidence of other contextual conditions that affect engagement in B2B settings. According to Jonas et al. (2018), engagement is conditioned by six conditions. The first condition is the willingness of actors to provide support. Willingness in their research is

argued to be higher at the begging of the interaction process (Jonas et al., 2018, Dwyer et al., 1987, Jap and Anderson, 2007). This willingness is put forward by Brodie et al. (2019) as proposition FP1 and labelled 'disposition'. However, in B2B, we use the label 'powers' or 'tendencies'. The second condition refers to resource dependency between interacting actors, with more resource dependency increasing the likelihood of business engagement. The third condition refers to the existence of a strong relationship, or friendship, which in turn enables higher engagement. Raile et al. (2008) posit that engagement was encouraged when an interpersonal relationship manifested through interactions and communication beyond work (Jonas et al., 2018). This might not be compulsory; however, a strong and sometimes personal relationship developed throughout a shared interaction history is critical. Without trust, the fourth condition, engagement might not take place. Gould (2012) and Vivek et al. (2015) believe that trust influences information exchange and that a lack of it leads to dysfunctional collaboration (Jonas et al., 2018). The existence of a common goal, the fifth condition, enables business engagement. The common goal is linked to the collective well-being of the service ecosystem, advanced by Vargo and Lusch (2017). Last, but not least, institutional arrangements, or a shared understanding of how to communicate and work, impact BE, aligned to the work of Vargo and Lusch (2016) and Brodie et al. (2019). All these contextual conditions are further exemplified in the below sections using empirical data collected for this research.

Critical realism can be the strong foundation for theories of business markets, as it helps to uncover properties of business relationships that are based on assumption that value is created within a service ecosystem (Ehret, 2013). Additionally, as critical realism is based on the belief that relationships have causal powers (Peters et al., 2013), it is adopted for this research, as it can help 'to provide more detailed causal explanations of a given set of phenomena or events in terms of both the actors' interpretations and the structures and mechanisms that interact to produce the outcomes in question' (Wynn Jr and Williams, 2012, p.788).

3.3.1. Reflexivity, epistemology and ontology

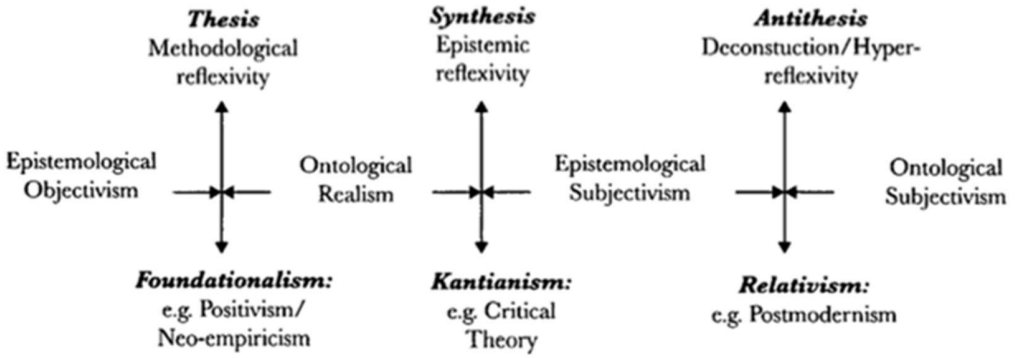
Reflexivity is 'an awareness of the researcher's role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research, 'enabling the researcher to

acknowledge the way in which he or she affects both the research process and outcomes' (Haynes, 2012, p.72).

Reflexivity involves the researcher reflecting on her experiences and questioning the way of doing of the research (Hibbert et al., 2010) while 'working with multiple interpretations in order to produce rich and varied results' (Alvesson, 2003, p.107). We need reflexivity in qualitative works for more effective, moral and ethical research projects (Cunliffe, 2003, Cunliffe, 2004), as well for theory development (Weick, 1999).

Reflexivity is embedded in the debates about the nature of knowledge, as the interpretations and theoretical assumptions of the researchers are not neutral but part of and help construct perceptions of reality (Haynes, 2012). The use of reflexivity often seems to be strongly connected to the ontological and epistemological perspectives (Johnson and Duberley, 2003), as 'researchers also make truth claims and construct meaning' (Cunliffe, 2003 p.985) to understand reality.

Johnson and Duberley (2003) provided a framework, illustrated in Figure 4, which helps to visually understand the various approaches to undertaking management research.



From Johnson et al. (2003)

Figure 4. Approaches for undertaking management research

The meta-theoretical perspective of my thesis embraced ontological realism along with epistemological subjectivism. As a result, the reflexivity adopted is labelled by Johnson et al. (2003) as epistemic reflexivity. According to it, BE research cannot be implemented in ' some intellectual space which is autonomous from researcher's own habitus' (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 1289). Epistemic reflexivity allows the inclusion of the researcher's self-

knowledge and accepts that the researcher's experience impacts the outcomes of research and that there will always be more than one valid version of any research. Epistemic reflexivity allows an open recognition of the 'existence of multiple voices and angles that occur and the need for researchers to analyse their accounts to create meaning and knowledge' (Johnson et al. 2003, p.1295).

As suggested by researchers, I focused on implementing a reflexive approach to this study. As a result, I continuously asked myself about the pre-existing ideas and thoughts I brought to my thesis, how I related to my work theoretically, and the influence all the above had on my thesis outcomes. I exercised subjective reflexivity (Haynes, 2012) in my research since I played a dual role: researcher and former worker in the industry I investigated. Reflexivity involved here is needed to separate the researcher's interpretation from insider interpretation.

3.4. Case study, case selection and argumentation

A qualitative case study approach was adopted because rich data was needed to facilitate the generation of theoretical categories that cannot be derived satisfactorily from the existing theories and existing, yet incipient, literature on business engagement. The unit of analysis is focused on BE practices that result from collaboration and interaction between actors. The researcher examined multiple instances of business engagement by a single organisation (distributor) with different types of stakeholders (business customers or pharmacies and a manufacturer) to understand the characteristics of engagement. All these aspects are further detailed below.

3.4.1 Case study method

Case studies have thus arisen as the main methodological approach in industrial marketing studies. This can be explained by the nature of the phenomena investigated, B2B interactions being difficult to access. In addition and the structure of B2B interactions is more complex than consumer markets (Easton, 2010). Therefore, case studies have become the 'primary tool' (Dubois and Araujo, 2007) among B2B researchers because of its particularities and challenges (Piekkari et al., 2010). Case studies are considered the most suitable method to research business networks (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005).

A single case study approach was selected as the research strategy for this study. Single cases are especially appropriate when researching new or unknown phenomena (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) or when the opportunity for unusual research access becomes available (Yin, 2013). Single case studies allow the researcher to describe the details of the context within which the phenomena under study occur (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991).

3.4.2. Case study – selecting the case

As recommended by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), the study is tightly scoped and follows an abductive approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Abductive design means that the researcher should be iterating between data, context and theoretical framework to capture as many layers of data as possible, with the aim to extend the theory and explore yet unclear underlying causal explanations (Matthyssens et al., 2013). Abduction accepts existing theories (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010) and is considered specifically appropriate for case studies in business network research (Dubois and Gadde, 2002).

In this study, the case is a medium-sized pharmaceutical distributor and includes its interactions with pharmacies and other stakeholders in the pharmacy service ecosystem. According to Stake (1995), the current situation can be described as instrumental, as the case is examined mainly to generate insights about some other issue, specifically business engagement. The single case study is suitable for the purposes of this study, as it can enable providing a rich description of the case and on improving the theoretical understanding of business engagement. Siggelkow (2007 p.20) advocates for this; the researcher chose a single organisation since it would allow them to gain ‘certain insights that other organisations would not be able to provide’. The selection of the case company followed a purposive sampling strategy, as this approach allowed the researcher to choose a case that illustrated some features or process of interest, specifically BE (Patton, 2005, Silverman, 2013); further, this case allowed the process of interest to be observed (Eisenhardt, 1989). In purposeful sampling, a specific case is selected since it can provide in-depth understanding and insights can be generated, rather than thinking about empirical generalisations (Dubois and Araujo, 2007). Also, a single case gives the opportunity for unusual research access (Yin, 2013) and search for a significant phenomenon (Eisenhardt

and Graebner, 2007). This type of sampling is very common among qualitative researchers who select this method to get closer to where the process being studied is more likely to occur (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Understanding the everyday processes for BE assumes a cultural competency that can help decode the interactions of participants. In the B2B settings, the recognisability of parties' actions may be explained if the researcher has the expert knowledge, as the organisational specifics are not available to outsiders (Arminen, 2000). As the researcher works for one of the partners of the suppliers for this distribution company, they can provide an internal understanding of the processes.

3.4.3. Pharmaceutical industry in Romania and the case description

The drug distribution market is restricted to a small number of players (2011, Institute of Financial Forecasting). Regarding local drug distributors, the big five distributors have more than 80% of the market since they distribute a wide range of products, such as medicine that requires prescriptions from doctors (RX), medical devices and over the counter (OTC) medicines. The big five distributors have a turnover estimated at 2.8 billion pounds (https://www.viata-medicala.ro/industria-farmaceutica/industria-farmaceutica-din-romania-a-ajuns-la-un-maxim-istoric-22365).

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Pharmaceutical industry in Romania KeysFin estimates that the pharmaceutical industry will continue to grow in 2021 towards the threshold of 70 billion lei (12.2 billion pounds). The turnover of manufacturers, distributors and pharmacies in our country increased by 2.6% compared to 2019 and by more than 100% compared to the turnover level recorded in 2010, reaching 66.6 billion lei in 2020, according to a KeysFin analysis based on information available at the Ministry of Public Finance (www.jurnaluldeafaceri.ro).

The turnover of pharmacy networks and drug distributors exceeded the €4 billion threshold in 2021 (www.Forbes.ro). Of this total, about 16% is represented by sales of OTC products and medical devices (2011, Institute for Financial Forecasting). The market for pharmaceutical retail companies (pharmacy networks) and distribution of medicines in Romania has also grown in 2021, the second year after the trend, according to the financial statements recently published by the Ministry of Finance.

Romania ranks seventh by number of pharmacies in the European Union, with more than 8,000 units. In terms of the number of pharmacies per 1 million users, Romania climbs to fourth place in the ranking, after countries such as Greece, Bulgaria and Spain (www.ziarulfinanciar.ro).

This research has been initiated by the researcher that works for 3M, and the company endorsed it. Ecosystem stakeholders have regarded 3M as one of the most innovative companies. This recognition has been based on 3M's ability to produce radically innovative solutions that helped customers fulfil their unmet needs. 3M's approach to business changed at the beginning of this research when it introduced the ‘customer first’ philosophy, aiming to underline the importance of customers as the most critical assets. This philosophy is based on establishing strong connections with customers by providing the right level of experience. A customer-first philosophy embedded in all layers of the organization is a critical element of success for forward-thinking organizations like 3M.

Building the right customer experience is the heart of 3M, which enables the company to enhance its offering and strengthen its brands. Having a ‘Customer first’ approach means that all processes that are in place need to capture the whole customer journey – from enquiries, referrals, follow-up, complaint handling and beyond, and establish an internal culture of continuous improvement to provide the customers and all stakeholders the right level of experience. The only way to deliver the right level of experience is by engaging with each customer at any stage of their journey and allowing and enabling them to interact with 3M and each other.

Despite its current focus on the 'customer first', 3M has initially faced some issues in demonstrating its business engagement. While 3M's interest in creating a more balanced inward–outward organization was derived from its 'customer first' approach, there were

still unanswered questions and no clear path for its employees to follow the new direction. Employees did not have clear guidelines regarding a clear path to build it.

So while 3M was implementing this new approach, it was also willing to create the road map to succeed in creating business engagement. The final objective was to generate maximum satisfaction with 3M' solutions by listening and actively engaging with the customer. To understand how to build the customer first, 3M needed to ask customers what their expectations from 3M and its partners are. The research should highlight how to generate better engagement from both sides of the interaction: 3M and its partners, including its distributor.

The distributor, the case, in this research is considered a small distributor as the company has a focused portfolio distributing only medical devices. The portfolio of products includes products from a global leader in the medical device, however, since the market for these products is niche, embryonic, and in development, the turnover of the company remains relatively small to the distributors giants that deliver prescription medicines or over the counter products. This distributor has twenty-seven employees, from which seven work as field sales representatives that focus on interacting with pharmacies in Bucharest, the capital of Romania.

The distributing company has started its activity in the field of distribution in 1999 establishing stable partnerships with customers. The company has been operating in the market for the distribution of pharmaceutical and non-medicine products that are sold in pharmacies for more than 15 years. Together with its suppliers, the company is recognized for offering high quality products, having continuity in the supply of consumables and providing customers with fast delivery based on sustained efforts to always have sufficient stocks of goods. The company meets its customers with a competitive and varied offer, periodically supplemented with new products according to market demands. The company is known for its reliability, professionalism and flexibility.

Although the focus is on the distribution activity in Bucharest, the company's products are also available in most areas of the country through collaborators: pharmacies, distributors, medical clinics, private hospitals. The company shows a high flexibility, adapting to the needs of its partners, treating any request as the most important potential collaboration.

They show flexibility in the conditions of collaboration, working both with independent pharmacies and with chains of over 600 pharmacies.

An important part of the positioning in the distribution market is done through the company's policy of transparency of information. The management of the company shared with the researcher their philosophy: the company is constantly making sure that it provides the information your customers need to make the right decision in choosing the products that best suit their needs.

The case study in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry was chosen as in this industry actors focus on health and human wellbeing. Pharma industry in Romania is subject to continuous scrutiny from different stakeholders and continuous improvements. The case study in pharmaceutical Romanian industry helps actors to become more effective in their interactions, deliver more value to actors that they interact but also other actors in their service ecosystem (i.e. end user, doctors etc). This case study can help these stakeholders understand what is working or not working and therefore what needs to be changed in the future to improve the wellbeing of the patience, the service that is delivered by doctors, distributors, and manufacturers.

3.4.4. Unit of observation and analysis

For business engagement research, the case studied is a distribution pharmaceutical company within the pharmaceutical service ecosystem in Romania. The units of observation are the distributor and the identified subunits of observation, the interactions with different actors, which are selected in this research through sampling technique (McClintock, 1985). These interactions take place between this distributor and different companies, mainly pharmacies, but also a big multinational manufacturer that is the supplier for this distributor. The same single-case study of a pharmaceutical distributor involves units of analysis at more than one level. The case study focuses on both the subunit level, in this research being the elements of BE practices – sayings and doing, understandings, rules and teleo-affective structures (Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2005, Schatzki, 2006) – and will also return to the larger unit of analysis, which is the business engagement practice.

3.5. Research design and protocol

The research design helps increasing the reliability of the case study research (Yin, 2013). A research design is a logic starting with the data collection and ending with the conclusions that are linked to the initial questions of the study. The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions. The research design is the strategy and tactics that leads the researcher in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting observations.

The elements of the design for business engagement research would address the following topics. The first part of the design guides how to implement this research. The second part details all information regarding the participants that will contribute to this research. In the third part, the data collection methods and sources and interviewing guides that will be used during the data collection are specified.

3.5.1. Ethical approval process

The collection and use of primary data do give rise to ethics concerns. Approval to undertake primary data collection was obtained from the Business School Research Ethics Committee before the researcher started the data collection. The research methodology, including scope of research, geography and data collection method were shared with the Ethics committee. The participant consent form, that was presented to respondents in both Romanian as well as English languages was also sent to research committee. This research has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the Nottingham University Business School Research Ethics Committee. The Business School Research Ethics Committee checked and endorsed the case study documentation before data collection started. The respondent consent form is included in Appendix X.

3.5.2. Planning research – Before fieldwork

Three principles are important for data collection to increase the study's quality substantially. These also help to deal with problems related to constructing validity and reliability (Yin, 2013).

The first principle to increase the reliability of the findings is to use multiple sources of evidence as a strategy to enhance data credibility (Patton, 1990) and enable triangulation,

offering a strong substantiation of constructs (Eisenhardt, 1989). This aspect is further detailed as part of data collection sources.

Another principle that was implemented refers to the creation of a case study database (Stake, 1995). This database is a formal collection of evidence that is different from the final case study report. This database contains the case study notes, the materials used or generated by the field work, any memos written in relationship to the data collected and preliminary narratives. This database is also a way of organising and documenting, in a chronological order, the data collected from a case study. The database contains four components: field notes, interview / observation-related notes, documents, materials, narratives and documents analysis. Creating a database helps improving the reliability of the case study (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

The last principle covers my plan to maintain a chain of evidence (Rowley, 2002). As these principles have been followed, then this case study's evidence should exhibit enhanced construct validity, thereby improving the overall quality of the case study. First, the researcher planned and used a diary that kept track of all events and documentation generated during the fieldwork. Second, the researcher aimed to adequately cite and write footnotes to note relevant resources, by referring to specific interviews or observations. Third, these specific sources, if checked, will point to the actual evidence, including notes, about the context under which the evidence had been collected (i.e. place and the time of the interviews or focus group). Due to the GDPR legislation, personal data was removed from these resources.

3.5.3. Participants / field informants

Business model determined the sampling in this research. The ratio of customers to distributor is in favor of pharmacists, and this specificity is observed in high number of interviews and observations run with pharmacists. However, the researcher included interviews with the distributor’s representatives (4), field visits (observing both sides of interaction: distributor’s representatives and pharmacists) and manufacturer.

Regarding the selected participants, the following were applied to BE research. The researcher obtained informed consent from all persons that were part of the case study either as part of interviews or observations. In addition, the researcher protected the

participants in the study from harm, including avoiding the use of any deception. Moreover, the privacy and confidentiality of people involved in the study was protected.

The use of multiple respondents helped to capture diverse perceptions and meanings that are critical to understanding complex business relationships (Dubois and Araujo, 2007). The relationships investigated in this research are detailed in Figure 5 below.

Sampling is a process that needs to be thoughtful and rigorous. It matters and has implications in relation to an array of issues for the whole trajectory of the analytic process (Rapley, 2014).

Purposeful sampling:

A pharmaceutical distributor and its partner pharmacies and one manufacturer, which are embedded units, were chosen for data collection. The good access helped the researcher to overcome some of the barriers to data collection.

Random sampling:

Some of the respondents were selected by chance – the pharmacies that the distributor had on his route to fieldwork. The visits to pharmacies were planned by the distribution company. This sampling approach increases the credibility of the results. Most of the pharmacists' interviews and observations were generated by this sampling technique.

Emerging sampling – Snowballing technique:

The researcher opted also for adding additional respondents to take advantage of unanticipated occasions after fieldwork has begun (Patton, 2002), to develop and elaborate on emerging conceptual ideas (Rapley, 2014).

In this research, the sampling was also driven by an aim to get data from respondents that were still part of the research scope but were not part of the distributor or even manufacturer influence. The researcher used connections with the pharmaceutical industry to contact a few pharmacists for this academic research. This approach is expected to improve the quality of data and insights. In addition to the initial pilot survey, three more interviews with pharmacists that work for pharmacies that are part of small, medium and large chains were also conducted. The mini focus group respondents were also part of the emerging sampling.

The sample description and the sampling method are described in the table 10.

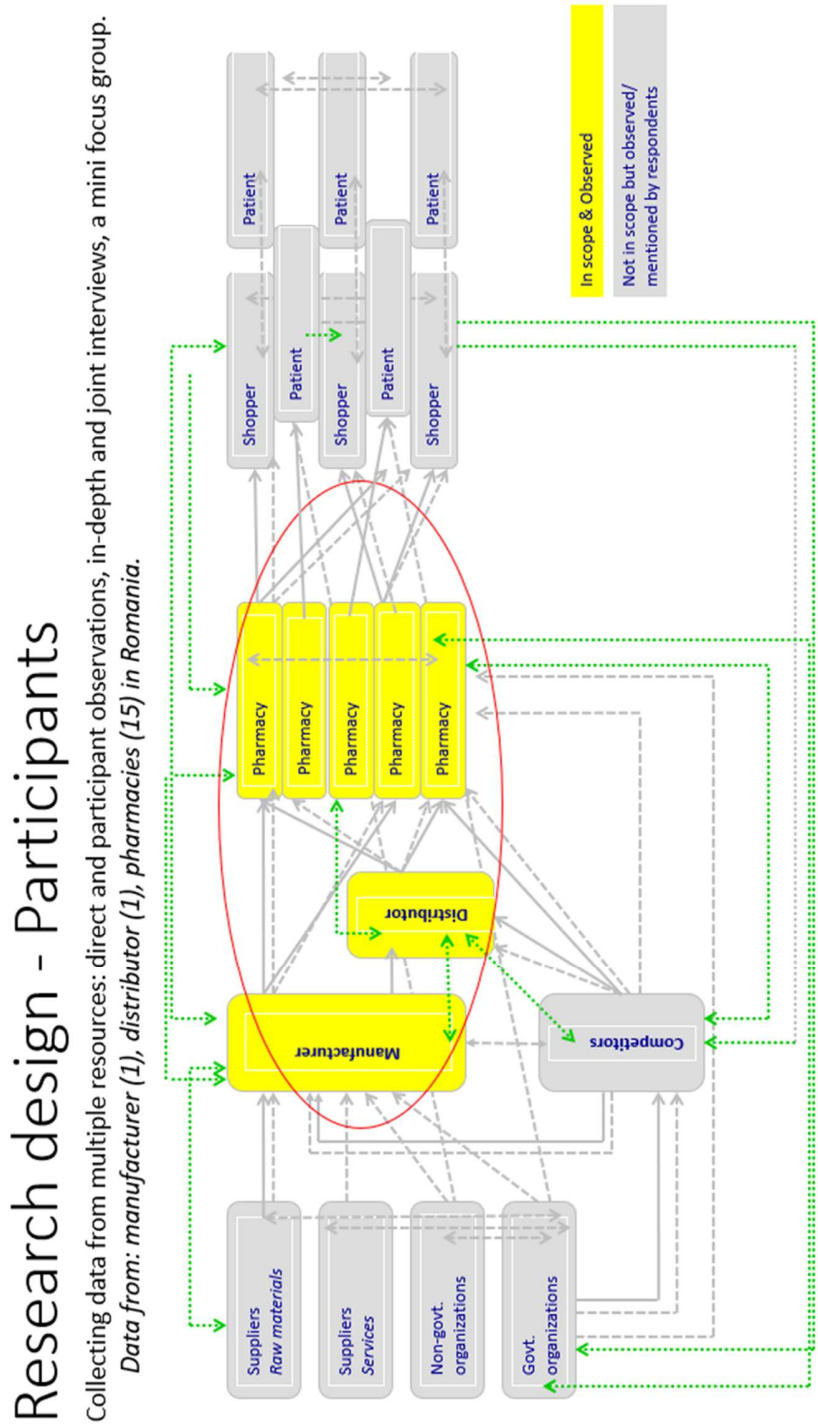


Figure 5. Research participants and their interactions

3.5.4. Data collection methods, sources and (interview) guides

Data collection methods such as observations, interviews, questionnaires and documents were used in this case study, an approach that is endorsed by researchers (Eisenhardt, 1989). For the actual work, a research design was adopted based interviews of both interacting parties and the observations of the customer–supplier face-to-face encounters, an approach deemed appropriate to study business relationships and interactions (La Rocca, 2013).

The researcher implemented this approach as the use of multiple data sources is known to increase the reliability of data (Benbasat et al., 1987, Leonard-Barton, 1990) and improve the corroboration of insights about the researched constructs (Voss et al., 2002, Benbasat et al., 1987, Eisenhardt, 1989).

The evidence collected will be based on different data: Interviews both in-depth, as well as joint interviews, observations, direct and participant observations and a mini focus group.

3.5.4.1. Interview guides

The collected data was from people and firms based on their everyday situations. The nature of the interview was semi-structured questions, as interviewees may not necessarily cooperate with the strict and defined line of questions (Yin, 2013). In addition, it was important to be empathic with the interviewee, that is, not to conduct interviews to get answers to the questions but to get a real 'interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman, 2013 p.9).

Table 9 summarises the key constructs related to BE practice and construct and the guiding questions that were used during the interviews.

Table 9 - Key BE constructs and guiding questions (Interview guide)

BE constructs/ *Details*	**Constructs' roots**	**Questions to probe the targeted construct(s)**
Activities: 1. Verbal/ communication 2. Doings a. Interaction/ rapport	**Practice theory** (Schatzki, 2006, Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2005, Schau et al., 2009, Shove et al., 2012)	How do you interact with the company/ sales rep? are there any specific order or steps? *(i.e. Salutation, warm up info exchanged, product solution, information needed, organize the next meeting etc.*) What drives you toward this interaction? How do you see the interaction/ relat.?

b. Information sharing *Behaviors that include practical activities, including info sharing, performances and representations or talk that result from interaction.*	**(Business) engagement literature** (Chandler and Lusch, 2015)	Has the way of interacting/ building relat. changed in time? The length of interaction? *i.e.. short and frequent/ no pattern). Probe for transactional vs. continuum.* Do you have a plan that you use before starting the interaction? Is there any specific order of activities that you do related to this interaction// relat.? How do you feel the rapport you have with mktg sales rep/ and his/ her company? *Probe for separate answers* What do you expect to get out of the interaction/ relationship? What do you give in exchange? What type of information do you share and what type of info you offer? For the info you share, do you have any insights/ perceptions about the learning process of the partner? What about own organiz.? *PROBE as much as possible for this section*
<u>Material arrangements/ resources (tangible and intangible)</u> *Resources include: all material, artifacts, platforms but also intangible (i.e. management involvement).*	**Practice theory** (Schatzki, 2006, Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2005, Schau et al., 2009, Shove et al., 2012, Echeverri and Skålén, 2011) **(Business) engagement literature** (Grönroos and Helle, 2012, Storbacka et al., 2016, Roberts and Alpert, 2010)	What elements influence this relation/ interaction? *(i.e. actors, company behind, available resources own and firm)* *Observe the alignment of resources* While interacting/ build relat. do you feel that you need to adjust the resources (and processes) in order to obtain the desired outcome out of the relationship? PROBE Would you say it is a continuous adjustment?
<u>Understandings/ know how</u> *Action understanding, that is the know-how to do things on the spot, general understanding or the broad ideas and meanings that are attached to a practice.*	**Practice theory** (Schatzki, 2006, Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2005, Schau et al., 2009, Shove et al., 2012, Echeverri and Skålén, 2011)	Why do you interact with this specific company? Are there any symbolic/ intangible aspects that drive the interaction/ relat.? What enables a good/ facile interaction? What role do you feel the company that the rep is representing is playing in this interaction/ relat.? *Probe: Close, important to drive the communication, to offer solutions, to listen to customer? Is the company doing this?* *Understand the role of the companies involved in the interaction.*
<u>Rules/ procedures/ guidelines</u> *Rules, principles, instructions that*	**Practice theory** (Schatzki, 2006, Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2005, Schau	Do you have any internal rules for interaction? Who has written them? Do you have any comments or insights about the partner/ collab. Firm rules for collaboration/ interaction?

are used in interaction	et al., 2009, Shove et al., 2012)	What about the un-written rules? Expectations? *(i.e. polite, Say Hello informed, etc)*
<u>Teleo-affective structures/ ends</u> A set of ends/ objectives that participants in practice target with their activities. Specific ends: o Customer experience o Loyalty/ Recommendation/ Business Growth/ Reduced costs	**Practice theory** (Schatzki, 2006, Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2005, Schau et al., 2009, Shove et al., 2012, Duguid, 2005, Warde, 2005) (Business) **engagement literature** (Roberts and Alpert, 2010, Grönroos and Helle, 2012)	How the interaction/ relationship started? *Not when*. What drove to the decision to start? How do you evaluate your objective was achieved? What do you do if it was not achieved? What criteria you have to evaluate success of an interaction? What happens is the initial goal (ends) is not achieved? What do you do? *Probe for considering alternatives.* Can you please comment on the role of offering (value proposition) you receive as part of interaction/ relat.? What role does it play? What do you look for? What is important to you: relationship per se vs product? Packaged offered? How do you see the customer experience you have had as part of interaction? Any recommendations/ improvements to the company? What do you feel are the outcomes of interaction/ relat./ collaboration for own pharmacy and for partner?
<u>(Emotional) Traits of engaged companies:</u> o Disposition o Commitment o Involvement & intensity	(Business) **engagement literature** (Vivek et al., 2015, Chandler and Lusch, 2015)	Would you please help me in understanding what role commitment plays in interaction (if any)? Please comment on own and partner. How is disposition affecting the interaction? For B2B is disposition important aspect? What is the role involvement plays in interaction? Can you please comment on the intensity of interaction/ relationship?

The questions included in the interview guide do not explicitly mention the BE concept, as it is a derived, academic concept. The BE will be probed towards the end of the interview but mainly be generated during the analysis. The questions above are organised based on themes or constructs of interest.

While the guide contains the questions to be asked during the interview, the researcher was aware of the fact that they might be modified or even replaced during the research, which is a common practice in case studies (Stake, 1995), which reflects the need to adjust to the findings generated by the first interviews that might reveal new constructs and new avenues for business engagement.

3.5.4.2. Interviews

In case study research interviews are a conventional form of data collection (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016) that help the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth information about the topic researched (Mason, 2002). They resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries and are fluid (Yin, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews with pre-determined but flexibly worded questions were used. In the interview guide, which is further detailed in the next section, questions that allowed the researcher to open discussion about BE-related constructs and some follow-up questions intended to provide additional confirmation about the issues of interest to interviewees were included. In this way, the interviewees were offered the opportunity to express themselves openly and freely and define their perceptions about interaction and business engagement from their own perspectives (Mason, 2002).

The interviews focused on the history and outcomes of relationship/collaboration/business engagement and tried to understand the concept, causes and outcomes. The BE case study included interviews with marketing and sales employees working with pharmacies, interview partners/distributors and pharmacists that collaborate or are involved in relationships with the distributor. Each person interviewed was someone who played an active role in the collaboration. This helped the researcher to understand the business engagement of the parties involved.

3.5.4.3. Joint interviews

It involves the researcher interviewing two people together (Houssart and Evens, 2011). Moreover, both interviewees should interact with each other (Seale et al., 2008) and should take part in the discussion that happens during the interview as fairly as possible (Wilson et al., 2016). Although this form of interviewing that is predominantly used in health studies (Polak and Green, 2016) has potential as a data collection tool, it has received insufficient attention in the qualitative research literature (Wilson et al., 2016). A joint interview is an appropriate data collection method when there is an interdependent relationship between interviewees (Caldwell, 2014). It is a powerful tool to collect information about an interaction, as it can add analytic value compared to individual interviews; it can 'help to explicate tacit knowledge, and to illuminate the range of often

hard-to-access resources that are drawn upon in making decisions' (Polak et al., 2016, p2). Joint interviews can help interviewees 'to reflect on relational practices that are often invisible' (Campbell, 2021, p.206). Moreover, joint interviews facilitate the triangulation of information by adding perspectives that extend the perspectives obtained from individual interviews (Vogl et al., 2019).

Interviews were recording using a professional recording device Sony ICDSX2000. The interviews were transcribed and translated resulting in equivalent of 114 pages. For each hour of recording the researcher spent between eight and ten hours to transcribe and translate.

3.5.4.4. Direct observation takes place in the real-world setting of the case, which is why they have been considered by Becker and Geer (1957) to be the single and best way to collect data about people in society. Observations are instrumental in case studies, as they can help to collect objective information about the research topic (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016). These observations are another important source of evidence for case study research that is often useful in providing complementary information about the topic being researched (Yin, 2013).

Similar to interviewing, observations also require a guide that helps the researcher develop prior to entering data collection. This guide should help the researcher to pre-determine exactly what type of data should be observed, the data that would eventually help answer the research questions in addition to the list of features to be addressed during the observations. This list should include the time/date/location of the observation, names/positions of persons being observed, specific activities and events related to the research questions, and initial impressions and interpretations of the activities and events undertaken by respondents (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016).

Immediately after the observations were made, a short interview was conducted informally by probing the concepts that are part of the interviews.

3.5.4.5. Mini Focus-Group

Carey (1994) defines a focus group as a semi-structured group session taking place in an informal setting. A mini focus group is a data collection method that is recommended

when researchers are faced with a situation where there is a small number of participants that are difficult to reach (O. Nyumba et al., 2018). Under these circumstances, a mini focus group with *2–5* participants (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005) can be run. However, this is considered an appropriate method when the topic needs to be further explored by participants with significant experience (Anderson and Arsenault, 2005).

Given the nature of the research setting, as detailed in this chapter (in East Europe, Romania, a former communist country, with limited to no openness to research in B2B settings), the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the specific need to have the in-depth discussion made the researcher choose a limited number of participants who knew each other. This enabled a fluent and open discussion of differences. Four pharmacists participated in this mini focus group. Carey and Smith (1994) argues that if there are a fewer people in the group, then there is an increased probability of respondents will interact. In addition, this situation will reduce the job of the moderators that have to manage and attend to a smaller group.

Group heterogeneity was assured as every pharmacist came from a different type of pharmacy: one independent, one national chain, one local chain / franchise and one was from a chain but was in the first year of practice, and therefore, her input was limited. The main advantage of focus group interviews is the focused usage of interaction in order to generate data (Morgan, 1996). This method provided the researcher with the opportunity to gather a small group of participants (pharmacists) that worked in different settings: independent or chain pharmacies. This diverse perspective allowed the researcher to cross-check the concepts generated during the in-depth interviews and get additional insights from pharmacists about differences and similarities.

Prior to the discussion, ground rules were shared with the participants. This process was explained to participants in writing (in the form they filled in) and before the commencement of the interview (Krueger, 1994). Further, the use of the recorder was explained. The confidentiality of information was reinforced (White and Thomson, 1995), the participants being informed that they could stop the interview at any time if they wanted to do so. They were promised that privacy would be ensured throughout the process of gathering, storing, and handling data. The purpose of the group interview was

explained, i.e. to get an understanding of a concept (business engagement) that is based on the interaction between businesses (i.e. pharmacies, through their pharmacists and manufacturer / suppliers through their medical / sales representatives). Thus, the participants were informed about the purpose and design of the research and the usage of research's outcomes.

In terms of data collection, there is no clear cut-off point indicating when to stop (Silverman, 2013), and this decision will not be taken until the data analysis is advanced. I will implement the research as per Small (2009), who believes that a case study starts with a set of questions that yield a new set of questions to inform the next case, with data collection ending when the last case generates very little new information, indicative of saturation being achieved. If this data saturation is not achieved, then there is a risk of the theory being considered inadequate (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

3.5.4.6. Data collected: Interviews and observations – Manufacturer, distributor and pharmacies

To get a better idea of how these practices take place, the researcher interviewed and observed actors from three points of the value chain: the manufacturer company, the distributor and the pharmacies in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry. The groups were observed and talked to, the details of the interviewed and observed interactions, and description of the respondents are presented in Table 10 below.

This step is related to summarising the observations made during the field visits that were transformed into text. The coding manual was used during the recording of the observational data and subsequently written in different documents (initial observations were recorded one by one for each pharmacy, then as data saturation was achieved, the observations were re-coded and consolidated under one document per day).

Table 10 - Respondents and sampling

ID Nr	Interview date	Time (min)	Type	Respondent description	Gender	Age group	Sampling method	Data collection method
1	26.06.2018	60	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	45-55	Emerging/ Snowballing	Interview
3	28.08.2018	67	Producer	Manager	Female	45-55	Purposeful	Interview

4	05.10.2018	52	Distributor	Manager	Female	35-45	Purposeful	Interview
5	16.10.2018	525	Distributor	Sales representative	Male	35-45	Purposeful	Interview & Observations
6	16.10.2018	15’	Independent pharmacy	Pharmacist	Female	25-35	Random	Direct observation
7	16.10.2018	15’	Independent pharmacy	Pharmacist	Female	25-35	Random	Direct observation
8	16.10.2018	15’	Independent pharmacy	Pharmacist	Female	> 55	Random	Direct observation
9	16.10.2018	17’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	35-45	Random	Direct observation
10	16.10.2018	30’	Independent pharmacy	Pharmacist	Female	45-55	Random	Direct obs Interview
11	16.10.2018	10’	Independent pharmacy	Pharmacist	Female	45-55	Random	Direct observation
12	16.10.2018	83’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	35-45	Random	Joint Interview Direct observation
13	17.10.2018	390’	Distributor	Sales representative	male	35-45	Random	Interview & Observations
14	17.10.2018	35’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	35-45	Random	Interview Direct obs
15	24.10.2018	240’	Distributor	Sales representative	male	35-45	Purposeful	Interview & Observations
16	24.10.2018	33’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	25-35	Random	Joint interview
17	24.10.2018	20’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	35-45	Random	Joint interview Direct observation
18	24.10.2018	27’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	25-35	Random	Joint interview Direct observation
19	24.10.2018	23’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	45-55	Random	Interview

								Direct obs
20	24.10.2018	47’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	35-45	Random	Interview Direct observation
21	13.09.2019	68’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	35-45	Emerging/ Snowballing	Interview
22	01.10.2019	64’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	35-45	Emerging/ Snowballing	Interview
23	02.10.2019	62’	Distributor	Manager	Female	35-45	Purposeful	Interview
24	20.10.2019	22’	Manufacturer	manager	Female	45-55	Purposeful	Interview
FG_F	26.02.2020	75’	Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	45-55	Emerging/ snowballing	Mini focus group
FG I			Independent pharmacy	Pharmacist	Female	45-55	Emerging/ snowballing	
FG_O			Pharmacy (chain)	Pharmacist	Female	45-55	Emerging/ Snowballing	

In addition to the table 10, table 11 provides a summary of the interviews.

Table 11 - Data collection methods

Participant	Method	Data collection details
1 manufacturer representative	Interviews	2 interviews (1.5 hours)
4 Distributor representatives (2 management and 2 sales representatives)	Observations Interviews	3 days of field visits and observations (13 hours) 4 interviews (8 hours)
13 Pharmacies (chain and independent) 13 pharmacists	Observations Interviews Joint interviews	Observations from 21 pharmacies (approx. 13 hours) 7 interviews (approx. 5 hours) 5 (approx. 2 hours)
3 Pharmacists	Mini-focus group	1 h and 15 minutes
Total	**Interviews** **Observations** **Mini focus group**	**19 interviews (approx. 18 hours)** **3 days (c. 15 hours)** **1 mini FG (c. 1h 15 min)**

3.6. Data analysis

The process of data analysis was iterative, with ‘an ongoing review of accumulated information in order to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories’ (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, p.56). This research followed an interpretive, abductive research design, systematically combining the theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork and case analysis outputs (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). This implied a ‘back and forth’ move between empirical theory and observations, as theory can only be understood from empirical

observations and the other way around (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). The use of previous research and existing theory lead to understanding of gaps in theory and knowledge and helped to create new constructs and develop theoretical patterns (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010).

3.6.1. Data analysis steps and activities

The analysis began as soon as data was collected, shaping future questions and helping structure the study, meaning analysis occurred in feedback loops as detailed below.

Data analysis was performed following the six steps (Braun and Clarke, 2006), using thematic analysis. At first, the researcher familiarised herself with the collected data. All the data from the interviews was transcribed and data from observations, including field notes were uploaded in Nvivo12, the tool used to analyse the textual data. In the second step, initial codes were generated. As part of this step, pre-existing theories, a set of research questions and reviews of the literature were consulted. The research questions impacted my data collection plan and, therefore, produced the analytic approach. During the third step, themes were uncovered. Data analysis was focused on systematic coding and cross-case or embedded unit comparison. This systematic approach guided the data analysis by linking it to the concepts or constructs generated during the literature review. The goal was to search for promising patterns, insights, or concepts (Miles et al., 2013). During the fourth stage of the analysis, the themes generated were reviewed. This step was completed simultaneously with data collection and analysis. During the fifth step, the themes were defined and named, and the researcher looked for an understanding of and causality between the key themes and constructs (Gummesson, 2005).

These six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) are presented in Table 12. Phases 1–5 have been conducted in an iterative way, moving back and forth, as it is further explained in the subsequent sections.

Table 12 - Research phases

No.	Phase	Description of tasks performed	Status
1	Familiarise with the data	Read and re-read the transcripts of the interviews and observational data. Some initial ideas were generated.	The process was iterative, moving back and forth between data,
2	Generating initial codes	Code-manual created (from theory) Coded systematically by adding relevant data chunks to each code.	

		Coded data beyond the theory (added codes to the code book)	codes and themes and theory.
3	Searching for themes	Combined all codes into themes.	
4	Reviewing themes	Checked the themes in relation to the coded extracts and data set. At this stage, a thematic 'map' of the analysis was generated.	
5	Label themes	Themes refined, their names and meaning generated.	
6	Producing the report	Final analysis of the selected extracts, related back to research question(s) and literature, drawn conclusions	*Part of thesis pending stage*

Adaptation from Braun and Clarke (2006)

One important step before data analysis was to create a code manual. This initial code manual was created based on theoretical concepts and research questions, detailed in the chapter on literature review, and used as a method of organising text for later interpretation (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The code manual is presented in Table 13.

Table 13 - Code Manual - Codes, definitions and theory area

No.	Code label / theme	Definition	Area
1.	Practices	Sayings and doings of interacting entities	Practice theory
1.1.	Activities	Actions performed by interacting actors	
1.2.	Procedures	Represents rules, principles, instructions	
1.3.	End/purposes	Purposes that people are committed to	
2.	BE	… a dynamic and iterative process generated by episodes of intense interactions that reflect actors' powers or tendencies to invest resources, beyond contractual obligations, in their interactions with other connected actors for the benefit of own, interacting actors as well as others in the service ecosystem.	S-D logic
	BE practices:	Saying and doings)	
2.2.	Social	Relating to other(s) and relationships	
2.3.	Cognitive	Learning and knowing efforts	
2.4.	Transformative	Adjusting operations to the other interacting actor	
3.	BE valence	The degree to which the BE outcome and behaviour are perceived as positive or negative.	S-D logic
3.1.	Positive	… leads to positive consequences	
3.2	Negative	… leads to negative consequences	
4.	Intensity	Degree of strength - extreme in degree; immersion in and about exchange	
5.	Resources	Materials, artefacts, assets used in the interaction (resources: information, emotions, physical, financial, temporal, behavioural, relational, social, cultural, ability, willingness)	S-D logic

The data collection began in June 2018, and the results were available by October 2019. The data was collected in Romania, in Romanian. All the respondents have university degrees and are fully articulate in Romanian. Some of them speak English, but they preferred the interview to be conducted in Romanian. The collected data was translated into English and uploaded to the NVivo 12 Computer software. To check if the data was translated accurately, the key informant checked a chunk of the data from the interview with her. Due to GDPR legislation, the audio data of the other interviews could not be shared with the key informant (non-transmissibility of personal data). The key informant confirmed that the audio data and translation were matching.

3.6.2. Coding

The process of data analysis was iterative, with 'an ongoing review of accumulated information in order to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories' (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, p.67), and based on thematic analysis to uncover the BE practice characteristics and patterns.

The process of coding is illustrated in Figure 6. and further detailed below.

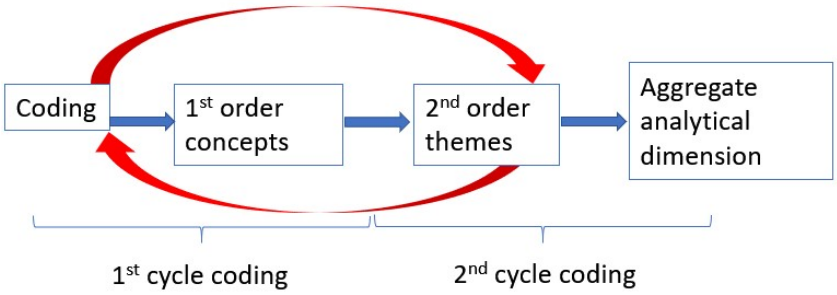


Figure 6. Generation of codes and themes

3.6.2.1. First cycle of coding

The thematic analysis involved identifying, coding, classifying, and labelling the initial identified patterns in the data. The inductive analysis started with inventorying and defining terms and practices that are specific to the B2B interacting organisations included in this study. The focus that guided the code generation aimed to reveal the practices actors engage in that could be understood only within their worldview. This is also called

emic analysis, a step referring to understanding the world from an insider perspective, from its practitioners, within the indigenous context (Patton, 2002).

Developing a manageable classification or a complete coding scheme beyond the code manual was the first step of the analysis. The researcher read the data a few times before field notes or interviews were completely indexed and coded. This classification scheme, the final codebook, was developed with the coding being developed as data was collected. The initially generated coding scheme included more than 70 codes. A preliminary codebook was shared with the researcher's supervisors and further revision was performed on the initial codebook.

During the first cycle of coding, every interview was coded twice, and after the codebook was revised, another round of coding took place to ensure the consistency of the coded data. During the third round of recoding using NVivo, the researcher also cross-compared passages (checking nodes) for more complex analyses across interviews. In order to decide the final coding structure and categories, the researcher used the criteria developed by Guba (1978), which recommends convergence (or figuring out what codes and categories fit together) and divergence (differences between categories to be clear and bold, no overlap) be checked (in Patton, 2002). These criteria helped to eliminate overlaps in coding and categorisation. The process was not linear; it was iterative and involved moving back and forth between data, codes and categories and even theories.

The coding process generated a large number of codes. Memos and annotations were used as means to record ideas (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), were then examined in light of their interrelationships. I employed simultaneous coding, or allocating the same text to more than one code (Saldaña, 2009). Initial coding (called also ‘open coding’) focused on nascent issues that had occurred during data collection and were captured using a wide range of codes (Saldaña, 2009). These codes are further detailed in Table 14 below.

Table 14 - Codes types – Initial, open code types

Code types	Details	Example from BE project
Attribute codes	Classifications of the companies	Companies: ‘Affiliated’, ‘Affiliated loose’, ‘Independent’
	Classifications of data sources	Interviews, participant and non-participant observation, field notes

Magnitude codes	Describe the degree of category (theme)	'Low intensity' and 'High intensity'
Simultaneous codes	Coding the same text to different nodes (codes)	When you see partner that is only transactional, it is exactly what you also offer! (coded as 'calibrating operations' and 'transactional – not wanted')
Descriptive codes	Interpretation / meaning	'Dynamic' describing the dynamic nature of engagement
Process codes	Using a '–ing' termination to show a process behind	i.e. Calibrating operations Extending help Getting competitive advantage
Values codes	Showing particular values	Valence (positive, negative, neutral)
Evaluation codes	Assigning judgments about the merits of a specific code	Power
Protocol codes	Assigning data to pre-established codes	Resources and their taxonomy

During this step, a list with 26 practices emerged, out of which 18 were BE practices and the remaining were transactional practices. These are further detailed in Appendix 2.

This thorough coding process has built the foundation for moving to the interpretative stage during which meanings have been obtained from the data.

3.6.2.2. Second-cycle coding: Pattern codes

This is an etic analysis, and it refers to labels imposed by the researcher, or categories that the analyst creates to the data. This is a way of grouping the briefs into a smaller number of categories, as well as themes and constructs into a smaller number of analytic units that are used in the analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

During this stage, cross-checking the second-order concepts versus previous studies into engagement, practices, interaction and institutions was performed and allowed for more abstract theoretical concepts to be overlaid over the initial data (Langley, 1999). The researcher used the first-cycle codes and assessed their communality and then assigned a pattern code to develop a statement that described the main theme (Saldaña, 2009).

During this step, second-order themes and the aggregate dimension of BE practices were generated. The structure of the codes and themes is presented in table 15.

Table 15 - First-order codes, second-order themes and aggregate analytical dimension

First-order codes - Activities	Second-order theme - Practices	Aggregate dimension – Practices
Greetings	Welcoming	Social practices
Introducing actors		
Emphasising in interaction	Building relationships	
Establish rapport		
Exchanging stories		
Searching info	Informing	Cognitive practices
Sharing knowledge		
Product training	Learning	
Acquiring network knowledge		
Organising/ attending events		
Extending help	Calibrating operations	Transformative practices
Increasing resources		
Accessing the network	Networking	
Operating in the network		
Advocating		
Implementing POSMs	Promoting products / solutions	
Organising campaigns		
Recommending solutions/ company		
Sampling		

BE practices identified based on the analysis are social, cognitive and transformative practices. These practices are further detailed in Chapter Four.

3.6.2.3. Indigenous typologies: Valence and intensity

Organisations develop their own communication styles to highlight the characteristics that are important for them. Every program 'gives rise to a special vocabulary that staff and participants use to differentiate between the types of activities, participants, participation, and variously valued outcomes' (Patton, 2002, p.454). Discovering indigenous typologies is based on an analysis of the whole and its parts as differentiated by people that usually divide the reality into distinguishable components (Patton 2002). The language of people whom the researcher interviewed revealed that engagement has valence (positive and negative) and intensity (high and low) that separates and distinguishes them from other things. The respondents did not articulate the engagement valence, but they pointed to some positive, negative or neutral interactions and relationships. These indigenous typologies highlighted that engagement valence and intensity are important to the interacting actors. In addition, to fully understand the context, it is necessary to understand these themes and their implications.

The second cycle of coding revealed the two categories generated from data as indigenous typology, namely BE attributes: intensity (with two values high and low) and valence (positive and negative). They are further detailed in Chapter Five.

3.6.2.4. Analyst-constructed typologies - BE patterns

In creating analyst-constructed typology of BE patterns through inductive analysis, I took on the task of revealing and describing specific patterns that appeared to exist but remained unremarked previously. Logical analysis was performed, and different dimensions (i.e. intensity and valence) were cross-classified to generate new insights into how data can be grouped and to examine for patterns that may not have been obvious during the initial analysis (Patton, 2002). It is a logical process that involves creating potential categories by crossing the 'Intensity' category with the 'Valence' category. Axial coding was used, with the initial codes (Intensity and Valence) as the 'axis' around which the above-mentioned new categories emerged, and synthetised to formulate core categories (Saldaña, 2009) that reflect different types of BE patterns. Using NVivo's 'coding query' based on the two already identified BE attributes, 'Intensity (low and high)' and 'Valence (positive and negative)' were generated. The results of each run of the coding query were saved as a Node. In NVivo, these can be retrieved in the 'Search' folder under 'Query Results'. By implementing the above-mentioned 'coding queries', a virtual matrix containing four quadrants for which no name or label immediately occurred was generated. The researcher then worked back and forth between the data and the logical construction, providing the meaning for each of the cells of the resulting matrix. This logical system helped to create ideal types of business engagement patterns, made of three BE patterns (i.e. Rewarding BE, Routine BE, and Conflictual) and one BE antecedent (transactional interactions). Meaningful patterns were generated by moving back and forth between the actual data and the logical construction. A full descriptive analysis of diverse BE patterns was performed by working back and forth between the matrix and the data. This is detailed in Figure 7 and further explained below. In describing the content of each of these types, 'Annotations' were used that were written during the interview transcription, as well as 'Memos' written after field visits and after interviews, along with those created during the analysis and linked to cases and to Nodes. During the analysis, analytical memos that captured the researcher's thoughts and observations were

generated and subsequently used to explain the content of the three types of business engagement patterns, as the use of these analytical memos can serve as a category-generating method (Saldaña, 2015).

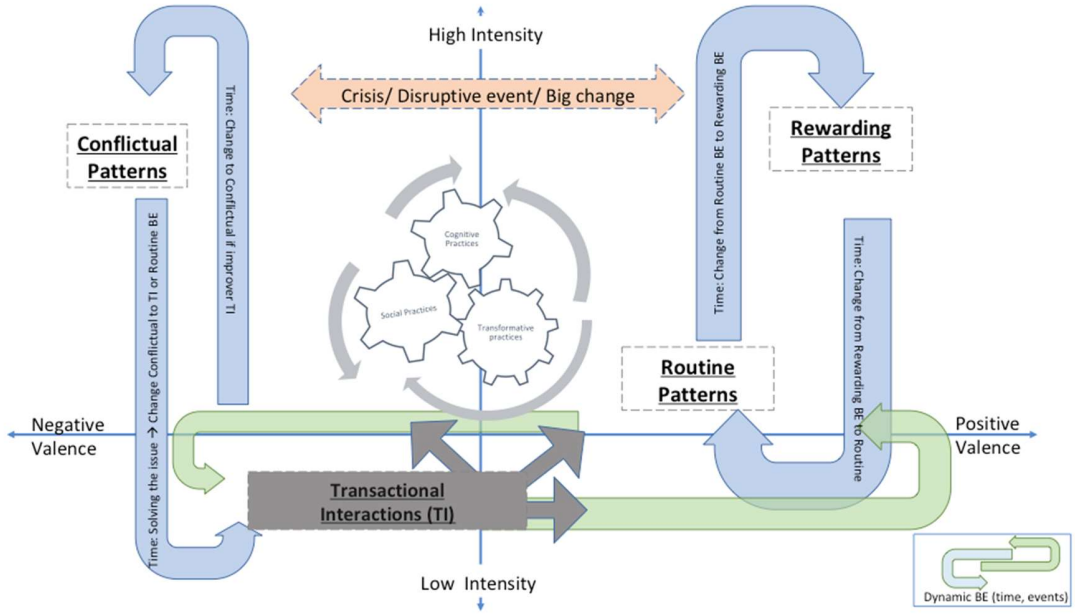


Figure 7. BE patterns and transactional interactions (TIs)

3.7. Evaluating the research quality

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that qualitative research should not be evaluated in terms of reliability and validity, as these are criteria designed for quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that internal validity criterion used in quantitative research be relabelled as credibility or the degree to which a respondent's views fit with a researcher's reproduction. In this research, to increase credibility of the findings, a mini focus group was conducted. Another quantitative criterion, external validity should be transposed in qualitative in transferability, which is the generation of sufficient case information so that case-to-case generalisations are possible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researcher should present adequate information for the reader to decide whether the findings are applicable to another context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The insights generated by this research are transferable to industries based on intense and frequent interactions between actors that are based on face-to-face meetings.

Reliability in quantitative should be transposed in qualitative research in dependability, or the extent to which the research design is logical and documented (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This research work is based on existing research guidelines. It has also been assessed by two academic professors. In addition, all documentation will be archived and will be made available for checking.

Moreover, this research is based on multiple data sources: in-depth and joint interviews, direct and participant observations and a mini focus group to triangulate the findings, to eliminate potential bias and to establish a good, qualitative research (Yin, 2013).

3.8. Chapter three: Conclusion

This chapter described the research process undertaken in this study, from its philosophical grounding to its chosen method. Using a distribution company in the Romanian pharmaceutical market as the case study subject, qualitative research data was obtained through interviews, direct and participant observations and mini focus groups of the different actors in the pharmaceutical industry. These research findings were interpreted from a critical realism epistemological stance. Last, but not least, the research quality was discussed.

Chapter Four: Business Engagement (BE) practices

4.1. Introduction

Chapter Four presents the findings of this study. Section 4.2 provides the details on BE practices that emerged from the researcher's observations, the interviews conducted and the mini focus-group. This chapter presents the findings based on analysis of the data concerning the three research questions, specifically in regard to the BE practices in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry. The social, cognitive, and transformative practices are presented in detail. This chapter also compare the BE practices with the existing literature body on customer engagement.

4.2. BE - A practice theory approach

To observe practices means to observe the doing and saying of interacting actors. Understanding practices should be based on looking at the organising principles of those practices – understandings highlighted in activities performed by the interacting actors and in rules and teleoaffective structures (Schatzki, 2001a, Schatzki, 2001b, Schatzki, 2005, Schatzki, 2006).

In this research, the elements of practice are detailed: understandings, rules and teleoaffective structures or what has been defined as practice anatomy (Schau et al., 2009).

4.2.1. Social practices (SPs)

Social Practices (SPs) take place at the beginning of any interaction. SPs capture the social facet of participation and activities performed in exchange situations among actors. The term refers to how actors connect and relate to others and also refers to the practices that characterise the relationships that those actors succeed in building. Through SPs, actors create and sustain ties with other interacting actors. SPs constitute a needed element of interaction, as emphasised by a pharmacist.

> Pharmacy 22: '*I do not have any free moments. I always have something to do. However, some of the interactions provide the social part.'*

SPs encompass two practices: 'Welcoming', which is the first interaction moment when seeing someone, and 'Building a relationship', which takes place throughout the interactions.

4.2.1.1. Welcoming

The Welcoming practice occurs at the beginning of any interaction. The Welcoming practice is the interaction behaviours and activities that occur when a person sees someone. As part of this practice, actors greet each other and create the foundation to start their interaction. Actors salute each other and ask the other person how he or she is. It is a critical practice that sets the foundation for the subsequent phases of interaction.

Each practice anatomy is described below, and illustrative quotes are provided in Appendix 3a.

Welcoming – Understandings

The 'Welcoming' practice is the starting point of any relationship. If an actor misses it, there is a high entry barrier into a relationship or into moving to the next step of building a (stronger) relationship. Actors welcome and get to know each other.

The Welcoming practice includes the following activities: 'Greeting' and 'Introducing the (new) actor'.

The 'Greeting' activity is the act of saluting performed by the interacting actors. This activity can vary from being very formal to being informal. Although a specific formality is required in this stage, the formality can become looser through repeated successful engagements, as described by one respondent:

> "Distributor 5: *I have a pharmacist that I salute in a very formal way. I say to pharmacist: 'I kiss your hand' and she is always telling me to stop greet so formal, to call her by name'*.

Depending on circumstances, if there is a new person involved in the interaction, another activity is performed: 'Introducing the (new) actor'. During this activity, the interacting actors introduce each other, or they introduce a new actor. This activity is a formal act of entering the interaction. In addition, when this activity is taking place and the new actor is introduced, this is accompanied by explaining the purpose of the interaction with the actor. During my field visits, I had the opportunity to experience this activity.

> Observation with pharmacy 6 and distributor*:' Distributor representative is greeting the pharmacist: Hello[name of the pharmacist]! …He greets the rest of pharmacists. Then he is asking the pharmacy manager the permission to interact, by making sure she is available. Then he introduces me to the pharmacist'*

Welcoming – Procedures/Rules

The Welcoming practice rules are not explicit or written. Because rules are informal, interactions are guided by the rules sensed by the interacting actors. For example, during one of the joint visits, one pharmacist shared the rules that should guide the interaction. She was expecting the sales representative to know how to behave and what rules he/she should apply in the interaction. In the example below the sales reps should sense how to act based on her state or her openness to act accordingly

> Pharmacist 20: *'I do not want interaction by book, artificial… like "hello! I came today to do X.". No. It is about communication human to human, rather than communication with standards, which I dislike. Maybe others like that way… He/ she needs to know when I am angry, sad, happy and she or he needs to know how to proceed accordingly.'*

Conversely, the sales reps expect the pharmacists to follow some rules. For example, they expect pharmacists to treat their interactions with consideration to ensure they do not make the sales reps wait. The distributor's sales rep was unhappy when he had to wait and demanded the other party follow some rules.

> Distributor 5: *I try to … explain her that is not nice to make the reps to wait... If he/ she visits you, and then you are busy you need to put additional resources to speed up because he/she also has limited time.*

It is also less unlikely that these rules are clearly stated in their contracts. However, the procedures of social interaction have been shared more openly with me, the researcher, as I was considered an outsider. I posed a minimal risk to interactions and outcomes.

Welcoming – Teleoaffective structures

Interacting actors' objectives are basic and straightforward: they want to be accepted by the other interacting actor and use the 'Welcoming' practice to warm up the initial part of the interaction. The 'Welcoming' practice aims to establish an initial connection, a feeling of shared endeavour and a sense of potential relationship that the interacting actors can develop.

> Pharmacist 16*: 'He introduced himself. I liked him from the 1st moment because he was very genuine, and familiar, as if we knew each other for a long time. This made me feel fine and relaxed helped me to feel released of the stress of dealing with the unknown of the first interaction.*

The objective of the Welcoming practice is to reach a positive state that will help actors assess the other interacting actor and establish an emotional connection that helps ease the difficulties or the unknowns of the following stages of interaction.

The ‘Welcoming’ practice anatomy – understandings, rules and teleoaffective ends – is synthesised in Table 12.

In addition to Welcoming, SPs comprise ‘Building Relationships’.

4.2.1.2. Building Relationshipst

The Building Relationships practice is the interacting actors’ sayings and doings that create strong ties between the actors. As part of this practice, actors invest resources in the relationship, such as (primarily but not only) time devoted to the other interacting actor. Actors spend time but also show much interest in the other actor’s life. One sales rep further emphasises this genuine interest in the other actors’ personal lives, hobbies and professional lives.

> Distributor 13*: ‘He (the researcher: the other distributor’s sales representative describing the distributor’s sales rep 1) is spending more time; he tells them a lot; he listens to them (pharmacists). He knows everything about the pharmacist’s children and many other details. The pharmacists know everything about him’.*

Understanding ‘Building Relationships’ practices requires analysing the elements of the practice: understandings, rules (or procedures) and the teleoaffective structures. These are further detailed below and summarised in Table 10. Each practice anatomy is described below, and illustrative quotes are provided in Appendix 3b.

Building Relationships – Understandings

Building a relationship is a continuous process done over time. For example, the sales rep and pharmacist develop a strong relationship through repeated interactions, as described by one respondent below:

> Distributor 05*: ‘The relationship has been built over many years.’*

To build these relationships, both actors know they need to continue investing time, willingness and financial resources. For example, one pharmacist describes below how the sales representative has developed their relationship. The rep kept coming to the pharmacy and devoting his resources to the relationship, despite the low sales generated in that pharmacy.

> Pharmacist 16 Joint Interview*: ‘He was still coming. I was raising my shoulders every time the distributor representative 1 visited us. I used to tell him that I sold only one knee brace or[...].’*

However, during the joint field visit with the distributor’s sales rep, I witnessed a strong relationship between them that can be attributed to his perseverance. He knew what he

had to do for 'Building relationships'.

The distributor's representative also highlights how pharmacists can develop the relationship. First, they need to be willing, and second, they need to devote time.

> Distributor 23 Interview*: 'In addition, the time they want to commit is essential….Good interaction is facilitated first by their time and second by their openness/willingness to get new information, order and create the relationship!'*

There are specific activities performed in 'Building Relationships'**: '**Empathising in Interaction', 'Establishing Rapport' and 'Exchanging Stories'.

'Empathising in Interaction' is when an actor displays feelings (i.e. compassion) towards the other interacting actor. These feelings contribute to the development of the relationship. For example, the sales rep of a distribution company describes how he behaved in a specific situation with a pharmacist with whom he did not have a good relationship despite regular visits and efforts to develop the relationship. The pharmacist he visited was in a difficult situation: she had to submit documentation to the Ministry of Health and was already late. The sales rep dropped all his other tasks and planned visits and drove her to the organisation where she submitted the required documentation. She appreciated this, as he had left everything aside to help her when she had a big issue, despite their poor relationship. He demonstrated empathy with her problem.

> Distributor 5: *'One day, I was there and she had an emergency to reach the CAS (Local Health Insurance House that is managing all the reimbursements for medicine). I was busy, but … so I offered my help to take her by car to the CAS. She suddenly had a different tone*[2]*; she was under huge time pressure. I left everything aside, and dropped her to CAS (part of Ministry of Health). She was surprised, and she thought I had hard feelings.'*

Pharmacist 12 also highlighted the existence of empathy when she had to learn about products. She received the product training materials from the sales representative and decided to study the materials rather than call the sales rep whenever she had a question or when a patient asked her questions. She did not want to hassle the sales reps repeatedly with fragmented questions.

> Pharmacist 12:' *I studied by myself as well as I thought I should not to squeeze Serge (the sales rep)… because he is not trainer at the end of the day.'*

[2] AC This is within practice physiology – link to teleoaffective structures

Firms' representatives might be unaware or might not accept that empathy can occur. Empathy is a human-to-human feeling, while the business-to-business (business-to-business) interaction should be professional. That is why some actors do not fully acknowledge that stronger feelings, such as affection or empathy, can take place, even over the phone.

> Distributor 23: *'I need to stay engaged, involved, willing to do business and the same would apply for them. I can feel at telephone when they are not OK, or they tell me they are sick, or they share with me that they had a terrible day … Interaction is not affective, but can be social. It is that part of empathy that we all have. I have empathy with some of them, not very often, but it happens.'*

'Establishing Rapport' is another activity performed during interactions. This activity attempts to warm up the interaction/relationship. It is an activity that can boost the whole interaction experience. For example, making jokes during the interaction can lead to 'Establishing Rapport'. This is another way to build the relationship, as it was noticed during the joint field visits with the distributor's representatives.

> Observation pharmacy 7: *'The other pharmacist sneezed, Serge said 'bless you' and asked if the cold was gone. The pharmacist in charge said that cold would be probably gone till next visit. They were exchanging a few jokes about this.'*

Teasing each other is another way of 'Establishing Rapport'. While teasing the sales representative, the pharmacist is validating how important the pharmacy is for the sales representative, as it was witnessed during the field visit.

> Observation pharmacy 12: *'Making a small Joking towards [distributor' rep name removed]… Anyway, you would have stopped first time to us. We are very special. We are located in a top location, the rest of them do not have such a good neighborhood area.'*

'Exchanging Stories' is about sharing news about hobbies and family or discussing other unobservable parts of the business and discussing other actors not present in the interaction. The impact of this activity is highlighted in one of the interviews:

> Field notes/ direct observation: *'I have also observed these activities. For example, during one visit, the sales rep started asking the pharmacist about her hobby: running and attending marathons. The pharmacist's reaction was very positive. I sensed a pleasant feeling when she shared her story with us'.*

These social activities have been confirmed by one of the focus group attendees.

Building relationships – Procedures and rules

The distributors' or manufacturers' representative is the driver of these practices. The sales rep describes the way he is doing this activity. He allows enough time to perform this activity. He described the process by comparing it to a routine interaction when,

usually, everything is done automatically, as if by autopilot, based on a specific routine. He explained that the process is not usual or routine-based but is a mandatory activity that he feels he needs to engage in.

> Distributor 5*: 'I go in, I say hello, I ask them if they need something and then good bye"...No, it is not that way. I have pharmacies where I spend 40 minutes or 30 minutes… where we discuss something else as well. This is part of the game!'*

There is no specific rule to 'Building relationships'. The sales representative demonstrates some degree of flexibility in the above quote. Despite a lack of specific procedures, the distributor's sales rep knows and follows rules that are not written. The sales reps use their experience of interactions with other pharmacists to make this a fruitful process, as detailed by one sales representative below:

Following specific rules that are not written but common sense–based (i.e. tact, diplomacy, good behaviour) helps 'Building Relationships', as one of the distributor's sales reps shared with me during the interview. However, some companies require their reps to follow internal rules in the pharmaceutical industry. Pharmacists know, then adjust accordingly, as they know what to expect.

> Distributor 5*: '... But with tact, diplomacy, good behaviour, and respect you can get to a point to win their hearts… to make they feel it is not only a transactional interest. They need to feel you want to help her every time, help with any other different issues, not only with the orders and pharmacy.'*

'Building relationships' requires both parties to be open to pursuing this activity. Some prefer not to develop the social part of the interaction and limit themselves to following only contractual terms.

Building relationships – Teleoaffective structures

If actors succeed in developing solid relationships, their businesses might be positively impacted. Actors know they have to devote resources and know that 'Building Relationships' will result in more substantial results for them and the companies they represent. One of the distributor's sales representatives links the lack of sales to a weak (or cold) business relationship. He also shared that good relationships lead to positive outcomes.

> Distributor 15*: 'if I do not pay attention, the relationship might get colder. For example, the pharmacist might have to order only two products but she thinks "Fine. I will not order them now as he does not visit me anyway"... I was very much involved in order to help them to improve and have positive results.'*

The data in this research bring some evidence that actors engage in Building Relationships, as through these, they can generate or create a sense of belonging to that business relationship and the service ecosystem. If this practice is performed well and the relationship develops, then positive outcomes are generated by the interacting actors for themselves and other actors in the network. A producer's representative again highlights the importance of developing these relationships and the fact that they can help develop business.

> Producer 3*: 'so then an important role of the distributor is to keep very close contact with the pharmacy and once the reps see the dynamic of the sales of the products then the reps can adjust what they can add or take out of the pharmacy (resources are pulled out). So many times, the increase or decrease of the portfolio is made based on our recommendation, but it is adjusted by the distributor as the reps see how the sales are evolving, based on interaction between the rep and the pharmacy.'*

Achieving desired ends is based on open discussions and negotiations. Then both parts can maximise the outcomes of their interactions. The actors involved have specific objectives or ends they want and need to achieve in interaction.

> Distributor 5*: In order to reach that point when you achieve your objectives, you do not need to be so rigid… I need to insist, persist if I want to achieve my targets.*

In addition to achieving specific objectives, the 'Building Relationships' practice generates affective ends, such as appreciation, positive feelings, or making actors feel good. For example, the pharmacist below mentioned that she appreciated the sales representative Serge, as he was visiting her regularly despite the hurdles that made it difficult for anyone to reach the pharmacy. This appreciation contributes to a strong relationship.

> Pharmacy 12*: 'Most of representatives want to use phone. That's why I appreciated Serge, as he never told me that he would just phone and send by courier/ drop shipment, as there is limited parking. He is taking time Wed and Th to talk to me for 10 minutes.'*

In addition, most interacting actors need more than just having successful business relationships. It is the social part that makes actors feel good. These social activities were also observed during the field visit when one of the distributor's sales reps made jokes and chitchatted with pharmacists. This activity contributed to a relaxed environment for the parties involved:

Pharmacy 08 Observation*: 'He (X) checked the stock by himself and then with the pharmacist, talking product by product (main categories). They started to make jokes and have a positive interaction.'*

Table 16 below, summarises the SPs, providing details about their anatomy and physiology.

Table 16 - Social practices (SPs) anatomy

Practice	Understandings - Activities	Procedures – Rules	Teleoaffective structures
Welcoming practice	The 'know-how' and shared purpose are reflected in both parties performing common activities. Activities: • Greeting • Introducing (new) actors	Informal, sometimes discussed by the interacting parties. Rules are not explicit. Actors need to use intuition to understand the expectations of the other party.	Establish an initial connection; Affinity is created during these practices; Acceptance of the other party is the result of these practices; Create a friendly context for the subsequent interaction phases.
Building relationships	This practice is a continuous process with actors devoting time, willingness sometimes even company (financial) resources Activities that highlight the actors' understandings are: • Empathising in interaction • Establishing rapport • Exchanging stories (about staff and business)	In general, there are no specific rules or procedures. Actors have their way of proceeding in order to achieve their targets. Some companies impose rules, and the other interacting actors know about them and adjust accordingly.	Achieve objectives (Sales); Feeling good with each other, having positive feelings and appreciation; Create a strong connection that, over time, leads to actors achieving their financial targets and other objectives; Maintain the interest in continuing the relationship; Create a sense of belonging in the relationship.

Conclusion

SPs are those practices that help interacting actors set the foundations of, and maintain, their business relationships. SPs comprise Welcoming and 'Building Relationships'. 'Welcoming' is the initial practice in which actors become engaged, and it is the

foundation for businesses to develop relationships and do business. 'Building Relationships' practices contribute to stronger ties between actors.

Firms, through their representatives, get involved in SPs, as there is pleasure derived from interacting. Firms' representatives do these activities to protect and enhance the business indirectly. Through deeper relationships, actors can achieve better financial objectives.

4.2.2. Cognitive practices (CPs)

CPs take place throughout the interactions between business actors. CPs refers to the actors' learning activities and efforts to accumulate knowledge, skills and experience. CPs draw on the idea of investment and incorporate thoughtfulness and a willingness to exert the effort necessary to learn, comprehend and absorb complex ideas and master difficult skills. While the CPs emphasised the work part of these practices, during the field visit, actors felt rewarded and enjoyed these practices, as was observed during the visits to pharmacies. CPs encompass 'Informing' and 'Learning' practices.

4.2.2.1 Informing

'Informing' practices refers to the interacting actors' behaviours and their activities of collecting and disseminating information other than product features. The activities actors pursue highlight the actors' understanding of this practice. The procedures they follow, as well as the teleoaffective structures, are detailed below.

Each practice anatomy is described below, and illustrative quotes are provided in Appendix 4a.

Informing – Understandings

Informing Practices are critical for the evolution of the interacting actors. Informing Practices are based on performing specific activities: 'searching for information' and 'sharing knowledge'.

'Searching for information' is an important activity that contributes to organisations' adequate operations. For example, finding small but relevant information about orders can disrupt the pharmacy's functioning.

> Pharmacy 14*:' I wrote an email to order on 11 Oct. Yesterday I wrote again an email asking about the products, about my order. Even today I have not received an answer. … After long investigations, the order is finally coming.'*

During their interactions with end users, pharmacies receive requests about new products. As a result, they need to identify who can supply that product to serve the end user. Pharmacists address questions about this situation to all their distributors to locate the distributing firm.

> Pharmacy 16*:'We encountered situations when I needed a product and we did not know where to order it. Then, the distributor representative appeared in the pharmacy as in a miracle. We asked him if he knew about that specific product, with the patient in the pharmacy listening to us.'*

End users demand many innovative solutions to solve their issues, and pharmacists do whatever is needed to provide these. As a result, they have discussions with distributors' sales representatives and ask the rep whether he or she knows any appropriate solutions for a specific problem.

> Ph_17 Int*: 'I remember I kindly asked him… oh yes, I remember now. It was about "rolator" a product that was not from [distributor name removed]. [pharmacist name removed] is showing me the product. He [distributor's rep] really helped us.'*

Even other actors, such as end users or doctors, need to search for information about the solution to a health-related issue, so they connect with pharmacies to find out where they can find a product.

There are circumstances under which products get into supply constraints or are discontinued, and pharmacies are not always informed about these situations. Therefore, discussing and asking for information about these products occur frequently.

> Pharmacy 22*: ' He helped us a lot, especially when we did not have a product, and we did not know what happened, and we needed to get that information to pass it to the patients. It could have been the product was not anymore imported, the active ingredient is not available, a lot was withdrawn from the market … I had the possibility to communicate freely and solve the problem!'*

Face-to-face interaction offers the advantage of searching for more sensitive information, such as competitive information, that is more difficult to obtain. As the competition between pharmacies is ubiquitous, pharmacists and sales representatives do their best to search for information about the competition.

> Mini focus group_I*:' I also ask them about the next-door pharmacy. What's going on there? … I ask top-level information, not details. …They also tell us this info (without being asked). They tell us if we have higher prices, especially for their own products. And I tell them the price in my pharmacy… '*

'Sharing knowledge' is the activity that facilitates passing knowledge to the other

interacting actor. This activity helps keep actors informed to make the best decision for themselves and the other actors. The example below, extracted from an interview, highlights how the interacting actors share their knowledge.

> Distributor 13*: 'I usually try to explain, sometimes probably better than a pharmacist can do. I have all the details[….]The pharmacist tells all the details to the patient. When the information seems to be incomplete, it is when I try to complete it with the rest.'*

Sometimes, the distributors/representatives know the history of a pharmacy. This knowledge is valuable, especially in situations where there are new pharmacists who do not have know-how: how it is working, what to order, and when. Then distributors' representatives share this knowledge. The sales representatives do all that is necessary to disseminate their knowledge about product features directly to the end users but with the pharmacist's endorsement.

> Distributor 23*: 'I have pharmacists that change from one pharmacy to another pharmacy. Once they are at their new location they ask me: 'Do you know what my colleagues in the present location used to order? Is it because I am not familiar? As I am coming from another location … and I do not know'*

A pharmacist has also confirmed this willingness to share his knowledge. She mentioned that the sales representative shared his knowledge, as she was new to the pharmacy and did not have all the background to make the best decision.

> Pharmacy 16*: I was on another world … I did not know what to do. I did not know the products, nor their characteristics and what they were for. He (here it is the Sales rep) told me that there were missing from the shelf and he provided the list of the products that had limited or no stock. He explained me, as we had to take 3 pcs per SKU, and we had to have the entire line for each size S, M, L.*

Informing – Procedures/Rules

The 'Informing' practice rules that characterise the pharmaceutical industry are usually explicit. Some of them are even written and circulated internally. The pharmacists know what they are not allowed to share with their interacting distributors' sales representatives. The same applies to distributors' representatives. Information related to the margin – whether the pharmacy margin, the distributing margin, or the producer margin – is not shared. Any other sensitive or confidential information is not shared or disclosed by pharmacists.

> Pharmacy 01: '*we do not supply information! Stock: no, Margin: no…We do not give confidential information, we cannot do that, but we tell them is we have them or not (products), if they move or not (but not the number of sales). They would like to see what the doctors prescribed, but we try not to share all information.'*

During the interaction, pharmacists and distributors sometimes refer back to the contractual terms/rules in place and how to solve potential issues. In these cases, the information and knowledge are shared.

> Distributor 23*: '… then we just discuss based on contractual terms. I share info about return policy. They ask me how long before they are allowed to return a product, or which are the steps that they have to take to return.'*

To deliver qualitative service to their customers, companies need access to information, and they usually access it. In this situation, when there is a legitimate interest to get and share the information and knowledge, the parties act accordingly, and the actors freely share the information or knowledge.

Informing – Teleoaffective Structures.

The objectives of 'Informing Practices' are diverse. Getting all the needed information helps actors find the distributors, products or solutions that customers/ end users need. Having the correct information and disseminating it lead to higher service quality for the end user and help differentiate the pharmacy from other pharmacies that offer low(er) prices, mainly.

> Pharmacy 12: *'But I am happy that the patient received the right information, so if he/ she has to decide in the future he/s he will know what exactly, and then also make a right comparison between me and another location. They also tend to compare, as the products are not cheap, so I believe that we are content with each other. They are content that they know what they need, to save to buy that product. I am content I was able to help, make right recommendations. I know that in this way he/ she will come back to me and became my customer.'*

In addition, the correct information and knowledge can not only help to determine the product features and to recommend accordingly but also help with understanding what is the right stock that a pharmacy needs. This information about the stock and what to recommend is pharmacies' and distributors' objectives.

> Pharmacist 14: *'… sometimes I need the face-to-face interactions or need more explanations. I ordered once a huge quantity because misunderstanding. I still have them on stock, because the definition of box was not very detailed, so I did not understand it so I had a surprise to see when the order arrived. I thought I ordered 20 boxes but I ordered 20 containers. She was laughing. I ordered online …'*

Customer satisfaction is critical, whether the customer is the end user or the pharmacy. That is why sharing information to fix the issue is critical. The criticality of having the information is highlighted below:

Distributor 23*: 'If the pharmacist is not satisfied? I share this information with the sales representative in charge of that pharmacy, and we try to fix the situation.'*

4.2.2.2. Learning

Learning refers to the practice of acquiring advanced knowledge, skills and experience. 'Learning' Practice is critical for the evolution of the interacting actors and the network they belong to. It also contributes to the actors remaining relevant to the business.

The anatomy of Learning Practices – understandings, rules and procedures and their teleoaffective structures – is detailed further below. Illustrative respondents' quotes are also provided in Appendix 4b.

Learning practice – Understandings

Learning practice is based on performing specific activities: 'Product training', 'Acquiring network knowledge', and 'Organising and attending events'.

'Product training' is an everyday activity of learning about product features/benefits. Pharmacists recognise the importance of Product training, as they have to learn to acquire knowledge and then act accordingly. The producer or the distributor's team facilitates the process and organises presentations.

Pharmacy 18: *'There might be some products we have never experienced; it is important to know about them.'*

The pharmacists recognise the need to have face-to-face interactions; not only should pharmacists have the info available online, but they need to learn about products and their features, and this activity is faster when it is done face to face. Technology offers many possibilities to share knowledge. However, sales representatives feel better control over the process and the quality of the knowledge when interacting face to face; also, it is easier for the reps to do product demonstrations face to face. However, in specific situations, online platforms offer benefits superior to those found in the interaction between the pharmacist and the firm's representative.

Pharmacist 06: *'The online resources are good for those that do not have enough time. But they are again impersonal, I would prefer to listen to someone that delivers some information than to join online. The knowledge is learnt if I see, if I see a schema, then I remember what I seen and heard easier.'*

Actors who are part of the network own the process: these include producers, distributors and pharmacists, each having a specific role in this activity. Pharmacists acknowledged

this during the interviews. The role of a distributor or producer representative is critical for delivering on-site training. Pharmacists also contribute to Product training. The pharmacy is the most suitable place for organising face-to-face training.

'Acquiring network knowledge' is the activity of grasping know-how as a result of interacting with actors in the network. In the pharmaceutical industry, information and knowledge flow smoothly within the network. Actors in the network access, validate and contribute to the information flow. All actors, including distributors' representatives, facilitate the flow of information and knowledge, whether about their products or something else.

> Pharmacy 01*: ' I need to connect with other pharmacists regarding patients, regarding cases when I do not know, or I don't have all instruments to solve it, or I do not have anyone to contact. Then you connect with another pharmacy/ pharmacist. It is especially good for new pharmacies, or new pharmacists that do not have enough experience…'*

To contribute to learning, companies have created special services, such as hotlines or telephone services, that enable learning, so the solution provided by the pharmacist to the end users is customised to the end users' needs.

> Pharmacy 01*: ' The pharmacy had the possibility to phone (the head office of producer), the special hotline (not the rep) to ask personalized treatment schemas for the patient. I described the symptoms etc... You could have asked the medical representative, but in case I described the question was more technical so then I need to call a specialized person. For example Herbalife had a doctor. I used to call the doctor every time I needed guidance for a treatment. It is important especially for patients that have multiple medications, like 9 pills a day.'*

The sales representatives learn a lot from interacting with pharmacists and from pharmacists' interactions with end users. Then the reps accumulate this knowledge and eventually use it in other interactions with other pharmacies or end users.

> Distributor 15*: 'This is the information I learnt while listening the conversation in the other pharmacy. I gave her a part of information, and I will help, I will go to the other pharmacy. So it is how I got additional information that I did not know before, but learnt it. That information did not help me directly to sell my products, but helped me to be useful to another person.'*

Pharmacists recognise that 'Learning' and 'Sharing knowledge' constitute a dynamic process that is taking place between the firms and within the firms.

> Pharmacy 12*:'He told me that he has a colleague that sells to hospitals and I am sure that they share information, and learn from each other. This is how you succeed to learn. It is the same way me and my colleague there is a close relationship. She is sharing with me what happened during the day … so I learn from her she learns from me.'*

Another activity that contributes to 'Learning' is 'Organising and attending events', such

as conferences or training events. This activity refers to acquiring knowledge based on participation in organised events. This activity is mainly intended to improve knowledge in the industry.

> Pharmacy 012: '*The companies organizing these courses/ seminars, invite specialists (i.e. Doctors, Professors), and companies also present their products and solutions during these events … I cannot say how important and how much I appreciate the producer that is able to organize these types of events!!! …it is great to hear them, to hear clinical studies, case studies research, and product presentations with reactions/ effects at a very professional level. This means they have a professional approach! '*

In addition to significant events such as the one described above, companies organise smaller events for pharmacy personnel that give the latter the possibility to acquire points that count for continuous education. To be able to keep working as pharmacists, personnel need to accumulate a specific number of points every year. Producers organise these events and, in cooperation with authorities and based on content and learning sources, award a specific number of points.

Learning – Procedures/Rules

Learning Practice has two types of rules: formal and informal. Formal rules refer to the ones governed by specific legislation. For example, to be able to keep working as pharmacists, personnel need to accumulate a specific number of points every year. Producers organise these events, cooperate with authorities and award specific points based on content and learning sources.

> Pharmacy 14*: 'the pharmacist are going outside of pharmacy for training sessions, including attending courses BUT only if there are points awarded based on attendance, otherwise nobody wants to waste their time.'*

For the rest of the learning activities, there are no specific rules. Actors know that they can improve, and they make the events available or attend the available events. Except for the continuous education points that pharmacists and assistants need to accumulate yearly, the rest of the learning is not governed by any rules or procedures. The process of Learning is also informal, with actors exchanging opinions and situations and learning from each other how to fix potential knowledge gaps. When there is such a need, then the training can be organised ad hoc. This is the reason the training takes place continuously.

> Producer 03*: 'every day when we have coffee in the morning when we have coffee, we exchange much more information that having formal meetings. This informal way is better.'*

When the process is more complex and includes the listing of products in many

pharmacies simultaneously, the rule is to organise a big launching event and invite all pharmacy personnel:

The distributor is emphasising that training is a must for the range he has in his portfolio. The pharmacists have much knowledge, but it does not cover all the details of the products they recommend and sell.

> Distributor 05*:' ... demonstrate how these can help them, the dimensions of the product, and fabric of the brace, in what situations the product is appropriate…. And I tell them the health issues the specific product is recommended. I can tell you, despite the fact they are pharmacists, they do not know. So it is good for them.'*

Learning – Teleoaffective Structures

Interacting actors' objectives are to improve the knowledge directly impacting how the products are recommended. This is the objective shared and recognised by all actors (i.e. pharmacists, distributors and producers) to have customer satisfaction. Expanding current knowledge means that actors can do a better job in serving the end user. Creating end-user satisfaction is the main objective of a pharmacy.

> Pharmacy 17*:' This is our objective: for the patient to leave this point being satisfied and informed.'*

Appropriate recommendations and selling products can be achieved if the pharmacists know the products and their recommendable features and can convince the end user. This can be achieved by being informed and knowledgeable.

The outcome of knowledge and Learning leads to good ends for all: patients receive the product they need; pharmacists recommend the right solution and generate end-user satisfaction; and sales reps generate sales.

> Distributor 03*:'... the pharmacists to have all the strong knowledge on the product to feel comfortable recommending it. This will help the pharmacists to recommend correctly the right product for the right medical issue the patient might have.'*

Sharing and learning knowledge creates opportunities for companies to be appreciated for their efforts to organise these learning events. This appreciation indirectly impacts the turnover or the achievement of financial targets.

> *Pharmacy 21: 'My feedback was positive, and the way the representative behaved made me think very high of the company. As a result of this presentation, [invitation was received despite the*

pharmacy not having a contract with that producer] I was in a situation to further promote the products to potential patients!'

The knowledge that is created by these practices comes from different sources and can broaden the actors' perspectives on existing products or solutions in the pharmaceutical industry or beyond the industry.

To summarise, CPs help interacting actors access new information and improve their knowledge. 'Informing' and 'Learning' practices create opportunities for actors to interact, to create and disseminate knowledge to improve operations, to achieve customer satisfaction, to broaden the actors' perspectives and to generate sales indirectly. Firms, through their representatives, get involved in CPs. By generating and acquiring knowledge, actors can make their customers loyal and achieve better financial objectives.

Table 17 below, summarises the CPs, providing brief details about their anatomy and physiology.

Table 17 - Cognitive engagement (CPs) practices anatomy

Practice	Understandings - Activities	Procedures – Rules	Teleoaffective structures
Informing	The know-how is reflected in how parties perform shared activities: • Searching/ collecting info • Sharing knowledge	Rules are explicit to the info that can be shared. For example, actors cannot share information about margins and other sensitive information.	Customer satisfaction; Being relevant in the network; (Having) The right stock of products.
Learning	Learning is a continuous process with actors devoting time and willingness to improve the current state in order to contribute to the evolution of actors involved Activities that highlight the actors' understandings are: • Product training/ Learning about solutions; • Acquiring network knowledge; • Organizing/ attending events (conferences, webinars etc.)	Learning is not governed by any rules or procedures, except rules according to legislation related to continuous education (personnel in pharmacies need to acquire a number of points annually)	Appreciation for attending/Learning; Expanding know-how/ Broaden perspectives; Recommending the right solution; Customer satisfaction; Sales.

4.2.3. Transformative practices (TvPs)

Transformative Practices (TvPs) refer to the process in which actors change to fit the (new) requirements of the network they are part of. This practice involves actors modifying resources and operating methods to ensure they remain relevant to the network. TvPs encompass the following practices: 'Calibrating Operations', 'Networking', and 'Promoting Products/Solutions'.

4.2.3.1. Calibrating operations

The practice of 'Calibrating operations' refers to the interacting actors' adjustment of operations to the other interacting partner(s). The 'Calibrating operations' practice is triggered by specific events, such as an arising need from the other actor or identifying a gap in internal processes that involve improvement of operations to fit the new requirements of the network. The actors' understandings of this practice are highlighted by the activities the actors pursue: 'Extending help' and 'Increasing resources'. The procedures they follow, as well as the teleoaffective structures, are detailed below.

The anatomy of the Calibrating operations practice – including understandings, rules and procedures and their teleoaffective structures – are further detailed below. Illustrative respondents' quotes are provided in Appendix 5a.

Calibrating operations – Understandings

The 'Extending help' activity means an actor has the willingness to assist and a specific behaviour towards the other interacting actor requesting help. This leads to the former helping others beyond typical responsibilities, whether the activities are business-related or not.

> Distributor 5*:' we tell each other problems, issues and if I can help, I do. I help them with business-related or with personal issues... They (pharmacists) need to feel you want to help her every time, help with any other different issues, not only with the orders and pharmacy.'*

A pharmacist explained the importance of the sales representative's extended help. According to her, the distributor's sales representative's interaction with the end user helped convince the end user, so the pharmacy sold the product. The pharmacist's behaviour in the interview is an indication that this is not a formal process. She laughed

because the sales representative was sometimes more proactive than she wanted in extending his help and interacting with end users.

> Pharmacy 18*: 'Yes, it happened many times. He helped us to recommend and to tell the patients what they need. I had a case. It was a lady she wanted the knee or ankle product I cannot remember exactly. [Distributor rep's name removed] came and started to interact with the lady. For the patient was very important to see the producer's representative here and get the recommendation directly from him. She was convinced.'*

'Increasing resources' is the activity of actors committing more resources, as needed. This means that at least one of the actors have to add significantly more resources, such as time, extra fuel for the car, to generate please the other actor. A few respondents provided examples of sales representatives who had to modify their daily route and increased their time in the field in order to solve the requests coming from the pharmacists.

> *Pharmacy 10: 'She once needed a product, so she called him asking him whether he had the product, was on stock and if he could bring her 3 pieces. The patient had to leave the country, so the pharmacists did not want to loose the patient. So sales rep left aside his route for that day, he went to warehouse, took the products and dropped them to the pharmacist. He also had a personal event that he missed due to the fact that he had to change all of that remaining day.*

The producer's representative involved in this research explained that adjusting the resources (i.e. investment in producing marketing collaterals or adding more staff) up or down, without proper discussions with business partners, is a risky process and activity that might lead to losing a future opportunity. This adjustment should be based on the interactions between producers, distributors and pharmacies. The producer also emphasised the critical role of distributors' representatives in deciding the number of resources to be invested.

> Producer 03*: '...competition in this product category is very different [than other categories].... So there is risk associated to adjust your activities and resources based on what resources a competitor has. It might be the case that the competitor might decide tomorrow that they will not promote the product range because they cannot afford to have them on stock in Romania...'*

The fact that the process is taking place is further confirmed by one of the distributor's sales reps. From his perspective, this activity is implemented naturally, based on interactions and negotiations with pharmacies.

> Distributor 13*: adjust the time I spend with them. Only if they ask my support, then I spend more time. If they ask, it is good to be there and provide the right answer to help here*

Calibrating operations – Procedures/Rules

The process of Calibrating Operations is implemented based on the actors' agreement. For example, helping the pharmacists is done with pharmacists agreeing on what they need and the distributor's sales rep sharing what he or she can do.

> Distributor 05*: 'I had a case, I was in a pharmacy and there was a patient which required a product, and very subtle, as there are pharmacists that dislike to get over them. I usually ask them if they agree me to look after the patient that needs a brace. There are pharmacists that accept this situation. The pharmacist then told the patient that the rep from the company is there and I could tell then the patient all the details of the product, how it works, and how it helps.'*

The practice is for the medical/sales rep to intervene in the pharmacy when there is a patient, usually after the pharmacist is supplying to the patient all the information she knows about that product range. There are some unwritten rules. First, the pharmacist, as she owns the relationship with the end user, interacts with him or her. Then, with the pharmacist's permission, the representative steps in. The pharmacist uses the distributors' resources to maximise the pharmacy's sales per location. Pharmacists also acknowledge this extended help. The distributor's sales representatives contribute to the customer experience. Although it is not their role to entertain the waiting customer, the distributor's sales representatives are helping the busy pharmacists, as they know this action helps the relationship. The distributor's resources are used for the pharmacy's benefit and indirectly for the distributor's benefit.

> Pharmacy 16*: 'you cannot stop the discussion with the patient you have in front of you, so it is great if someone can hold the other patient, can discuss a little till I finish with the other one. It is a real help, as you do not want the patient to go.'*

The sales representative knows that this is something he should and can do. As a result of his behaviour (taking over the act of recommendation), the pharmacist can allocate resources to something else and therefore create additional value for the pharmacy. The sales representative is sharing an example that emphasises that 'Increasing resources' involves not only the sales representatives acting accordingly but also other firms' representatives doing the same.

> Distributor 05*: 'I put everything aside. I then called my colleagues to prepare the invoice and the parcel, and went to [distributor name removed] office, picked up the parcel and dropped it to the [name of the key stakeholder removed]'s pharmacy. She then called her patient telling him that she had the products.'*

There are some specific situations in which pharmacies cannot pay on due time, as per existing contract terms or agreements. The additional resources needed in the pharmaceutical industry include working capital (in the example above it is about cash). The sales representatives have some guidelines that help them to decide how to behave. However, due to repeated interactions and specific contexts, both parties know what to do.

> Distributor 15*: 'I have a direction from the owner. But the payment term is the same across the pharmacies. The other conditional terms are different to each of them. If they do not respect the payment term, I am flexible.'*

Calibrating operations – Teleoaffective Structures

It is important to ensure that this leads to an outcome targeted by all actors, recommending the right solution, persuading the patient and then generating sales. The interacting actors work as one entity to maximise the value. As a result, the actors' operation lines become blurred. The pharmacy uses the supplier's resources to provide differentiating end-user experiences and to achieve the final goal: cash the value of the product or the solution offered to the end user.

> Distributor 05*: 'yes, a lot of these cases. Then I take over the presenting process, and the pharmacist is closing the circle by cashing the value from the customer/patient.'*

A pharmacist also recognises the result. When the other party, the distributor's sales representative, is adding these additional resources, the pharmacist has a high appreciation.

> Pharmacy 12*: 'That's why I appreciated (distributor sales representative), as he never told me that he would just phone and send by courier/ drop shipment, as there is limited parking. He is taking time Wed and Th to talk to me for 10 minutes…. I have also other suppliers that visit us, and interact with us but the relationship with Serge is special. He is adjusting himself to our needs'*

Reaching objectives is based on actors relying on each other when needed. When the service was above the expectation, when the effort and resources increased/peaked, the pharmacy felt that its needs were prioritised as number one.

> Distributor 05*: 'I need to do everything possible to do the order shipment in 1-2 hours, which I actually do. This is how I succeeded to gain their trust, respect and comfort that they can relay on me.'*

When the actors invest these additional resources, customer satisfaction and sales are generated. However, the most critical end achieved by actors is a long-term strong customer relationship. This situation makes all the actors relevant to their network.

4.2.3.2. Networking

Networking is accessing, connecting and operating interactively as part of a network. 'Networking' means connecting to a group of actors and their relationships, through which actors can access resources created by their relationships and interactions. It requires developing skills, negotiating to develop contacts and exchanging resources.

The anatomy of 'Networking' practices – understandings, rules and procedures and their teleoaffective structures – is further detailed below. Illustrative respondents' quotes are provided in Appendix 5b.

Networking – Understandings

Networking practice is based on performing specific activities: 'Operating in the network' and 'Advocating'.

'Operating in the network' is the activity of enabling actors' access to the network. In the pharmaceutical industry, the connectivity to the network is normal. Therefore, there is a need to be part of a network. The network helps actors meet patient needs. Actors in the network access, validate and contribute to this process. Based on their knowledge, pharmacists recommend other pharmacies to end users.

> Pharmacy 12*: 'We do this as they also recommended us when it was the case. We have a very good collaboration. They do more the part for medicines, the part that addresses the medical devices they send the patients to us. And it works really well.'*

A distributor representative also acknowledges the network collaboration. Everyone in the network talks to other actors, such as doctors, pharmacists or manufacturers' and distributors' representatives, to solve pharmacy or non-pharmacy-related issues. This is why the distributor sales reps know they must be present and have specific behaviours that would not expose their relationships with pharmacists.

> Distributor 15*: 'they talk to each other, and share the fact that '[name of the distributor's rep removed] has visited me" so if I skip a location, even though it is not so profitable as the location you just visited, the pharmacist in the less profitable locations feels excluded and thinks "hm… [name of the distributor's rep removed] has not visited me, to share some information and ask me if I need something…!'*

‘Operating in the network’ also includes actions that help actors strive for, survive in or maintain their position in the network. This means depending on network partners. The dependency of actors in the network is recognised. An actor that does not perform affects the others in the network. Pharmacies believe that success is not based on one actor only. A pharmacist shared that achieving end-user satisfaction or ‘making the patient happy’ is the objective of pharmacies and distributors.

> Pharmacy 16*: ‘So it is a chain reaction or a domino effect. If one link in the chain is broken, then the business works slower/ more difficult to have results.’*

Pharmacists acknowledge the interactions occurring within and beyond their organisation. For example, technology (e.g. groups on Skype) facilitates connections with other pharmacies and enables them to work on special cases or patients.

> Pharmacy 01*: ‘I do interact with my pharmacy colleague as well as with other colleagues (in the chain). For example we are invited to some presentations, then we discuss about the products (content of the presentation), and how the products are received and experienced by patients, and which doctors recommend the products.’*

‘Advocating’ refers to the activity of recommending an actor to the other actors in the network. This activity is critical for the multiplication of interactions and leads to the increased relevancy of the actor who is supported or recommended. Delivering good one-to-one experiences helps actors with good performance to get access to a broader network. Respondents share that ‘Advocating’ is the activity that is also performed actively by distributors’ and manufacturer’s representatives. A pharmacist recognised the importance of it:

> Pharmacy 22*: The reps can also promote you, if they feel that you give them attention, if they see they have someone to talk to and can have an open and good communication, if you know their products, if you know the difference between their products and their competitors’ products.*

Networking – Procedures/Rules

The rules of Networking are not written; actors act based on a specific situation or a need arising from the interacting actor.

In the network, each actor has a pre-defined role and knows what he or she needs to do and how to ask for help when needed. The manufacturer’s representative mentioned that, for example, distributors are box movers that can add value in implementation (sales, distributing marketing collaterals), but they need to ask the manufacturer’s help when it

is about delivering training to pharmacists.

> Producer 24*: 'The reality is a distributor plays two roles: resource and resources mover. The distributor has the expertise on some areas, and less know-how in other areas, and they do not have the abilities to build this later expertise. For example, delivering training to pharmacists, they will never do by themselves. They will ask for us, our excellence in delivering the right content in this respect. On other areas, such as implementation, using our resources: flyers, brochures, point of sales materials, they do by adding their value.'*

The process and procedures are not written; the actors involved know what they have to do. Also, for example, pharmacists shared that they expect manufacturers and distributors to stay in touch with doctors.

> *Mini focus group: 'practically it is important at the same time the relationship that the rep is establishing with the doctors (AC here it is a clear indication that engagement only rep-pharmacist is not enough. It is mandatory to engage with other stakeholders, here doctors) that have office around the pharmacy.'*

Networking processes or procedures are enabled by focal actors who facilitate other actors' access to the network. For example, the producer is introduced to the pharmacists that sell its products, and the distributor's sales representatives facilitate this access. In addition, pharmacists give other pharmacies access to patients. For example, a pharmacist detailed that in case she does not have a solution, after doing all internal steps (i.e. contacting headquarters), she does not have any issue recommending another pharmacy where she used to work before the current one. A pharmacist shared the example of when she provided access to a network (chain of pharmacies) by taking the distributor to the new location she had just moved to. She had worked with the distributor in her previous pharmacy (Gedeon Richter) and then decided to continue the relationship as she moved to another pharmacy. The distributor had limited sales in the new location, so it got access to the location.

> Pharmacy 20*: 'Here I could choose whom to work with. To be honest, I could do similar while I was with Richter because I could argument why I wanted to work with a specific firm. I was allowed there as well as pharmacy manager, but in Richer there was an additional step of making the argumentation to interact with a specific company.'*

The network connections work smoothly and help all actors find a working solution for their network prosperity and good functioning.

> Pharmacy 1*: '… if a product disappears from the market, if it starts being subsidized, or stops being subsidized, the medical representatives should inform us. … But this depends a lot on the company. Sometimes the doctor is not informed about a change and prescribes [the medicine]. The first thing I do is to call directly the doctor to inform him/ her…. I call or even visit the doctor.'*

Networking – Teleoaffective structures

The service ecosystem is intertwined, with the value being co-created by actors. For example, the pharmacists and distributors' representatives shared that if one link is not working, all suffer. In this situation, they need to repair the link, but through negotiations, they usually overcome any issues arising from the interaction. Noteworthy is that all actors in the network should benefit.

The pharmacist used a different tone and words to convey the appreciation of the companies that enable the interaction with a broader network, with other firms' representatives, peers or key opinion leaders. For example, another pharmacist attended an event in which a manufacturer (Solgar) presented its products, and this manufacturer impressed her. Then the pharmacist, even though the pharmacy she works for does not have the products, recommended Solgar to her colleagues and told the patients where they could find the products.

> Pharmacy 21: '*I usually talk about this. My colleagues and I do interact. I tell them what impressed me. For Solgar I met a person with 2 children that were all vegans. Then I talked with their parents about vitamin B12 product from Solgar.'*

Networking is also based on the support the actors provide to each other. Producers and distributor representatives shared that the network supports each actor's part of it, especially when he or she needs it.

> Producer 03: '*every time the partners need our support they will have a partner that they can count on.'*

Success in the pharmaceutical industry is based on the ability of actors to co-create with other actors in the network. Pharmacists and distributors recognise that the result of not being flexible and not working or adjusting to the other actors they are connected to is the actor being rejected from the network, affecting sales for all involved but especially for the rejected actor. A pharmacist respondent acknowledged that when she is pleased with a company, she recommends that company not only to end users but also to other pharmacies in the network.

> Pharmacy 21*: 'I appreciate they, they have been so opened, so I shared the fact that I will promote them, which actually happened!'*

4.2.3.3. Promoting products/solutions

This practice facilitates the awareness of the product or solution, namely the brand or the company, creating demand for the traded solutions.

The anatomy of 'Promoting products' practices – understandings, rules and procedures and their teleoaffective structures – is further detailed below. Illustrative respondents' quotes are provided in Appendix 5c.

Promoting Products/Solutions – Understandings

There is a specific set of activities that actors perform in this respect: 'Implementation of point of sales materials (POSMs)', 'Organising campaigns', 'Recommending the solution', and 'Sampling'.

The activity of 'Implementing POSMs' refers to the act of placing the POSMs in different selling locations. This activity has been observed during the field visits with the sales reps and also mentioned by different actors: pharmacists, sales reps and manufacturer representatives.

'Organising campaigns' is a normal activity in the pharmaceutical industry. Actors involved in this field organise different promotional activities to increase sales. Regardless of the pharmacy size or type, the sales representatives are involved in this activity and know what they have to do when the activity takes place.

> Pharmacy 01: '*we have reps visiting us and presenting what products we have already listed in our portfolio, campaigns that will be implemented, contests for end users as advertised on TV and prizes, like computers, skate rollers etc.'*

'Recommending the solution' is the activity that helps increase awareness of the solution and the company that trades and markets the solution. This is an activity that is shared between the producer, the distributor and the pharmacy. The producer is pulling all information and materials for this activity. The distributor also has the role of setting up or sharing the information with pharmacies and taking any feedback from them.

> Producer 03: '*So we are in charge of marketing the product...Other pharmacies are much more involved: they promote the products, they recommend the products and host events in their pharmacies.'*

'Sampling' is the activity of giving free-of-charge products to different stakeholders (distributors, pharmacies or end users / patients). It is considered a real help for

pharmacists that enables the act of creating demand for the products. Moreover, 'Sampling' is helping pharmacists to create a positive end-user experience.

> Pharmacy 22: …*She gave me samples to re-distribute to my patients… and these are helping me a lot here! The products are not very cheap.*

Promoting products/solutions – Rules and procedures

In smaller pharmacies, everything is done in the location, with the discussion and negotiation done with the pharmacist manager. The distributor and its sales representatives own the activity of placing the POSMs.

The rules are different in other pharmacies, usually bigger ones, where everything is negotiated at the headquarters and included in a formal agreement. These different rules, versus rules or processes for small, independent pharmacies or smaller distributors, apply to big organisations (i.e. big distributors or big chain pharmacies). This is because big organisations have internal systems and procedures that guide their activity and interaction with patients and distributors' sales reps.

> Producer 03: ' *With a national, big distributor, you need to establish a meeting; you need to have an agenda so it becomes very formal and everything is based on a protocol. This is it: at the end of the day every company has its own approach. But with a smaller partner… they will work differently with us, will be flexible, this distributor will come and ask for programs rather than wait for me to propose programs. It is different approach.'*

Promoting products/solutions – Teleoaffective structures

Promoting Products/Solutions practices has various pursued ends and generates affective states for the interacting actors. The first end of these practices is to create awareness, demand and, therefore, sales for all parties involved.

Actors involved in these practices pursue different activities to create customer satisfaction. Competition is high, so pharmacists and their partners (i.e. distributors, doctors, manufacturers) need to have the patient at the centre of attention to help implement all needed activities to make patients return. The effort of Promoting the product leads to the patient being loyal. This is one aspect that pharmacies aim for and need from their customers. However, 'Promoting' must be based on solid evidence rather than material benefits. Creating positive feelings is an essential affective structure.

Making the end user feel good and happy and creating a positive experience are the purposes of these practices.

> Pharmacy 18: '*This is the objective: the patient needs to be happy, to be satisfied with the service received as this is what we provide: a service*.'

Promoting the product, solution or company should also be focused on patient satisfaction. If end-user or patient satisfaction is generated, this leads to more sales and better financial results for all involved.

> Pharmacy 12: '*So we need to work to promote my pharmacy, to increase the turnover. And we just need to do this. My excuses do not have any value. We need to promote it. This promo of the pharmacy is done through patient satisfaction. If I know to present a product, to adjust to each customer … because I cannot talk to a doctor the way I talk to a 70 years old patient that does not know what a brace is, just as an example. Separately, we need to learn as much as we can, we just need to work (smiling) to make the sales and everyone to be content.'*

Firms, through their representatives, get involved in TvPs. Through these practices, actors contribute to value co-creation and ensure the business remains relevant in the short and medium term, achieving better financial objectives. TvPs contain practices that help interacting actors potentially transform the way they operate. 'Calibrating Operations', 'Promoting Products/Solutions' and 'Networking' practices create opportunities for actors to create additional value. As a result, actors enhance their operations, achieve customer satisfaction and remain relevant to other actors in the network and the pharmaceutical field.

Table 18, below, summarises the TvPs, providing brief details about their anatomy and physiology.

Table 18 - Transformative practices (TvPs) anatomy

Practice	Understandings - Activities	Procedures – Rules	Teleoaffective structures
Calibrating operations	The know-how is reflected in how parties perform common activities: • Extending help • Increasing resources	Rules are not explicit. Actors know how to behave without having written rules.	Sales; Appreciation; Long-term relationship; Remain relevant to the other actors; Trust; Respect; Customer satisfaction.
Networking	This is a continuous process with actors devoting more resources to the other actors	Rules are not written. Actors know that there is in their best interest to do	Being relevant in the network; Appreciation;

	Activities that highlight the actors' understandings are: • Accessing network • Operating in the network • Advocating	networking without being told. This is based on their continuous ongoing interactions with the rest of the actors.	Sales (achieving common goals); Getting/ receiving support; Being promoted to others; Solving issues faster.
Promoting products/ solutions	These practices help with product demand. The specific activities are shared between different actors Activities: • Implementing POSMs • Organising campaigns • Recommending solution/ company • Sampling	Formal procedures are stipulated by contracts or negotiated directly between parties.	Create awareness and demand; Better financial results; Customer satisfaction; Successful collaboration.

4.2.4. Discussion: BE practices and CE dimensions

Previous studies have defined actor engagement using the behaviours which transcend transactions (Alexander et al., 2018b, Van Doorn et al., 2010), involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements. Considering cognitive, social, and transformative elements, the present research aims to examine the multi-dimensionality of engagement based on data gathered in the pharmaceutical industry. Put succinctly, this research provides a deeper understanding of BE by looking at BE-related practices. This deviation from prior studies stems from the challenges associated with separating these elements from one another. There is ambiguity on whether this chasm is possible within a consumer setting and whether the interrelated of dimensions do exist. It is possible to embed behaviours in cognitive and emotional realms, which is why the elements that this research proposes offers a more practical approach in deciphering BE practices and eradicating the potential overlap between practices. BE comprises the dimensions propounded by research in consumer engagement. However, it is important to examine dimensions that can be separated from each other more clearly. Cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements can be observed more easily in consumer research and are intertwined in business-to-business interactions. Therefore, it is important to explore more observable practices that can clearly be distinguished from each other.

By looking at the practices embedded in engagement, this research goes one level down as pointed out by (Jonas et al., 2018) to decipher BE, which therefore comprises behavioural actions. Each engagement practice has a behavioural element embedded in

the activities interacting actors perform since this research is premised on the Practice Theory approach. In literature pertaining to customer engagement, behavioural engagement denotes the voluntary resource contributions of actors aimed at the engagement object, though it transcend what is foundational to the relationship (Brodie et al., 2011a).

This research underscores an intellectual endeavour embedded in any interaction. Premised on this interaction's perceptions, actors could witness certain feelings. Some practices' affective element exemplify their existence in teleoaffective ends. Nevertheless, this question needs to be answered: should this intellectual effort be labelled emotional or cognitive? Since they are deeply intertwined, the problem of separating the cognitions and emotions has been recognised (Wilson, 2019, Baumeister et al., 2007).

Cognitive dimension denotes the actor's intellectual efforts towards the company or brand. It is difficult to observe emotional and cognitive elements due to how they are defined in the literature on consumer engagement. Separating emotional efforts from intellectual ones might be onerous across business-to-business settings. In prior research, 'cognitive' has been defined as the extent of concentration on an engagement object (Brodie et al., 2011a, Vivek et al., 2014). Thus, it reflects the disposition of actors to expend mental concentration to interaction with a focal resource (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019).

Concerning affective or emotional aspect, prior studies suggest that emotions are present in business-to-business settings, in congruence with extant literature (Ekman et al., 2021, Brodie et al., 2019). The practice of 'Emphasising in interactions' demonstrates one of them. As social interactions generate them, these emotions have been categorized with other social engagement practices. The affective/ emotional dimension pertains to the dedication, feelings, as well as enthusiasm (Brodie et al., 2013, Vivek et al., 2014) expressed towards the engagement object. By getting emotionally attached actors to engage with each other, it becomes possible to surmount impediments (Jonas et al., 2018, Dougherty, 1992) and address interactions within the B2B context (Vivek et al., 2015).

In this B2B research, the emotional aspects of engagement are premised on social interaction. Social practices that comprise of affective elements, coupled with

transformative/ cognitive practices, are essential to help comprehend the BE concept. According to studies as per which social interactions provide actors with opportunities to form strong ties resulting in mutual benefits (Pittaway et al., 2004, Morrissey and Pittaway, 2006). Hardwick and Anderson (2019), engagement is a '…process characterised by interactions that grew from increasing affect and cognition'.

BE is also characterised by additional practices. 'Transformative' practices remain paramount in this context, reflecting seemingly additional proclivities of actors to increase value proposition. Via these transformative practices, the actors become more relevant to each other, as well as to other actors in the network, thus resulting in heightened reliance on each other.

Table 19 below outlines customer engagement dimensions and underscores how these dimensions pertain to BE practices.

Table 19 - Intersection between BE practices and CE dimensions

Engagement Previous research ↓		**Business engagement Practices ↓**		
		Cognitive	**Social**	**Transformative**
Dimensions ↓	**Definitions ↓ →**	refers to the actors' learning activities and efforts to accumulate knowledge, skills and experience	captures the social facet of participation and activities performed in exchange situations with the other actor(s)	refers to the process where actors change to fit better the (new) requirements of the network they are part of. This practice involves modifying resources and operating methods to ensure actors remain relevant to the network they are part of.
Cognitive (Brodie et al., 2011a, Vivek et al., 2014)	Refers to the degree of absorption in or concentration on an engagement object	The degree of absorption manifests in all BE dimensions.		
Affective/ Emotional (Brodie et al., 2013, Vivek et al., 2014)	Relates to feelings, enthusiasm and dedication		Emotions manifest in SE: in Building relationships	Advocating & Promoting products practices might

	invoked by the engagement object		(Empathising in interaction, Establishing rapport, Exchanging stories)	contain emotional signs
Behavioural (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014, Van Doorn et al., 2010)	Implies voluntarily resource contributions, focused on engagement object	Behaviours exist in all BE practices (i.e. doings and saying). Businesses invest resources in social, cognitive and transformative practices in their interactions.		

Chapter Five: BE Attributes (Intensity and Valence)

5.1. Introduction

Organisations develop their particular language systems to emphasise differences they believe are critical (Patton, 2002). The language of people interviewed has revealed that engagement has different characteristics: such as valance and intensity. However, respondents did not articulate, for example, the engagement valance per se but pointed out some positive, negative, or neutral interactions and relationships. These indigenous typologies have highlighted that engagement valance and intensity are essential to the people in the setting. To comprehend the setting, it is necessary to recognise these themes and their implications. The second coding cycle has revealed the categories generated from data as indigenous typology: BE attributes. The BE attributes generated from previous literature and current data are intensity and valance. Chapter Five presents these two attributes: intensity (detailed in section 5.2) and valence (included in section 5.3) as they emerged from the researcher's observations, the interviews conducted and the mini focus-group implemented in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry, in a B2B settings. This chapter ends with a reflection included in section 5.4 that highlights how these attributes can be understood based on the existing body of literature on customer engagement.

5.2. Intensity

In the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, intensity is defined as 'the magnitude of a quantity (such as force or energy) per unit (as of area, charge, mass, or time)'.

Talking about engagement, a respondent states:

> Pharmacy 17*: '[…] there is an intensity! […]there is profound intensity.'*

Another pharmacist points to the fact that this engagement intensity is different from company to company:

> Pharmacy 12: *'[Intensity] exists, and there are differences between firms. For example, intensity exists between this pharmacy and the distributor represented by its representative. He is a complete partner for us. He is offering us everything.'*

Respondents experienced 'Intensity' in many different ways. They linked 'Intensity' to the number of resources that they use with the other interacting partner (resources mean

the number of people, the time allocated, the interest in), the speed of acting (how promptly they were able to solve the issue), the frequency of interaction (expectations were to have regular interactions or additional ones, if needed, beyond the regular ones) and being active (being able to solve a current issue or to act on the emerging issue).

Companies' representatives involved in this research have recognised intensity in multiple ways: the amount of time dedicated to the other actor, the degree of openness, unconditional support, frequent interaction, continuity, speed and promptness.

Intensity can be the amount of time dedicated to the interaction.

> Pharmacy 01*: 'There is a partnership, but definitely here it is about how much time you dedicate to it: can be shorter or longer. If you have time to interact, discuss.'*

Intensity means the number of resources or efforts allocated in interaction.

> Distributor 23*: 'They are more open than others; they tend to put additional efforts…some of them, not necessarily all.'*

It can also mean the number of activities that the other actor implements:

> Producer 03*: 'The collaboration is engaging. They dedicate time, and activities we implement are more in number and amplitude.'*

Intensity can be linked to the extra energy devoted to an interaction. For example, pharmacist 14 was recalling an event when she had to spend a lot of her energy:

> Pharmacy 14*: '[…] I need to hold the driver to check the quantity received versus the invoice! There is a big discussion around it, almost a fight about it.'*

Another pharmacist (Pharmacy 01) was linking engagement intensity to speed. She called it 'slow', meaning no speed.

> Pharmacy 01*: 'There are some interactions that are […]'slow, superficial.'*

The intensity level is evaluated by actors in this industry based on rhythm or interaction frequency, as described by one of the respondents:

> Pharmacy 01*: '[…] they tend to have rhythm, frequency in visits, events, and they tend to have discipline. It is important to keep going, not to do something now and then after 1,000 years.'*

5.3. Valance

Valance has been defined as the behaviours that have positive or negative consequences for interacting firms. Therefore, an inductive neutral valance was generated.

It was challenging to capture negatively valanced engagements. Companies' representatives could not sometimes recall negative BEs or tried to minimise them. This

challenge is a psychological way of maintaining equilibrium by rejecting negative states that cause discomfort.

> Pharmacy 21*: 'Hmmm… I cannot remember any negative examples. There are delicate or sensitive situations.'*
>
> Pharmacy 17*: 'I have not had problems, but occasionally there are small issues.'*

Negative interaction is perceived as 'no interaction' and therefore rejected. The interest of the companies was to move to the positive ones, the ones with positive effects.

> Pharmacy 12*: '[…] so let us focus only on interaction between suppliers and me […] I do not have any more disappointments as I am used now to these situations.'*

Negative BE requires 'corrections'. One objective is to have the world systematised and predictable.

> Pharmacy12: *I always dot the 'i'. We need to have discipline. How can we work if there is no rules and discipline? Everything would be chaos.*

Negative BE is put aside as the resources should go to the positive ones, the ones that help achieve specific interaction-related objectives:

> Pharmacy 12*: 'I try to put aside the negative ones, and always be positive, to reach…to achieve my objectives. Since I finalised the school, my objective has been to help patients and people around.'*

Negative valance means negative consequences for all parties. In this case, pharmacists are not getting the product or sales, and the supplier ends up being replaced.

> Pharmacy 19*: 'I have many examples. I had cases when I had to send one email two or three times. Then I called them, asking about a product. I got an answer that the product was not in stock….So if we have alternatives, we replace them.'*

Negative valance means one firm is treating the other firm poorly and inappropriately.

> Pharmacy 14*: '….I am the fifth wheel of a car. It is highly unpleasant! They are more interested in sending the medicines to the hospital, and then for them, we do not count as much! So I am telling you about negative interactions and what I do not like.'*

Positive BE requires parties to interact positively, aiming for positive engagement. It is also about reciprocal BE. Positive BE requires the companies to be market-oriented. The pharmacist will be open to a positive BE, but the supplier needs to invest resources for this to be achieved.

> Pharmacy 14: *'I do not have the same (positive interactions) with other firms[…].It depends on the firm.'*
>
> Producer 3: *'When a retailer is open to my engagement, I am inclined to do more promo activities; I have monthly programmes.'*

5.4. Discussion of CE, AE and BE Attributes

Although there is a wealth of consumer engagement studies examining valance, the literature on business-to-business engagement remains scarce. As mentioned in Chapter Two, a few studies (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019, Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Vivek et al., 2015, Ekman et al., 2021, Vivek et al., 2021, Vatavwala et al., 2022) focused on engagement look at positively and negatively valenced engagement.

In the B2B area, some academic researchers have mentioned intensity. However, the characteristic was either mentioned without providing additional details or without a particular emphasis on it (Vivek et al., 2012, Gambetti et al., 2012, Brodie et al., 2013, Fehrer et al., 2018b), or labelled 'magnitude' (Islam and Rahman, 2016) or defined as the extent of strength that categorises customers as passive/engaged/disengaged/ non-engaged (Ng et al., 2013). In their conceptual work Van Doorn et al. (2010) advance the idea that intensity is embedded in CE behaviours. According to the authors CE has specific modality/ forms, or ways customers 'engage more frequently and more intensively in CEB actions' (p 259). Vivek et al. (2012) borrow from the information system literature and articulate intensity as being an 'individual's participation in and connection with an organisational offering or organisational activities (p.133)'. Azer and Alexander (2020) using online research based on Tripadvisor reviews emphasise the importance of detecting intensity levels of negative engagement behaviour as different intensity levels results in negative impacts on business. In this work, again studied at the individual, end user level, manifestation and behaviours are clustered as having high and low intensity.

As far as this B2B research is concerned, intensity reflects the speed of acting, the number of resources, the actor's extra level of energy dedicated to interaction, and the frequency of interaction. The present study captures intensity more deeply than merely pointing whether it is high or low.

Even though prior studies have acknowledged the variation of BE due to intensity, the research in this domain remains insufficient (Sands et al., 2022). By examining the combinations of valences/intensities and their outcomes, the findings presented here explore BE practices further. The section below elucidates BE patterns using valence and

intensity. To generate BE practices patterns, the current analysis uses an inductive approach.

Chapter Six: Patterns of BE practices

6.1. Introduction

Practices do not have well-defined boundaries – they overlap (Lammi, 2018). In addition, Schatzki (2001b) states that if an organising element of practice is shared with another, these practices intersect. As a result, a practice is rarely isolated; instead, it exists within a number of other practices. We can better understand certain practices that might be interrelated if we look at practice complexes (Shove et al., 2012). In addition, a practice can depend on others to persist (Lammi, 2018, Shove et al., 2012). Details about how practices intersect and work with each other, referred to as practice physiology (Schau et al., 2009), are provided below.

Before detailing the BE patterns and their related practices, it is worth mentioning that not all business-to-business interactions result in BE. Some interactions are transactionally orientated: actors interact to solve their basic business needs. These interactions can be one-off or repeated over time. These are shown in Figure 7 as transactional interactions. The practices that detail transactional interactions are included in Appendix 6. Section 6.2 below provides details related to rewarding patterns.

Chapter Six details the patterns of BE practices as they emerge from research in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry. Section 6.2 reveals the details about rewarding patterns of BE that have been generated from the interplay between intensity and valence, specifically reflecting high intensity and positive valence. Furthermore, social structures, mechanisms, and conditional factors are exposed. In addition, details about how practices intersect and work with each other or practice physiology (Schau et al., 2009) are provided, along with a description of the related outcomes of rewarding BE patterns. In the same manner, Section 6.3 depicts the details about routine patterns of BE that have been generated from the interplay between intensity and valence, specifically reflecting medium intensity and positive valence, giving details on how practices intersection, or practice physiology (Schau et al., 2009), mechanisms, social structures and conditional factors and their related outcomes. This section ends with a reflection on routine BE patterns and value co-creation. The last section of Chapter Six specifies the conflictual BE patterns, mechanisms, social structures, physiology of practices and their related

outcomes. Finally, section 6.4 ends by exposing conflictual BE patterns and value destruction.

6.2. Rewarding patterns

Following the definition of BE provided in Chapter Two, a definition of rewarding patterns is proposed. These result from a dynamic and iterative process characterised by highly intense interactions that reflect actors' high investment of resources with other connected actors, leading to very positive direct outcomes for interacting actors, as well as indirect ones for others that are involved.

6.2.1. Uncovering the structures, mechanisms and conditions of 'Rewarding patterns'

In order to provide details behind rewarding pattern mechanisms, which cannot be observed, retroduction was used to make inferences about them using data from observations and interviews. In general, in the pharmaceutical field, which is characterised by repetitive interactions, rewarding patterns result from a request generated by one party based on a need from a third party. However, there are situations in which rewarding patterns are the result of an exceptional event, such as a conference to which the focal company has invited reputable key opinion leaders or professors from recognised universities, as was shared by respondents and highlighted below by one of them.

> Pharmacist 1: *One of them invited my professor from Iasi University. Hello!* (Researcher: the respondent used 'hello' in English to mention something extraordinary) *I cannot say how important and how much I appreciate the producer who organised these events!*

The cognitive learning practice of organising and attending events, such as conferences or training events, mainly intends to improve attendees' knowledge. However, these events also enable effective social practices, such as relationship building as participants engage in activities, such as exchanging stories and establishing rapport.

Rewarding patterns are based on interactive processes that arise from requests from third parties. The resources initially added by one party are beyond the other party's expectations. The latter recognises and appreciates these additional resources. One of the manifestations of rewarding patterns is related to this increase in resources allocated to solving the problem or request. One pharmacist described a situation when she asked a distributor's representative to help her. Initially, she expected other departments of the

distributor to block her request. However, the sales representative found a solution. This is how the rewarding patterns unfolded:

> Pharmacist 12: *The invoicing department people would not allow him to come immediately, but his reaction was very prompt. He confirmed that the first thing he would do the next day would be to come to the pharmacy with the products, and this helped me a lot.*

The mechanism present in this case is 'willingness to support', that is, the openness of the actor to fix any issue, and, in this case, the condition might be the distributor's other departments, which can influence the outcomes. However, in the situation above, the sales representative not only removed any of the potential barriers (being blocked by the internal firm's stakeholders) but also showed openness and speed in solving the request. The pharmacist expected the sales representative to be blocked. However, by finding a solution, he exceeded the pharmacist's expectations, leading to rewarding patterns. The outcome of rewarding patterns is value co-creation. This generates short-term (in this case, that of the pharmacy customer) satisfaction. The implications for the other party are also positive. As a result of rewarding patterns, the distributor and its representatives receive special treatment, as described below:

> Pharmacist 14: *Engagement with a trusted supplier is different: they (the sales or medical representatives) do not have to wait while the products are counted and compared to the invoice.*

The speed of answering the request, a condition for this process, is critical in developing rewarding patterns. For example, a pharmacist recounted a situation when she asked the sales representative about an unknown product. He could not answer immediately but looked it up and quickly returned to the pharmacist.

> Pharmacist 16: *I asked, 'Do you know this product?' and, in two seconds sharp, X called me back.*

The interaction mechanisms in the above example are the sales representative's willingness to search, leave other tasks aside and provide an answer. The resources that the distributor's sales representative added to this interaction, and the conditions of this process, are perceived as exceptional because it is about speed and the fact that the solution was not in the hands of the sales representative's company. Instead, it was his power and disposition that enabled these rewarding patterns.

The process of reaching rewarding patterns is further described by one distributor's sales representative, who changes their route if there is a particular request from a specific pharmacy. He allocates time and incurs additional costs, and these show empathy.

Distributor 15: *In this pharmacy, she cannot have more than one piece per SKU. So, in this case, to help her, I need to be very prompt when she asks me for something.*

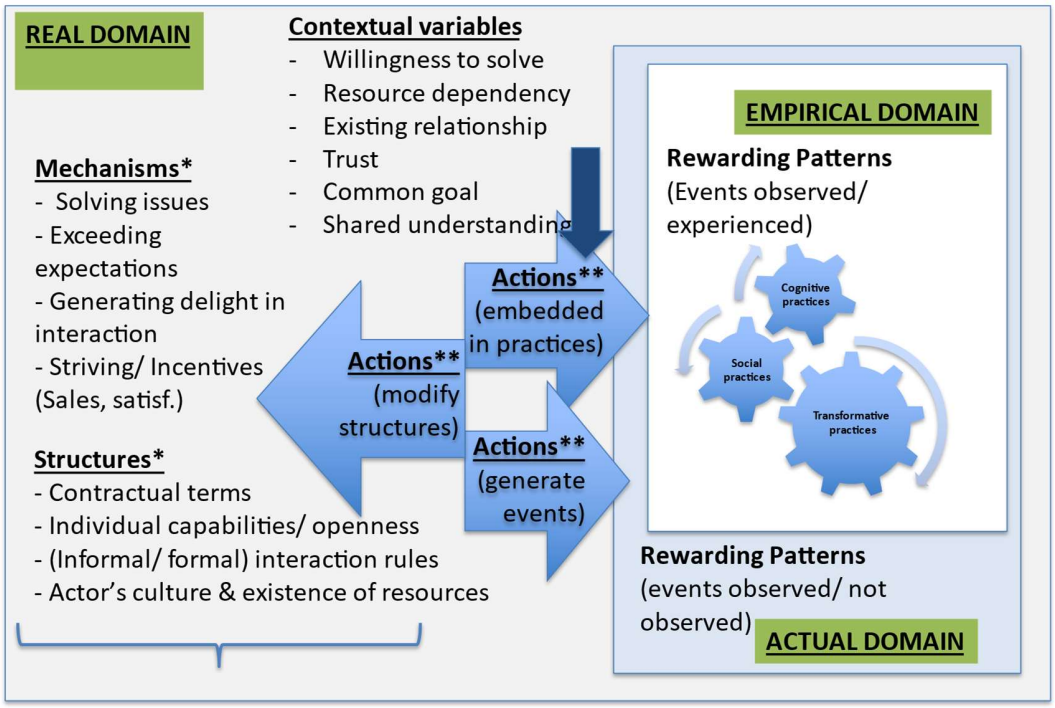
Another representative describes the importance of the partner's openness in adding additional resources or conditions to achieve rewarding patterns.

Distributor 24*: They are more open than others and tend to put in additional effort.*

Furthermore, one manufacturer's representative highlights that resources and willingness make a difference between the rewarding patterns with some businesses, but with others the manufacturer cannot achieve rewarding patterns:

Producer 3: *The small regional distributor is independent, resulting in more collaboration. They dedicate time, and they implement an increased number of activities. They are more involved than the other distributor.*

The ways the structures, mechanisms, and conditions lead to Rewarding patterns are further illustrated in Figure 8 below.



** Not observable – retroduction & researcher derived*

*** Actions have been detailed as part of BE (previous submitted chapter, part of BE Practices) .*

Figure 8. Rewarding patterns: structures, mechanisms, and conditions

6.2.2. Rewarding patterns – Practices physiology

The elements of rewarding patterns and interaction practices are further detailed below. These reveal the nature of rewarding patterns and highlight how they relate to BE practices. During rewarding patterns, all BE practices, namely social, cognitive and transformative practices, manifest. The number of implemented practices is extensive, and they have positive outcomes for the parties involved. Regarding rewarding patterns, engagement practices are not enacted in isolation; they intersect each other.

There are two specific situations where rewarding patterns have been observed. The first one is when they are triggered by the occurrence of a cognitive learning practice that involves organising and attending events. Respondents emphasised these events, and they demonstrated high levels of energy and enthusiasm when they talked about them.

> Pharmacist 1: *The companies organising these courses and seminars invite specialists, like doctors or professors, and companies also present their products and solutions during these events. Wow.*

The pharmacies' business partners organise events occasionally, depending on the context or specific need, for example when launching or re-launching product lines or announcing a breakthrough innovation. During these events, certain social practices are enacted: welcoming, which includes both greeting as well as introducing (new) participants' activities, and relationship building activities. The latter is very common, with actors engaging in establishing a deep rapport and exchanging stories. These events cover not only the cognitive practices through activities that improve expertise, but they also enable social practices and facilitate relationship building, as well as interaction with other pharmacists, professors, key opinion leaders and manufacturer's representatives.

Additionally, during cognitive practice events, participants not only improve their expertise (cognitive practices), but they also deploy networking practices (transformative practices) through advocating activities in which actors talk about each other and recommend a specific participant who has proved to exceed their expectations.

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent I*: I have been in touch with my former university colleagues, and I asked them . . . .*

It is widely accepted that there are a high number of transformative practices. During these events, calibrating operations are seen as the key to an 'increasing resources' activity. For example, pharmacists devote extra time and effort to attending these events, while

manufacturers and distributors invest financial resources in organising them by inviting recognised key opinion leaders to talk about clinical studies. Moreover, these key opinion leaders and doctors take time off from their regular work activities to prepare and present, and also devote resources to running these clinical studies.

Cognitive practices manifest at an extended level. For example, during the mini focus group, the pharmacists linked engagement directly to firms' commitment to learning by organising events. This is also linked to transformative practices as they demonstrate the firm can assist in calibrating operations by having an increased number of resources:

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent F*: The larger firms usually organise events inside or outside the pharmacy.* (Researcher: events or symposiums are seen as the highest form of engagement) *The larger the firms, the more resources are added. They have the resources to ensure the protocol. For example, in my case, the firms organise presentations.*
>
> Mini Focus Group, Respondent I*: They are better organised and have many representatives.*

In addition to calibrating operations, these events create opportunities for another transformative practice: promoting solutions, which is a natural end since during these events, attendees, pharmacists, distributors' representatives and, also, other doctors succeed in gaining additional knowledge (cognitive practice), which results in them promoting products. Participants involved in cognitive practices also engage in transformative practices as they implement practices related to promoting products by recommending the specific solutions of the person who initiated the cognitive practices.

> Pharmacist 21: *I was invited to the Sheraton, and the presentation was exceptional. The speaker was a geneticist who presented clinical studies demonstrating the benefits of Vitamin B12. The pharmacy chain I am part of does not distribute these products, and the Solgar representative was surprised. However, my feedback was positive, and the way the representative behaved made me think very highly of the company. As a result of this presentation, I was in a situation to further promote their products.*

In addition, these events can trigger other transformative practices and related activities. For example, participants gain access to an extended network during these events. Additionally, as a result of the events, participants start advocating.

The second situation where rewarding patterns have been observed is when an external factor is triggered, which makes participants search for a solution. During the field visit and direct observation, I noted that BE practices interacted with each other. Initially, actors engage in social practices, such as welcoming each other, and then, as per the case

below, they engage in a search for information, which is part of the informing aspect of cognitive practices; these lead to transformative practices, specifically to actors employing calibrating operations practice by increasing resources – in this case, mental resources required by the exchange of information between participants.

> Pharmacist 20, Direct Observation: The pharmacist mentions a need she has. The sales representative mentions the G18 product and tells the pharmacist that the standards are very tight and precise, regardless of the brand. He is immersed in this discussion, searching mentally for the right product to offer, and he exchanges ideas very quickly with the pharmacist.

Another example is a pharmacist who mentioned situations when she needed a product but did not know where to find it if it existed. So she called the distributor's sales representative about it. This can be viewed as a cognitive practice as it is an information searching activity.

> Pharmacist 16: *Since then, very time I come across an unknown product or a strange request,* X *is the first person I phone to ask if he knows product. Usually, if it is not in the GenM portfolio, he tells me to wait for him to get some information. He says, 'Give me two seconds, and I will get back to you.' In two seconds sharp, X calls me back. I hardly put down the phone or call someone else before X calls me back.'*

These cognitive practices lead to transformative calibrating operations, a practice that involves the increasing resources activity that both interacting actors have acknowledged in the joint interview. For example, the distributor's sales representative, X, left the task he was doing in order to provide the needed support and spent extra time addressing the enquiry, as did the pharmacist. In addition, if the solution was needed immediately, the distributor's sales representative would leave everything he was doing at that moment in order to serve the pharmacist.

> Distributor 5: *It was Friday, and my family and I were close to leaving for a city break. The pharmacist called me at 12.30 PM, telling me she had a patient that needed three or four items of Cold–Hot Teddy (a 3M product). I was very far away from the GenM office. If I had been closer to the office, then no issue, but I was far away. So then I put everything aside. I called my colleagues to prepare the invoice and the parcel, went to the GenM office, picked up the parcel and dropped it at the pharmacy.*

The engagement in transformative calibrating operation practice triggers another networking practice – advocating. Pharmacist 16 offers further evidence as she is responsible for a small network, talks to her colleagues directly and advocates for one sales rep representing distributor.

> Pharmacist 16: *I have the highest appreciation for X [*from Distributor*]. I can testify that every location you visit will tell you how much they appreciate him.*

A few pharmacists and distributors' representatives mentioned situations when the distributor visited during a busy time, e.g. when the pharmacist was trying to serve more

than one patient. The representative understood the difficulty of serving more than one patient simultaneously, and, with the pharmacist's endorsement or based on existing trust, he stepped in and engaged in conversation with a waiting patient. In the above example, through relationship building practices and empathising in interaction (here, the distributor's representative understanding the difficulty of the pharmacist to focus on multiple requests), which reflect social practices, actors participated in transformative practices. This is highlighted by the fact that calibrating operations practices were enacted when the other actor extended his help (the distributor's representative performed tasks beyond his responsibilities by allocating time to talk to the patient).

> Pharmacist 17: *He (the sales representative) helps when he has the opportunity. When there is someone here, he can interact with that person. So, yes, he is actively doing that. Proactively, he is approaching patients* (Researcher: here she laughs a little, and her body language indicates that sometimes his behaviour might be seen as a little intrusive).
>
> Distributor 13*: I usually supplement the explanations and details provided by the pharmacist. I had one case with a patient who wanted a post-natal product. As a result, I recommended post-surgical support, and the patient was happy.*

As outlined above, rewarding practices determine each other sometimes in a sequential manner. In addition, these practices take place simultaneously, sometimes making it very difficult to separate them from each other.

A summary of rewarding patterns and practices, the way they interact and how they are put into practice are further detailed in Table 20.

Table 20 - Rewarding patterns & physiology of practices

Rewarding patterns practices				
Social practices	**Cognitive Practices**	**Transformative Practices**		**Transactional Interactions**
… exist. and intersect with Cognitive Practices.	… are very preeminent. Intersects with Transformative E	**Dominant** Supports Social and Cognitive Practices. Source of Rewarding BE		Good Transactional interactions

6.2.3. Rewarding patterns – Outcomes

The theoretical perspective used for understanding BE and SD-Logic generally focuses on the value co-creation process. The value is co-created in the interfaces and interactions among actors that connect and integrate their resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), and value co-creation is linked to engagement (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Marcos-

Cuevas et al. (2016, p98) propose that ‘sustained and purposeful engagement is the critical mechanism to develop co-creation capabilities’.

While the distributor's representative points to resource dependency being linked to a greater willingness for engagement, this openness is based on expected outcomes. If the expected impact (firm's performance) is high, engagement is also high.

> Distributor 4*: Maybe it sounds terrible, but it depends on how much you need the other partner. If you need them more, then your attitude is different, and your commitment is different!* (Researcher: engagement is based on the dependency level. The more an actor depends on the other actor, the more likely the former is to commit more resources) *It is generated by the importance you give to that interaction. The intensity of interaction and engagement is based on the importance and impact that the interaction has on making the firm perform well.*

Another distributor's representative further underlines this. The respondent highlights the fact that engagement is driven by the need to reach internal targets (i.e. financial targets), and that makes them allocate additional resources:

> Distributor 23*: Pharmacies that are part of chains are more engaged. They feel their internal policy, the targets they have and internal competition mean they want to be the first, so they put in additional resources, are more open, and they tend to make more effort.*

The other outcomes of rewarding patterns have been derived using collected data and looking at the social, cognitive and transformative practices detailed in section 4.2. Rewarding patterns are linked to specific outcomes for interacting actors: having positive feelings, trust, respect and appreciation for other interacting actors. In addition, rewarding patterns lead to actors creating a solid connection or maintaining interest in continuing the relationship. As a result of networking practices embedded in rewarding patterns, actors are promoted by others; there is a realised relevancy of actors to the network. By promoting solutions, actors create awareness and demand for products. Cognitive practices make actors expand know-how, which leads to recommending the right solution and to broadening perspectives.

On the other hand, cognitive and social practices help establish an initial connection (e.g. through events). Then, through calibrating operations, which are part of transformative practices, actors get support and solve issues faster. These lead to actors achieving their financial targets (sales) and other objectives and generating customer satisfaction.

Table 21 below summarises the value co-created practices as revealed by this research and details how they relate to different forms of capital values.

Table 21 - Rewarding patterns and value

	Rewarding patterns			Value co-creation	
	Practices	**Activities**	**Comments**	**Ends/ Value**	
Cognitive Practices	Informing	Searching for info	Triggered by external factors	Create awareness and demand.	
		Sharing knowledge			
	Learning	Product Training	Not recorded/ not needed	Expanding know-how (that leads to Recommending the right solution) Customer satisfaction; Broaden perspectives;	
		Acquiring network knowledge	Facilitated by events		
		Organising & attending events	Taking place once in a while, with many actors attending		
Social Practices (SPs)	Welcoming	Greeting	Customary, taking place at the beginning of interactions	Establish an initial connection (Events); Create a strong connection/ Maintain interest in continuing the relationship.	
		Introducing actors	Especially for big events		
	Building relationships	Empathising	Not recorded		
		Establishing rapport	Especially for big events		
		Exchanging stories			
Transformative Practices	Calibrating operations	Extending help	Triggered by a third party	Getting/ receiving support and solving issues faster.	
		Increasing resources	Dominant activity		
	Networking	Advocating	It is an activity that is generated by exceptional efforts	Being promoted to others/ Relevancy to the network;	
		Operating in the network		Having positive feelings, trust, respect and appreciation;	
	Promoting solutions	Recommending solution	It is an activity that is linked to events	Achieve financial targets (Sales) and other objectives.	
		Sampling	This activity is part of the events.		

6.2.4. Discussion: Rewarding patterns and value co-creation

According to the findings on Rewarding patterns, high and intense BE creates value for network actors, in line with prior studies that point out actors tend to engage only if they expect to derive value from cooperation (Hoyer et al., 2010, Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018). Nevertheless, driven by the well-established advantages of companies' positive

engagement (Naumann et al., 2017)., the literature provides some insights into positive engagement (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Rewarding patterns have been derived when Transformative practices exist, particularly Calibrating operations practice, including solving business challenges, which needs actors to leverage further resources and involve other actors. Engagement is strongly influenced by this resource dependency (Scheer et al., 2015, Jonas et al., 2018). Rewarding patterns unfold when, as a case in point, a pharmacist is required to address the request placed by a patient or a doctor. The pharmacist relies on the distributor's rep for identifying a solution, demonstrating the linkage between engagement, knowledge usage, and the process of identifying the final solution.

Rewarding patterns is also triggered by cognitive practices, such as organising or attending events. Making investments and allowing others to learn indicate commitment to the relationship (Nyaga et al., 2010). Designing vital customer experiences should be prioritised by firms (Witell et al., 2020, Harby, 2018) by involving a broad array of more actors. Also involved are considerable amount of resources via Calibrating operations practice capable of resulting in BE Rewarding patterns. Thus, actors participate in a bond that can be nurtured further. According to prior studies, networking helps maintain and further enhance relational exchanges (Paulraj et al., 2008).

One of the primary reasons underpinning actor engagement, as reiterated by previous existing research (Raile et al., 2008, Jonas et al., 2018) is interpersonal relationship exemplified via interaction and communication beyond the work. This observation is in line with existing research carried out by Uzzi (1997), according to which actors belonging to varied organisations who are personally more familiar with each other are more likely to engage for work-related issues (Breschi and Lissoni, 2009, Jonas et al., 2018). Rewarding patterns have also been observed in relationships between actors that are familiar to each other, as per prior studies (Chandler and Lusch, 2015, Jonas et al., 2018).

This research contradicts some literature focusing on the business-to-business engagement characteristic of formalisation/rationality by showing Rewarding patterns premised on dominant social practices with an affective element present (Reinartz and

Berkmann (2018). Even as the transactional aspect of the business-to-business exchange remains intrinsically rational, the emotional connection is a vita aspect of engagement (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019). The notion that social practices form a key aspect of Rewarding patterns concurs with the research of Harrison et al. (1996), who contend that stakeholders must enter into a bond of some kind via shared history to collaborate successfully.

6.3. Routine patterns – Positive valence and intensity

While the engagement literature (Brodie et al., 2013, Hollebeek and Chen, 2014) presents high engagement as an ideal state, the findings of Jonas et al. (2018) indicate that while inter-organisational engagement is not always high, the results for actors can be excellent, and they call for additional research to examine why this is the case. Based on their insights and this empirical research, it can be argued that a form of engagement, expressed as routine patterns, can explain how these promising results were reached.

BE unfolds differently when there is positive valence and low intensity. This is the case with routine patterns. Routine patterns are based on a dynamic and iterative process, with regular frequency characterised by interaction episodes of some intensity, though not as high as for rewarding patterns, which reflect actors' investment in regular resources in their interactions with other connected actors for the benefit of their own, interacting actors and involved others.

During a field visit by a sales representative, an example of routine patterns was observed and described in the notes.

> Pharmacist 11 Observation*:* He greeted the personnel. As in all the other pharmacies, the sales representative stepped behind the counter and checked the products. The pharmacist in charge (a replacement for the pharmacy manager) and the sales representative agreed regarding the order and the payment of a previous invoice. This interaction was not exceptional; it was routine based, mainly because the pharmacist manager was not on duty.

More details about the nature of routine patterns, structures, mechanisms and conditions are presented below.

6.3.1. Routine patterns: Structures, mechanisms and conditions

As in the case of rewarding patterns, retroduction, in which the researcher makes inferences, was used to identify and explain the social structures, causal powers and generative mechanisms based on empirical investigation by Hu (2018).

In the equilibrium phase, routine patterns can be seen as an interaction, indicating that BE is in place, but the interaction can run smoothly with adequate, typical resources being allocated.

> Producer 24*: At the end, you as a company can reach equilibrium at the moment. Even with the former distributor, we could have a relative equilibrium when we had a different category manager.*

The producer exemplifies the relationship with a large distributor with whom they reached an equilibrium, which helped the producer reach the objectives, distribution or market footprint while specific resources were being allocated.

> Producer 3*: A big (national) company gives us a national distribution for our products.*

In the example above, the actors, a manufacturer and a distributor, have created routine patterns based on a mechanism of interaction to reach equilibrium or maintain business continuity. This mechanism is based on the condition that specific resources are added to interactions. The example below further underlines this.

> Producer 24*: Internally, they might have decided: for specific suppliers that represent, for example, 0.5% of turnover, allocate X time, or the activities that you need to do for this supplier need to be limited to Y.*

While equilibrium is a state observed in many business interactions with pharmacies, respondents also mentioned external factors that lead routine patterns to transform into rewarding patterns. A respondent described a specific situation that was an example of a routine pattern that transformed into a rewarding pattern. The example below highlights that rewarding patterns are sometimes based on existing routine patterns. The BE was transformed and influenced by a specific issue, driven by requests from a third party. In the example below, the pharmacist had a routine pattern with the distributor's representative. However, in a specific situation, a request from a patient made the pharmacist and distributor's representative increase their engagement, resulting in a change from a routine pattern to a rewarding pattern. This change requires the other actor to have the disposition and power to respond.

> Distributor 5: *So the product stays on the shelves, and they discover it when someone demands it. The pharmacist, Y, calls me. 'X, I need that plaster, and it needs to be …. Here are all the details as a patient needs it,' Then X says, 'Y, you have it in your drawer.' Then Y asks, 'Do I have it in my pharmacy?'*

One distributor's representative describes the relationship and mechanism for achieving and maintaining routine patterns as getting the work done in a consistent, predictable way, eliminating all unknowns or unclear issues.

> Distributor 5: '*The relationship is excellent and based on correctitude and professionalism. The pharmacist manager does not like grey areas, so things can be black or white. If work is done, then everyone is content.*'

The BE remains routine, and it looks as if it does not have anything special, like requiring a high number of resources. It is very close to a routine, as it was observed:

> Pharmacist 8 Observation*: Evidently the relationship and interaction were routine-based but very positive.*

So the BE evolved from routine to rewarding patterns. The two actors were getting in touch for the benefit of another actor, with positive results for all. This situation requires the other actor, in this case the distributor's sales representative, to have the disposition and power to respond.

Due to the rules in place, imposed by chain pharmacies, most of the interactions in the pharmaceutical industry are transactional, with just some characterised by routine patterns and a few showing rewarding patterns. The excerpt below is part of a memo written immediately after visits to a few pharmacies that are part of a big chain. The memo indicated that routine patterns are still different from transactional interactions, as detailed below:

> Day 2 Observation*: There was a big difference between chain pharmacies and independent ones: the interaction is not as intense. Strong relationships cannot be developed in these chains as the headquarters strictly regulate the interaction. The interaction tends to be very exchange driven, with a few exceptions.*

For the actors to remain on the positive side of BE, their routine patterns must be enriched with episodes of rewarding ones. A critical outcome of routine patterns is that they create the foundation for a potential change to rewarding patterns. Routine patterns carry a risk. If two interacting actors have routine continuous patterns, their relationship may be transformed into transactional interactions. The manufacturer's representative talks about the routine patterns she had with a distributor, which became transactional interactions due to internal factors, particularly some organisational changes:

> Producer 24: *When a new category manager was allocated and received internal guidelines on how to interact and other internal objectives, which we were unaware of, we failed to synchronise. Suddenly, we were not able to interact.*

In the case above, the relationship turned from routine patterns to transactional interactions, and in the end, it completely stopped. Unfortunately for actors, some of these changes are unforeseeable and difficult to predict.

Figure 9 further illustrates how structures, mechanisms and conditions lead to routine patterns.

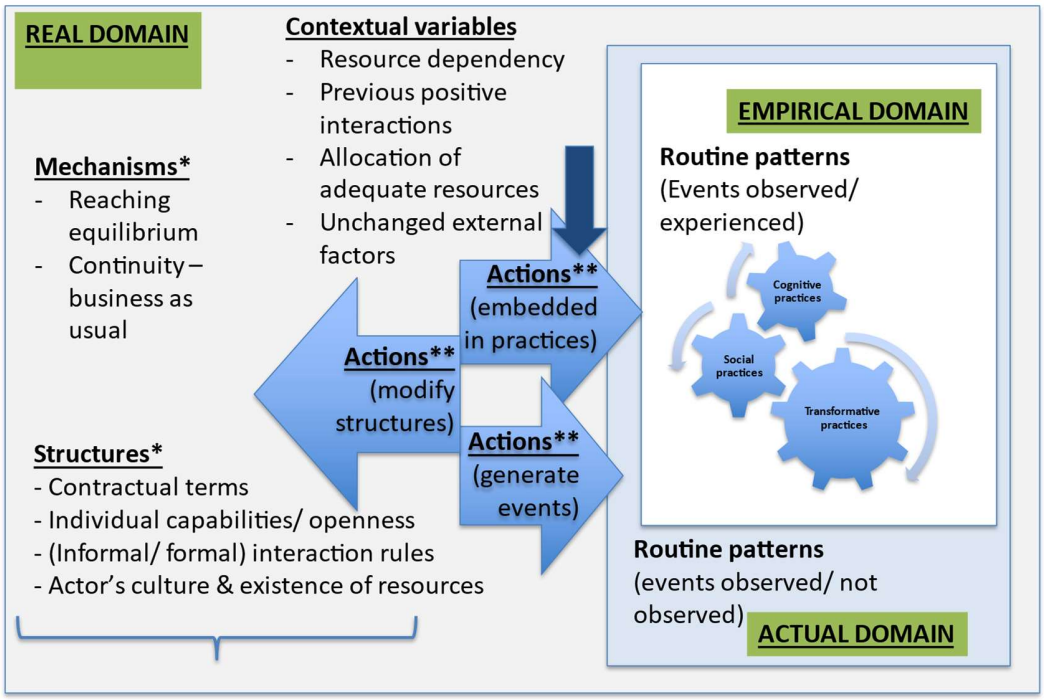


Figure 9. Routine patterns: mechanisms, structures, and conditions

6.3.2. Routine patterns and practices' physiology

By looking at the routine patterns and practices intersections, or routine patterns physiology, this research aims to understand how these changes occur and the potential outcomes for all involved. All BE practices (i.e. social, cognitive and transformative) contain Routine patterns. The number of practices exercised is more limited than for rewarding patterns but still has positive outcomes for the parties involved. The routine patterns and corresponding practices and their interactions are detailed below. They further reveal the nature of the routine patterns.

Routine patterns compared to transactional interactions involve resources and interactions with some intensity. Routine patterns involve actors exhibiting all BE practices, with social ones being prevalent. Transformative practices are mainly focused on solution-promoting practices, while cognitive, informing and learning practices are present, but they are also light or casual, the same as transformative practices.

During routine patterns, actors need to invest in social practices. Therefore, for routine patterns, actors devote more resources to social practices to maintain their good relationships and secure positive transactional interactions, both actual and all the expected future ones.

Routine patterns are triggered by ongoing relationships and proper transaction interactions. They are based on the excellent relationships that the actors have. For example, one of the distributor's representatives mentioned that social practices (building relationships by establishing rapport) helped him, along with good transactional interactions to achieve transformative practices – promoting products by having high point of sale visibility.

> Distributor 5*: I visit this pharmacy every week. Due to the relationship I have built, I can go behind the counter, take the keys from the window display and check the stock thoroughly. I check what is missing, take notes, and the next day I come and I bring the order and take the money. The visibility is excellent for my products.*

The focus group provides insights into the sequences of engagement practices. For example, pharmacists mentioned that actors socialise with them, and during their chitchat, they also give pharmacists information they know is valuable for them. Therefore, actors' social practice of establishing rapport leads to cognitive practices, more specifically informing (searching for info) and also learning (acquiring network knowledge) practices, as actors get an understanding of what happens with other actors:

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent I: *Yes. True. They also tell us this info* (about prices in other pharmacies) *without being asked. They tell us if we have higher prices, especially for their products, and I tell them the price.*

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent F: *Yes, it is a reasonable price, but at Farmacia Tei it is ... Now Dr Max is also cheaper.* (Researcher: respondents shared their experiences between each other, not only with me).

During their interactions, the actors enact all social practices. I observed their social interactions and captured them in my field notes. For example, during the field visit and direct observation, I noticed that the actors engaged in various social practices: welcoming

with greetings and my introduction (new actor). These practices paved the way to engage in building relationships practices. I also observed that there was empathy in the interaction. One example is based on field observation during which the distributor's sales representative asked a pharmacist about their cold, which was a sign of empathy. Also, the actors exchanged stories during this interaction.

> Pharmacist 8 Observation*:* X, the distributor's sales representative, talked about the previous visit. At that time, one of the pharmacists had a cold, and, even today, she had many clothes on, a sign that the cold was not gone. The other pharmacist sneezed. X said, 'Bless you' and asked if their cold had gone. The pharmacist in charge said it would probably be gone by their next visit. They were exchanging a few jokes about this.

An example of the social practice of building relationships through an establishing rapport activity was done to strengthen the relationship further. This is from direct observation in one pharmacy. The field notes highlighted that the sales representative had engaged in social practice.

> Pharmacy 8 Observation: The other pharmacist sneezed, and the distributor's sales representative said, 'Bless you' and asked if their cold had gone. The pharmacist in charge said it would probably be gone by the next visit. They were exchanging a few jokes about this. The relationship and interaction were routine based but very positive.

In another pharmacy, a relationship building practice conducted through a rapport establishing activity served as the foundation for transactional interaction.

> Pharmacy 9 Observation*:* They started to make jokes, interact positively and engage with each other. Order was maintained during this social part.

Social practices are combined with both transactional interaction and cognitive practices: Sharing knowledge, is a transformative practice that includes promoting solutions practices: implementing point of sales materials (POSMs), and organising campaigns, as exemplified by one pharmacist.

> Pharmacist 1: *We have reps visiting us and presenting products that we have already listed in our portfolio, campaigns that will be implemented, competitions for end-users as advertised on TV and prizes, like computers and roller skates. We also have in the pharmacy a situation with the rented plan-o-gram* (space that the producer rented in the pharmacy). *The reps are coming and checking if the plan-o-gram contains the products agreed upon. In addition, if there is a specific order from a patient, I order the products we do not have, and those sold out are brought into the pharmacy by the producers' reps.*

Generally, for pharmacies that are part of a chain, the actors usually have a transactional orientation as strict rules guide all interactions. Both representatives confirm these facts.

> Pharmacist *22: The rules are stringent for this chain and the previous chain! Discussions and negotiations between chain and manufacturer were carried out by the main office/ headquarters.*

> Distributor 13*: They see only the profit centre. They do not believe in a specific product! It is because they do not have time. They have 6,000+ products to look after in their pharmacy. The only way business with a personal touch would work in a chain pharmacy is when the pharmacist recommending it is also using that product.*

However, there are exceptions. For these pharmacies, transformative practice (promoting products) helps actors break the boundaries of imposed rules and interaction focused on transactions to unfold routine patterns.

> Distributor 13*: I have very little interaction. The only time I am more involved is when we have special marketing events: a special promo activity.*

During these occasions, actors succeed in getting in touch on a different level, and the relationships move to routine patterns. For example, in one of my memos, I wrote:

> Memo (Building relationships): This kind of BE tends to remain for a long time in the latent stage unless the other actor brings some additional resources into play.

Table 22 below provides a summary of routine patterns and the anatomy of practices.

Table 22 - Routine patterns and physiology of practices

Routine patterns – Practices				
Social Practices (SPs)	**Cognitive practices (CPs)**	**Transformative Practices (TvPs)**		**Transactional interactions (TIs)**
Very prominent! Building relationships Intersect with Transactional interactions, but also with CPs and TvPs	Limited CPs (some Informing and some Learning)	Limited TvPs (i.e. Promoting Solutions)		Transactional Interactions that have cadence and rhythm. All TIs Practices are standard with positive outcomes. **An essential foundation for Routine BE**
Actions (as part of practices) are enabled under each dimension.				
Critical to devote resources to 'Building relationships' practices.	Sharing Knowledge; Searching for info; Acquiring network knowledge.	'Promoting solutions' and Organizing campaigns, Implementing POSMs)		

SPs = Social practices; CPs = Cognitive practices; TvPs = Transformative practices; TIs = Transactional interactions.

6.3.3. Routine patterns – Outcomes

Routine patterns are also linked to value co-creation. They are linked to the stability and predictability of the actions of and outcomes for interacting actors, maintaining sales and market footprint. In addition, they create a foundation for change to rewarding patterns.

For routine patterns, the expected outcomes are not different from rewarding patterns. Businesses expect the value to be co-created. One pharmacist emphasises the fact that value co-creation is essential:

> Pharmacy 12: *If a company makes a profit, it might invest in the business and salaries, so we need to contribute to the return. So it is like a domino effect.*

In a few cases, maintaining a good relationship and routine triggered an affective response from the pharmacy: care about the resources of the other party and empathy. There was a reward for all parties as the relationship continued in the same positive way when the pharmacist moved to a different pharmacy.

> Pharmacist 16: *I told him not to come as it meant wasted resources for him: time, fuel and energy. Better to communicate with each other by phone. But he still came.*

One distributor's representative further reveals the importance of routine patterns and proper interactions and their outcomes:

> Distributor 4: *Numbers* (Researcher: here respondent refers to sales and profit) *are not the most important objective. The numbers are coming only if we succeed in interacting properly and developing relationships. We can obtain a lot, but we do not realise this.*

The same distributor's representative advises the importance of keeping the right balance regarding the resources, not increasing them excessively all the time. Keeping the business in routine, with maybe some peaks to reach rewarding, gives the firm the right approach to value co-creation while protecting resources.

> Distributor 4: *Knowing the history, it is clear that you are inclined to stay connected and receptive. You have some background. However, it is important to realise where you need to draw a line as you need the firm to be careful not to reach an extreme when taking decisions that might affect you.*

Based on routine patterns and enacted practices and knowing from section 4.2. the corresponding outcomes, the value co-created is presented in Table 21. Table 23 details these routine patterns and practices, as well as the value co-created by actors and the specific outcomes or ends/ value.

Table 23 - Routine patterns and value/ outcomes

	Routine patterns			Value co-creation	
	Practices	**Activities**	**Comments**	**Ends/ Value**	
Cognitive	Informing	Searching for info	Triggered by external factors or specific needs.	Create awareness and demand.	
		Sharing knowledge			

	Learning	Product Training	These are practices that take place throughout informal interactions.	Expanding know-how (that leads to Recommending the right solution); Customer satisfaction;	
		Acquiring network knowledge			
		Organizing & attending events	Not taking place		
Social Practices (SPs)	Welcoming	Greeting	Customary, taking place at the beginning of interactions	Establish an initial connection; Create a strong connection/ Maintain interest in continuing the relationship; Felling good; Protect the other (cost)	
		Introducing actors	Only if it is the case – context depended		
	Building relationships	Empathizing	This is the dominant practice		
		Establishing rapport			
		Exchanging stories			
Transformative Practices	Calibrating operations	Extending help	Not taking place		
		Increasing resources			
	Networking	Advocating	These are activities that might be implemented and are potentially the outcomes of Routine patterns.	Being promoted to others/ Relevancy to the network;	
		Operating in the network		Having positive feelings, trust, respect and appreciation;	
	Promoting solutions	Recommending solution	It is an activity that is linked to events	Achieve financial targets (Sales) and other objectives.	
		Sampling	This activity that might take place, however, was not observed/ recorded		
		Organizing campaigns	These are activities for Routine patterns.		
		Implementing POSMs			

6.3.4. Discussion: Routine patterns and value co-creation

The existence of Routine patterns and their contribution in creating value for actors is one of the salient findings of this research. Previous research has largely focused on extremely high engagement as the ideal state (this extreme engagement is labelled as Rewarding patterns in the present study characterised by high-intensity/ positive engagement). This is tantamount to undermining a bulk of Routine BE patterns and ends up missing an engagement that is not transactional interaction. The current research's findings validate the empirical findings of confirm Jonas et al. (2018), as per which engagement between organisations s not always high. Nevertheless, the firms' results can be excellent, reflecting the presence of an unknown construct.

The fact that engagement is not constant is another contradictory or surprising outcome of the current study. Some supportive arguments in organizational behaviour studies must be considered as customer engagement research stems from the concept of employee engagement. According to George (2010, p.253), 'engagement may best be viewed as a dynamic process that fluctuates over time… I suggest that fluctuations in levels of engagement may be beneficial for a variety of reasons and uniformly high levels of engagement may be detrimental'. When examining employee engagement, the researcher portends the advantages of volatile engagement levels.

George (2010) opines that engagement is required 'when there are real problems and the need for improvements and change' (p. 259), which is in line with this research's findings: Rewarding patterns emerge owing to special events or external requests requiring actors to find a solution. Through Transformative practices, Rewarding patterns indicate additional costs invested by interactive actors. Hence, Routine patterns should be deemed critical as they deliver control and stability over costs although it is important for researchers as well as business actors to achieve Rewarding patterns of BE. The focal firm, or the distributor, poignantly observed the risk in this study. One representative of the of the distributor remarked, '[You] need to draw a line, as you need as a firm to be aware that you do not go to extremes, to take some decisions that would affect you.'

Business actors understand how to communicate and work together (Jonas et al., 2018). Although Routine partner interactions have been acknowledged in the past (Vivek et al., 2021), the present research denotes the first empirical one that establishes their linkage with business engagement. In this context, some actors exchange knowledge and information to attain their goals (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

Intensity is what distinguishes Rewarding patterns from Routine; the former is characterised by high intensity, whereas the latter is characterised by lower intensity. Also, many Transformative practices were observed for Rewarding patterns, whereas Routine is premised more on social practices. Transformative practices necessitate additional resources. Calibrating operation practice includes 'Extending help' and 'Increasing resources' activities that are most financially draining for the focal firm. Furthermore, additional resources are devoted to Rewarding in comparison to Routine

patterns. Costs during Routines are maintained within the acceptable range to meet the expectations of customers. It is this cost control that is pivotal for the financial results of a firm. Reinartz and Berkmann (2018) identify certain behaviours they view as 'Tactical engagement', implying that a focal firm invests in a relationship at the cost of generating goodwill.

6.4. Conflictual patterns

Following the definition of BE detailed in Chapter Two, a definition of conflictual patterns is proposed**.** Conflictual patterns result from a dynamic and iterative process characterised by highly intense interactions that reflect actors' high investment of resources that erode their interactions with other connected actors, leading to undesirable outcomes for interacting actors and indirectly for involved others.

6.4.1. Conflictual patterns: Structures, mechanisms and conditions

Actors involved in interactions usually reject the idea of conflictual patterns as this can have negative impacts. It is challenging to make pharmacists talk about negative interactions. During the focus group, a pharmacist shared the following with me:

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent F: *This is rare. Conflicts are not common. We do not want the above conflicts, nor do our partners.*

An example comes from direct observation. I was in a pharmacy, interviewed the pharmacist and asked about her negative experiences. She mentioned twice that she could not recall any negative experiences. Then one supplier delivered her order to a nearby pharmacy, leaving it there for three days. When the assistant pharmacist told her, the pharmacist was clearly showing discontent, a sign of a negative interaction. She picked up the phone to call the supplier. Afterwards she stopped and shared with me that this was not the first time: she had repeatedly asked the supplier for standard delivery to her pharmacy. The improper order handling or failure to deliver against expectations was the mechanism that led to the conflictual patterns. The pharmacist and the distributors interacted and created a product order in this case. Then the distributor, instead of following the previously agreed delivery terms (in this case the structure), decided to drop the order at a different location. The pharmacists would have called the distributor and argued or fought over the wrong delivery, showing conflictual patterns. The mechanism

in this case is ‘arguing or disagreeing’. Another respondent, a participant in the focus group, provides an example:

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent F*: The rep told me, ‘But I am not accountable for that.’ I replied, ‘Me neither. I cannot be accountable for these mistakes.’ Then the rep said, ‘But I had them on my desk, and I forgot to take them.’ I told him, ‘No problem, you go back, not today but tomorrow and bring them here. And then I can pay.’ The rep left, slamming the door, and I assume he cursed me as well.*

The pharmacist revealed that this was not the first time it had happened, so conflictual patterns are generated through repeated improper interactions. Lack of trust is one of the specific features or conditions of conflictual patterns, as indicated by one respondent:

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent F*: I believe some intentionally adopt this behaviour.*

Pharmacist 12 recalled another situation when she had a negative experience. Her headquarters recommended that she interact with a specific supplier. Therefore, she ordered some products, but the end-users wanted to know some specific features of one product. She was trying to contact the firm supplying the products without being very successful. She had specific expectations from the other part: to contact the warehouse to check the product features and communicate back to her. She repeatedly asked for this information without the supplying firm being able or willing to provide it. In this case, the mechanism for reaching the outcome (conflictual patterns) failed to deliver up to expectations.

Another example of a negative high-intensity interaction came from Pharmacist 14, who had repeatedly invested many resources in an interaction. However, the supplier was not clear: the pharmacy was blocked from ordering due to delayed payments (a condition that influences the mechanism's output). This situation generated a lot of negative feelings and comments. In this situation, if there are no alternatives to get the same or similar products, the relationships may continue but remain toxic for both parties. The interaction is affective (negative) and erodes resources on both sides: the pharmacist's time and then the negative word of mouth feedback, and most probably products that are not promoted to end-users.

Pharmacist 20 recalled conflictual patterns when she almost felt pushed to order a new product, a special toothbrush for teenagers, which she did not believe in (an example of a faulty transactional interaction). The structure here is the pharmacy, the supplier and the manufacturer interaction. The manufacturer and distributor presented and promoted the product. The pharmacist rejected the solution (a mechanism), which, in her opinion, did not have a real value to the end-user (the condition). The previous examples demonstrate operational problems and complaint behaviour as a form of expressing conflictual patterns. This example is different as it relates to the strategic direction or viability of a product of the interacting partner. However, in this example, it also generated the same outcome: conflictual patterns since the pharmacist felt this 'new product' was used as an excuse for her pharmacy to order more products and to increase the transactional interaction or activity.

Pharmacist 20 gave another example of conflictual business engagement. She described a case of distributor representatives that repeatedly tried to make the pharmacy establish at least some transactional interactions. However, the pharmacist did not like the supplier representative, and she did not trust him as he did not make any attempt to understand her way of working. She described him in negative terms (calling him 'pesky' and saying, 'I do not know how his family puts up with him.'). Through the mechanism of 'pushing back' and influenced by the fact that the products were not irreplaceable, she stopped the relationship, despite the pharmacy headquarters' contractual terms with that distributor. This indicates that if the other party is not socially accepted, it may be impossible to reach any other conclusion (transactional interaction). Even when a higher-order organisational structure (i.e. the headquarters) regulates and endorses the relationship between the pharmacy and the potential supplier, the supplier's pushback or denial might occur.

All the above conditions are included in the initial list of conditions that influence the mechanism: willingness to solve, resource dependency, existing relationship, trust, common goal, and shared understanding of institutional arrangements.

Figure 10 illustrates the interplay between mechanisms, structures and conditions.

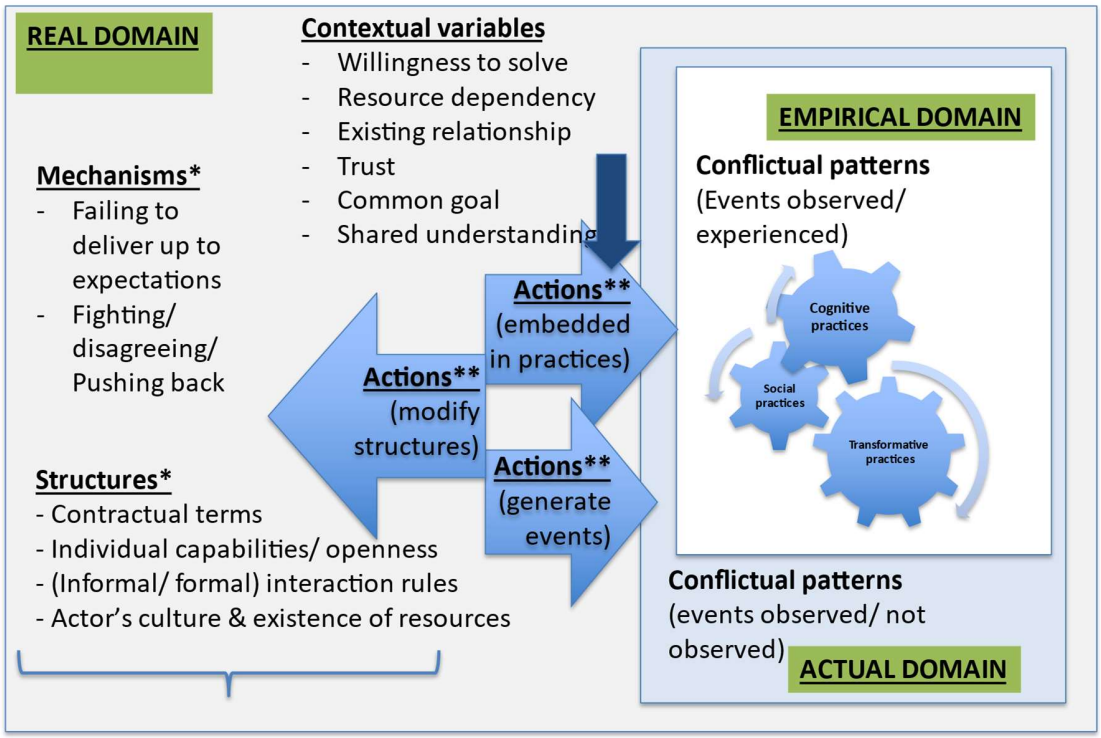


Figure 10. Conflictual Patterns: Mechanisms, structures and conditions

6.4.2. Conflictual patterns – Practices physiology

The elements of conflictual patterns and their interactions are detailed below. This description will further reveal the nature of conflictual patterns and highlight how they relate to BE practices. Conflictual patterns include all BE dimensions: social, cognitive and transformative engagements. However, the number of practices exercised is limited, and practices adversely affect actors.

In general, repeated errors during transactional interactions drive toward conflictual patterns. For example, previous unfulfilled commitments experienced during transactional interactions, where one party struggled to deliver up to expectations, led to conflictual patterns. Also, based on direct observation and also interviews, repeated mistakes in transactional interactions and improper relationship management lead to a conflictual business engagement.

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent I: *It takes way too long, causing negative feelings. For example, when trying to promote their products. As an example, when the rep tried to switch the patient to the product she or he sells.*
>
> Mini Focus Group, Respondent F: *For example, I asked company X as with the last three orders they did not supply what I asked for. They did not send me the ordered products, and then they forgot something else. I cannot remember what exactly.*

Social practices exist but are basic and do not generate pleasant outcomes. Sometimes improper social engagement can generate pushback, even though other pharmacies that are part of the same chain endorse the relationship. One pharmacist indicated her discontent with an actor who does not follow the regular social engagement of greeting protocols. Sometimes actors participate in a practice that is opposite to building relationships as they fight to establish rapport, and there is little to no empathy in interaction.

One pharmacist gives an example. While reaching other actors of the interacting partner, she gives them the sign of her discontent. She is showing the opposite of empathising in interaction, a clear sign of conflictual patterns.

> Pharmacist 14: *To whom should I talk nicely? To the lady at the warehouse?*

Another pharmacist details one interesting aspect related to conflictual patterns. In order to reach and feel empathy in interaction for the specific situation created in her pharmacy, she increased the connectivity with the other company. As she had a product with a high inventory value that was due to expire, and she could not experience empathy with the sales representative, she had to reach the upper management of the producer.

> Pharmacist 1: *I called the company manager and asked for help with the products. I explained I could not give them to other pharmacies; there were no patients for the products, and I tried everything. So I asked for help to solve this situation. Unfortunately, the manager moved from Sibiu to another city, but I succeeded in finding him, and he finally helped me.*

Social practices manifest only at a limited level. The primary social practice developed by the interacting actors relates to informing, namely searching for information that is missing. The actors resume searching and talking about the issue (the wrong order) to fix the source of erosion. One surprising insight about conflictual patterns is that they are more enduring than previous research has highlighted. Conflictual patterns come with increased resources, which means transformative interactions in the form of calibrating operations practice are needed to solve the source of conflict. This increase in resources equates to businesses having additional costs. As a result, I would expect actors involved

in conflictual patterns to find ways to resolve the situation quickly. However, the research underlines that this is a more enduring situation, with at least one party adding more resources and costs to fix the situation. Although there are alternatives to the existing partnership, the parties remain connected during conflictual patterns and continue to interact.

> Pharmacist 14: *I wrote an email to order on 11th Oct; yesterday I wrote an email again asking about the products in my order. Even today, I have not received an answer.*

With conflictual patterns**,** cognitive practices lead to transformative practice, which manifests through two types of practices. In the case of transformative engagement, I should note that a limited number of practices are involved. One of them is related to calibrating operations. In this regard, when conflictual patterns arise, actors calibrate operations by increasing resources. Actors intend to solve the issue and minimise the potential loss with practice.

> Pharmacist 12: *Last month, I received 500 boxes of Panadol and this month, I will receive another 300 boxes of Panadol (the same company), even though I did not exhaust the other order. However, I have not received the order for insulin. From the same company! Moreover, in addition, I had to call them three times.*

In addition to the pharmacists above, who mentioned multiple connections with the other parties, one pharmacist described the situation below, also emphasising additional time spent, an indication of transformative practice in calibrating operations (increasing resources) practice:

> Pharmacist 12: *This part of the communication was lacking. We had this situation – we phoned and ordered, and even had a face-to-face meeting, and I ordered, and the products arrived after 2–3 weeks. We had one time when we they doubled the orders.*

As there was no empathy in interaction, which is the opposite to the social practice of building relationships, the transformative networking practice experienced was the opposite of advocating. One of the mini focus group respondents highlighted that conflictual patterns end with negative consequences and talked negatively about a company that provides negative experiences:

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent I: *If the firms are not credible and do not engage as we engage, we move them to the blacklist. The owner of the pharmacy has a blacklist. We sometimes argue about the names on it.*

Once a supplier is placed on the blacklist, there is no way for the actors to engage in transformative promoting solutions, practices that are completely blocked as a result of conflictual patterns.

A summary of the conflictual patterns practices and their interactions are provided in Table 24 below.

Table 24 - Conflictual patterns and physiology of practices

Conflictual patterns Practices				
Social	**Cognitive**	**Transformative**		**Transactional interactions**
It exists, but it is limited: Informing & Building relationships (Negative)	It exists, and it contains a few practices. It leads to Transformative	Exists, it contains a few practices: Calibrating operations (Increasing resources) and Networking (opposite of Advocating)		Defective TI (improper use of resources by one party) are the leading cause of Conflictual patterns. **Source of Conflictual patterns**

6.4.3. Conflictual patterns – Outcomes

Understanding conflictual patterns is critical as it leads to value destruction, which can be damaging for all parties involved.

Conflictual patterns lead to resources being spent in vain and contribute to losing patients and declining sales. Time is the most significant loss for the pharmacy.

> Pharmacist 13: *There are problems! The order is not delivered on time or too late. There are missing products from the order, or the order includes deteriorated products. It takes a long time to fix these issues.*

Focus group participants acknowledged this waste of resources (i.e. additional time spent arguing by both interacting parties) and recognised the lengthy process linked to conflictual patterns:

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent I*: It takes way too long, causing negative feelings.*

Conflictual patterns have implications, not only for the interacting actors but also for others in the network (i.e. patients or doctors), and erosion is transmitted to all.

> Pharmacist 18*: It is a chain with a domino effect. If one link in the chain is broken, the business works more slowly, making it more difficult to achieve results.*

The outcome, as described by Pharmacist 20, is ‘when there is a negative interaction and engagement I avoid recommending’.

The outcomes of conflictual patterns are losing trust in the manufacturer/ pharmacist, increasing suspicion in interactions, and generating negative word of mouth feedback. This case also highlights the value destruction that conflictual patterns can generate. The relationship, in this case, continues as the pharmacy has other products from the same manufacturer and distributor, but a different outcome is that their future interactions will remain potentially only as transactional interactions.

Overall, conflictual patterns outcomes are value destruction for all actors involved. Pharmacists as well as supplies and manufacturers, end-users and patients are all negatively impacted.

In addition, while there are clear negative impacts, such as negative word of mouth feedback, as opposed to advocating, the pharmacist did not stop the transactional interactions. I asked whether she would continue recommending the solution, and she said yes, but her body language highlighted her hesitation. She continued saying that she needed that information but then changed the subject to the pharmacy's headquarters' role in providing alternatives. She had relative independence to start new partnerships. However, she did not have enough resources to confront the risk of searching and starting a new partnership. As a result, she continues the existing one, where she can cope with the fact that she knows what to expect and, therefore, act accordingly. Therefore, she would continue to have the products and interact with that supplier. There was a reluctance to change the relationship, although clearly this did not work. It is unclear how long these conflictual patterns will last and whether actors will continue to have transactional interactions or stop interacting.

Once established, network connections are hard to destroy, even after repeated conflicts. All parties seem to put all the required effort to reach equilibrium, with a relationship only ending in infrequent circumstances. Focus group participants also recognise this.

> Mini Focus Group, Respondent F: *This situation (*Researcher: conflictual patterns*) is rare. Conflicts are not common. We do not want the above conflicts, nor do our partners. It is uncommon to terminate relationships.*

Mini Focus Group, Respondent F: *We stop just if they make big mistakes!*

Conflictual patterns, their enacted practices and the corresponding outcomes (or ends/ value) are detailed in Table 25.

Table 25 - Conflictual patterns and value/ outcomes

Business engagement practices			**Conflictual patterns**	
Practices		**Activities**	**Activities**	**Ends/ Value**
Cognitive	Informing	Searching for info	It takes place in an attempt to find the root cause	- Actor dissatisfaction No relevancy
		Sharing knowledge	*Not taking place*	
	Learning	Product Training	*Not taking place*	
		Organizing & attending events	*Not taking place*	
Social Practices	Welcoming	Greeting	It takes place. Kept by actors at minimum	Establish contact
		Introducing actors		
	Building relationships	Empathizing	**Harassing/ disregarding***	Felling bad Toxic relationship Distrust
		Establishing rapport	**Lack of rapport**	
		Exchanging stories	*Not taking place*	
Transformative	Calibrating operations	Extending help	*Not taking place*	
		Increasing resources	To solve the source of conflict	Increased costs – loss of resources
	Networking	Advocating	**Sabotaging*** – opposed to advocating	Failure Disapproval Negative WOM
		Operating in the network	*Not taking place*	
		Acquiring network knowledge	*Not taking place*	
	Promoting solutions	Implementing POSMs	*Not taking place*	
		Organizing campaigns	*Not taking place*	
		Recommending solution	Stopped.	Loss of sales/ decreasing sales
		Sampling	*Not taking place*	

6.4.4. Discussion: Conflictual patterns and value destruction

The researcher encountered actors experiencing Conflictual patterns of BE during fieldwork. This approach was premised on a positive approach of believing that all interactions must foster value co-creation, since the researcher lacked a-priori view of value destruction. As per BE's definition, interacting partners intend to invest resources to benefit themselves, their partners, as well as others within the service ecosystem.

However, benefits are not always accrued as a result of these interactions. Based on SD-Logic, this research commenced with a positive approach as far as value co-creating practices is concerned (Vargo and Lusch, 2011a, Vargo, 2011, Vargo and Akaka, 2012, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2011b, Vargo and Lusch, 2018a). Ambiguity prevailed on whether these scenarios could be deemed business engagements. Recent studies have revealed negative engagement and connected it with value destruction or value destruction (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016) in addition to value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2011a, Vargo, 2011, Vargo and Akaka, 2012, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2011b, Vargo and Lusch, 2018a).

According to this research, driven by inadequate service delivery, Conflictual patterns stem from transactional interactions. This finding is in line with previous research where the stage of the exchange process was found to significantly contribute to value destruction (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016). Practice misalignment also leads to Conflictual patterns: For example, ordering, that forms part of TI, was carried out as agreed upon, but delivery was not. In this instance, value destruction is ascribed to the gradual heterogeneity in service delivery (Makkonen and Olkkonen, 2017, Echeverri and Skålén, 2011). There is little to no empirical research on negative customer engagement (Vatavwala et al., 2022), which is why an understanding of Conflictual patterns was elicited from research of disengagement or conflictual service failure as well as value destruction literature streams in business-to-business settings.

This research suggests that improper Social practice, specifically the inability to ‘Establishing rapport’, is another source of negative engagement. To illustrate, a pharmacist alludes to a partner's representative as ‘so [...] pesky’. Here, the inability to understand the other partner results in Conflictual patterns due to process misalignment as well as resource/practice absence (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016) or deficiency (Vafeas et al., 2016). Actors incongruently activate (Razmdoost and Mills, 2016) elements of the interacting practices (i.e. procedures, understanding and teleoaffective structures). In this case, it pertains to within-practice misalignment, as both parties did not align their understanding of Social practice.

According to the findings of this study, the paucity of problem-solving expertise related to BE's conflictual patterns leads to value destruction. As a case in point, let us suppose a scenario where a pharmacist explicated a situation whereby a partner was asked about specific product details. However, the partner was unable to even confirm the product's presence in the warehouse, forming customer dissatisfaction and a loss of the supplier's relevancy. The studies on value destruction posits worsening relationships caused by a paucity of expertise in problem-solving (Cabiddu et al., 2019). Value destruction is a foreseeable outcome of actors' decisions and interactions concerning the process of resource integration (Cabiddu et al., 2019).

BE Conflictual patterns can result in simultaneous value co-creation and value destruction. Echeverri and Skålén (2011), value destruction takes place when there is misalignment of activities and actor requirements. Nevertheless, the present study comprises scenarios where value co-creation and value destruction took place despite the aforementioned misalignment. In parallel with the value being co-destructed (i.e. negative word of mouth), some value was co-created (i.e. some sales being generated), albeit not at the same level had there been alignment. For instance, one focus group respondent referred to the conflict with a manufacturer as well as the representative that could not deliver multiple times, leading to aggression on the latter's part *('the representative almost smashed the door*'). Yet, a decision was taken to continue the relationship: '*I have demand for 'Fares' products*'. Here, the value was co-destructed: a weaking of the relationship and customer dissatisfaction. On the other hand, existing sales (continued relationship owing to customer demand) led to an economic gain. Hence, this research shows that it is possible for value co-creation and value destruction to take place simultaneously, which is in line with the views of Prior and Marcos-Cuevas (2016) that value co-creation is not in stark contrast to value destruction.

While all dimensions of engagement are present, the fact remains that they consist of a lower number of practices, which suggests that Conflictual patterns causes the actors to narrow their attention to resources on practices capable of minimising their losses as well as the losses faced by other actors. According to the data gathered in this research, actors add more resources to address conflict sources and Conflictual patterns tend to last long.

At the same time, adverse outcomes do not straight away inflict harm upon the parties involved. In a study in business-to-business settings, Mele (2011) pointed out that conflict leads to wastage of resources and reduces value generation. On the other hand, recent studies point out that disengagement does not immediately end a relationship (Lehtinen et al., 2019, Vatavwala et al., 2022). This is because the end-user could seek a specific solution that forms part of the seller's portfolio (Vatavwala et al., 2022). Although disengagement posits a neutral approach towards a partner, prevailing research does not divulge why a negative engagement causes the continuation of a relationship. As one respondent mentioned, the decision not to discontinue the actors' relationship can be explained by the presence of network effects (for example, demand on the part of end-users). Because value co-creation (e.g. economic benefits of generating sales) takes place simultaneously with value destruction (e.g. distrust), as a consequence continuation is ensured.

Actors complain and negatively evaluate the other actor during conflictual patterns of BE. This observation is similar to the generic actor research, according to which negative actor engagement manifests via negative WOM/reviews, and complaints (Brodie et al., 2019, Azer and Alexander, 2020, Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016). This finding also holds true in business-to-business settings. Representatives of pharmacists and distributors were found to negatively review actors.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1. Chapter introduction

Chapters 1–6 addressed the Business Engagement practices, attributes and their interplay to produce different patterns and outcomes. This chapter details all contributions made by this research and summarises previous chapters' empirical findings concerning engagement, practice theory and S-D logic literature.

The chapter is structured as follows: section 7.2 summarises research findings and theoretical contributions that are based on existing literature gaps; section 7.3 presents the contributions to practice; section 7.4 concludes the thesis by underlining research limitations and recommending future study avenues and directions.

7.2. Research findings and theoretical contributions

By grounding BE within the theoretical perspective of S-D logic, midrange theory of engagement, and practice theory and by offering a view of what actors do in real-life scenarios, namely their practices, this thesis enhances the understanding of engagement practices in B2B settings and complements the development of this theoretical area. Understanding these practices is crucial because BE has a significant impact on actors' decision-making processes, dependence on other interacting actors, and willingness to pay a premium (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). In spite of the criticality of interorganisational relationships, there is a lack of understanding of B2B engagement (Vivek et al., 2021).

Brodie et al.'s (2019) conceptual article proposes a revised framework for understanding actor engagement. This seminal work is used in the next sections as the reference point. The contributions made by this research in the field of BE are detailed in the following sections by comparison with the AE related propositions advanced by Brodie et al. (2019).

7.2.1. BE and service ecosystem - Capturing multi-stakeholders perspectives based on dyadic interactions.

Brodie et al. (2019) recognize the importance of service ecosystems and network connections. Their foundational propositions advance the idea that AE occurs in

connection with other actors (FP1) affecting actors' network connections (FP2). Their ideas are based on S-D Logic perspective that stresses the importance of service ecosystem (Lusch and Vargo, 2014, Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Value co-creation happens as actors establish relationships (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

The body of knowledge on versatile players in networks is still dispersed (Brodie et al., 2019), and there is a dearth of research on engagement in business-to-business (B2B) settings that addresses many actors in networks (Brodie et al., 2019, Wilson, 2019, Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018). The majority of studies have focused on a single end-user, primarily the individual, as opposed to a multi-stakeholder approach (Hollebeek, 2016). By looking at specific actors (such as distributor sales representatives, distribution managers, pharmacists, and manufacturers' representatives) and their interactions, the current research fills this gap and offers insights into how various BE practices and their patterns evolve. While the majority of the literature is centred on dyadic, unilateral engagement, in this study, BE depicts practices and behaviours when both parties display reciprocity since it can be formed if both actors show a willingness and similar intents (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Ulaga and Eggert, 2006) affecting them but also others in their service ecosystem.

The majority of relationships are created and maintained in the pharmaceutical industry—and generally on the distribution side—based on dyadic interactions. Although most interactions are dyadic, they refer to and influence numerous network players (i.e., patients, doctors, hospitals, healthcare governmental and nongovernmental entities). The research's insights come from these dyadic interactions, but they are viewed from a multistakeholder perspective. Due to the difficulty of implementing research in business-to-business contexts, the dynamic of network engagement and its theoretical understanding are fragmented (Fehrer et al., 2018b; Nyadzayo et al., 2020). This problem has led to the predominance of consumer-based research in the derivation of insights and consequences of engagement (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018). The distinctions between B2C and B2B have been recognised, nevertheless (Reinartz and Berkmann 2018). The dearth of studies on engagement in business-to-business settings, despite its acknowledged importance, makes it necessary for the advancement of the engagement body of knowledge (Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018, Kumar and Pansari, 2016, Youssef et

al., 2018, Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018, Vivek et al., 2015). Therefore, by offering insights into the under research B2B engagement domain characterised by limited number of studies, this work contributes to mid range theory of engagement.

The research sheds light on BE by looking at two interacting parties at once while taking into account how other players in the service ecosystem are influenced. Research has also skipped overlooking various focus items in the service ecosystem and other circumstances (Conduit et al., 2019, Dessart et al., 2016). The majority of BE knowledge is based on consumer engagement, which is a dyadic manifestation beyond the transaction (Alexander et al., 2018), with the brand or focal object then extended to community engagement, where engagement implies the interactions between members while the focus remains on the object. A few studies research engagement bi-directionally, considering replies of actors or feedback loops, one example being research by Essamri et al. (2019). Engagement is typically researched from one side, or unidirectionally, from the customer to the brand/community or company, with no feedback loop from the company to the customer, where the customer is the end-user and the study is focused on them. However, if we continue to approach BE or actor engagement in the same manner, ignoring the action and reaction that typically occurs quickly, we will never completely comprehend engagement in commercial settings.

7.2.2. BE – Tendency. Behaviours - Beyond contractual obligations

The first proposition (FP1) advanced by Brodie et al. (2019, p.8) state that 'AE reflects an actor's disposition, which occurs by connections with other actors, to provide resource contributions beyond what is elementary (transactional) to service exchange.'

As emphasized in the section 2.3.5., and in line with critical realism philosophical perspective, this research advances the idea that in B2B engagement is the tendency, or power, rather than the disposition. The argument is since the concept of engagement has been tied to disposition, and this perspective has been propagated from customer (individual) engagement. As identified in the section 2.3.5, disposition is an individual trait, that we should cautiously consider for understanding actor engagement (i.e. machine, business/firm, governmental organization). Additionally, it will be useful to understand and use 'disposition' from a critical realism perspective. In his work, Bhaskar

(1997) talks about the need to analyse disposition as power or tendencies. Throughout Bhaskar's work, disposition is considered as power, or tendency (Hartwig, 2015). Analysing further the concept of 'powers', Mingers (2014) described it as 'the ability of a system to produce a particular effect in a particular context or in interaction with some other system'. Continuing his ideas, the author makes the connection between the system and its specific properties that are emergent from the structure (components and relations) of the object (Mingers, 2014). Considering the aforementioned arguments, the term adopted in this study for BE is 'powers' or 'tendency', and not 'disposition' that is rooted in consumer engagement.

An additional contribution of this research identified that engagement represents behaviours and actions that go beyond contractual obligations, replacing therefore 'beyond transactions'. Previous research, that has been rooted in consumer engagement emphasized 'beyond purchase' (Van Doorn et al., 2010, Brodie et al., 2011a, Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014), beyond what is elementary to exchange (Alexander et al., 2018a) or beyond transactions (Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2018, Brodie et al., 2019). However, in B2B there are activities and behaviours that are included in contractual terms, and these should not be considered engagements. Interviews and observations demonstrated that business actors reveal their BE when they allocate more resources (i.e. additional resources, such as time, money, mental effort, qualified personnel etc) than those required to fulfil their contractual obligations. By employing specific practices (i.e. social, cognitive and transformative) these actors achieve specific patterns of BE (i.e. rewarding, routine or conflictual).

7.2.3. Understanding BE Practices (RQ1)

Brodie et al.'s (2019, p.11) work posits in their fifth proposition that 'AE is coordinated through shared practices that occur within the engagement platforms.'

This study exposes what occurs and what business actors do to generate BE. Using data gathered and a practice theory methodology, BE is broken down into social, cognitive, and transformative practices. The results of this research may be applied to various B2B situations where there are frequent face-to-face interactions, even though this is a case study of a supplier in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry.

The current BE research identifies practices that are social, cognitive, and transformative, each of which has affective and behavioural dimensions. Each of these practices has a behavioural dimension that is ingrained in the behaviour and actions and sayings, as well as an emotional dimension that is represented in the teleo-affective structures. This approach is based on the fact that it is exceedingly challenging to discriminate between the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement dimensions that are supported by consumer research. Brodie et al. (2019, p. 11) recommend understanding engagement from a practice perspective because 'we need a better understanding of the actions performed by interacting actors,' and as a result, practice theory is combined with an abductive approach, offering an alternative way to look at and understand the concept.

Therefore, by revealing the 'Understandings' element of each practice, which in turn provides insights into the actions or activities associated with each practice, this research underlines the significance of engagement in a business-to-business context. Previous literature on customer engagement (Brodie et al., 2019, Brodie et al., 2015, Brodie et al., 2011a, Brodie et al., 2011b, Van Doorn et al., 2010) is based on end-user customer engagement, with researchers agreeing on the fact that engagement is multi-dimensional (Reinartz and Berkmann, 2018).

According to this study, social practices like ‘welcoming’ and ‘building relationships’ aid business actors in creating and maintaining social bonds that allow them to form affinities with other people and gain their acceptance as well as good emotions and praise. Social practices encourage actors to maintain their connections and foster a sense of community within those connections (Sarmento et al., 2015) offering benefits for the parties involved (Geiger and Turley, 2005).

Informing and learning practices are examples of cognitive practices. Actors' views and understanding are widened through cognitive practices that produce knowledge. Actors are taught to value the other actors who work with them and provide these learning opportunities through these practices. Indirectly, more information helps actors remain viable in their network, increases customer happiness, and promotes the best solution, all of which leads to increased sales.

'Calibrating Operations', 'Networking', and 'Promoting Products/Solutions' are examples of transformative practices that call for actors to alter their interactions, provide more for other engaging actors, and meet the needs of the (new) system. According to Thompson et al. (2017), reciprocal interdependencies are needed for processes of 'mutual adjustment', which represent 'calibrating operations'. While 'promoting solutions' refers to actors who facilitate the public knowledge of the product or solution, 'networking' refers to actors who connect with or are suggested to other actors.

7.2.4. Valence and intensity, BE practices' patterns (RQ2) and bundles

Brodie et al. (2019) signal in their work the importance to look at different engagement intensities and valence (FP 4). Interviewed or observed participants in this study have indicated that engagement varies in valence and intensity, among other attributes. Therefore, by highlighting the significance of engagement attributes, intensity and valence, in developing particular patterns of BE behaviours that have specific consequences, this research advances our knowledge of engagement in a business-to-business setting. Respondents mentioned some good, negative, or neutral encounters and relationships but did not explicitly state the valence of engagement. This research contributes by highlighting that to fully comprehend BE practices and their patterns, it is crucial to look at these features and how practices are combined. Additionally, it is not just about combining these practices; what differentiates them is how actors use them. As a result, the study contributes by illustrating that a focus on patterns and combinations alone could lead to an over-simplification of B2B engagement. The current research demonstrates that to fully understand B2B engagement, it is necessary to be nuanced and to zoom in on or out of the interactions and relationships among interacting actors.

The findings also suggest that it is feasible to have a high level of engagement with any business actor, if there are certain particular episodes, as indicated by the research findings. In the majority of interactions, business actors create routine patterns that serve as the basis for rewarding pattern episodes. Reinartz and Berkmann (2018, p.255) assert that it is crucial to consider engagement bundles, saying 'It is neither possible [nor] meaningful to have a high engagement with every partner.'

By investigating how BE properties (intensity and valence) interact, this research has offered a complex perspective on BE in B2B settings, demonstrating how BE unfolds, specifically through rewarding, routine, or conflictual patterns. The researcher reveals that valence and intensity have an impact on BE, topics that need to be researched (Sands et al., 2022).

When there is high intensity and positive valence of BE, rewarding patterns develop, as this study demonstrates. Actors improve their resources because rewarding patterns are built on transformative, calibrating operations practices. These rewarding patterns can only be produced by one interacting actor, typically the supplier, expending significant effort. For rewarding patterns, transformative practices are frequently used, and actors pool additional resources. Therefore, when transformative practices are lacking, organisations are generally unlikely to reach rewarding patterns of BE. These rewarding patterns of BE must bring in a sizable amount of cash for the business actors because they incur additional costs.

The current research demonstrates that rewarding patterns of BE are centred on transformative practices, while they also exhibit a high proportion of cognitive practices (such as learning or seeking knowledge/solutions). Cognitive practices like learning, which are connected to special events or informing, are included in rewarding patterns. Even though they are less common than transformative and cognitive practices, social practices have also been proven to produce rewarding patterns of BE.

This study also establishes that routine patterns of BE are dominated by social practices, which benefit interacting agents. In this study, respondents reported that the lack of social practices makes it unlikely for actors to establish routine patterns of BE. The 'Building Relationship' practice, which comprises activities like 'Empathizing in Interaction', 'Establishing Rapport', and 'Exchanging Stories', is the most significant of the social practices mentioned. While the literature on customer engagement (Brodie, 2013; Hollebeck, 2014) depicts high engagement as the ideal state, more recent research in B2B settings suggests the possibility of other types of engagement (Jonas et al. 2018), providing some early indications of the existence of routine patterns of BE and its importance.

According to the results of this study, routine patterns of BE should be given a lot of consideration since they are what actors mostly do in the workplace and bring in significant revenue. Although routine patterns of BE are essential, it is also important to sometimes create rewarding patterns and 'spice up' the interaction between the actors by providing extra resources. During this investigation, some hints reinforcing patterns of BE are ingrained in routines or manifest as deviations from routine patterns of BE. To fully understand BE, it is crucial to look at bundles of engagement (i.e., rewarding but also routine), rather than focusing only on rewarding or routine patterns. Based on the findings of this study, routine and rewarding patterns of BE seem to complement one another since the former involves greater social and cognitive practices and the latter more transformative and cognitive ones.

As confirmed in Chapter Six, Section 6.4, resources of both parties are eroded by conflictual patterns of BE. Even though there is little research on dysfunctional interpersonal relationships in B2B settings and this is an empirically understudied field of study, these insights about conflictive patterns are not surprising (Cabiddu et al., 2019). Conflictual patterns of BE only involve cognitive practice, informing, and a few restricted social practices, such as greetings, and instead of the practice of 'building relationships,' which is unique to BEs with positive valence, there is a practice of 'damaging relationships,' which lacks empathy for other interacting actors.

7.2.5. Outcomes of BE patterns (RQ3)

Brodie et al.'s (2019) work posits in their second proposition (FP2) that AE is has specific consequences that affect actor's dispositions and network connections. Value co-creation is encouraged through engagement between various service ecosystem participants (Viljakainen et al., 2013a). Little is known about BE specifically despite its importance to the value co-creation process (Chandler and Lusch, 2015; Storbacka et al. 2016; Brodie et al. 2019).

In contrast to earlier research, this study broadens the concept of value by offering insights into additional forms of value, in addition to the well-known commercial value, such as intangible ends/ value. Previous research has a history of not offering a comprehensive

perspective of value definitions in favour of concentrating on particular types of value, including financial or economic rewards (Lombardo and Cabiddu, 2017).

It is not surprising that the most common practices of rewarding patterns are based on ‘Calibrating Operations,’ which entails increasing the amount of time and resources spent on social interaction and helping to create new sources of economic benefits. Additionally, rewarding patterns' transformative practices lead to the co-creation of intangible outcomes, notably for the party committing additional funds (the producer or distributor). The current study claims that actors that were successful in providing value above and beyond the expectations of the other actors produced 'memorable client experiences' (Harby, 2018; Wittell et al., 2020). Due to certain practices, rewarding patterns also help the actors expand their knowledge. Due to their complementarity, rewarding patterns should be examined alongside routine patterns, as is put forward in section 7.2.4. Through associated practices, routine patterns significantly strengthen the relationships between actors. These positive outcomes were also seen in routine patterns, especially relationship building. The findings of this study indicate that the importance of developing both rewarding and routine patterns when they consider generating BE in their connections with other actors since the generated value is complimentary and the ensuing co-created value has the potential to be maximized. Trust, reputation, and appreciation stimulate the actors' desire to associate, whereas relationship building gives the means for forging lasting bonds and forming a partnership. The sense of co-created value and an actor's propensity to persist with a role are both influenced by their reputation, according to a prior study. Economic benefits (sales and profits), of course, serves as the basis for actors' existence as a company; as a result, the significance of these benefits cannot be understated.

The findings are not unexpected in terms of conflictual patterns. Conflictual patterns result in the destruction of value and the loss of economic benefits. However, the current study demonstrates negative engagement and ties it to value destruction, in addition to value co-creation (Pret et al., 2016, Vargo and Lusch, 2011a, Vargo, 2011, Vargo and Akaka, 2012, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2011b, Vargo and Lusch, 2018b). Since one of the entities can make up for the loss by interacting favourably with other parties, the damage may be less detrimental to that party. Additionally, negative publicity, for

instance, might damage an actor's ties with other actors and influence the actor's reputation, which again can have an indirect impact on sales. An actor's reputation can be damaged much more easily than it can be enhanced (Griffin, 2014). The reputational damage is tough to easily heal; it is a drawn-out process that requires a lot of money. The study's noteworthy finding is that conflictual BE patterns might result in concurrent value co-creation and destruction, despite the fact that previous research has described them as two distinct outcomes. In tandem with the value being co-destructed (i.e., sabotage, negative word of mouth), the value was co-created (i.e., a continuous relationship and some sales were made), though not to the same extent as it may have been if alignment had been present. The inability of the players to quit the toxic relationship due to resource dependency or a lack of resources on their part, or because other actors in the service ecosystem depend on them to maintain the relationship, can be attributed to this.

To conclude, this research contributions extend the existing actor engagement work (Brodie et al) by providing specific insights that are summarized in table 26 below.

Table 26 - Brodie et al. (2019) foundational propositions and present research

(Brodie et al., 2019) foundational propositions	**Present research**	
	Section	**Extending ideas**
F1: AE reflects an **actor's disposition**, which occurs by connections with other actors, to provide resource contributions **beyond what is elementary (transactional)** to service exchange.	7.2.2.	Nuanced the engagement term 'Disposition' that is rooted in consumer engagement with 'Tendency' that is a B2B specific term. Business engagement (BE) is a dynamic and iterative process generated by episodes of intense interactions that reflect actors' tendencies to invest resources in their interactions, beyond the contractual obligations, with other interconnected actors for the benefit of [their] own, interacting actors, as well as others in the service ecosystem. Replaced engagement that is demonstrated in consumer engagement by behaviours 'Beyond transaction' with BE demonstrated through practices that go 'Beyond contractual obligations'.
F2: AE emerges in a dynamic and iterative processes, where its antecedents and consequences affect **actor's dispositions** and **network connections**.	7.2.1. 7.2.5.	BE is dynamic and iterative. Dyadic BE but influencing multiple actors in the pharmaceutical ecosystem (7.2.1) Interplay of BE valence and intensities generate different patterns and specific consequences (ends/ teleoaffective structures) that affect actors' tendencies and their network connections.
F3: AE is a multi-dimensional concept, subject to the **interplay of dispositions** (emotional and/ or cognitive), **behaviors** and the level of **connectedness** among actors.	7.2.3.	BE is a **multidimensional**, Social (containing emotional), Cognitive, and Transformative. BE is subject of **interplay of tendencies** to invest resources **beyond contractual obligations, behaviours (**embedded in social, cognitive, and transformative practices**)** and **connectedness**.

F4: AE occurs within a **specific set of institutional contexts**, generating differing **AE intensities and valence** over time.	7.2.4.	The interplay of intensity and valence generate specific BE patterns (Rewarding, Routine and Conflictual) Practices contain specific rules that affect the tendencies to invest resources.
F5: AE is coordinated through **shared practices** that occur within engagement platforms.	7.2.3	Present research specifies which are these shared practices for B2B: BE is coordinated through specific B2B practices: social, cognitive, and transformative that occur in the present study through face-to-face interactions and other mentioned platforms (social media, technology etc)

7.3. Research findings and practical impacts

In addition to the aforementioned scholarly accomplishments, this thesis also makes several contributions to the managerial practice.

First, BE is a tacit construct because businesses do not explicitly state it. As a result, managers might benefit from understanding the BE notion first before developing strategies to boost or maintain it. This research helps managers better comprehend the concept, enabling them to develop targeted plans and techniques to maximize it.

Second, according to the findings of this research, developing BE is predicated on particular practices (such as rewarding and routine patterns). The current study reveals that memorable moments can be created thanks to rewarding patterns of BE that are based on transformative practices. However, under these circumstances, actors must mobilise more resources and attract in new actors. This dependence on resources has a major impact on engagement, as also demonstrated in previous research (Jonas et al., 2018, Scheer et al., 2015). Although these rewarding BE patterns contribute to the advantages of positive employee engagement in businesses (Naumann et al., 2017), they also demand investments. As a result, actors should consider switching between rewarding and routines BE patterns. Routine patterns can also be seen as crucial since they provide value, stability, and cost management as it entails the use of social practices, which are based on low-cost activities.

Additional managerial advantages from adopting these patterns are possible. Through data segmentation and activity planning, actors can create episodes of routine that are anchored in rewarding patterns. For instance, this exploratory study revealed that rewarding pattern episodes are vital, but managers should anticipate that routine pattern episodes will make up the majority of the contribution.

Third, and in accordance with the second point, managers need to be aware of the precise value outcomes that companies can co-create, or destroy, in order to maximize a range of outcomes and everyone's gains. For instance, businesses need to understand the relationship between engagement and value. The development of platforms and programmes that benefit businesses and other stakeholders will be aided by understanding the mechanisms and recognizing this link. This would enhance managerial understanding of the strong and weak points of their particular BE practices and might lead to enhanced performance results.

7.4. Research limitations and future study recommendations

Despite the outlined research contributions, this study has several limitations that lead to recommendations for future research.

First, this exploratory research is based on a single case study in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry. Future validation and application of the key findings across various settings and interactions, including other countries and industries, or other than face-to-face interactions, are required to assess the BE practices, patterns and transferability across contexts.

Second, like most existing engagement-based marketing, this research investigates actors' engagement at a specific time. Longitudinal studies are conducted for two reasons: to describe change patterns and establish the direction and magnitude of change (Menard, 2002). A longitudinal BE study would generate a deeper understanding of the long-term viability of the service ecosystem (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

Third, the current work focused primarily on existing, ongoing relationships. While one of the respondents (the distributor's sales representative) mentioned his attempt to establish a new relationship with a small, local pharmacy, the interaction was acknowledged but not included in the current research. Additional work should examine how BE unfolds and possibly other practices that result from these new and first interactions, as BE dynamics may differ between existing (i.e. repeat) and new interacting actors.

Fourth, although this research includes multiple stakeholders who work for the same organisation, patterns of collective engagement have not been analysed (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2019, Wilson, 2019). However, understanding the dynamics of collective engagement of other actors in service ecosystems will be interesting. For example, consider an interaction in which management disregards a fully engaged sales representative. What happens to the representative's BE with the other interacting actor (such as a pharmacist or group of pharmacists)? What is the collective impact on the relationship with the group of pharmacists if the sales representative and management are fully aligned? Are there different patterns?

Finally, there was a sample limitation. The study's foundation was a convenient case study selection and snowballing technique. This study relies on observational data but has also been based on shadowing or field visits with the distributor's sales representatives following their interactions with pharmacists. These data sources complemented the in-depth interviews and joint interviews. Further steps, such as gathering other sources of information, were taken in the mini focus group. However, future investigations may wish to validate the present findings by employing even more diverse data sources pertaining to the specific targeted study population and different research designs.

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Appendix 1: Respondent consent form

Nottingham University Business School
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Information for Research Participants	**Informatii pentru participantii la cercetare**
Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may change your mind about being involved in the research at any time, and without giving a reason. This information sheet is designed to give you full details of this scientific research project, its goals, the research team, the research funder, and what you will be asked to do as part of the research. If you have any questions that are not answered by this information sheet, please ask. This research has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the Nottingham University Business School Research Ethics Committee.	Va mutlumesc ca ati acceptat sa participati in aceasta cercetare. Participarea dumneavoastra este voluntara, aveti dreptul sa va razganditi asupra ei pe parcursul cercetarii, fara sa fie nevoie sa motivati. Aceast formular este conceptut sa va dea toate detaliile despre aceasta cercetare stiintifica: obiectivele ei, echipa implicata, sponsorul acesteia, si informatiile care vi se vor solicita pe parcurs. Daca aveti orice intrebare care nu este cuprinsa in acest formular, va rog sa mi le adresati. Aceasta cercetare a fost revizuita si a primit aviz favorabil din partea comisiei de etica din cadrul Universitatii Nottingham – Facultatea de Busines.
What is the research project called? Business to Business Engagement: A Case study in the pharmaceutical industry	Numele cercetarii? Implicarea si interactiunea intre firme: Un studiu de caz in industria faramceutica
Who is carrying out the research? *The research is being carried out by myself (Anca Cretu), as a student of the PhD program of the University of Nottingham, on behalf of the university. This is a scientific research towards a PhD degree in Marketing at the University of Nottingham. This research is supervised by Professor Heidi Winklhofer and Associate Professor Linda Peters from the University of Nottingham.* *This research output (thesis) is covered by an embargo and the material collected will not be in the public domain for 5 years.*	Cine conduce cercetarea? *Cercetarea este condusa de catre subsemnata (Anca Cretu), in calitate de student doctorand al Universitatii Nottingham, in numele universitatii. Acesta este un proiect stiintific care va conduce catre absolvirea Doctoratului in filozofie, cu specializare in Marketing, Universitatea Nottingham. Aceasta cercetare este supervizata de catre Profesor Doctor Heidi Winklhofer si Profesor Asociat Doctor Linda Peters de la Universitatea Nottingham.* *Aceasta cercetare va fi supusa unui embargo, si teza rezultata nu va fi disponibila in spatial public pentru o perioada de 5 ani.*

What is the research about?

The research aims to understand how businesses engage with each other and the characteristics of this interaction/ engagement in the pharmaceutical ecosystem. So the focus is on this engagement/ relationship that is a result of interaction of two companies rather than two individuals.

What groups of people have been asked to take part, and why?

Pharmacists in Bucharest and potentially other cities in Romania (i.e. Bacau), & sales/ marketing representatives that interact on behalf of their company (producers/ distributors) with the pharmacists. They will help uncover the patterns of engagement between pharmacies and other commercial representatives.

What will research participants be asked to do?

Respondents will be required to answer questions about this relationship/ interaction/ engagement process. This research has an exploratory nature. Due to limited insights that exist in the field, there are no right and wrong answers to these questions. Participants will be interviewed face-to-face. The interviews will take up to one hour and will be conducted in the participant's location (pharmacy) or in case of (sales) representatives, the interview will be arranged to take place in their office (company office). Participants will be asked for permission to have the interview recorded (voice recording).
The interview questions deal with three key issues: the different patterns of business-to-business engagement; the impacts of internal business structures and processes on the way business engage; the

Ce ne propunem cu aceasta cercetare?

Prin aceasta cercetare incercam sa intelegem cum se implica firmele, cum interactioneaza, care sunt caracteristicile acestei interactiuni in industria farmaceutica. Obiectivul principal este de a intelege aceasta interactiune/relatii de colaborare intre firme, nu intre persoanele implicate.

Care sunt grupurile de personae care au fost invitate sa ia parte si de ce?

Farmacisti din Romania (Bucuresti, Bacau si alte orase), reprezentanti de vanzari al firmelor distribuitoare si producatoare de produse comercializate in farmacii.
Aceste persoane, reprezentand companii, vor facilita intelegerea acestor caracteristici ale interactiunii intre farmacii si companii distribuitoare/ companii producatoare).

Ce li se va cere participantilor sa faca?

Voi pune un set de intrebari fiecarui paricipant la cercetare care vor adresa despre relatiile de colaborare/ interactiunile/ angajarea / anagajamentele inter-companii. Datorita cantitatii foarte limitate de informatii stiintifice existente in acest domeniu, aceasta cercetare are un caracter explorator. De aceea nu exista raspunsuri gresite si corecte. Participantii vor fi intervievati in persoana. Interviurile vor avea o durata de aproximativ o ora si vor fi conduse in locatia intervievatului (in farmacie sau la biroul reprezentantului). Va voi cere permisiunea explicita de a inregistra interviul (voce). Aceasta metoda ma ajuta pe mine ca cercetator, sa surprind toate aspectele pe care dumneavoastra acceptati sa le imparasiti.
Intrebarile vor surprinde 3 aspecte: carateristici ale interactiunii/ relatiei/ anagajarii in aceasta relatie comerciala; impactul structurii interne a firmei si proceselor existente in aceste interactiuni/ relatii/

impact of the above on the outcomes of business engagement.
In addition, questions about pharmacy details (i.e. size, number of pharmacists, part of chain or independent) will be asked.

What will happen to the information I provide?

All data will be stored electronically, and only my supervisors and I will have access to it. The data from all interviews will be consolidated, and recoded based on themes generated from all interviews. All answers will remain anonymous. In case I need to justify my argumentation, what the respondents will share with me will be quoted but no names will be explicitly provided. In order to maintain confidentiality in the write up I will only refer to "… a pharmacist in Bucharest", or "a pharamacist in Bacau", a "representative of the company interacting with pharmacist in Bucharest / Bacau".
Personal data:
As part of the field data collection process, there will be two categories of personal data collected:

1. *Voice recording of the interview done with the respondent, containing all answers given to different questions with subject as described above. This personal data will be used exclusively in the scope of this case study research, will be processed by myself on behalf of the University and will be accessed and archived by the University 30 days after interviews and retained till the end of my PhD (December 2021).*
2. *The respondent form containing his/ her name and signature as proof of evidence that the interview took place. This document containing personal data signature*

anagajamente comerciale; impactul tututor elementelor descrise mai sus in rezultatele obtinute de ambele parti.
La sfarsit vor fi inregistrate si cateva detalii legate de firma: marimea, numar de farmacisti, farmacii independente/ de retea.

Ce se va intampla cu informatiile furnizate?

Informatiile vor fi salvate si arhivate electoronic si numai supervizorii de doctorat de la Universitatea Nottingham si subsemnata vom avea aces la ele. Informatiile furnizate vor fi consolidate, codificate, analizate si re-grupate pe teme. Toate raspunsurile vor ramane complet anonime, cu imposibilitate de identificare ulterioara. La intocmirea raportului citatele vor fi insotite doar de un nume fictiv, farmacie independent/ de retea si numele oras. Pentru a mentine confidentialitatea si anonimitatea dv., in momentul in care voi scrie teza voi folosi urmatorul mod de citare: "… un farmacist in Bacau" "o farmacista din farmacie de retea din Bucuresti", un "reprezenant al unei companie de distributie in farmacii", sau "un reprezentant al unei companii producatre de produse destinate comertului in farmacii"
Date personale:
2 categorii de date personale vor fi colectate:

1. *Interviul: inregistrarea vocii, si toate detaliile furnizate in timpul discutiilor/ interviului. Aceasta categorie de date for fi utilizate exclusiv in scop cercetarii stiintifice. Aceasta categorie de date vor fi procesate exclusive de catre subsemnata, cercetator si student al Universitatii Nottingham. Aceste date personale vor fi encriptate, salvate si arhivate electronic dupa 30 de zile de la interviu, in baza de date a universitatii si vor fi retinute pana la finalizarea doctoratului (Decembrie 2021).*
2. *Formularul prezent care contine numele si semnatura intervievatului - folosit ca dovada a existentei*

(name, signature) will be accessed only by the University of Nottingham and subsequently archived in an electronic format after 30 days following the interview and retained till the end of my PhD (Dec 2021). The hard copy of this form will be destroyed after 30 days following the interview.

No hard copy, no digital copy of this form, no the voice recording containing your personal data will be retained by myself as student of the University of Nottingham for more than 30 days. The personal data will be available to you/ respondent in the first 30 days after the interview. After that all personal data will be removed and the information will be transformed in pseudonymised and then anonymised dataset. This final anonymised data set will be the one that will be further analysed. The final research output will be based on this anonymised data.
No other personal data is collected, no personal data becomes subject of data transfer to a third party.

What will be the outputs of the research?

PhD Dissertation, academic papers and conference contributions to inform further research in this area.
Guidelines for key stakeholders aimed at improving engagement with pharmacists.
None of the research outputs will contain personal data.

Contact details
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prezentului interviu. Acest document va fi accesat doar de catre Universitatea Nottingham si va fi arhivat electronic la 30 de zile dupa interviu si arhivat la Universitatii Nottingham pana la finalizarea doctoratului (Dec 2021) a. Formularul present, in forma lui fizica (hartie), va fi distrus dupa 30 zile de la interviu.

Nici formularul si nici copia electronica a lui nu vor fi retinute de catre mine, student al Universitatii Nottingham, mai mult de 30 zile de la interviu. Aceste date personale vor fi disponibile la solicitarea dumneavoastra, daca doriti, in aceste prime 30 zile de la interviu. Dupa aceasta perioada de 30 zile, toate datele personale vor fi indepartate si eu, ca student al Universitatii Nottingham, voi pseudonimiza si anonimiza complet datele colectate. Aceste date anonimizate vor fi cele care vor intra in procesul de prelucrare si pe baza lor voi scrie raportul final al cercetarii stiintifice.
Nici o alta categorie de date personale va fi colectata. Datele dv personale nu vor fi trasferate catre terte parti.

Care vor fi rezultatele acestei cercetari?

Dizertatie doctorat, articole in publicatii de specialitate si prezentari la conferinte.
Linii directoare menite sa imbunatateasca colaborarea/ interactiune firmelor cu farmaciile;
Documentele (cele de mai sus) rezultate din cercetare nu vor contine date personale.

Detalii de contact
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Tel: +44 (0) 115 9515412 Jubilee Campus Nottingham B71 (North Building, Jubilee Campus) Associated Professor Linda Peters E-mail: Linda.Peters@nottingham.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 115 8466098 Nottingham B78 (North Building, Jubilee Campus) **Complaint procedure** If you wish to complain about the way in which the research is being conducted or have any concerns about the research then in the first instance please contact any of my research supervisors (details above). Or contact the School's Research Ethics Officer: Dr Chris Carter Nottingham University Business School Jubilee Campus Nottingham NG8 1BB Phone: 0115 84 66062 Email: christopher.carter@nottingham.ac.uk Please confirm by signing this form that you accepted to take part in this research, as a respondent answering to the questionnaire administrated and your interview to be voice recorded. *Yes, I accept to be interviewed, the interview to be recorded, and the interview to be further processed after personal data is removed.* *Name……* *Signature……* *Date:…….* *Location: ……..*	Tel: +44 (0) 115 9515412 Jubilee Campus Nottingham B71 (North Building, Jubilee Campus) Profesor Asociat Dr. Linda Peters E-mail: Linda.Peters@nottingham.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 115 8466098 Nottingham B78 (North Building, Jubilee Campus) **Proceduri legate de eventuale plangeri** Daca doriti sa depuneti o plangere legata de modul in care aceasta cercetare a fost implementata, va rog luati legatura cu supervizorii de cercetare (detaliile mai sus). SAU contactati Comisia de etica a scolii: Dr Chris Carter Nottingham University Business School Jubilee Campus Nottingham NG8 1BB Phone: 0115 84 66062 Email: christopher.carter@nottingham.ac.uk Va rog confirmati semnand ca acceptati sa luati parte din aceasta cercetare, ca intervievat care va raspunde la setul de intrebari si acceptati ca interviul sa fie inregistrat. *DA, accept sa fiu intervievat, interviul sa fie inregistrat si procesat dupa ce datele mele personale au fost eliminate.* *Name……* *Semnatura……* *Data:…….* *Locatie: ……..*

Appendix 2a: First cycle coding (Codes and Codes description) - BE Practices

Practices	First cycle coding (Activities)	Description of codes	Second order (Practices)	Description
Cognitive Practices	Searching for info	*Searching for missing information*	Informing	Enable information exchange
	Sharing knowledge	*Passing knowledge to the other interacting actor*		
	Product Training	*Studying (own)/ enabling training about product features/ benefits*	Learning	Acquiring knowledge
	Acquiring network knowledge	*Acquiring information and knowledge from other actors in the network*		
	Organising & attending events	*Coordinating/ making arrangements of special social occasion for other actors in the network*		
Social Practices (SPs)	Greeting	*Saluting and establishing rapport*	Welcoming	Initial interaction behaviours and activities
	Introducing actors	*A new person involved in the interaction is introduced to the others*		
	Empathising	*Displays feelings (i.e. compassion) towards the other interacting actor*	Building relationships	Creating strong ties between the actors
	Establishing rapport	*Engaging in an interaction with an attempt to warm up the interaction/ relationship*		
	Exchanging stories	*Becoming aware of something as a result of interacting with another actor*		
Transformative Practices	Extending help	*Helping the other actor to promote products/ beyond the responsibilities*	Calibrating operations	Adjusting operations to the other interacting partner(s)
	Increasing resources	*Investing more resources as needed*		
	Advocating	*Marketing solution/ company, contribute to an increased awareness*	Networking	Enabling access to other actors/ recommending actors
	Operating in the network	*Striving or surviving in the network*		
	Recommending solution	*Facilitating the awareness of product/ solution/ brand/ company*	Promoting solutions	Creating demand for the traded solutions
	Sampling	*Giving free of charge products*		
	Organizing campaigns	*Promotional activities to increase the sales*		
	Implementing POSMs	*Placing point of sales materials in different selling locations*		

Appendix 2b: First cycle coding (Codes and Codes description) – Transactional interaction practices

Theme	First order coding (Activities)	Description of codes	Second order (Practices)	Description
Transactional interactions practices	Checking stock	*Verifying the stock*	Coordinating exchange	Facilitating transactions
	Listing (new) products	*Making the product available for sales*		
	Cashing invoices	*Complete financial transaction*		
	Ordering	*Requesting products*		
	Supplying/ delivering	*Shipping, sending products*		
	Solving product issues (dealing with damaged, helping with expired products)	*Finding solutions for products to expire, or do not sell*	Fixing exchange issues	Mending transactional issues
	Fixing broken process	*Acting to mend transactional problems*		

Appendix 3a: Social Practices (Beyond contractual terms), 'Welcoming' - Anatomy and illustrative quotes

Practice	Practice anatomy		Illustrative quotes
Welcoming	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Greetings	Distributor_5_Interview*: 'I have a pharmacist that I salute in a very formal way. I say to pharmacist: 'I kiss your hand' and she is always telling me to stop greet so formal, to call her by name'.*
		Introducing new actors	Pharamcist_6_Observation*: Distributor's sales rep1 is greeting the pharmacist: 'Hello [pharmacist name removed]!' ...He greets the rest of pharmacists. Then he is asking the pharmacy manager the permission to interact, by making sure she is available. Then he introduces me to the pharmacist.*
	Procedures/ Rules	Rules are not formal or explicit	Pharmacist_20_Interview*: 'I do not want interaction by book, artificial… like 'hello! I came today to do X.'. No. It is about communication human to human, rather than communication with standards, which I dislike. Maybe others like that way… He/ she needs to know when I am angry, sad, happy and she or he needs to know how to proceed accordingly.'* Distributor_5_Interview: *'I try to … explain her that is not nice to make the reps to wait... If he/ she visits you, and then you are busy you need to put additional resources to speed up because he also has limited time.'*
	Ends – teleoaffective structures	Feeling good	Pharmacist 16_Joint_Interview*: 'he introduced himself. I liked him from the 1st moment because he was very genuine, and familiar, as if we knew each other for a long time. This made me feel fine and relaxed helped me to feel released of the stress of dealing with the unknown of the first interaction.'*

Appendix 3b: Social Practices (Beyond contractual terms), 'Building relationships' - Anatomy and illustrative quotes

Practice	Practice anatomy		Illustrative quotes
Building relationships	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Empathizing	Distributor 5_Interview: *One day, I was there and she had an emergency to reach the CAS (Local Health Insurance House that is managing all the reimbursements for medicine). I was busy, but … so I offered my help to take her by car to the CAS. She suddenly had a different tone; she was under huge time pressure. I left everything aside, and dropped her to CAS (part of Ministry of Health). She was surprised, and she thought I had hard feelings.* Pharmacist_12_Interview: *I studied by myself as well as I thought I should not to squeeze [distributor representative name removed]… because he is not trainer at the end of the day.* Distributor_23_Interview: *I need to stay engaged, involved, willing to do business and the same would apply for them. I can feel at telephone when they are not OK, or they tell me they are sick, or they share with me that they had a terrible day … Interaction is not affective, but can be social. It is that part of empathy that we all have. I have empathy with some of them, not very often, but it happens.*
		Establish rapport	Pharmacy_07_Observation: *The other pharmacist sneezed, squeeze [distributor representative name removed] said 'bless you' and asked if the cold was gone. The pharmacist in charge said that cold would be probably gone till next visit. They were exchanging a few jokes about this.* Pharmacy_12_Observation: *Making a joke with [distributor representative name removed]… Anyway, you would have stopped first time to us. We are very special. We are located in a top location, the rest of them do not have such a good neighbourhood area.*
		Exchanging stories	*Distributor_05_Interview: … I deal with the other pharmacists, the same very good interactions and strong relationship. We sometimes, allocate the time to discuss personal information, so the relationship is very good.* *Pharmacy_09_Observation: At the end sales rep asked her if she participated in marathon. Pharmacist confirmed, and she shared with us that she was not a sporty person in the high school, but now she is running and doing sports.* *Mini-Focus Group_F I: Yes, a new relationship is formed. Yes, and we talk about family and children. With some it is about the name and the company he/ she represents.*

	Procedures/ Rules	Process is based on know how No specific Rules Common sense Some firms have rules	*Distributor_05_Interview: I go in, I say hello, I ask them if they need something and then good bye'…No, it is not that way. I have pharmacies where I spend 40 minutes or 30 minutes… where we discuss something else as well. This is part of the game!* *Distributor_05_Int: I just spend as much I feel it is necessary. In this way, I succeed to build the relationship. … so what I have in mind is to spend my time with the pharmacists. I do have a strategy how to approach them.* *Distributor _05_Int: … But with tact, diplomacy, good behaviour, and respect you can get to a point to win their hearts… to make they feel it is not only a transactional interest. They need to feel you want to help her every time, help with any other different issues, not only with the orders and pharmacy.* *Mini focus group_F: the reps are extremely well monitored. They have specific number of pharmacies and doctors' practices that they need to visit. They have GPS. They are not allowed to stay … It happened to me … The rep told me he could stay only 10-15 minutes.*

	Ends – teleoaffective structures	Strong sales Positive outcomes for all actors in the service ecosystem Appreciation Make you feel good	*Distributor_15_Interview: If I do not pay attention, the relationship might get colder. For example, the pharmacist might have to order only two products but she thinks 'Fine. I will not order them now as he does not visit me anyway'… I was very much involved in order to help them to improve and have positive results.* *Distributor_05_Interview: In order to reach that point when you achieve your objectives, you do not need to be so rigid… I need to insist, persist if I want to achieve my targets [sales, customer staisfcation].* *Producer_03_Interview: so then an important role of the distributor is to keep very close contact with the pharmacy and once the reps see the dynamic of the sales of the products then the reps can adjust what they can add or take out of the pharmacy (resources are pulled out). So many times, the increase or decrease of the portfolio is made based on our recommendation, but it is adjusted by the distributor as the reps see how the sales are evolving, based on interaction between the rep and the pharmacy.* *Pharmacy_12_interview: Most of representatives want to use phone. That's why I appreciated [distributor representative name removed], as he never told me that he would just phone and send by courier/ drop shipment, as there is limited parking. He is taking time Wed and Th to talk to me for 10 minutes.* *Pharamcy_16_Joint Interview: Now it is true that we have a lot of online, virtual courses etc. but the human touch disappears. There is none visiting us, asking us if we are OK. They can see us upset, they can tell us a joke and make us laugh!* Pharmacy_08_Obs: *[Distributor representative name removed]: we can do things as usual, including doing what we have to do, as well as making jokes. He checked the stock, by himself and then with the pharmacist talking product by product (main categories). They started to make jokes, positive interaction, engaging from both parties.*

Appendix 4a: Cognitive Practices (Beyond contractual terms), 'Informing' - Anatomy and illustrative quotes

Practice	Practice anatomy		Illustrative quotes
Informing	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Searching for info (order, product etc.)	Pharmacy 14 Joint Interview: *'I wrote an email to order on 11 Oct. Yesterday I wrote again an email asking about the products, about my order'.* Pharmacy_16_Joint Interview: *We encountered situations when I needed a product and we did not know where to order it. Then, the distributor representative appeared in the pharmacy as in a miracle. We asked him if he knew about that specific product, with the patient in the pharmacy listening to us.* Pharmacy_17 Interview: *I remember I kindly asked him… oh yes, I remember now. It was about 'rolator' a product that was not from GenM (GenM is the firm the sales rep represents). Simo is showing me the product. He really helped us.* Pharmacy_16_Joint Interview: *Patient came to us, and he was not sure about the product the doctor mentioned. And then the patient called the doctor and put though the doctor to me. The doctor explained exactly what was the need, the product that covered that need.* Pharmacy 22 Interview*: It helped us a lot, especially when we did not have a product, and we did not know what happened, and we needed to get that information to pass it to the patients. It could have been the product was not anymore imported, the active ingredient is not available, a lot was withdrawn from the market …* Mini Focus Group_I*: I also ask them about the next-door pharmacy. What's going on there? … I ask top-level information, not details. …They also tell us this info (without being asked). They tell us if we have higher prices, especially for their own products. And I tell them the price in my pharmacy…*
		Sharing knowledge	Distributor 23 Interview: *I have pharmacists that change from one pharmacy to another pharmacy. Once they are at their new location they ask me: 'Do you know what my colleagues in the present location used to order? Is it because I am not familiar? As I am coming from another location … and I do not know'* Distributor 05 Interview: *I usually I tell them about product features and competitive advantage. I cannot hide that I use the competitive products that the pharmacy has, that have a lower quality. In this way, by describing the category rather than only my products the patient is then convinced to buy….* Pharmacy 16 Joint Interview*: I was on another world … I did not know what to do. I did not know the products, nor their characteristics and what they were for. He [distributor representative name removed] told me that there were missing from the shelf and he provided the list of the products that had*

			limited or no stock. He explained me, as we had to take 3 pcs per SKU, and we had to have the entire line for each size S, M, L.
	Procedures/ Rules	Explicit rules	Pharmacy 01 Interview: *we do not supply information! Stock: no, Margin: no…We do not give confidential information, we cannot do that, but we tell them is we have them or not (products), if they move or not (but not the number of sales). They would like to see what the doctors prescribed, but we try not to share all information.* Pharmacy 01 Interview*: we tell them if we have their products or not (Researcher: respondent referring to pharmacy having the products on stock), if they have sales or not … but we do not share the size of the sales.*
		Contractual terms	Distributor_23_Interview… *then we just discuss based on contractual terms. I share info about return policy. They ask me how long before they are allowed to return a product, or which are the steps that they have to take to return.*
	Ends – teleoaffective structures	Service differentiation -Competitive advantage	Pharmacy 12 Interview*: But I am happy that the patient received the right information, so if he/ she has to decide in the future he/s he will know what exactly, and then also make a right comparison between me and another location. They also tend to compare, as the products are not cheap, so I believe that we are content with each other. They are content that they know what they need, to save to buy that product. I am content I was able to help, make right recommendations. I know that in this way he/ she will come back to me and became my customer.*
		Manage cash-flow	Pharmacy 14 Joint Interview*: … sometimes I need the face-to-face interactions or need more explanations. I ordered once a huge quantity because misunderstanding. I still have them on stock, because the definition of box was not very detailed, so I did not understand it so I had a surprise to see when the order arrived. I thought I ordered 20 boxes but I ordered 20 containers. She was laughing. I ordered online …*

Appendix 4b: Cognitive Practices (Beyond contractual terms), 'Learning' - Anatomy and illustrative quotes

Practice	Practice anatomy		Illustrative quotes
Learning	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Product training	Pharmacy 18 Joint Interview*: ... there might be some products we have never experienced; it is important to know about them.* Pharmacy 01 Interview*: the representatives are doing like a small presentation, including to the team managing the central delivery platform.* Pharmacy 06 Interview: *The online resources are good for those that do not have enough time. But they are again impersonal, I would prefer to listen to someone that delivers some information than to join online. The knowledge is learnt if I see, if I see a schema, then I remember what I seen and heard easier.* Pharmacy 22 Interview: *I prefer the face-to-face, but there are benefits: the information that is contained by the online course is much bigger. Some of them have 60 pages. The advantage is that you can go back and read the info and presentation again. For the face-to-face interaction is more difficult to refer back to that info.* Pharmacy 19 Interview*: When I came to this location I did not know the products, so he brought brochures (here created by manufacturer). I read them and learnt what the products were doing. He (here about the distributor sales rep) helped us a lot!* Pharmacy 21 Interview: *here we have reps visiting us in pharmacy. Here we have discussions… depending on our time. When there are new products, they ask permission and do on site/ on location presentation and training.* Pharmacy 14 Joint interview*: Plus, we have the products here, so the pharmacists can see and touch them. It is important to associate what you hear with the visual of the product. For example, I read before all presentations about Alcon products...*
		Acquiring network knowledge	Pharmacy 01 Interview: *I need to connect with other pharmacists regarding patients, regarding cases when I do not know, or I don't have all instruments to solve it, or I do not have anyone to contact. Then you connect with another pharmacy/ pharmacist. It is especially good for new pharmacies, or new pharmacists that do not have enough experience…* Distributor 15 Interview*: This is the information I learnt while listening the conversation in the other pharmacy. I gave her a part of information, and I will help, I will go to the other pharmacy. So it is how I got additional information that I did not know before, but learnt it. That information did not help me directly to sell my products, but helped me to be useful to another person.* Pharmacy 01 Interview: *The pharmacy had the possibility to phone (the head office of producer), the special hotline (not*

			the rep) to ask personalized treatment schemas for the patient. I described the symptoms etc... We used to have this possibility. I believe this option exists even today, for example for cancer and other. You could have asked the medical representative, but in case I described the question was more technical so then I need to call a specialized person. For example Herbalife had a doctor. I used to call the doctor every time I needed guidance for a treatment. It is important especially for patients that have multiple medications, like 9 pills a day. Distributor 05 Interview: *... you learn continuously. I listen how the recommend the products to their patients, and where I do not understand something I learn from them. There are some cases when this learning is useful; sometimes what I have learnt has not yet proved to be useful. But it is great to learn continuously. I cannot say that I know everything.* Pharmacy 12 Interview: *He told me that he has a colleague that sells to hospitals and I am sure that they share information, and learn from each other. This is how you succeed to learn. It is the same way me and my colleague there is a close relationship. She is sharing with me what happened during the day … so I learn from her she learns from me.*
		Organizing/ attending events	Pharmacy 01 Interview: *The companies organizing these courses/ seminars, invite specialists (i.e. Doctors, Professors), and companies also present their products and solutions during these events … I cannot say how important and how much I appreciate the producer that is able to organize these types of events!!! …it is great to hear them, to hear clinical studies, case studies research, and product presentations with reactions/ effects at a very professional level. This means they have a professional approach!* Producer 03 Interview: *We also invite them to presentations, and to continuous educational events, we offer them mannequins and leaflets to create brand.* Pharmacy 14 Joint Interview*: the pharmacist are going outside of pharmacy for training sessions, including attending courses….*

	Procedures/ Rules	Formal- legislation Informal- no rules	Pharmacy 14 Joint Interview*: … for training sessions … BUT only if there are points awarded based on attendance, otherwise nobody wants to waste their time.* Distributor 04 Interview*: every day when we have coffee in the morning when we have coffee, we exchange much more information that having formal meetings. This informal way is better.* Producer 03 Interview*: we need to do this continuously. We also have to apply the same principle when it is about pharmacies as they rotate the personnel. Today you talk to someone, and you might talk to someone else in a month or so as the pharmacists decides to move to a different pharmacy or get promoted to a different role (than dealing with patients).* Producer 03 Interview: *if we list a new product range, we recommend first to organize a special launching event to train/ prepare the launch with the pharmacists ….* Distributor 05 Interview*: … to demonstrate how these can help them, the dimensions of the product, and fabric of the brace, in what situations the product is appropriate…. And I tell them the health issues the specific product is recommended. I can tell you, despite the fact they are pharmacists, they do not know. So it is good for them.*

	Ends – teleoaffective structures	Customer satisfaction	Pharmacy 17 Interview: *This is our objective: for the patient to leave this point being satisfied and informed.*
		Recommend the right solution	Producer 03 Interview*: ... the pharmacists to have all the strong knowledge on the product to feel comfortable recommending it. This will help the pharmacists to recommend correctly the right product for the right medical issue the patient might have.*
		Broaden perspectives	Pharmacy 21 Interview*: ...the knowledge I get. These are not necessarily coming from the representatives. The knowledge can be from a doctor, a specialist ... they are not only medical. There are things that help enlarge your perspectives.*
		Expanding knowledge	Distributor 04 Interview*: They succeeded to know the products much better, and this had an impact on the way they presented to patients the products. When they understood the products, and what each of them was good for, it was reflected because they recommended the products better….*
			Pharmacy 14 Joint interview*: ...seeing and listening was making a difference. After the lady from Alcon explained me all details, I can now explain to the patient how to do use the products.*
			Pharmacy 01 Interview*: It was easy to follow her describing the benefits of the products ... This is important as it makes our jobs (pharmacists' jobs) easier. If you know a product, then the way you re-distribute the information is different.*
		Appreciation	Pharmacy 21 Interview*: My feedback was positive, and the way the representative behaved made me think very high of the company. As a result of this presentation I was in a situation to further promote the products to potential patients!*

Appendix 5a: Transformative Practices (Beyond contractual terms), 'Calibrating Operations' - Anatomy and illustrative quotes

Practice	Practice anatomy		Illustrative quotes
Calibrating Operations	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Extending help	Distributor 05 Interview*: we tell each other problems, issues and if I can help, I do. I help them with business-related or with personal issues. They might ask me to buy them something they need from the market. If they know that I come, I do this, if I can help I always do. They (pharmacists need to feel you want to help her every time, help with any other different issues, not only with the orders and pharmacy.* Pharmacy 18 Joint Interview*: He helped us to recommend and to tell the patients what they need. I had a case. It was a lady she wanted the knee or ankle product I cannot remember exactly. Distributor's Sales rep came and started to interact with the lady. For the patient was very important to see the product representative here and get the recommendation directly from him. She was convinced* Pharmacy 17 Interview*: he helps when he has the opportunity. When there is someone here and he can interact with that person. Yes, he is actively doing that. Proactively, he is approaching patients (she is laughing a little).*
		Increasing resources	Pharmacy 10 Interview*: I once needed a product, so I called him asking him whether he had the product, was on stock and if he could bring her 3 pieces. The patient had to leave the country, so the pharmacists did not want to loose the patient. So sales rep left aside his route for that day, he went to warehouse, took the products and dropped them to the pharmacist. He also had a personal event that he missed due to the fact that he had to change all of that remaining day.* Producer 03 Interview*: for this product category the competition is very different than others. Sometimes we have in the category products that are so low priced, that we cannot even compare to them, or they at the medium level and do programs depending on resources available. So there is risk associated to adjust your activities and resources based on what resources a competitor has. It might be the case that the competitor might decide tomorrow that they will not promote the product range because they cannot afford to have them on stock in Romania...* Producer 03 Interview*: so then an important role of the distributor is to keep very close contact with the pharmacy and once the reps see the dynamic of the sales of the products then the reps can adjust what they can add or take out of the pharmacy (resources are pulled out)* *Distributor 13 Interview: adjust the time I spend with them. Only if they ask my support, then I spend more time. If they ask, it is good to be there and provide the right answer to help here.*

	Procedures/ Rules	Informal- no written rules, based on negotiations	Distributor 05 Interview*: I had a case, I was in a pharmacy and there was a patient which required a product, and very subtle, as there are pharmacists that dislike to get over them. I usually ask them if they agree me to look after the patient that needs a brace. There are pharmacists that accept this situation. The pharmacist then told the patient that the rep from the company is there and I could tell then the patient all the details of the product, how it works, and how it helps.* Distributor 13 Interview: *In principle, I allow the pharmacist to tell all the details to the patient, when the information seems to be incomplete it is when I try to complete it with the rest. As said, I give the room to the pharmacists, I do not start the explanations, or to contradict or to kind of show off. It would not be OK to do that.* Pharmacy 16 Joint Interview*: you cannot stop the discussion with the patient you have in front of you, so it is great if someone can hold the other patient, can discuss a little till I finish with the other one. It is a real help, as you do not want the patient to go.* Distributor 05 Interview*: Definitely they do appreciate my involvement. They tell me: [distributor representative name removed], look the lady or gentleman wants to know the product. And then I start talking to the patient and show them alternatives, provide all details. … I am adding value to the offer and they reach the moment of cashing the value of the product from patients, with little work from their side!* Distributor 15 Interview*: I have a direction from the owner. But the payment term is the same across the pharmacies. The other conditional terms are different to each of them. If they do not respect the payment term, I am flexible.*
	Ends – teleoaffective structures	Financial benefits/ Cash/ Sales Relevancy to the network Appreciation Trust/ respect/ appreciation Strong relationship	Distributor 05 Interview*: yes, a lot of these cases. Then I take over the presenting process, and the pharmacist is closing the circle by cashing the value from the customer/patient.* Pharmacy 18 Joint interview*:* certainly helped! We did not loose the client and we offered him a convenient alternative. Pharmacy 12 interview: *That's why I appreciated [distributor representative name removed], as he never told me that he would just phone and send by courier/ drop shipment, as there is limited parking. He is taking time Wed and Th to talk to me for 10 minutes…. I have also other suppliers that visit us, and interact with us but the relationship with [distributor representative name removed] is special. He is adjusting himself to our needs* Distributor 05 Interview*: I need to do everything possible … This is how I succeeded to gain their trust, respect and comfort that they can relay on me.* *Field notes_10: But it was how he succeeded to build a long-term relationship: adding additional resources and service (delivery of the exceptional order).*

Appendix 5b: Transformative Practices (Beyond contractual terms), 'Networking' - Anatomy and illustrative quotes

Practice	Practice anatomy		Illustrative quotes
Networking	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Operating in the network	Pharmacy 01 Interview*: I need to connect with other pharmacists regarding patients, regarding cases when I do not know, or I don't have all instruments to solve it, or I do not have anyone to contact (then you connect with another pharmacy/ pharmacist). It is especially good for new pharmacies, or new pharmacists that do not have enough experience…* Pharmacy 01 Interview*: I do interact with my pharmacy colleague as well as with other colleagues (in the chain). For example we are invited to some presentations, then we discuss about the products (content of the presentation), and how the products are received and experienced by patients, and which doctors recommend the products.* Pharmacy 12 Interview: *… to the one in the corner (a pharmacy). We do this as they also recommended us when it was the case. We have a very good collaboration. They do more the part for medicines, the part that addresses the medical devices they send the patients to us. And it works really well.* Distributor 15 Interview: *they talk to each other, and share the fact that '[distributor representative name removed] has visited me' so if I skip a location, even though it is not so profitable as the location you just visited, the pharmacist in the less profitable locations feels excluded and thinks 'hm… [distributor representative name removed] has not visited me, to share some information and ask me if I need something…!* Pharmacy 16 Joint Interview: *So it is a chain reaction or a domino effect. If one link in the chain is broken, then the business works slower/ more difficult to have results.* Pharmacy 01 Interview*: we have a group (on Skype), we write to each other about cases, patients etc.*
		Advocating	Producer 03 Interview*: the pharmacists talk about a category, then it is important they talk about us (our brand) and say that they had a positive interaction, and that the product range, the brand are qualitative.* Pharmacy 22 Interview*: The reps can also promote you, if they feel that you give them attention, if they see they have someone to talk to and can have an open and good communication, if you know their products, if you know the difference between their products and their competitors' products.*

	Procedures/ Rules	Informal- no written rules/ negotiated (or consulting) between parties	Pharmacy 22 Interview*: Another situation, when I had product that I could not sell that was getting close to expiration date, the medical reps visited doctors, promoted the product and could use the one that was getting close to expiration as a sample, or could ask the doctor to prescribe that medicine.* Mini focus group*: practically it is important at the same time the relationship that the rep is establishing with the doctors [Researcher note: here it is a clear indication that engagement only rep-pharmacist is not enough. It is mandatory to engage with other stakeholders, here doctors] that have office around the pharmacy* Producer 03 Interview*: The distributor has the direct commercial relationship with the pharmacies. So the distributor is introducing us to the pharmacy. The process is based on a common visit in the pharmacy.* Pharmacy 22 Interview*: If the product is there, I can send the patient. I cannot ask the pharmacy to transfer the product – this is legislation, we cannot transfer 1 piece from one pharmacy to another one. Then, if the product is not available I should call the headquarters or send the patients to the pharmacy I know it has stock for most products, the one I worked before.*
	Ends – teleoaffective structures	Sales Appreciation Support Being promoted to other actors	Distributor 05 Interview*: Both of us win, as they sell the product and have the money, I also sell them the replacing product that was sold. Everyone wins, it is a chain (domino effect)... unfortunately if a link is broken then the chain is not working properly.* Pharmacy 01 Interview: *... I interact with the company, with their reps, with other pharmacists, plus special invitees: doctors, university professors. One of them invited my professor from Iasi University … it was WOW [Researcher note: this pharmacist used 'hellooo' as a sign of something very special!!!].* Pharmacy 21 Interview: *I usually talk about this. My colleagues and I do interact. I tell them what impressed me. For Solgar I met a person with 2 children that were all vegans. Then I talked with their parents about vitamin B12 product from Solgar.* *Prod_03_Int*: *every time the partners need our support they will have a partner that they can count on* Pharmacy 21 Interview: *I appreciate they, they have been so opened, so I shared the fact that I will promote them, which actually happened!*

Appendix 5c: Transformative Practices (Beyond contractual terms), 'Promoting solutions' - Anatomy and illustrative quotes

Theme	Practices & anatomy		Illustrative quotes
Promoting products/ solutions	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Implementing POSMs	Producer 03 Interview: … *the implementation of the POS is more or less local/ pharmacy: next to the door, or next to the window, we can have a local and specific in store negotiation with the pharmacy.*
		Organizing campaigns	Pharmacy 01 Interview: *we have reps visiting us and presenting what products we have already listed in our portfolio, campaigns that will be implemented, contests for end users as advertised on TV and prizes, like computers, skate rollers etc.* Distributor 13 Interview: *… The only moment I am more involved is when we have special marketing events: a special promotional activity.*
		Recommending solution	Producer 03 Interview: *So we are in charge of marketing the product...Other pharmacies are much more involved: they promote the products, recommend the products and host events in their pharmacies.* Pharmacy 10 Interview: *He offers a lot of information to the pharmacists. It is helping that information, not only to have promoted that product but also to pass that information to the patients. I really want to have a qualitative service and not only price… All this information and tools to promote help me a lot!*
		Sampling	Pharmacy 22 Interview: *…She gave me samples to re-distribute to my patients… and these are helping me a lot here! The products are not very cheap.* Pharmacy 01 Interview: *Patients come back after testing a product. The samples can be a foil with 4-5 pills.*

	Procedures/ Rules	Informal-agreed based on negotiation Formal written (contracts)	Producer 03 Interview: … *the whole process takes place in the pharmacy and we have the opportunity to influence the whole process (listing products, getting space etc.).* Producer 03 Interview: *I do not need to tell them where to place a display and why. They know how to construct and plan in a way to reach the best places where displays and other materials need to be. But there are some activities where we add the value, and they just facilitate the transfer of it and process without influencing it.* Pharmacy 22 Interview: … *so probably this is why chains have reached the conclusion they need to constrain their staff not to work openly/ directly with representatives. There is a risk when every pharmacist is ordering products. In addition, what chains wanted to do with the existing rules is to eliminate the risk of collaborations pharmacist – representative, like 'order 5 products and I give 1 ticket as a gift…'.* Distributor 13 Interview: *Promoting a specific product or solution is sometimes based on a system in [pharmacy name removed] there are standard questions. I believe that these are written on the pharmacists' screen, to guide them, to help them to recommend the right product. The system is developed by [pharmacy name removed].*

	Ends – teleoaffective structures	Create awareness/ demand	Producer 03 Interview: *we also promote products on digital channel (i.e. web-site) and during sport events to increase the visibility of the brand, we have digital SEM, outbound links from our website to sport events websites. All of these help us to build the demand and create awareness of our solutions.*
		Customer satisfaction	Pharmacy 18 Joint Interview: *This is the objective: the patient needs to be happy, to be satisfied with the service received as this is what we provide: a service*.
			Pharmacy 01 Interview: *This is also how you make the patients loyal as well! You do not recommend something because it is discounted, or something … you always need to think about impact on health, to make the patient come back in pharmacy.*
			Pharmacy 01 Interview: *The patients are happy even for a small gift…a small sample has an impact on patient.*
		Financial benefits	Prod 03 Interview: *As a result of this investment, we are expecting the pharmacist to recommend the product on a constant (continuously) basis, to present our brand as a first option to the patient our and then the patient, if he/ she has the budget, to pay for the product.*
		Successful collaboration	Pharmacy 12 Interview: *So we need to work to promote my pharmacy, to increase the turnover. And we just need to do this. My excuses do not have any value. We need to promote it. This promo of the pharmacy is done through patient satisfaction. If I know to present a product, to adjust to each customer … because I cannot talk to a doctor the way I talk to a 70 years old patient that does not know what a brace is, just as an example. Separately, we need to learn as much as we can, we just need to work (smiling) to make the sales and everyone to be content.*

Appendix 6 – Transactional interactions – Practices & anatomy

Theme	Practices & anatomy	Activities (Expressing Understandings)	Procedures / Rules	Ends-Teleoaffective structures
Transactional interactions	Coordinating exchange	Checking stock	Written (contracts) & internal norms/ procedures	Turnover/ Sales Customer satisfaction
		Listing (new) products		
		Cashing invoices		
		Ordering		
		Supplying/ delivering		
	Fixing exchange issues	Solving product issues (dealing with damaged, helping with expired products)		Minimizing loss Customer satisfaction
		Fixing broken process		