Strategically releasing control: navigating the complexities of enabling category captains


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Strategically Releasing Control: 
Navigating the Complexities of Enabling Category Captains

ABSTRACT

Many retailers seek growth by strategically enabling a category captain to manage a category on their behalf. Past research assesses the efficacy of category captaincy from a retailer perspective, with results effective category captain arrangements depend on the respective abilities of actors to effectively operate in such a network structure. Less is known about what and how manufacturers become successful captains or how challenger manufacturers unseat an incumbent captain. With this research, we contribute to the growing but still small literature on category captaincy in two main ways. First, we re-orient the focus from the retailer to the manufacturer (both captain and non-captains) to uncover the enabling strategies and underlying capabilities captains and non-captains require when operating in category captaincy networks. Second, we contextualize the captaincy lifecycle in terms of three stages; consideration, captaincy, and renewal. Drawing on interviews with retailers, category captains, and non-captains from six sectors we develop propositions whereby capabilities are contingent on actor goals across the captaincy lifecycle. In so doing, we extend existing research by identifying the capabilities necessary for different actors to gain benefits from category captaincy arrangements.

Keywords: Category captaincy, category management, strategic enablement, enabling strategies.
INTRODUCTION

Category management is common in retail, whereby product categories are treated as strategic business units and specific strategies are developed to manage and grow individual categories (e.g., salty snacks, carbonated beverages, and so on). One means by which retailers seek to increase efficiency in category management is through partnership with a key manufacturer, or a category captain (Alan, Dotson, and Kurtuluş 2017; Bandyopadhyay, Rominger, and Basaviah 2008; Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011). Such arrangements allow one supplier to take on a significant role in the retail management of the category for all brands, including those of competing suppliers (Desrochers, Gundlach, and Foer 2003). While existing research provides insight to the benefit of category captain relationships for retailers (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011; Nijs, Misra, and Hansen 2014), there has been less focus on understanding category captain arrangements from the supplier perspective, specifically the resources and strategies required to become, effectively compete as, and renew being (or dethrone) an incumbent.

Under category captaincy, retailers effectively outsource the responsibility for managing a category and its supplier relationships to one key supplier with the goal to grow the overall share of the category (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011; Morgan, Kaleka, and Gooner 2007). The practice is widespread and likely the dominant mode for many European and US-based retailers (Subramanian et al. 2010), however, it would seem to challenge the traditional views, including the knowledge-based view and resource-based view of the firm. These views consider a firm's internal capabilities as key to its strategy and performance (Barney 1991; Deligönül and Çavuşgil 1997) with the most critical resources being those that are superior in use, hard to imitate, difficult to substitute for, and more valuable within the firm than outside (Porter 1986).
Rather than engage a category captain, the resource-based view would suggest retailers develop category management capabilities in-house. However, research has shown that when retailers do not engage a category captain, they tend to not invest their own resources into category management and miss subsequent performance improvements (Gooner, Morgan, Perreault, 2011). Hence, when manufacturer brands engage as category captains, they can provide significant value to retailers that is otherwise not realized.

Category captaincy is an act of mutual strategic enablement. The retailer enables the captain by allowing access to pertinent data and provides control for the captain in making product range, shelf allocation, product placement, and pricing decisions across the store network (Kurtuluş and Toktay 2011). In exchange, the captain enables retailers with knowledge of consumer needs and behavior, taking on the role of management of the product category, including the relationships between competitors and the mix of brands to drive value for the retailer by growing the category overall. Initially, the category captain phenomenon was primarily an activity within the FMCG sector, however, today the arrangement operates across a wide variety of sectors, including DIY, pharmacy and apparel. Prominent captains include Colgate, Proctor & Gamble, General Mills, Pepsi and Kraft, to name a few (Progressive Grocer, 2019). Category captaincy provides benefits to multiple actors, including the retailer, the category captain, and even non-captains operating under captaincy arrangements (Kurtuluş and Toktay, 2005; Kurtuluş, Nakkas and Ülkü 2014).

This paper develops understanding of category captain arrangements, and the necessary capabilities to win, manage, and retain (or challenge) captaincy from a manufacturer’s perspective. This is important as much past research has focused on the perspective of the retailer rather than that of the manufacturer (captain and non-captains) in these B2B relationships. With
this research, we address calls for a greater understanding of the capabilities required for the multiple actors within captain networks (e.g., Nijs, Misra, and Hansen 2014). Multiple-actor perspectives (captains, non-captains, and retailers) are included to aid in teasing out captain and non-captain capabilities. Capabilities are important as they encapsulate the processes by which resources can be combined and deployed to achieve positional advantage (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011). Understanding capabilities in the context of category captaincy is important as retailers often face resource deficits and strive to leverage supplier resources and capabilities to create and capture greater value through the management of categories (Chimhundu, McNeill and Hamlin, 2015; Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011).

Our focus on the capabilities that enable captain and non-captain suppliers is important for two reasons. First, although capabilities are at the heart of much category captaincy research, a deliberate focus on those necessary to enable and operate under new network structures remains unexplored. Second, despite being concerned that category captains may exploit non-captains (Kurtuluş, Ülkü, Dotson and Nakkas 2014) much of the research is focused on implications for the retailer and the captain. Next we provide a brief overview of the theoretical background that frames our research before detailing our research method. We then outline our findings before presenting a discussion and conclusion.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Historically, much research on category management focused on the effectiveness of category management by the retailer (e.g., Basuroy, Mantrala and Walters 2001; Dhar, Hoch, and Kumar 2001; Gruen and Shah 2000; Lindblom and Olkkonen 2008). Over time this research stream evolved to examine the category captain phenomenon, with debate arising as to whether
category captain arrangements lead to competitive exclusion or not. Mixed evidence has both supported (Morgan, Kaleka, and Gooner 2007) and refuted (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011) the claim.

The knowledge-based view of the firm suggests that of all possible resources available to an organization, knowledge bases resident within a firm are the main determinants of sustainable competitive advantage (Gupta and Govindarajan 2000; Rapp, Ahearne, Mathieu and Schillewaert 2006). However, category captain arrangements challenge this idea and suggest that knowledge bases external to a firm can provide competitive advantage (Alan, Dotson, and Kurtuluş 2017). Now, manufacturers strategically enable retailers to positively drive assortment, pricing, and/or merchandising decisions, creating value through cooperation (Ehret 2004). The combination of retailers’ lack of resources and manufacturers’ superior category, consumer, and market trend knowledge creates strategic enablement opportunities. Accordingly, many retailers engage one of their leading manufacturers as a category captain to manage a given product category. The literature on category captaincy tends to focus on the perspective of the retailer or on retail competition. As a means to synthesize our review of the literature, we provide an overview of key literature and contributions in Table 1, distinguishing this existing literature from our work. Next we provide an overview of the strategic value of category captains before providing an overview of what is known with regard to effectively enabling category captain networks.

**The Strategic Value of Category Captains**

Retailers appoint category captains for a number of reasons, including enhancing category value and performance, accessing supplier capabilities, achieving greater power and control, and
reducing transaction costs (Dhar, Hoch, and Kumar 2001; Dupre and Gruen 2004; Gruen and Shah 2000; Kurtuluş, Nakkas, and Ülkü 2014; Kurtuluş and Toktay 2011; Subramanian et al. 2010). Although initial fears regarding a shift towards a more adversarial set of relationships between category captains and suppliers (and to a lesser extent retailers) appear unfounded, research suggests that the structure of the network does change (Hingley 2005). For example, retailers typically work more closely with their category captains to the detriment of other suppliers while captains may access retailer knowledge about the performance of their competitors, and require sensitive information from non-captains (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011).

Despite initial fears that category captain arrangements would undermine supplier relationships, result in captain opportunism, legal “militancy” by suppliers, or reduce consumer welfare (Morgan, Kaleka, and Gooner 2007), research suggests this is not the case (Nijs, Misra, and Hansen 2014). Kurtuluş, Nakkas and Ülkü (2014) identify that category captain arrangements are mutually beneficial for the retailer and captain when the category captain has greater capabilities than the retailer, the products are more attractive, there are high costs of managing variety, low retail margins (relative to manufacturers), and competition for the captaincy is moderate. Although research suggests retailers claim the majority of the value from category captain arrangements, suppliers also benefit, usually through category growth (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011). In fact, as several authors have shown, the potential for win-win scenarios is if anything, underappreciated (even by retailers) (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011; Nijs, Misra, and Hansen 2014).

This sentiment of win-win in category captain arrangements has received empirical support (Alan, Dotson, and Kurtuluş 2017). Alan, Dotson, and Kurtuluş (2017) find that such
arrangements improve category sales, benefit the retailer’s private label as well as the captain’s national brands, and that the competing manufacturers (non-captains) also benefit from overarching category captain arrangements. In essence, allowing a lead supplier greater influence through a captaincy arrangement can result in enhanced category management resources and capabilities for the retailer (e.g., Corsten and Kumar 2005).

**Limited Understanding of How to Effectively Enable Category Captain Networks**

Concerns about resource decisions and by implication capabilities are implicit in many papers on category captain arrangements. Gooner, Morgan and Perreault (2011) identify that each actor within a category captain-defined network must deploy their unique resources effectively to benefit from such arrangements while retailers are encouraged to select captains to fill capability gaps (as opposed to developing them in-house). Likewise, studies often examine how much manufacturers should invest in developing their category captaincy capabilities. However, these authors rarely identify exactly what capabilities manufacturers should invest in and imply that category captaincy simply involves the technical aspects of category management (Nijs, Misra, and Hansen 2014) or “the process for managing entire product categories as business units [including] decisions such as product assortment, pricing, and shelf-space allocation to each product on the basis of category goals” (Kurtuluş and Toktay 2011, p.47).

Other studies identify strategies or tactics that various network actors should use but do not examine the underpinning capabilities. For example, Subramanian et al. (2010) suggest non-captain manufacturers should invest in category-expanding services as a means of keeping the category captain “on their toes”, while Kurtuluş et al. (2014) and Kurtuluş and Toktay (2011) identify category expansion as a key means of reducing non-captain militancy. Some have
proposed the need for each network actor to be ‘adaptable’ and for category captains to invest in monitoring to reduce militant behavior (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011). Finally, others have suggested that the challenge relies not so much on technical effectiveness but on softer, impression management skills. Since captains must walk a fine line between optimizing the retailer’s performance and their own (Nijs, Misra, and Hansen 2014, p.78) captains may have to manage retailer expectations of growth and their ability to deliver increases in value in order to subtly enhance their own returns (Kurtuluş et al. 2014). Despite this, explicit consideration of the capabilities necessary for captains and non-captains remains, to the best of our knowledge, rare. We therefore interviewed networks of actors experienced in category captaincy. These included category captains and non-captains, as well as their retail partners. We then develop a series of propositions relating to capabilities in the context of category captaincy arrangements.

**METHOD**

Given the lack of previous research on capabilities for operating in category captain-defined networks, we chose an exploratory research design, drawing our data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with captains, their retailers and non-captain suppliers in Australia. We treated each network as a “mini-case” (Eisenhardt 1989), selecting six sectors to ensure diversity and saturation and then sampling retailers, captains, and non-captains within each. Non-captains are defined as significant suppliers who had the resource base and market coverage to potentially act as captains (these choices were confirmed by the non-captains’ respective retailer and category captains). That is, in line with our focus we did not sample small specialist suppliers who neither had the ability nor desire to be category captains.
We used a purposive sampling strategy, focusing on categories where category captain arrangements are most likely to occur where captaincy has been identified as having the most strategic importance (e.g., Hingley 2005; Morgan, Kaleka, and Gooner 2007). Kurtuluş, Nakkas and Ülkü (2014) suggest category captaincy occurs in categories with specific characteristics including those where manufacturers have greater expertise than retailers, have a national presence, and where there is competition for the captaincy role. Details of the final sample are provided in Table 2 which includes players from the following networks: carbonated beverages, alcoholic beverages, confectionary, FMCG, grocery, and pet care. These networks represent several billion dollars’ worth of annual sales and include major Australian retailers and manufacturers (several of whom are also global brands).

**INSERT TABLE 2**

Face-to-face interviews were used in order to explore a range of practices and challenges faced by each network member, as well as to reflect on the experience of being a category captain. We sought to examine the differing perspectives of network members while adhering to case research protocols (Beverland and Lindgreen 2010; Yin 1994). Thus, we sampled six networks for a total of 27 interviews. We conducted interviews with retailers, category captains and non-captains. Although we were not focused on exploring the capabilities required by retailers (we collected data on this issue) for operating in category captain arrangements, we treated these informants as customers of category captains, and thus their views were critical for understanding category captain capabilities (particularly as these interviews involved discussion of captain selection and renewal). The same approach was used for category captains and non-captain suppliers. We also interviewed each network player on their experiences, investments, and beliefs about capabilities. This data was used to both triangulate the “customer” data and
also to identify areas of tension that may represent a mismatch of expectations. Data collection ceased when no new data yielded few theoretically new insights (i.e., theoretical saturation) (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Interviews were conducted by two of the research team at the informants’ workplace and involved open-ended grand tour questions (where interviewees respond on their own terms) and floating prompts (questions that explore topics that emerge during the interview process) typical of interpretive research (McCracken 1986). Lasting between sixty and ninety minutes on average, interviews commenced with a discussion about the informants’ experience of category captaincy arrangements. We then explored informant notions of best practice, desirable partners, tensions and conflicts, and category characteristics, before ending on general perceptions regarding category captaincy (including comparing initial perceptions with post-experience realities) and how it could be improved. Questions were adjusted slightly depending on whether the informant was a retailer, category captain, or non-captain supplier. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. In total, the data set consisted of 308 single-spaced pages of text.

Two research team members conducted the analysis after each interview (we rotated this role) with a third acting as a devil’s advocate. Consistent with this form of research we analyzed the data at the case (network) and cross-case (between networks and network roles) level (Eisenhardt 1989). Analysis involved reading each transcript several times, often re-listening to interviews, and then using Spiggle’s (1994) open, axial, and selective coding techniques (aided by Nvivo software). A number of strategies were used to improve the trustworthiness and quality of our interpretation by addressing issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (criteria typical of qualitative marketing management studies, e.g. Flint,
Woodruff, and Gardial 2002). First, credibility was addressed through multiple interviews from different perspectives (triangulation), member checks, comparing analysis outcomes with raw transcripts in order to reach theoretical saturation, and multiple coders. Second, transferability was addressed through sampling from a range of industry contexts and network positions. Third, dependability was addressed by asking informants for multiple examples of interactions, conflict, cooperation, and negotiation to identify consistencies across many informant recollections. Finally, confirmability was addressed by using three coders, providing short summaries of each interview to informants, and using dialectical tacking to support or enhance emerging findings.

**FINDINGS**

Our aim is to identify capabilities for captains and non-captains operating in category captain-defined networks. We focus on capabilities in line with Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault (2011), who distinguish between resources capabilities—being the processes by which such resources are combined and deployed to achieve positional advantage among consumers (e.g., Vorhies and Morgan 2005). To this end, this section tacks between informant accounts and the relevant literature in order to develop testable propositions. Through our discussions, we identified different capabilities and enabling strategies across three stages of the captaincy lifecycle: consideration, captaincy, and renewal. The first phase is a consideration phase whereby potential manufacturer brands are ‘shortlisted’ based on their perceived capabilities. During this phase, potential captains are reviewed, and a category captain is selected. At this phase, The consideration phase involves investments in capabilities that represent points of parity. That is, they are the bare minimum for being considered as a category captain and/or non-captain. Once selected, the captaincy lifecycle progressed to the captaincy phase, a phase whereby the category
captain takes control of the category and manages related strategic decisions and supplier relationships on behalf of the retailer. During the captaincy phase, those capabilities that defined category captains over non-captains become prominent as well as those were deployed by non-captains to undermine the captain. Toward the end of the captaincy period, the captaincy lifecycle moves into the renewal phase. At this time, the retailer reviews performance and reconsiders the incumbent for renewal. The renewal phase involves the capabilities necessary for ensuring one is renewed as the category captain. In the subsequent sections, we unpack the relevant enabling strategies. Table 3 provides a summary of our findings across each stage of the captaincy lifecycle – specifically outlining the enabling strategies and how each strategy is achieved, along with illustrative quotes.

**INSERT TABLE 3**

**The Consideration Phase**

Leverage Capabilities and Trust

The first phase of the captaincy lifecycle was the consideration phase. In this phase, potential category captains go through a vetting process and are short-listed based on a number of criteria, including their market power (market size, brand strength) and ability to enhance the retailer’s capabilities (particularly in marketing and consumer insights). From a retailer perspective, this evaluation process was discussed in terms of seeking a suitable category captain that could strategically enable capabilities deemed as lacking, or resources it did not have. In terms of the actual evaluation process, the consideration phase as involving two key components. First, an evaluation of the capabilities that represent points of parity, that is, the bare minimum for being considered. These represent hygiene factors to be within the captaincy consideration set, and consistent with the existing literature related to market power and expertise in category
management (Subramanian et al., 2010). Second, an evaluation of the capabilities that distinguish manufacturers apart, which typically included the manufacturer’s existing, or implied, relational capabilities as well as stated capabilities in marketing and consumer insight.

The first key criteria used could distinguish potential captains is market power, in terms of market size and brand strength. Retail informants were consistent in their view that the major national brands needed to have a prominent place on retail shelves. Two reasons existed for this view. First, customers would expect major national brands to have a strong presence. Second, being a major national brand was a proxy measure for capabilities in brand, marketing, and insights. However, in some cases, no one supplier has a clear point of difference. Our informants discussed views regarding the power of leading brands, which emphasizes the need for brand leadership capabilities, although these capabilities were deemed as necessary for being a category captain, in themselves they were not enough to be captain.

Moreover, being the largest supplier, brand, or a market leader was not in itself sufficiently enough to ensure appointment as captain. While niche or very small specialist suppliers were not included in the consideration phase (because of a lack of resource base), retailers all stated that when categories are moderately competitive, manufacturer size differences are often slight and provide little real difference in terms of capabilities. In this case, it was the existing, or implied, relational capabilities, underpinned by a preparedness to work collaboratively and build category value that acted as a point of difference and added weight to appointment as the captain. For example, Jackie (grocery retailer) illustrates how a smaller (albeit not niche) manufacturer may be able to elevate themselves into the consideration set:

It’s not always about how much the power they have in the market. Not every one of your major suppliers is necessarily easy to deal with and there are others who may be smaller and have a genuine interest in working with you. … They demonstrate that through by expressing a desire to work with you day-to-day and what they bring you is opportunity
and a new way of thinking. When there are issues, they have ability to resolve those issues in a quick, sometimes non-traditional, and effective way.

Second, an evaluation of the capabilities that distinguish manufacturers from each other involved an assessment of the potential captain’s capabilities in marketing and consumer insight, and existing relational abilities. Marketing and consumer insight capabilities were commonly discussed as resource capabilities that the retailer was seeking to attain through captaincy arrangements. Retail informants commonly identified a desire to access the captain’s specialist expertise in marketing and consumer insight – with such capabilities able to elevate a manufacturer within the consideration set, especially when the retailer sought to address their own capability deficiencies. Jackie’s (groceries retailer) passage below illustrates this point and is echoed by many of our respondents (i.e., see Table 3, Walter’s quote).

We generally have a lack of market and consumer information, we don’t have our own dedicated insights department, or really understand what the market is doing – or likely to do in the long term. So we want to share this responsibility with a key supplier – they have the ability in invest in what we can’t – so in essence we are saying ‘come in to our business we need to work collaboratively to develop the category going forward.’ We want the opportunity to get insights, both locally and overseas, to develop as a retailer … a big part of it is marketing and consumer knowledge.

Both Jackie and Walter identify the need to acquire capabilities in areas where the retail management team feels deficient. Walter is in effect looking to buy-in category specific expertise by partnering with a category captain as opposed to investing in the development of specialist knowledge in-house. Walter is hoping to access firms with a track record of category-specific innovation, including the research budgets underpinning them and the knowledge and expertise contained in the captain’s innovation department. Importantly, Walter acknowledges that his retail budget would be unlikely extend to cover the capabilities investment received from a category captain.
Our findings suggest that retailers’ consideration criteria for being a supplier and a captain overlap but also differ. Jackie’s decision not to automatically hand the category captain role to the largest supplier implies that size per se is not a key variable driving their decision. This view was reinforced by all retailer respondents and by analysis of the respective market shares of captains and non-captains sampled. Subramanian et al. (2010) suggest that the largest manufacturer may not always be the obvious choice for a category captain because retailers often seek suppliers best placed to take a strategic view of the category. Others have identified a desire to work closely as an important antecedent for retailer adoption of a category captain (Hingley 2005; Kurtuluş et al. 2014; Morgan, Kaleka, and Gooner 2007). Together, this leads to the following proposition:

P1: All things being equal, firms that (a) have parity giving capabilities (brand leadership, marketing expertise, customer understanding) and (b) relational capabilities (in terms of trust and shared outlook) are more likely to be considered for captaincy roles than those with lesser relational reputations (despite evidence for (a)).

The Captaincy Phase

Once selected, the captaincy lifecycle progresses to the captaincy phase. In this phase the retailer strategically releases control of the category to the chosen captain, handing over a degree of strategic decision-making and supplier relationship management. During this phase, tension and exploitation occurs among all actors. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the inter-relationships between the actors at this phase. Our discussions explored the goals, tensions, conflicts, practices and experiences of retailers, captains, and non-captains during this phase. In doing so, we identify the competing tensions at the surface and below the surface (sub-text
tensions) between all actors. Importantly, we identify two overarching enabling strategies at this phase of the lifecycle. The category captain engages in category stewardship and the non-captain engages in opportunistic entrepreneurship. Each of these is detailed in the following section.

INSERT FIGURE 1

Category Stewardship

Once selected as a captain, retailers suggested that it is critically important for the captain to work for the greater good of the category. We labeled this enabling strategy ‘category stewardship’. In effect, those that strive to be captains must either be able to act as category stewards or be seen to be better stewards than the incumbent. During the captaincy phase, there is inherent tension between the captain and the retailer in terms of demonstrating collaboration. On the surface, there is a desire for the captain to be demonstrating a ‘we/ us’ mentality, however the sub-text to this tension is that the captain has a desire to extract value from the captaincy position, which is often linked to ‘growing me’. Between the captain and non-captain, there is tension between the surface level perception of collaborative effort and the sub-text tension of competitive tension. In achieving category stewardship, three key drivers were identified: an ‘us’ or ‘we’-orientation (work for the benefit of the category, rather than opportunistically improving their position within it), developing long-term focus, and embracing psychological ownership of the category.

The first way in which the captain exhibits category stewardship was discussed in terms of embracing ‘we’ or ‘us’ rather than ‘me’. In examining expectations of the strategic partnership, our retail informants identified a focus on collaboration, or growing the category and not just the captain’s brands and exploiting the captaincy position for self-gain. For example, Walter (FMCG
retailer) illustrates that orienting the captain to this mind-set is a typical struggle at the beginning of the captaincy phase, with many being initially self-oriented (see Table 3). Instead, the best performing captains needed to move away from seeing the role solely through self-interest, viewing collaboration as imperative and adopting a ‘we’ mentality. This was cited as central to a captain’s performance during the captaincy phase. Donnie (Confectionary retailer) explains further:

You need the captain to take a step back and work for the greater good. This can be tough, and you wouldn’t give [the captaincy role] to anybody … Let’s say you have Cadbury, Nestlé and Mars [as suppliers]. Mars has a number of the major sellers in the top ranked items within the category, while Nestlé has greater total volume, but Cadbury is the biggest in terms of overall share … This could be a tough decision; you could equally say we will give it to Cadbury. But you could give it to Mars given their dominance in some segments, or you could even make the case for Nestlé. But it has to come down to the relationships, the people and their capability and resource. Which is the better choice? Of course, it is the one that takes a broader view of things and is not as blinkered [by self-interest].

Consistent with the literature (Alan, Dotson and Kurtuluş 2017), Donnie highlights how category captains face conflict between their desire to maximize the exposure of their own brand and meeting category goals. In this way there is an inherent sub-text to the tension between the captain and retailer, between the collaborative growing ‘we’ and the captain’s desire to grow ‘we’. This view was consistent across retailers, with many suggesting strong suppliers have large resource bases and the ability to be able to take a broader view of the category (and not be narrowly focused on individual brands). This was essential to a successful captaincy arrangement.

Category stewardship also involves captains demonstrating a long term holistic focus. As Marty (alcoholic beverage retailer) says, good category captains are able to take the view that “in order to grow the category I’ve actually got to put the opposition product ahead of mine, and they’re not all big enough to do that.” This desire for category stewardship is why retailers place
such emphasis on relational capabilities and reputation when selecting the category captain (see P1). Stewardship is inherently relational, collaborative, and focused on mutual long-term benefit (2012). Stewardship is also not altruistic. Instead, by putting others interests first, benefits are believed to accrue to the steward over the long run. This is certainly the belief of retailers and category captains. For example, Donnie (retailer) elaborates:

Ideally the whole thing is about driving profitable sales and where it has been done effectively certainly the experiences that I’ve had anyway with category captaincy is their sales have grown because as a result of planning the category they are also then thinking ahead towards promotional programs, thinking ahead towards seasonality, so they’d be doing a category program now [early January], but they would be thinking about ‘what are we doing for Christmas? What are we doing for Easter, Father’s Day, Mother’s Day…?’ So, it gives the category captain I think a longer view of the category rather than the buyer or the category manager phoning up a supplier and saying, ‘look we’ve got a promotion next month what have you got?’ The category captain can in fact forecast out almost 12 months if there is a definite planning process within the retailer’s business, plan out what’s happening in Easter next year and getting the benefit of that to the disadvantage of their competitors.

Donnie’s passage describes the shift to a longer-term planning horizon as a result of category captaincy arrangements. This shift has several advantages for retailers, but importantly, also for the captain. As many informants noted, planning sessions became more intense, more detailed, and involved significant information sharing, and trend and needs analysis at a category level. Many category captains noted that they had increased the frequency with which they met retailers (extreme changes such as moving from quarterly to fortnightly meetings were not unusual).

Stewardship is also mediated by psychological ownership, or the “state of mind in which an individual feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of it is theirs” (Hernandez 2012, p. 182). Psychological ownership requires a significant mindset shift for the category captain. This shift was discussed by retail informants in terms of a shift toward a long term focus for captains.
Since category captains were often organizations with well-established brands, they tended to frame the category in terms of their own brands and their own consumers. Consistent with research on interpretive barriers to inter-functional coordination (Dougherty 1992), category captains tended to draw on information that confirmed their own bias while ignoring contradictory input. For example, Maude (Pet Care retailer) identifies how such bias fractured the relationship with the pet care category captain:

Suppliers tend to do a lot more consumer and market research. For instance, if you’re talking pet food, Nestlé Purina is miles ahead. But, in many instances you get them coming to us and saying, ‘Guys, we really understand the consumers, we understand the market, and we’ll show you how to grow it.’ But when you start getting into the nitty gritty, they know how to grow the category from their perspective. When you start talking to them about products they don’t sell, like a pouch of wet cat food, which is about 25% of cat food sales, they haven’t got a clue. Then when we discuss a product like dog food rolls, the wet dog roll market, which is about 47% of our total [sales] in dog food, they haven’t got a clue either. And you want to be our pet care category captain!? When almost half of dog food sales, and a quarter of cat food sales you haven’t a clue about! And then they turn around and say ‘well, you shouldn’t be selling that stuff’ … That’s not the way to run our category – our customers want those products.

Maude’s passage reinforces the need for a holistic category perspective whereby the captain takes on psychological ownership for the entire category as well as the need to overcome interpretive barriers that lead to a lack of category understanding. In the pet care category Maude is responsible for, the largest supplier Purina primarily deals in dry food whereas suppliers who focus on wet food lead critical segments within the market. As a result, Maude has struggled with the decision to either split the category (into wet and dry food) or re-assess the captaincy role and search for a broad-minded captain (which is what she did). Many of our retail informants challenged captain’s interpretive schemes in order to focus the captain on the needs of all consumers in the category.
The perspective of psychological ownership is reiterated in the carbonated beverages category by Jeffrey (retailer) who discusses the need to set up the aisles according to how the consumer wants it, not just according to how Coca Cola (their category captain)- wanted it. The focus here is in keeping the consumer happy and coming back, which is perceived as being more sustainable for the retailer than just selling more Coke. Jeffrey identifies the value he wishes to derive from a category captain. In articulating his desire to drive value through understanding the consumer and delivering value to all customers (not just Coke buyers), Jeffrey identifies the need for the captain to take ownership of the category and all its customers.

Putting aside short-term interest requires the captain to adopt category stewardship. Stewardship is a prosocial behavior that “requires one to take felt ownership and moral responsibility for customers’ overall welfare” (Schepers et al. 2012, p.2). Stewardship sits in contrast to an agency approach whereby actors seek to maximize their own self-interest and consists of two antecedents: other-orientation and long-term focus (Hernandez 2012). One captain, Knox, who been renewed as the category captain three times, expressed that taking responsibility for the success of a category, demonstrates psychological ownership whereby he takes an emotional interest in the success of his customer’s business. One result of this was to invest in different types of market sensing capabilities, shifting focus away from sole emphasis on one’s brand(s) to gaining an understanding of category dynamics.

In summary, retailers desire certain types of value from category captains. This involved putting aside their own interests and developing a ‘we’ orientation, shifting toward a holistic long term focus, and embracing psychological ownership of the category. Retailers desired this because they wanted to improve the customer attractiveness of the total category and use this as a point of difference with their competitors. Thus, category captains are valued for their ability to
manage relationships, put the category’s interest ahead of their own and take a long-term position. Interviews with category captains reinforced this view, identifying how their practices shifted and (as will be covered below) how being a steward gave them a greater likelihood of being retained as captain. This leads to the following propositions:

P2a: Adoption of category stewardship rather than an opportunistic focus will increase likelihood of selection as a category captain.

P2b: Successful category stewardship involves (a) we-orientation, (b) long-term focus, and (c) psychological ownership of the category.

Opportunistic Entrepreneurship

During the captaincy phase, non-captains discussed the adoption of strategies for survival under the captaincy arrangements while also ‘chipping away’ at the credibility of the incumbent captain. Figure 2 illustrates the non-captain tensions, being a tension between collaboration and competition with the captain, and a tension between being a team player and undermining the captain. Most of the passages in this section come from non-captains in specific categories; however (as part of triangulation) we also draw on passages from captains because they are often non-captains in another category but with competitor retailers and so can compare and contrast the two roles. In our interviews with non-captains, discussions were framed in terms of gaining captaincy. Broadly they set out to achieve this through a bundle of activities and investments that we categorize as “opportunistic entrepreneurialism”. Opportunistic entrepreneurship involves attacking the incumbent captain’s weaknesses via strategic impression management and challenging the status quo by sowing doubt in the mind of retailer.
In terms of impression management, non-captains expressed a common aim of “trying to do what our competitors (the captain) cannot”. Smokey, non-captain in the alcoholic beverage category, discussed how he strives to chip away, bit by bit, and show that he has a superior knowledge of the products across the range from the consumer perspective. It was common for non-captains to discuss shopper and category insights as playing an important role in strengthening their credibility and assisting with impression management. The sentiment of “chipping away” was common across many non-captain reflections, with many signaling a constant, incremental approach to undermining the incumbent captain through attacking weaknesses, leveraging their own unique capabilities to highlight the opportunity costs of appointing the captain, and looking for small points of difference, all of which are aimed at creating an impression that the retailer is not getting the best deal. Importantly, although such actions are aimed at sowing seeds of doubt in the minds of the retailer, non-captains are mindful of the need to appear to be on the retailer’s side. Therefore, opportunistic entrepreneurialism involves careful signaling toward foregone retailer benefits and aiming at creating an impression with the retailer than the non-captain would be a better category steward than the incumbent. This struggle is represented in Figure 2 as the tension between “being a team player” and “undermining the captain’s efforts”.

In challenging the status quo, non-captains discussed a number of strategies. Often these involved pitching monetary and non-monetary benefits to retailers. For instance, Jasper, non-captain in the confectionary category, illustrates how monetary rewards can aid in unseating a captain:

It is important to note that Coles and Woolworths [the two major grocery chains in Australia] are publicly listed companies who answer to their shareholders. They have to deliver a return. Therefore, if we went and offered the best deal to get rid of a competitor,
the retailers have to listen, because there’s a chance that they can make more money and deliver a greater return.

In contrast, Franz, non-captain in the carbonated beverage category, discusses the value in non-monetary rewards in unseating a captain (as illustrated in Table 3). While these passages identify how non-captains seek to challenge the status quo but frame the disruption in ways beneficial to the retailer, Jasper’s approach is more direct than Franz’s. However, both represent the same logic. Jasper has invested in a range of process improvements aimed at price competitiveness relative to the captain. Although this may oversimplify what retailers desire in a captain, Jasper is seeking to reposition his firm as the one best placed to meet the real needs of his retail clients. Franz, instead, focuses on using other aspects of the marketing mix to build genuine points of difference between them and the captain. In this way, they are once again able to slowly and constantly undermine the incumbent captain in order to improve their own position.

The final way in which non-captains engaged in challenging the status quo is by playing competing retailers off against each another. Aimee, a non-captain in Pet Care, typifies how non-captains use knowledge of this to undermine their captains:

You try to leverage them you know (the retailers), so if you were like weaker with one, you go to the other and do a huge promotion and try to hurt the competing retailer. They usually come to you and say hang on; we want to do more with you. There’s a lot of different power players at work.

Although research on category captain arrangements often focuses on controlling captain opportunism and reducing non-captain misbehavior (usually defined in relation to potential legal action), Aimee’s passage offers a different view on the inherent power-relations. Building on research on networks whereby suppliers exist in many networks but have different positions (which define their roles, rights and obligations) in each (Ford, Gadde, Håkansson and Snehota
we identify how suppliers targeting multiple retailers can use their position in one network to improve their position in another. Research on category captaincy tends to focus on the power relations in immediate networks, however Aimee’s passage and those of the other informants above suggest in cases where some level of retail competition exists, it is not just retailers that benefit from playing suppliers off against one another for the captaincy role.

In sum, unseating an incumbent captain requires non-captains to demonstrate they would be better stewards via impression management and challenging the status quo. Since research identifies (and our informants reinforce) that opportunism by category captains is a concern for retailers (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011; Nijs, Misra, and Hansen 2014), non-captains are in effect playing to such fears by suggesting incumbents are taking advantage of the captaincy role for selfish gain. Thus, for non-captains, opportunistic entrepreneurship is enabled by investments in impression management and challenging the status quo. Impression management involves the projection of ideal behaviors in order to improve one’s reputation with target audiences (Elsbach, Sutton and Principe 1998). In this context opportunistic entrepreneurship is not so much focused on short-term personal gain, but on demonstrating the non-captain’s superior ability to enhance category relative to the incumbent captain. This leads to the following propositions:

P3a: Non-captains are more likely to unseat incumbent captains if they build a reputation for stewardship that exceeds that of the captain by identifying, exploiting, and communicating a captain’s weaknesses and opportunities for value creation.

P3b: Undermining an incumbent captain involves (a) specific investments in market sensing focused on exploiting gaps between competitors (both within and between networks), (b) leveraging network position, and (c) impression management.
The Renewal Phase

Proactive Impression Management

Toward the end of the captaincy phase, the captaincy lifecycle progresses toward the renewal phase. At this stage the captain enters into a phase of proactive impression management. The goal of the captain during this phase is to provide a solid foundation for renewal as captain. This gives rise to another set of capabilities we term proactive impression management, which involves category captains signaling to retailers they increased category value. This is made all the more difficult given non-captains have typically invested heavily during the captaincy phase in developing capabilities aimed at dethroning the captain. While the focus at this stage is on the category captain, the non-captain continues with opportunistic entrepreneurship as a strategy to undermine the captain. Captains stressed the need for three types of proactive impression management: proactive category management, performance leadership and horizon expansion. Retailers confirmed this view through their emphasis on accessing manufacturers’ specialist expertise when discussing their “real” motives for category captaincy.

However, it is important to note that prior to entering the renewal phase, category captains discussed the necessity to assess category-level investment versus return. While research indicates that captains can benefit from such arrangements if they can grow the size and/or value of the category (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011), concerns arise because retailers are perceived to have significant power in the relationship. Captains constantly referred to category captaincy as a double-edged sword, whereby they valued the role and worked hard to achieve and retain the status of captain. However, decisions around the levels of investment in the relationship had to be framed in terms of trade-offs between the benefits flowing from the
role, the level of investment needed to achieve those benefits, and the likelihood of getting renewed. Conflict arises at this stage from tension between an agency-informed ownership approach emphasizing maximizing personal benefit and a stewardship logic focused on achieving long-term gains by putting the retailer and their customers first (but which implies retention as captain) (cf. Hernandez 2012). It was common for category captains to note that the retailer maintains a stronger position through captaincy arrangements, subsequently making a high level of demand which can erode profitability.

The first impression management strategy is proactive category management, or the signaling of one’s credibility and expertise in category management. Elliot, FMCG category captain described inter-supplier collaboration as an important, albeit not always easy, component of proactive category management. It was common for captains to confirm this sentiment and ensure their competitors deliver the same level of service, because “if you have a weak link, it could impact the performance of the category which could impact you as a captain”.

The second form of impression management identified was signaling performance leadership. This form of impression management was more proactive than the first because it involves investing in sensing activities that predict the likelihood of problems and relational capabilities with non-captain suppliers to ensure they do not become significant issues for the category. Paradoxically, many captains also felt that in making these investments and working directly with non-captains, they were strengthening their potential replacement's capabilities. In addition, performance leadership involved the signaling of one’s competitiveness relative to one’s potential replacements. For example, Brandt, carbonated beverage category captain, suggests:

You need to approach the retailer and show them you can support their business. You need to be able to service your offer and you need to be able to go the retailer and say ‘we will
give you over and above what you normally get, be that in dollars or marketing support’…. we have to work closely with the retailer to get new products to the market.

Brandt, and other captains, identify the importance of constantly signaling to retailers that their offers represent the best one can get. As such, they invest heavily in tracking data to demonstrate their leadership on key retailer criteria such as price, value, growth, and return per square meter. This information is typically used in formal meetings and review periods, but category captains also feel it is important to remind retailers in more informal settings about their comparative performance. As Brandt mentions, they also invested in efficiencies in order to remain ahead of competitors on this issue. And, they invested more heavily in service delivery expertise – all significant up-front investments in the relationship that necessitated proactive impression management to increase their chances of renewal.

The final form of impression management is proactive but goes beyond predicting problems and expands on psychological ownership of the category, moving toward horizon expanding activities. Uli’s (grocery category captain) comment echo’s the sentiment of others stating:

They (the retailers) want you to come to them with solutions […] to suggest that by changing the way they manage the category on the shelves, they will make better margins. How can I get more out of my shelf space than I am getting today? And they are looking at suppliers for this and if you are good at coming up with suggestions and making a good offer – helping them open up to potential opportunities on the horizon – then you get a good chance at staying on as the category leader.

This identifies the ways in which captains signal performance leadership and the subtler shift needed to ensure retention. Brandt (carbonated beverage category captain) also focuses on the more explicit ways in which performance leadership can be signaled – providing unique retailer-specific innovations and promotions. Limiting offers to just one retailer either through
price promotions, other forms of promotions such as competitions, or larger investments such as unique product lines for a retailer act as an important signal of a captain’s commitment. With retail concentration high in many economies, limiting one’s market to just one channel is a powerful signal of sincerity of intent, or felt ownership, because it provides value to the retailer at the short-term expense of the captain.

Uli’s quote identifies a less obvious way in which captains seek ways to extract more value from the category by investing in what we call horizon expansion, whereby captains take the lead in challenging retailer’s existing practices in order to expand the size and/or value of the category. Retailers echo this point, identifying at the end of their interviews and in debriefing sessions that the real benefit they gained from the category captain was access to unique insights and expertise that could make them think differently about their existing operations. For example, Marty and Jeffrey, retailers in the alcoholic and carbonated beverage categories respectively, derive value from captaincy arrangements because the captains have local and international exposure, typically opening up information they may not know. In essence, these retailers seek to understand how they broaden their horizon. In doing so, they seek to integrate global trends and track the numbers on a bigger scale than any one retailer could. This sentiment identifies the need for horizon expansion.

In sum, proactive impression management involves captains taking the initiative to expand their customers’ strategic horizons about their business, which correlates with signaling you have their long-term interests at heart. Although proactive impression management may not ensure renewal (that ultimately is up to the retailer), such proactivity in is an important signal of sincerity (Beverland, Farrelly, and Woodhatch 2007). The three forms of impression management we identify are essential for category captains interested in renewing their role as
captain. However, while all three are necessary, only horizon expansion potentially provides a buffer against entrepreneurial non-captains toppling the incumbent. This is because category captains can exploit the benefits of incumbency and leverage informal channels, existing relationships with retailers, and focus their capabilities in a targeted way (often based on their quasi-insider status). Our informants indicate that category captains are chosen for their capabilities and in particular the captain’s ability to draw on insights and begin conversations about the assumptions underpinning retailer practices. Although not all of these conversations may lead to change, they have a stronger signaling effect that reinforces psychological ownership of the category and that the captain is not exploiting their position for personal gain. Together, these passages suggest the following propositions:

P4a: Proactive impression management will reduce the effectiveness of non-captain opportunism and increase a category captain’s chance of retention.

P4b: Proactive impression management is achieved by signaling (a) proactive category management, (b) performance leadership through retailer-specific innovations, and (c) behavior focused on continuous expansion of the category.

DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In an effort to optimize limited resources, retailers often strategically enable category captains and allow them to manage retail categories on their behalf. Whilst past research has considered the potential benefit of these relationships from a retailer perspective, to date there is limited understanding of the capabilities required to attain, manage, and retain category captain roles. In this section we outline our theoretical and managerial contributions, as well as the limitations of our research, and suggestions for future research direction.
Our findings make several contributions. First, we identify several different capabilities for captains and non-captains that extend well beyond technical expertise in category management. Second, we identify a contingent relationship between capability investments and different actor goals. Third, we suggest that the identified benefits to suppliers of being captain require not just category growth but also role renewal. Fourth, in identifying the need for category stewardship we complement existing agency approaches to research on category captain arrangements, highlighting the importance of signaling and impression management. Finally, our paper is the first to identify the capabilities needed by non-captains to operate within category captain-defined networks.

We extend previous work calling for greater integration between category captain research and relational frameworks (Gooner, Morgan, and Perreault 2011). With the majority of research on category captaincy framed around typical agency concerns such as opportunism, trade-offs between in-house category management and use of a captain, and minimizing misbehavior by non-captains, we complement this with a focus on skillfully managing interactions and network position, and on identifying the need for investments in practices typically associated with stewardship. Although stewardship is used extensively by management scholars as a means to minimize employee opportunism (Hernandez 2012), and for service researchers to improve customer focus and satisfaction (Schepers et al. 2012), to our knowledge this construct is not used in the context of channel management.

We highlight the importance of concerns over role retention in category captain investment decisions. To date, much of the research focuses on category growth as the means by which suppliers gain from category captaincy arrangements. The experiences of our informants do not contradict this focus; however, captains tend to treat this as given. Likewise, the actions of
non-captains focused on “outbidding” captains through efficiency gains, or calculated moves to lower the credibility of a captain’s performance claims. In focusing on managing the tension involved in category captain arrangements, we expand our knowledge of the tactics and capabilities needed to ensure renewal. Beverland, Farrelly, and Woodhatch (2007) identify proactivity as essential to renewing advertising agency relationships with clients. They suggest that influence tactics to expand the client’s horizon are critical to communicating genuine interest in the relationship. We build on this by distinguishing between different types of proactivity, the outcomes of each, and the capabilities underpinning such a stance. In identifying the centrality of stewardship to category captain selection and renewal we provide a broader frame for theorizing proactive value management between relationship partners.

It is also clear that retailer, captain, and non-captain decisions are influenced by considerations of other networks, including those of competitors. Thus, although category captaincy is pitched as a means by which retailers can improve channel efficiency, market power is taken into account when awarding captaincy decisions, meaning that no one dominant category captain may emerge in the sector. Given the shift to the co-development of category strategy and information sharing this is probably a wise strategic move on behalf of retailers. Likewise, the ways in which non-captains leverage their network position with competitors to undermine the captain highlights the complexity of category captain dynamics in a way not captured by previous studies. Such outcomes suggest much can be gained by studying category captaincy through multiple theoretical lenses including transaction cost economics, relationship management, and network approaches.

**Managerial Implications**
Our findings suggest category captains and non-captains must invest in a mix of capabilities that ensure continued selection into the network, maintenance of one’s role, and the ability to skillfully manage one’s network position in order to ensure acquisition or renewal of the captaincy. For captains and non-captains, investments in proactive capabilities are necessary although the specificities are goal contingent. For the captain, proactivity acts as a buffer against entrepreneurial non-captains whereas for non-captains, proactivity is focused on subtly undermining the captain. For both, the findings suggest investments in relational capabilities are essential both for selection but also retention.

These findings reinforce the view that retailers stand to gain much (if not the most) from category captaincy. Retailer respondents openly admitted that a shift to category captain arrangements increased competitiveness within the category, and that they stood to benefit from this increased rivalry. As with previous studies, our retailers were also aware of the potential for abuse, and even though stewardship was the criteria for selection, they still retained the view that category captains tended towards preferring their own range to competitors. As a result, retailers often guarded against this by conducting what they called “sanity checks” which in effect were secondary opinions from non-captains and reflections on their own category data. Apart from being mindful of what capability gaps need filling (when selecting category captains), retailers should formalize these types of review procedures as a means of instilling and reinforcing a stewardship orientation in their captains.

For category captains, although there is much to gain from the role, these gains depend not only on the ability to grow the category (and one’s position within it), but also to renew the role. The first goal suggests the need for other-orientation and a long-term focus whereby captains put the needs of the category before their own. The second goal however suggests that
these two aspects of stewardship need to be complemented by skillful impression management whereby captains signal genuine psychological ownership of the category through attending to trends and forces that may shape the category for the future and give the retailer an edge over their competitors. Although research suggests focusing on how to maximize one’s coverage in a category is important, we suggest retention is as (or more) essential for gaining the benefits of category captaincy and that attempts to maximize coverage may not be the best way forward. Future research should test this view.

Finally, for non-captains, impression management is critical. Since non-captains have less direct interaction with retailers, they must leverage the opportunities they do get to pitch themselves as better stewards than their competitors. However, unlike captains who face the disadvantage of incumbency, non-captains coveting the category captain role must be skillful political operators, engaging in careful sleight of hand. The complexities in playing one retailer off against another in order to undermine confidence in the captain must be tempered with the potential for a loss of trust (through a reputation for ruthlessness) and the recognition that such advantages may be short lived if retailers (through their category captain) demand the same service levels non-captains provide to their competitors. Understanding how the various actors manage these power dynamics over time provides a fertile area for future research.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Consistent with other exploratory studies our focus was to generalize to theory rather than to a wider population. We examined category captain-defined networks in Australia, a country known for its highly concentrated retail sector, especially in FMCGs and grocery. Although two of our retail informants identified that retailers operating in more fragmented
markets could benefit from category captains, our results are limited by our sampling of large firms in concentrated but highly competitive sectors. This may also limit the generalizability of some of our propositions because several captains identified that the size of the category and potential for growth are critical given the required investment to gain these benefits. Although we chose categories where category captaincy is the norm, we recognize that other types of product categories, including those with a greater depth and spread of product line may have different dynamics, requiring their own unique capabilities. Future research should therefore examine the practices of actors in these different categories.

Our propositions should be examined empirically. Studies could test our propositions based on surveys of retailers, captains, and non-captains, while longitudinal studies could examine the relationship between these capabilities, enabling strategies, and future research opportunities identified in Table 4. We also suggest that signaling is important for effective impression management, as such studies could examine the types of framing strategies used by captains and non-captains to drive change in retailer behavior, undermine retailer confidence in the captain, and/or see either party expand their share of the category. The need to balance stewardship and ownership is identified in the findings and managing these tradeoffs is a critical concern for many human resource scholars. Research drawing from this domain may prove useful in identifying the relative merits of either approach and the appropriate mix of activities for different enabling strategies.

In light of the findings regarding how supplying competing retailers acts as both a constraint and a resource for captains and non-captains, future research could model these dynamics to gain a more comprehensive understanding of constructs such as opportunism and misbehavior, and the means by which retailers and captains should monitor and limit them.
Finally, based on the literature, we limited our study to retailers, captain and non-captains. In each of the networks examined there were also small, focused suppliers whose size and resource bases prevented them from ever being a captain and through some checking on our behalf, had little desire to achieve this status. Nevertheless, these suppliers are often important for category variety and also margin and were viewed by captains as important to achieving their goals. Future research could explore how these suppliers relate to category captains, the capabilities they need to maintain supplier status, and the benefits gained from being managed by a captain.

CONCLUSION

With this research, we contribute to the growing but still small literature on category captaincy in two main ways. First, we re-orient the focus from the retailer to the manufacturer (captain and non-captains) to uncover the enabling strategies and underlying capabilities captains and non-captains require when operating in category captaincy networks. Second, we contextualize the captaincy lifecycle in terms of three stages; consideration, captaincy, and renewal. In doing so, we extend extant literature in terms of the understanding of what, why, and boundary conditions for the success of category captain arrangements. Our research shines a light on the capabilities necessary for captains and non-captains to operate successfully in category captain-defined networks. Thus, we extend the literature by identifying not only the conditions under what captains and non-captains can benefit, but also a number of capabilities that each party must invest in if they are to realize the potential of category captaincy.
REFERENCES


