



Developing a typology of Business-to-Business (B2B) customer journeys

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ABSTRACT

Interest in customer journeys (CJ) is growing in business-to-business (B2B) settings. Surprisingly, scholars remain silent about how contextual factors shape combinations of B2B CJs, B2B customer experience management (CXM) approaches, and B2B customer experiences (CX). Employing an abductive research procedure that integrates field-based insights from 56 managers with literature, we propose a typology of three distinct B2B CJ archetypes. We identify (1) lean CJs, focusing on efficiency and minimizing customer effort through seamless, digitally driven touchpoints; (2) co-created CJs, prioritizing collaboration through personalized, consulting touchpoints that address diverse stakeholder goals and strengthen relationships; and (3) transformational CJs, emphasizing strategic partnerships and new ways of value creation by introducing innovative touchpoints to the CJ. Our analysis also reveals four tensions in customer–supplier interactions across the three CJ types. These CJ archetypes and associated tensions help marketers align their CXM approach with specific customer goals, meaningful CX responses, and relevant business contexts.

Depending on the concrete setting, different customer journeys undoubtedly exist.

—Head of service for industrial applications, engineering manufacturer

1. Introduction

The customer journey (CJ) concept represents the most recent step in the evolution of B2B buying process research and follows the IMP group's interactive approach to B2B markets in that it unfolds over sequences of interaction episodes that are embedded in ongoing business relationships and interfirm networks (Håkansson, 1982; Steward et al., 2019). It thus occupies a distinct position at the interface between customer experience (CX) and customer experience management (CXM). Scholars conceptualize it as a series of touchpoints (i.e., points of interaction) between the customer and supplier, which is subject to managerial action (Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Lundin & Kindström, 2024), and where CX, conceived as the customer's multidimensional responses, occurs (De Keyser et al., 2020). In this way, B2B CJ effectively captures the interactional paths that unfold between suppliers and customers as they work toward mutually desired outcomes.

B2B CJs can vary substantially in practice due to differences in customer goals, relevance of CX responses, suppliers' CXM approaches, and B2B contexts (Arkadan et al., 2024). Academic understanding of such variations, however, remains limited, hindering both knowledge development and managerial application. While conceptual work acknowledges that B2B CJs may take different forms, empirical research has yet to examine these differences systematically (see Table 1, column: Typology). Scholars thus agree that the existing literature “tends to promote a one-size-fits-all approach” (Wirtz et al., 2025, p. 5) and have called for empirical work that develops a B2B CJ typology by identifying different types of B2B CJs and their contingencies and how these CJs relate to CX and CXM (Purmonen et al., 2023). This research call is well aligned with the interactive approach, which proposes the joint investigation of all relevant factors to understand organizational buying behavior (e.g., Håkansson, 1982; Steward et al., 2019). We argue that the lack of insight into the variations of B2B CJs stems from two key shortcomings.

First, empirical research has typically approached CJ from either the customer or the supplier perspective, thus often examining CX and CXM in isolation (see Table 1). This is a critical neglect since CX captures customers' responses to touchpoints along the CJ, while CXM refers to the supplier's efforts to shape those CX responses by designing

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touchpoints and influencing CJ flows (Witell et al., 2020). As CX cannot be “managed” directly (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), CJs provide a shared foundation for understanding the organizational alignment between CX and CXM (De Keyser et al., 2025). Relatedly, as a progression of touchpoints between customer and supplier, the CJ shapes how CX unfolds and accumulates across touchpoints, while also providing the space where CXM is enacted (De Keyser et al., 2025). Accordingly, and in line with the interactive approach (e.g., Håkansson, 1982), the B2B CJ is not a path to purchase but a trajectory of collaboration and coordination in which the CJ unfolds within business relationships. Examining solely CX or CXM and relying on a single data source offers only a partial view (e.g., Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Lundin & Kindström, 2023), whereas understanding B2B CJ variations requires integrating customer and supplier perspectives. The few studies adopting both perspectives remain conceptual (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2025; Witell et al., 2020) and fail to investigate the mutual supplier and customer benefits of distinct types of CJs. As Table 1 shows, empirical studies also either focus on a narrow aspect of the phenomenon, like the digitalization of CJs (Andersson et al., 2024; Lundin & Kindström, 2023), rather than a comprehensive analysis, or examine a specific research setting, like cloud services (Terpoorten et al., 2024).

Second, insufficient attention has been paid to contextual factors that may influence variations in CJ, CX, and CXM manifestations (Table 1). This neglect is in stark contrast to the interactive approach’s view that B2B relationships are embedded in the environment and thus contextual factors matter (Steward et al., 2019). Relatedly, mostly conceptual

research suggests that contextual factors strongly influence CX (De Keyser et al., 2020) and, in turn, the effectiveness of CXM and CJ management (Homburg & Tischer, 2023), especially in diverse B2B markets (Grewal et al., 2015; Wirtz et al., 2025). B2B markets are inherently complex and heterogeneous, characterized by diverse customer goals, varying market conditions, and intricate relationships across a wide range of industries and business requirements of B2B customers (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2017; Witell et al., 2020). Addressing this complexity requires identifying key contextual factors that distinguish different types of CJs (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Purmonen et al., 2023). While few empirical B2B CJ studies have begun to include contextual factors, they treat them as isolated variables (e.g., Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Terpoorten et al., 2024), and none examine how these factors translate into distinct CJ types.

Overall, the existing literature (see Table 1) provides a limited understanding of what drives the differences of B2B CJs, how these differences manifest, and how they relate to variations in CX and its management across B2B contexts. Thus, to move the field beyond context-specific research, narrow in scope and conceptual delineations of the phenomenon, further empirical research is warranted that jointly considers B2B CJ, CX, CXM, and contextual factors and explores their combinations. To address the research gaps outlined above, this study adopts the interactive approach as our theoretical lens for understanding CJs in ongoing business relationships (Håkansson, 1982; Steward et al., 2019). It employs an abductive research procedure, integrating insights from 56 semi-structured interviews with 24 customers (CX side) and 32

Table 1
Key customer journey (CJ) studies in a B2B context.

Studies	CJ	CX	CXM	Contextual factors	Typology	Conceptual/Review	Data source	Empirical context	Consideration of B2B CJ phenomenon scope focus	
									Scope	Focus
McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019)	x	x					Customer	Heavy asset service	Narrow	Text-mining approach to extract touchpoints
Steward et al. (2019)	x			x		x			Comprehensive	Evolution of CJ in B2B literature
Witell et al. (2020)	x	x	x	x		x			Comprehensive	CJ as a part of a CXM framework
Grewal & Sridhar (2021)	x			x		x			Narrow	Social influence in CJs
Durmusoglu et al. (2022)	x		x			x			Narrow	Capabilities for developing new CJs
Rusthollkarhu et al. (2022)	x		x				Supplier	Cross-industry	Narrow	AI tools
Terho et al. (2022)	x		x				Supplier	Cross-industry	Narrow	Digital content marketing
Homburg & Tischer (2023)	x		x	x			Supplier	Cross-industry	Narrow	CJM capabilities
Koch & Hartmann (2023)	x	x		x			Customer	Logistics services	Narrow	Online touchpoint quality
Lassila et al. (2023)	x						Customer	HR services	Narrow	Interaction in the pre-purchase stage
Lundin & Kindström (2023)	x		x				Customer & supplier	Capital-intensive products	Narrow	Digitalized touchpoints
Purmonen et al. (2023)	x			x		x			Comprehensive	Integrative CJ framework
Andersson et al. (2024)	x		x	x			Supplier	Safety equipment	Narrow	Digitalizing CJs
Lundin & Kindström (2024)	x		x				Supplier	Capital-intensive products	Narrow	Digitalizing CJs
Terpoorten et al. (2024)	x		x	x			Customer & supplier	Cloud computing	Narrow	CJs of IT-savvy and IT-novice firms
De Keyser et al. (2025)	x	x				x			Comprehensive	Convergence-based lens on CX & CJ
Mora Cortez & Johnston (2025)	x	x	x	x		x			Narrow	CJ stages and CJ mapping
Current research	x	x	x	x	x		Customer & supplier	Cross-industry	Comprehensive	CJ typology & tensions

Note. This table includes studies published in business and management journals with an Academic Journal Guide (AJG 2024) ranking of ≥ 2 , set in the B2B context. Only studies that explicitly feature “customer journey” as a keyword or in the title and provide a definition of the concept are included.

suppliers (CXM side) along with the literature to develop a holistic B2B CJ typology that reflects CX, CXM, and CJ elements while accounting for contextual factors. Constructive typology building represents a distinct form of theorizing that identifies internally consistent configurations of attributes while abstracting from empirical complexity (Doty & Glick, 1994; McKinney, 1966). As such, beyond descriptive ordering, typologies contribute to knowledge generation by offering conceptual differentiation in that heterogeneous phenomena are structured into coherent types to facilitate comparison, reveal underlying patterns, and identify novel contingencies (Doty & Glick, 1994; Macinnis, 2011).

Our proposed typology of (1) lean, (2) co-created, and (3) transformational CJs advances research by empirically uncovering systematic variations in B2B CX and CJ manifestations while offering practical guidance for tailoring respective CXM approaches. It enables suppliers to identify customer goals more precisely and to move beyond the common “one-size-fits-all” to a context-specific B2B CXM approach. Although beyond the study’s original focus, our analysis also disclosed four tensions in customer–supplier interactions across the three B2B CJ types, a topic largely neglected by prior research (Wittel et al., 2020).

This article is structured as follows. The next section outlines the study’s methodology. We then introduce its conceptual foundations, including the four main elements that serve as its scaffolding. Next, we present the B2B CJ typology, supporting each type with empirical

evidence and references to the literature, and discuss tensions in customer–supplier interactions. The paper concludes with a discussion of research and managerial implications.

2. Methodology

Given the sparse literature on B2B CJ typologies, we adopt an abductive research process (Dubois & Gadde, 2014; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abduction supports the exploration of unexpected findings, such as variations in B2B CJs, CXs, and CXM approaches observed in this study, by framing them within existing concepts, allowing novel conceptual insights to emerge, and extending established knowledge (Sætre & Van De Ven, 2021). Fig. 1 illustrates this procedure, highlighting the iterative interplay between “empirical sources” (i.e., the data collected and analyzed) and “theoretical sources” (i.e., concepts and insights from the focal literature on CJ, CX, and CXM, supplemented by broader organizational buying behavior (OBB) and B2B marketing literature) through cycles of observation and contextual refinement.

This combined approach ensures that our emerging typology of B2B CJs is both empirically rooted and informed by prior research, offering a robust framework for advancing research (Doty & Glick, 1994). When analyzing the empirical sources, we followed coding principles inspired by grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). [Web Appendix A](#)

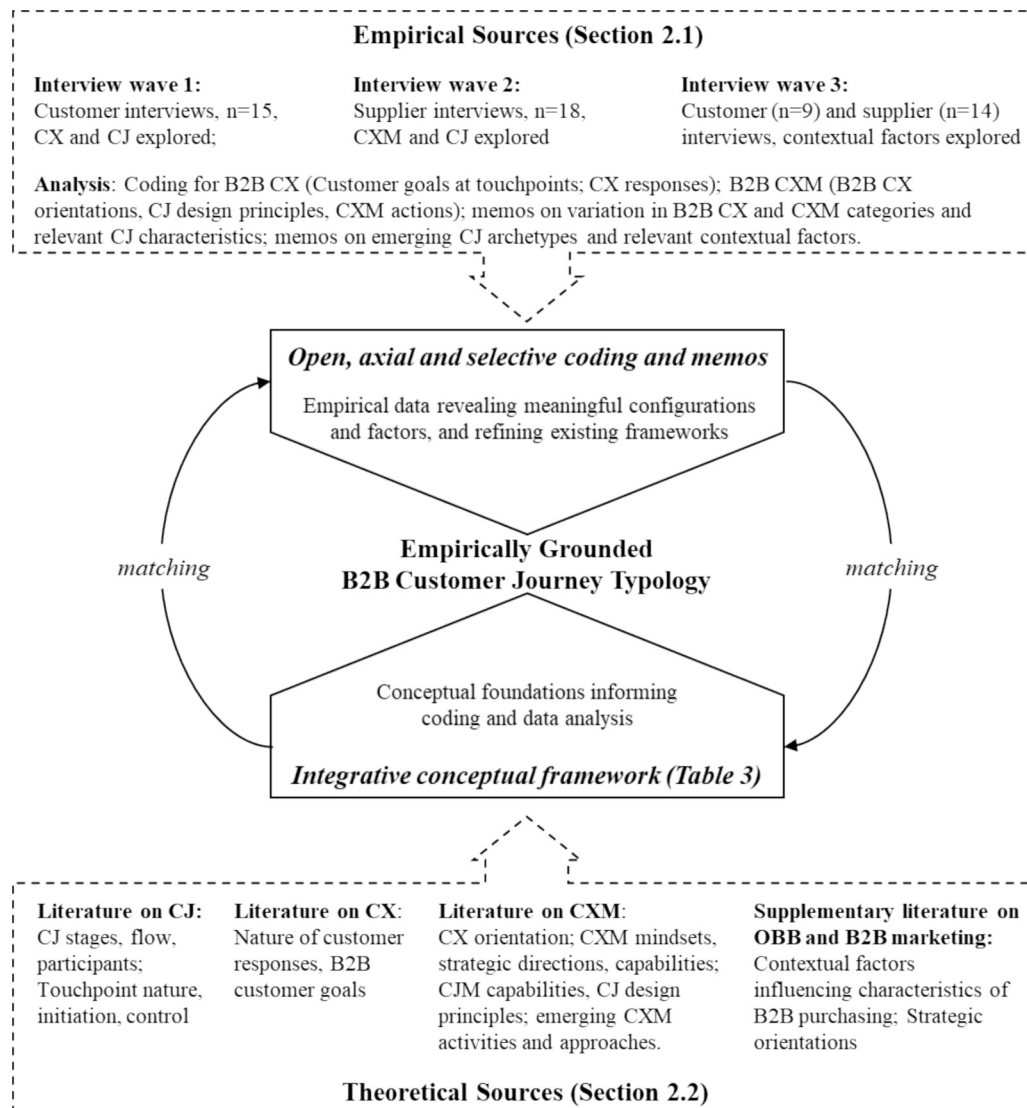


Fig. 1. Abductive approach to B2B customer journey typology development.

provides a detailed process outlining how our theorizing evolved.

2.1. Empirical sources: data collection

Consistent with qualitative marketing studies (e.g., Malshe & Sohi, 2009), we employed theoretical sampling, a central concept of grounded theory, in which decisions about what data to collect next and from whom to collect it are guided by the emerging (i.e., grounded) theory itself rather than by predetermined sampling criteria (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In our study, we selected interviewees who directly engage at the customer–supplier interface. Over 12 months, we conducted 56 in-depth interviews (see Table 2), a sample size sufficient for exploratory research (McCracken, 1988). The overall sample comprises key decision-makers

Table 2
Sample characteristics.

Characteristics	Type of data collection and number of respondents		
	Interview wave 1 (n = 15)	Interview wave 2 (n = 18)	Interview wave 3 (n = 23)
Perspective			
Customer	15	–	9
Supplier	–	18	14
Industry			
Automotive	1	2	2
Chemical	1	2	1
Construction	–	2	2
Energy and environment	3	1	4
IT and electronics	5	2	7
Machines and equipment	–	4	5
Medical	3	2	–
Transport and logistics	–	2	1
Others	2	1	1
Size (employees)			
≤500	4	–	1
501–5000	1	–	1
5001–50,000	5	11	10
>50,000	5	7	11
Value chain position			
Beginning	2	3	4
Middle	3	6	12
End	10	9	7
Function			
Digital	1	2	3
Marketing	–	4	1
Purchasing	7	–	6
Sales	–	3	2
Service	1	4	2
Strategy	6	5	7
Other	–	–	2
Job title			
CXO*	3	3	0
Director, vice president	0	9	6
Head of department	1	3	7
Manager	11	3	10
Job experience (years)			
<10	13	6	15
10–20	1	6	6
>20	1	6	2

*CXO refers to chief executive officer, chief sales officer, chief strategy officer, and chief marketing officer.

from 24 B2B customers and 32 suppliers. The decision-makers from the supplier firms were all involved in the planning, design, and execution of touchpoints along the CJ and, therefore, directly experienced the phenomenon of interest. Customer informants in our dataset are treated as proxies for the most shared and dominant experiences within their company, therefore representing collective experiences and organizational goals (De Keyser et al., 2025; Wirtz et al., 2025). We sampled B2B customers and suppliers from various industries and value chain positions to achieve the necessary diversity among respondents for a comprehensive typology.

Specifically, we employed a multistage approach and collected data in three waves. In the first wave, we interviewed customers on B2B CX, its underlying responses, and related B2B characteristics to derive a generalizable understanding of B2B CX. The second wave focused on developing a cross-industry conceptualization of B2B CXM by conducting interviews with suppliers. The third wave emphasized the interplay between B2B CX and CXM by combining the perspectives of both customers and suppliers. In these interviews, we explored contextual factors related to the connection between B2B CX and CXM, providing the information needed to develop a CJ typology.

Each of our interview guidelines consisted of three parts (see Web Appendix B–E). We first gathered background information on the participants and their firms (e.g., job positions, organizational structures). The main part of the interview focused on the concept of B2B CX (customer version) and CXM (supplier version). In this section, we intentionally kept the questions unspecific, encouraging managers to share their conceptualizations with examples drawn from their experiences (Gioia et al., 2013). The third part of the interview strived for clarification, reflection, and exploration of other potentially crucial issues. Questions were carefully phrased in a non-directive manner (McCracken, 1988). As the study progressed and themes emerged from the data, subsequent interviews included additional questions to clarify participants’ views, provided examples of evolving themes derived from literature, and our coding. To avoid directive biases, we put these questions at the end of each interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This helped us check the dependability of our emerging typology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) while remaining receptive to participants’ lived experiences and professional perspectives. We audiotaped all interviews and transcribed the data verbatim. The interviews ranged from 23 to 94 min, with an average of 48 min.

2.2. Theoretical sources: selection of relevant concepts and frameworks

In line with our abductive research process, through iterative reflection between data and literature, the CJ, CX, and CXM literature was consolidated as central to understanding variations in B2B CJs. In addition to the B2B CJ literature summarized in Table 1, we drew on key B2B CX and CXM studies (e.g., Arkadan et al., 2024; Gounaris & Almoraish, 2024; Wirtz et al., 2025), as well as established CJ, CX, and CXM frameworks originating from B2C research (e.g., Becker & Jaakola, 2020; De Keyser et al., 2020; Homburg et al., 2017). The core CJ, CX, and CXM literature provided a foundation for developing our interview guidelines.

During the analysis stage, we incorporated supplementary OBB (e.g., Bunn, 1993; Lewin & Donthu, 2005) and B2B marketing (e.g., Bilro et al., 2023; Mora Cortez et al., 2021) literature to compare our empirical findings with existing knowledge on contextual factors. This phase also involved updating and enriching prior conceptual understanding, for example, by supplementing CX orientation (Arkadan et al., 2024) with other strategic orientations (e.g., Bicen et al., 2021; Wielgos et al., 2021). Various strategic orientations served as sensitizing concepts in our analysis (Dolbec et al., 2021), helping us differentiate among variations in CX orientation within CXM.

2.3. Data analysis and interpretation: empirical-theoretical integration

The data analysis involved an ongoing interaction between empirical insights and literature. It proceeded in two phases: (1) organizing and interpreting empirical data through coding, and (2) interpretive integration and typology development through memo-writing. [Web Appendix F](#) illustrates this process.

In the initial exploration and coding stage, we used MAXQDA to conduct grounded theory-inspired open, axial, and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two researchers independently performed open coding to identify relevant facets of B2B CX and B2B CXM, allowing key elements to emerge from respondents' perspectives. During axial coding, we drew on our core literature (i.e., theoretical sources) to relate the codes and reassemble them into main and sub-categories that formed preliminary elements of the B2B CJ typology. In the selective stage, we synthesized these categories into an initial CJ typology framework emphasizing variations in CX and CXM characteristics. Following prior work (e.g., Homburg et al., 2017), we eliminated categories mentioned by only one respondent and/or that showed poor fit to the overall framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This coding phase thus provided the initial elements of the B2B CJ typology.

Like other typology development studies (e.g., Tomczyk et al., 2022), our typology was not derived directly from the coding frame or isolated text units. As the analysis progressed, we recognized variations in our categories and that contextual factors shaped differences in B2B CJs and their CX and CXM elements. Following established principles of typology building, which emphasize developing ideal-type representations that capture meaningful configurations of attributes (Doty & Glick, 1994; McKinney, 1966), we examined how CJ characteristics, CX responses, CXM approaches, and contextual factors combined into meaningful patterns across the data. We did so by iteratively moving between full transcripts, the coding frame, the emerging typology, and the relevant literature and relying on memo-writing, which supported this interpretive work (Saldaña, 2021). Memos, for example, focused first on single use cases and their particularities with respect to the relevant CJ typology elements. They were then assembled into more abstract ideas that underlie each CJ type, complemented by a list of quotes for each CJ typology element per CJ type. These steps were continuously accompanied by intense discussions among the researchers. Our abductive, iterative process culminated in empirically grounded B2B CJ archetypes. In parallel, as we reviewed transcripts and memos, we noted instances in which interviewees described misalignments, competing demands, or friction in customer-supplier interactions. We treated these as tensions, systematically tracing their recurrence across interviews and exploring how they related to each emerging CJ type.

2.4. Trustworthiness assessment

We enhanced the trustworthiness of our findings following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations. We applied data and theory triangulation by drawing on the literature and supplier and customer interviews. Consistent with the refutability principle for ensuring rigor in qualitative research (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), we deliberately sampled firms varying in size, value chain position, and industry (e.g., Malshe & Sohi, 2009) to enable potential counterevidence. This diversity supports the argument that our typology is sufficiently exhaustive and applicable across B2B industries (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

We employed different strategies to ensure rigor. For the coding stage, two researchers, who were unfamiliar with the study, coded verbatim transcripts of 18 randomly selected interviews using our coding framework. The intercoder reliability, measured by the proportional reduction in loss (PRL), was 0.78, surpassing the 0.7 threshold recommended for exploratory research (Rust & Cooil, 1994). For the interpretive stage, iterative peer debriefings with a co-author who was not involved in the initial coding enhanced credibility (Lincoln & Guba,

1985) and helped to mitigate researcher bias. Finally, we improved content validity by presenting and refining our findings in two workshops with 14 doctoral researchers and four professors who were not previously engaged with the project.

3. Conceptual foundations of B2B customer journey typology development

3.1. B2B customer journey (CJ)

This study is theoretically positioned in the interaction approach to B2B markets. Following the IMP tradition, we conceive B2B CJs as sequences of interaction episodes that unfold within ongoing buyer-supplier relationships and which are embedded in wider business networks. Consequently, CJs are not linear paths to purchase but dynamic, relational, and network-conditioned processes of value co-creation (Håkansson, 1982; Steward et al., 2019). B2B CJs are also defined as “the series of touchpoints associated with purchase and usage of goods and services” (De Keyser et al., 2025, p. 1), touchpoints being commonly conceived as points of direct or indirect interaction with the supplier (Purmonen et al., 2023). As stated before, recent work has called for research that differentiates among distinct B2B CJ types (Purmonen et al., 2023; Wirtz et al., 2025). Responding to this call and informed by CJ literature, we examine three key characteristics of B2B CJs: current conceptualizations of CJ stages, the nature of touchpoints, and touchpoint initiation.

The first key characteristic concerns the relative *criticality* of specific CJ stages within the overall journey. De Keyser et al. (2025, p. 4) recently defined B2B CJ as “a multi-phase process, consisting of a buying phase and an implementation-and-usage phase, each of which is further divided into multiple stages (i.e., pre-, core-, and post-)”. With most CX (M) literature focusing so far on the purchase stage (Wirtz et al., 2025), Mora Cortez and Johnston (2025) observe that certain stages may vary in relevance depending on the offering. However, these frameworks do not explicitly address the relative importance of individual stages across different CJ types.

Second is the *dominant touchpoint nature* that a CJ consists of. Scholars recognize that touchpoints vary in nature, ranging from human, physical, and digital to hybrid forms, and that these forms often coexist within a single CJ (De Keyser et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). While traditional B2B marketing literature emphasizes human and physical touchpoints, recent studies highlight that human touchpoints are most influential (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025), with a growing prevalence of digital ones (e.g., Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Despite this shift, literature does not yet provide a clear understanding of which touchpoint type dominates in specific CJ contexts or how their relative importance varies across different B2B settings (Steward et al., 2019).

Third, we consider *touchpoint initiation*. Touchpoints may be firm- or customer-initiated (e.g., Anderl et al., 2016; Schmitt et al., 2025). CJ literature suggests that firm-initiated touchpoints are primarily brand- or partner-owned and thus under the focal firm's control, implying that a supplier can design, influence, or manage the interaction at a given touchpoint to introduce, for example, a new product (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2025; Pizzutti et al., 2022; Ruz-Mendoza et al., 2021). In contrast, many customer-initiated touchpoints, such as review platforms, are not under the focal firm's control (De Keyser et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Pizzutti et al., 2022). B2C research suggests that customers find frequent firm-initiated touchpoints intrusive, especially when they lack the necessary information (Wiesel et al., 2011), and discontinue the CJ. Considering touchpoint initiation allows for a more nuanced understanding of B2B CJs and helps distinguish between CJ types based on who initiates the supplier-customer interaction.

3.2. B2B customer experience (CX)

Existing research on B2B CX strongly relies on the general definition

of CX established in B2C research. CX is defined as customers' responses to a firm's offerings across various stages of the CJ and is thus closely connected to the CJ concept (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019; Witell et al., 2020).

An essential starting point for understanding B2B CJs from a CX perspective refers to *customer goals at touchpoints* (Lemke et al., 2011; Wirtz et al., 2025). Organizational goals are often tied to measurable outcomes, such as cost savings or benefit generation (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006), and serve as a reference point for evaluating supplier interactions across touchpoints. For instance, when a procurement team understands and agrees on how a supplier's offer contributes to their organization's strategic objectives, this understanding can foster a positive CX. So far, the specific nature of B2B customer goals at individual touchpoints and how these goals contribute to variations in CJ types remains underexplored.

Furthermore, scholars agree that *CX responses* can be cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory, or relational in nature (e.g., Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). First, the cognitive response is what a customer thinks as they process information (Keiningham et al., 2020), such as the price or technical attributes of a supplier's product/service (Grewal et al., 2015). Second, the emotional response relates to a customer's inner moods and feelings beyond the "grasp of mind" (Gentile et al., 2007), stimulated, for example, by a sales representative's visit or a personal invitation to a factory tour. Third, the behavioral response manifests in a customer's intended and/or actual activity (Schmitt, 1999), such as participating in a referral program or attending a co-development workshop. Fourth, the sensory response refers to the customer's extraction and handling of information through the senses (Gentile et al., 2007), which, in a B2B context, is most salient in visual (e.g., user interface design) and tactile (e.g., product weight or surface) perceptions. Fifth, the relational response refers to reactions like gratitude or guilt resulting from the mutual social influence exerted by the customer (e.g., buying center members), suppliers, and third parties on their respective expectations, goals, or behaviors, during, e.g., a project meeting (Hamilton et al., 2021).

The nature of B2B CX has sparked some debate among researchers. Traditionally, B2B buyers are viewed as more rational than consumers, primarily because they pursue economic goals on behalf of their organizations (Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006), thereby placing greater emphasis on cognitive CX responses. Recent B2B CX research, however, highlights the importance of emotional and relational CX responses in B2B contexts, challenging this traditional view (Gounaris & Almoraish, 2024; Weiger, 2023; Witell et al., 2020). Despite these valuable insights, it remains unclear whether all CX responses matter equally in diverse B2B contexts, and further investigation is warranted (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; De Keyser et al., 2020; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). This study contributes to filling this research void by investigating how the relevance of CX responses varies across B2B CJ contexts.

3.3. B2B customer experience management (CXM)

Research on CXM remains comparatively limited, particularly in B2B contexts (Wirtz et al., 2025; Witell et al., 2020). Broadly, CXM refers to suppliers' customer-centric efforts at touchpoints along the CJ to evoke positive experiences that create value for customers (Homburg & Tischer, 2023). The most comprehensive CXM framework identified key elements of CXM in a B2C setting (Homburg et al., 2017). Subsequent studies have extended it to B2B contexts (Klink et al., 2021), while others have explored specific facets such as CX orientation (Arkadan et al., 2024) and CJ management capabilities (Homburg & Tischer, 2023), or conceptualized alternative CXM strategies (Wirtz et al., 2025). To advance this understanding, we integrate CXM literature across three key CXM elements relevant for the CJ typology development: CX orientations, CJ design principles, and CXM actions.

The first CXM element, *CX orientations*, highlights how managers

leverage organizational learning about CX and view CXM as a route to superior firm performance (Arkadan et al., 2024; Homburg et al., 2017). Arkadan et al. (2024) link CX orientation to broader research on strategic orientations, this literature covering, among others, relationship orientation (e.g., Palmatier et al., 2006), alliance orientation (e.g., Bicen et al., 2021), and digital orientation (e.g., Wielgos et al., 2021). Recent work calls for further research to explore how CX orientations and related CXM strategies vary across B2B contexts (Arkadan et al., 2024; Wirtz et al., 2025).

The second CXM element, *CJ design principles*, refers to strategic guidelines for shaping CJ design. These draw on existing categorizations such as thematic cohesion, consistency, connectivity, and context sensitivity of touchpoints (Homburg et al., 2017; Kuehnl et al., 2019). Related work on journey management capabilities has adapted these principles to B2B settings, highlighting value anchoring, consistency, internal integration, and individual control of touchpoints (Homburg & Tischer, 2023). Overall, these contributions remain fragmented and do not fully account for the relative emphasis on CJ design principles required across diverse B2B markets.

The third CXM element, *CXM actions*, concerns a firm's ability to translate CX orientations and CJ design principles into practice. It involves designing and monitoring CJs, and prioritizing and adapting touchpoints (Homburg et al., 2017). Although not always studied separately, these activities are related to a substantial body of knowledge on journey and service design, which has been primarily explored in B2C contexts (e.g., Patti et al., 2020; Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010). B2B studies tend to focus on AI, digitalization, and CX measurement techniques (Lundin & Kindström, 2023; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019; Rushtollkarhu et al., 2022). Existing work, however, primarily examines the implementation of CX tools rather than how firms choose different CXM approaches across B2B contexts.

3.4. Contextual factors influencing B2B CJ, CX, and CXM

Research suggests that a range of contextual factors shape the characteristics of B2B CJ, CX, and CXM. Prior studies highlight customer-related factors such as organizational structure or process complexity (Lundin & Kindström, 2023; Steward et al., 2019; Witell et al., 2020); offering-related factors like offering type (e.g., Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2025; Homburg & Tischer, 2023) or complexity (e.g., De Keyser et al., 2025; Kandil et al., 2024; Lemke et al., 2011); relational and interactional factors such as social dynamics (e.g., Grewal & Sridhar, 2021; Witell et al., 2020) or purchase complexity (Isabella et al., 2025; Maga & Bodlaj, 2025). Although discussed less frequently in CX research, market-based factors, such as competitive intensity, are also relevant (e.g., De Keyser et al., 2020). Despite these primarily conceptual discussions, few studies have empirically examined how such contextual factors shape CJ formation or explain variations in CJ, CX, and CXM manifestations (De Keyser et al., 2020; Purmonen et al., 2023; Wirtz et al., 2025).

Thus, to identify the most influential contextual factors, it is useful to draw on broader B2B marketing and OBB research, where situational contingencies in decision-making have received greater attention (Steward et al., 2019). As part of our abductive process, the initial data analysis revealed several contextual influences shaping B2B CJs. We subsequently revisited the OBB and B2B marketing literature to sensitize and position these findings, thereby identifying three contextual factors.

The first contextual factor is *supplier offering complexity*, defined as the buyer's perception of the complexity of the offering and, relatedly, of interactions (Bilro et al., 2023; Lewin & Donthu, 2005; Mora Cortez et al., 2021). The second refers to the *strategic importance of the supplier offering*, defined as "the buyer's perception of the significance of the buying decision in terms of the size of the purchase and/or the potential impact of the purchase on the functioning of the firm" (Bunn 1993, p. 45; Sales Baptista, 2014). The third contextual factor concerns *the competitive intensity*, referring to the strength of competing suppliers' activities

in the market where supplier-customer exchanges occur (Bilro et al., 2023; Cabanelas et al., 2023). While these contextual factors are well-established as key contingencies in B2B decision-making, they have not yet been examined in CJ types.

3.5. Integrative conceptual framework

For the reader’s convenience, Table 3 organizes and integrates the conceptual foundations for developing our B2B CJ typology. It summarizes key insights from core and supplementary literature on the focal concepts of our B2B CJ typology and highlights gaps in the existing literature that our B2B CJ typology aims to address. Notably, Table 3 is not an a priori framework and should not be understood as a predefined analytical frame but rather as an outcome of our abductive research process as outlined in Fig. 1.

4. Empirically grounded B2B customer journey typology

Our central finding is a context-dependent B2B CJ typology, featuring three distinct B2B CJ archetypes: (1) lean, (2) co-created, and (3) transformational CJs. They integrate and highlight variations in four key elements: (1) contextual factors, which ultimately shape the CJ archetypes by driving the variations of (2) the CJ, including critical stages and dominant touchpoint nature and initiation, (3) the CX, which captures diverse customer goals and most relevant CX responses, and (4) the CXM, which includes distinct B2B CX orientations, CJ design principles, and CXM actions. Subsequently, we introduce each B2B CJ type. When doing so, we enrich our findings with interview quotes and the literature (cf. Fig. 1).

Table 3
Integrative Conceptual Framework.

Typology element	Insights from core & supplementary literature	Representative literature sources	Knowledge gaps
B2B CJ			
Critical CJ stage(s)	B2B CJ consists of many phases and stages (e.g., pre-, core-, post-purchase)	De Keyser et al., 2025; Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2025	Unclear which distinct B2B CJ types emerge from combinations of critical stages, touchpoint nature & initiation
Dominant touchpoint nature	CJ consists of several touchpoints that vary in nature: human, physical, digital	De Keyser et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Lundin & Kindström, 2023	
Touchpoint initiation	Touchpoints can be customer- or supplier-initiated	Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Pizzutti et al., 2022; Ruz-Mendoza et al., 2021	
B2B CX			
Main customer goals at touchpoints	B2B customers’ diverse goals influence CJ and CX evaluation	Grewal & Sridhar, 2021; Lemke et al. 2011; Purmonen et al., 2023	Unclear how differences in customers’ goals shape CX and CJ variation
CX response relevance	CX comprises cognitive, behavioral, relational, emotional, and sensory CX responses	Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; De Keyser et al., 2020; Gounaris & Almoraish, 2024; Weiger, 2023	Unclear which CX responses are critical across B2B contexts
B2B CXM			
CX orientations	CX orientation Cultural mindsets: experiential response orientation, journey orientation, alliance orientation Strategic orientations: digital orientation, relationship orientation, alliance orientation	Arkadan et al., 2024 Homburg et al., 2017 Kandemir et al., 2006; Kindermann et al., 2021; Mu et al., 2017; Palmatier et al., 2006; Sin et al., 2005	Unclear how orientations vary across context or manifest in distinct B2B sub-orientations; lack of integration with other strategic orientations
CJ design principles	CJ design principles: thematic cohesion, consistency, connectivity, context sensitivity B2B CJ management capabilities: value anchoring, consistency, internal integration, individual control	Homburg et al., 2017; Klink et al., 2021; Kuehnl et al., 2019 Homburg & Tischer, 2023	Lack of integration between different CJ design principles; unclear how their relative emphasis varies across B2B contexts
CXM actions	CXM capabilities: journey design, journey monitoring, touchpoint prioritization, adaptation	Homburg et al., 2017; Lundin & Kindström, 2024	Unclear how the relative emphasis of CXM actions varies across B2B contexts
Contextual factors			
Offering complexity	Type of offering	Bilro et al., 2023; Mora Cortez et al., 2021	These contextual factors have not been empirically examined in relation to CJ types and it is unclear how they shape CJ types
Strategic importance of supplier offering	Offering complexity, purchase complexity Purchase importance, product importance	Kandil et al., 2024; Lewin & Donthu, 2005 Bunn 1993; Sales Baptista, 2014	
Competitive intensity	Competitive intensity	Bilro et al., 2023; Cabanelas et al., 2023	

4.1. Lean customer journeys

4.1.1. Contextual factors shaping lean customer journeys

Our analysis reveals that lean CJs occur when the supplier’s offerings are of *low complexity*, e.g., standard components ordered by an engineering firm, which require relatively straightforward interactions or even automated decision-making (e.g., Andersson et al., 2024; Sales Baptista, 2014). Also, the *strategic importance of the supplier offering is low*, meaning that even if the solution is critical to current operations, e.g., maintenance of an important production module, it does not transform the customer’s business. A director of central purchasing from a machines and equipment firm elaborated on both the complexity and the importance of the offering that leads to a lean CJ:

Depending on [the supplier profile], we have different requirements for the collaboration. Is it a supplier who has an innovation profile, or is it one whom we supply with drawings and who is supposed to work through them, so-called job shoppers? With the job shopper, it’s a commodity business transaction. The experience with a supplier of screws and washers is not decisive; it is a commodity that I can get anywhere.

As the previous quote indicates, superior CX is not what customers intentionally seek in this context, as they can easily switch suppliers if it is subpar. For suppliers, however, CX becomes a key lever for differentiation in *highly competitive markets*. Lean CJs thus aim to generate an “ordinary CX,” focusing solely on specific CX responses (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020, p. 638), as the head of service from a supplying engineering company elaborated:

Our prices are on par with our competitors', so the question is: who can offer added value to this customer? That's why the CX becomes especially important in these highly mature technological applications, where I don't base my decision on the price or the tool's features, which only differ minimally.

4.1.2. Characteristics of lean customer journeys

A lean B2B CJ is characterized by efficiency, ease, and smoothness of transactions, making the *core- and post-purchase stages* such as purchase, delivery, and complaint management especially critical (cf. De Keyser et al., 2025). For example, an in-house consultant of a supplying global chemical company emphasized:

In the case of commodities, the CX focuses very strongly on the procurement transaction from the customer's point of view, in fact, entirely. [From] obtaining offers for the actual purchasing process to the delivery process. That is where most mistakes can happen.

Digital touchpoints primarily dominate a lean CJ, with both customers and suppliers seeing potential for increased efficiency through automated purchasing decisions and traceable processes. The head of business development of an energy company referred to the opportunities digital touchpoints create for customers of a lean CJ:

We use [digital technology] to improve efficiency and customer perception, i.e., the quality of service provision, transparency for customers, and time. For example, the customer sees just in time where his request is and how far it has progressed. However, for his own data as well, these digital possibilities offer much greater transparency into his optimization potential, which we use to improve the CX.

Finally, the prevalence of digital touchpoints allows customers to initiate touchpoints at different points of the CJ without suppliers necessarily reaching out first. Since customers in lean CJs strive for maximum efficiency, they prefer control over touchpoint initiation to avoid intrusive firm-initiated interactions (Ruz-Mendoza et al., 2021). Thus, in the words of a director of central purchasing at a machines and equipment firm:

What one can observe is a significant shift towards digitalization, where our suppliers are driven by us [the customer] to connect with us via a digital platform and establish a digital customer-supplier interface. So, many more interactions are taking place now on this platform.

4.1.3. B2B CX in lean customer journeys

B2B customers favoring lean CJs emphasized their *goal of efficiency and cost optimization* through simple and automated touchpoints, as a senior purchasing manager noted:

Whenever there is high-cost pressure, I do not need many bells and whistles; I am looking for the best price, which is "cherry-picking." [...] When buying basic products such as sand, for example, I do not really need personalized touchpoints. I want to buy these products online as straightforwardly as possible.

Such cherry-picking reflects rational, economically driven buying behavior, making lean CJ touchpoints ideally suited to stimulate *cognitive CX responses*. Touchpoints that convey information easily translated into numbers and objective price comparisons evoke favorable cognitive responses (Grewal et al., 2015). A vice president of purchasing of a machine and equipment company illustrated this preference when reflecting on their experience with a supplier:

Sixty percent of our customer-supplier interactions are evaluated by hard facts. These are aspects that we can measure objectively and mainly concern quality, logistics, and costs of interactions. Consequently, we strongly focus on the rational part of our CX.

Our analysis also repeatedly identified the importance of touchpoint functionality in supporting cost-effectiveness and convenience, particularly by stimulating *sensory CX responses* to reduce customer effort (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). Addressing the sensory CX response, a head of strategic purchasing at a construction company explained:

An essential part of our CX is how our technicians and engineers, as actual users, evaluate the usability and convenience of the products and services of our suppliers. For example, how easy and fast can components be assembled? Do these products and services make the work on the construction site easier due to reduced weight or easier handling?

4.1.4. B2B CXM in lean customer journeys

Offering lean CJs requires a distinct B2B CXM approach. We find that firms offering lean CJs display a CX orientation we term *digital experience orientation*. This orientation reflects an intention to improve firm performance by using digital touchpoints to create effortless, seamless CXs. As a focused subset of a firm's broader digital orientation (Kindermann et al., 2021; Wielgos et al., 2021), it centers on leveraging digital technologies to streamline interactions and enhance CX. Within the broader CX orientation, it integrates elements of experiential response and touchpoint journey orientations (Arkadan et al., 2024; Homburg et al., 2017), emphasizing frictionless experiences that help customers progress smoothly along the CJ. As a strategy manager in the business services industry noted:

We continually reassess how to utilize digitalization to enhance the CX. This is grounded in an obsession with understanding each step of a CJ—regardless of channel—thinking about how digital [touchpoints] can help improve CXs.

Our analysis of the supplier data revealed the importance of seamless interactions within the CJ in reducing costs and saving customer time. As such, *touchpoint integration* emerges as the key design principle for lean CJs. It combines various elements from previous CXM frameworks, such as touchpoint consistency and connectivity, as well as internal integration capabilities (e.g., Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Illustrating this principle, a sales director for e-business at a construction supplier explained:

Since last year, we have been offering a comprehensive fulfillment solution that combines online and offline touchpoints. More precisely, we provide modular vehicles equipped with sensors that measure tool consumption, such as screws, and that reorder them automatically. By partnering with an external service provider, the reordered tools are directly delivered to the vehicle overnight, allowing the craftsman to get into a fully equipped vehicle the next day and drive straight to the construction site.

Finally, with respect to CXM actions, *CJ monitoring* is essential for assessing the efficiency of each touchpoint in terms of time, effort, and the costs required by the customer at each stage (De Keyser et al., 2025). Related to Homburg et al.'s (2017) touchpoint monitoring capability, it emphasizes a holistic approach across the entire CJ, particularly relevant in digitalized B2B contexts (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). A chief marketing officer at a machinery and equipment company described their approach as follows:

As an essential requirement, without collecting touchpoint data, no statement can be made about the effectiveness of current CXM actions or the potential for improvement. That is why we try to digitize as many touchpoints as possible by utilizing sensors to make them objectively measurable in real-time.

4.2. Co-created customer journeys

4.2.1. Contextual factors shaping co-created customer journeys

Co-created CJs typically occur when customers purchase *complex* (i. e., specialty) *supplier offerings*, such as integrated robotic systems for precision manufacturing, that require explanation, adaptation, and the involvement of multiple experts from both the customer and supplier sides (Sales Baptista, 2014; Terpoorten et al., 2024). These offerings are also of *moderate to high strategic importance*, which fosters co-created CJs characterized by high cooperation and intensive social and informational interaction (Metcalfe & Frear, 1993). As a head of strategic purchasing from an IT and electronics firm, put it:

The pressure to listen to one another and work together will increase further as technological complexity grows even greater. (...) We are looking for long-term relationships. This is simply because we purchase highly complex products, for which you cannot switch suppliers overnight.

Co-created journeys are more likely to emerge when firms operate in markets with *low or moderate competitive intensity*, facing so far only a small number of global competitors in specialized sectors. The interviewee continued, referring to a rise in competitive pressure:

It is the tougher competition that exists and the greater transparency that buyers now have. (...) In the past, the customer was not going anywhere. He did not even know who our potential competitors were. But today, they use Google, enter a few keywords, and then they have three or four companies they can reach out to.

4.2.2. Characteristics of co-created customer journeys

In line with Terpoorten et al. (2024), co-created CJs are complex, highly involved processes, marked by the *critical importance of the implementation-and-use stage* (cf. De Keyser et al., 2025), where more intense interactions take place (Sales Baptista, 2014). An in-house consultant of a supplying global chemical company explained that much of the CX unfolds during product use, where collaboration and responsiveness are essential:

That's different with specialties, where a large part of the customer experience occurs during the product use. Things play a role there, like are we available when the customer faces problems with our product? The problem is not necessarily our fault, but the customer's use causes it.

What defines this CJ is the prevalence of *human and physical touchpoints*. Although digital interactions are important, in-person encounters are especially critical for the co-creation of mostly physical core offerings (Bolton et al., 2018; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Schmitt et al., 2025). As a head of service from an IT and electronics supplier emphasized:

Today, we develop customer systems together with customers. (...) It is a big issue; it is really more about personal dialog [than IT systems]. (...) It's actually still the face-to-face meetings that are important, when we have open conversations, open discussions [with our customers].

Finally, the co-created CJ is inherently collaborative, requiring a *balance of supplier- and customer-initiated touchpoints*, with mutual touchpoint control based on ongoing exchanges that enable collective action (Lundin & Kindström, 2024; Tueanrat et al., 2021). Co-created CJs also involve multi-party touchpoints, such as direct contact with upstream suppliers, that extend beyond the formal dyad. As a purchasing manager at a high-tech firm explained:

We have a supplier who assembles the control cabinets for us and also configures the parts that are in there, which he procures, but we

partly negotiate them, or they are also determined by us, and accordingly, we are also in contact with these upstream stages.

4.2.3. B2B CX in co-created customer journeys

Our data analysis reveals that customers emphasized the need for touchpoints that are *personalized, coordinated, and integrated* into their daily operations. In such CJs, multiple employees from both the customer and supplier sides work closely together, reflecting high levels of customer participation (e.g., De Keyser et al., 2020; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). As a strategy manager from a medical supply company noted:

The complexity of the medical sector requires us to be proactive in our relationships with suppliers. [...] Our suppliers can only provide us with the desired CX if we work closely with them. This requires us to engage in joint co-development or co-production activities.

Given the collaborative context, the customer's active co-creation behavior becomes crucial for success in these multi-person interactions, making touchpoints that stimulate *behavioral and relational CX responses* critical, as a procurement manager of a manufacturer described:

We have a supplier evaluation that is based on these three pillars [operational performance, i.e., adherence to deadlines, quality, and, above all, cooperation], of which the topic of cooperation, for example, is also evaluated, response times, I will say, a bit of these soft factors like interaction, openness, working together on improvements, contribution to innovation. In other words, everything you tend to evaluate is based on your gut feeling and whether you like working with the supplier. For me, that is part of the CX.

4.2.4. B2B CXM in co-created customer journeys

For co-created CJs, our data highlights the importance of a *multi-personal journey orientation* in B2B CXM. This orientation creates value by addressing the distinct goals and relational dynamics of multiple stakeholders involved in buying and usage centers (e.g., Becker et al., 2023; Purmonen et al., 2023), thereby fostering co-creation at each touchpoint. Tailored to B2B settings with diverse actors shaping the CX, it adapts the principles of relationship orientation (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2017) toward a CX-focused logic.

Where traditional relationship orientation emphasizes long-term relational ties as a source of advantage (Day, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2006; Sin et al., 2005), CX orientation prioritizes touchpoint-level value creation (Arkadan et al., 2024; Homburg et al., 2017). As a subset of CX orientation, multi-personal journey orientation aligns these views by leveraging the involvement of multiple individuals on both supplier and customer sides, including end-users (De Keyser et al., 2025). It focuses on relational and behavioral CX responses—such as trust, empathy, and reciprocity—while tailoring the experience to each stakeholder's objectives, enabling more personalized and meaningful CXs across touchpoints (Terpoorten et al., 2024; Tueanrat et al., 2021). As the head of sales at an automotive supplier explained:

We are conducting an ongoing buying center analysis for all touchpoints because interests, attitudes, or skills are commonly unique. These insights help us to split the CJ into standard and specialty sub-journeys. [...] Developing personas also supports our understanding of the buying center members, their needs, and objectives. Based on these insights, we adapt our touchpoints to the decision-makers or machine operators.

The primary touchpoint design principle for co-created CJs is *context sensitivity*, which enables personalized and adaptive interactions tailored to the individual needs and goals of customer employees. This journey design principle draws on concepts from Homburg et al. (2017) and Kuehnl et al. (2019) and aligns with the individual control of

touchpoints capability (Homburg & Tischer, 2023). A marketing director at a chemical supplier illustrated such a proactive adaptation to contextual shifts:

To forecast how the CJ might change, we create scenarios quarterly. These scenarios consider various macro- and microeconomic factors. For our Asian crop protection customers, for example, we were able to anticipate at an early stage that a prolonged drought would greatly increase the need for touchpoints that provide information and advice on fertilization during such periods.

In terms of CXM actions, our data reveals that an effective co-created CJ requires *touchpoint prioritization and adaptation* to address varying requirements across interactions. This action refers to two capabilities from prior literature (Homburg et al., 2017) that focus on improving and adapting key touchpoints in response to changing contextual insights. A marketing director from a chemical supplier highlighted the importance of aligning each touchpoint with its intended function, jointly referring to prioritization and adaptation:

Some touchpoints should stimulate interactions between the customer and supplier (e.g., a sales rep call); others should help make a process as simple and convenient as possible (e.g., an online payment system). It is, therefore, very important to be precise about the contribution a touchpoint should make to the overall CX.

4.3. Transformational customer journeys

4.3.1. Contextual factors shaping transformational customer journeys

Our analysis shows that transformational CJs typically unfold in contexts where the supplier's offering is perceived as having *low to moderate complexity*. This means that, while the underlying solution may involve sophisticated development (e.g., smart container tracking in logistics), it requires relatively little customer expertise, as most of the innovation occurs on the supplier side.

What distinguishes this CJ type is the *high strategic importance of the offering*, which addresses future customer goals rather than current ones. These CJs involve a different kind of social and information exchange than co-created CJs (cf. Metcalfe & Frear, 1993), as they expand the set of parties to the broader CX ecosystem. An IT and electronics supplier reflected on customers' goals for strategic partners in their business development:

A very distinct group of customers that thinks far ahead, acts very strategically, and expects a much stronger partnership-based collaboration. They are not looking for someone to sell them a machine, but rather someone who can help them develop their vision further and accompany them.

Transformational CJs are particularly prevalent in *moderate to highly competitive markets*, where low entry barriers or technological disruption drive firms to seek differentiation through innovative solutions beyond the core offering, as this engineering supplier specified:

We are not a monopolist here (...), we simply need a healthy entrepreneurial spirit again and question everything. (...) Sooner or later, we will see competition from China in this customer segment, as well. You simply must get closer to the customer, you have to make more of an effort to maintain the business.

4.3.2. Characteristics of transformational customer journeys

Transformational CJs represent new kinds of CJs for both supplier and buyer, defined by ongoing innovation across the entire CJ. These CJs have *no single critical stage* since their outcomes are typically a disruption of traditional ways of working. Instead, they depend on open communication, experimentation, and continuous knowledge exchange from the very beginning to the end of the CJ. This requires a profound mindset shift, as a marketing director from a high-tech firm vividly

noted:

Most important is the mindset. The willingness within a company to ask questions, to be open, to ensure it approaches the customer again and again, and to question processes taken for granted.

Furthermore, in transformational CJs, *human and digital touchpoints* are *prevalent*, allowing suppliers to rethink what they offer and how they engage with customers, thereby catalyzing broader transformation. Digital touchpoints do not function simply as efficiency tools but become sources of innovation (Durmusoglu et al., 2022), new value propositions, and new business models that bring multiple actors outside the original value chain together within a broader ecosystem. In this regard, several suppliers illustrated this idea by introducing a digital marketplace that offers an Amazon-like one-stop shopping, or, as a customer stated:

[The supplier] offers something like an Amazon-style marketplace for B2B companies, so we no longer need to manage multiple suppliers ourselves. Instead, I access everything through a single marketplace. I effectively work with one supplier, who has many others operating in the background. He can leverage economies of scale, making this a potentially very attractive business model.

Finally, transformational journeys involve proactive *supplier initiation*, with innovative touchpoints shaped by knowledge contributions from broader ecosystems such as education partners, industry associations, or technology providers (Ruz-Mendoza et al., 2021). These touchpoints often take the form of capability-building, diagnostic, or exploratory engagements that support the customers in their core business. A manager at a chemistry firm clarified how deeper customer understanding can drive business-model innovations:

For instance, in crop protection, we asked why farmers actually buy our products, what true problem they want to be solved. We realized that their ultimate goal is a secure, successful harvest, and that weather often matters more than plant diseases [that our products treat]. So, we thought: if we want to offer them true peace of mind about their harvest and income, we need to address weather risks too. Since there are insurance companies in the agro sector that offer bad weather insurance or crop failure insurance, we joined forces. And these are typical business-model innovations.

4.3.3. B2B CX in transformational customer journeys

Customers operating in transformational CJs indicated that they are primarily interested in *innovative touchpoints* that enhance their business operations. Thus, supplier firms play a key active role in value creation for their customers (De Keyser et al., 2020; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). Consider the remarks of this vice president of strategy of a logistics provider:

Digital companies like Amazon have large amounts of customer data, which they can use to enter our markets. As a result, it is important for us to continuously develop innovative ways of creating value. To achieve this, we rely heavily on our suppliers' support in enhancing our relevance and strengthening our customer relationships.

We propose that the transformational CJ is the most sophisticated of the three archetypes, as *all five CX responses* are prevalent. Beyond the previously shown relevant CX responses, a high emotional CX response is also crucial (e.g., Andersen & Kumar, 2006) for this CJ type, as a brand manager at an FMCG manufacturer highlighted:

I regularly experience positive emotions when collaborating with my suppliers (agencies). For example, when we had a lovely exchange, and I received samples from them, I thought, 'Wow, this is really good, cool'. But, for example, yesterday, I was distraught when I noticed that a supplier had not done their job very well. This can cause trouble for me, especially in more complex projects, and you

rely on one supplier, which does not perform well. Then it is just very annoying for you as a hub, and you can get truly annoyed

4.3.4. B2B CXM in transformational customer journeys

Our analysis identifies *CX ecosystem orientation* as the defining CX orientation for transformational CJs. It emphasizes value creation within a network of interconnected actors beyond market boundaries. It extends alliance orientation (Homburg et al., 2017) into a dynamic, multi-actor system, combining insights from alliance and network research (Bicen et al., 2021; Mu et al., 2017) with customer ecosystem perspectives (Lipkin & Heinonen, 2022). In B2B contexts, such ecosystems bring together diverse actors to jointly deliver a focal value proposition that cannot be achieved alone (De Vasconcelos Gomes et al., 2022; Krishna, 2023). While traditional ecosystem views stress actor-to-actor value creation, a CX perspective places the customer as the primary beneficiary. Accordingly, CX ecosystem orientation highlights how alliances and partnerships enhance CX by enabling new solutions. A sales manager at an IT supplier stressed the importance of early stakeholder involvement:

Last year, we had a multimillion-dollar IT implementation project focusing on supplier interfaces. However, after the introduction, the technical sound solution was too demanding for many of the customer’s small suppliers. As a result, we had to conduct extensive training at the suppliers’ premises. This cost us more than ten million [dollars], and we completed the project with a six-month delay. To this day, we have involved all relevant stakeholders earlier and more intensely in touchpoint development processes.

Given the many stakeholders involved, the primary touchpoint design principle for transformational CJs is *value anchoring of touchpoints*—ensuring that each touchpoint is clearly aligned with the customer value proposition (Arkadan et al., 2024; De Keyser et al., 2025). While earlier referred to as a capability (Homburg & Tischer, 2023), we view it here as a CJ design principle to emphasize its strategic role in guiding touchpoint development. Related to the thematic cohesion of touchpoints (Homburg et al., 2017; Kuehnl et al., 2019), this

principle emphasizes value in each touchpoint over mere cohesiveness. Illustrating this approach, a head of marketing from a machine and equipment firm explained:

We aim to offer the value proposition “performance maintenance maximization” to reduce our customers’ maintenance costs to a minimum. Accordingly, we provide technical and non-technical touchpoints, including quarterly training programs, monthly newsletters that explain recent software updates, an app with tutorials, and remote control implementation.

The most salient CXM action in this archetype is *CJ transformation*, which involves depicting all touchpoints from the customer’s ecosystem to identify opportunities for and ensure the success of transformation efforts (Durmusoglu et al., 2022). Building on Homburg et al.’s (2017) concept of touchpoint journey design, this action emphasizes the supplier’s capability to work together with other ecosystem actors and collaboratively design end-to-end CJs that align with the focal customer’s goals (Arkadan et al., 2024; Purmonen et al., 2023). A director of marketing at a machine and equipment company explained its importance:

Mapping all touchpoints of the CJ on a digital dashboard, including customer satisfaction KPIs and touchpoint relevancy ratings, enables us to gain an overall picture of value-affecting touchpoints, facilitates proactive troubleshooting, and supports the allocation of resources for concrete CXM actions.

4.4. Summary of B2B customer journeys archetypes

Table 4 summarizes our B2B CJ typology. In short, *lean B2B CJs* occur in highly competitive markets, where buyers seek efficiency and cost optimization for offerings of low complexity and low strategic importance. It relies on customer-initiated, digital touchpoints that minimize customer effort at the core and post-purchase stages, which, in turn, trigger cognitive and sensory CX responses, and are managed through a digital experience orientation focused on touchpoint integration and CJ monitoring.

Table 4
Empirically grounded B2B customer journey typology.

Descriptive criteria	Type 1: Lean customer journey	Type 2: Co-created customer journey	Type 3: Transformational customer journey
Contextual factors			
Offering complexity	Low	High	Low to moderate
Strategic importance of supplier offering	Low	Moderate to high	High
Competitive intensity	High	Low to moderate	Moderate to high
B2B CJ			
Critical CJ stage	Core- and post-purchase	Implementation / use	No priority stage
Dominant TP nature	DigitalCustomer-initiated	Human and physicalSupplier- and customer-initiated	Digital and humanSupplier-initiated
TP initiation			
B2B CX			
Main customer goals at touchpoints	Efficiency and cost optimization through simple and automated touchpoints	Personalization, coordination, and integration of complex and multi-personal touchpoints	Differentiation through new forms of value creation at innovative touchpoints
CX response relevance			
Cognitive	✓	✓	✓
Behavioral	–	✓	✓
Relational	–	✓	✓
Emotional	–	–	✓
Sensory	✓	–	✓
B2B CXM			
B2B CX orientations	Digital experience orientation	Multi-personal journey orientation	CX ecosystem orientation
CJ design principles	Integration of touchpointsCJ monitoring	Context sensitivity of touchpointsTouchpoint prioritization and adaptation	Value anchoring of touchpointsCJ transformation
CXM actions			

Note B2B = Business-to-Business; CX = Customer Experience; CXM = Customer Experience Management; CJ = Customer Journey; TP = Touchpoint.

Co-created CJs are found in low-competition, specialty markets, where buyers seek coordination, personalization, and integration for complex, often strategically important offerings. It involves a balanced multi-actor collaboration across physical and human touchpoints, with the use phase as a critical CJ stage, triggers cognitive, behavioral, and relational CX responses, and is managed through a multi-personal journey orientation focused on context-sensitive touchpoint prioritization and adaptation.

Transformational CJs are prevalent in moderately to highly competitive markets, where buyers adopt offerings of low complexity but high strategic impact to drive innovation and differentiation. This CJ type relies on supplier-initiated, innovative touchpoints across the entire CJ, triggers the full range of CX responses, and is managed through a CX ecosystem orientation focused on value-anchoring of touchpoints and CJ transformation efforts.

5. Tensions in customer-supplier interactions

Across the three identified CJ types, interviewees consistently addressed tensions that arose at the supplier-customer interface. While our study did not initially seek to uncover tensions, their recurrence and salience in our data point toward frictions (De Keyser et al., 2025). The tensions cluster around four domains: (1) defining and scoping CX, (2) customer orientation and expectations, (3) information and data exchange, and (4) supplier management.

5.1. Defining and scoping CX

A first tension arose over how suppliers define the CX and the resulting scope of touchpoints they consider under their control and/or within their responsibility (Arkadan et al., 2024; Terpoorten et al., 2024; Witell et al., 2020). Suppliers of *lean CJs* tended to define CX only through touchpoints under their direct control, excluding those managed by, e.g., subsidiaries or third parties. However, they consistently reported difficulties maintaining a coherent brand image across touchpoints beyond their control, such as when positive delivery experiences from non-branded subsidiaries conflicted with negative offering-related touchpoints, such as price increases by the focal supplier. Suppliers of *lean CJs* responded by strengthening touchpoint integration and/or by achieving an omnichannel presence.

Some suppliers of *co-created CJs*, in turn, struggled with the multi-person journey orientation, as customers held them accountable for touchpoints under a third party's control. As one supplier put it:

If [the repair of a defective tool or the delivery of a spare part] does not work, it will, at the end of the day, come back to us.

Our findings show that suppliers of *co-created CJs* addressed this tension through strong touchpoint prioritization and adaptation (Lundin & Kindström, 2024), aligning with recommendations to clarify their and intermediaries' influence in CJs (Terpoorten et al., 2024; Witell et al., 2020).

Finally, suppliers of *transformational CJs* emphasized tensions arising from customers' increasing innovation capabilities, which are beyond their control and are literally driving the evolution of this CJ type. This is because, as customers' capabilities evolve, suppliers' touchpoints must evolve too (Schmitt et al., 2025; Witell et al., 2020). One supplier saw this evolution as a push toward new digital business models:

Customers [are] becoming increasingly intelligent in solving their problems themselves (...) I always have to be one step ahead (...). We have to address a problem that the customer cannot yet solve for himself. And then we very quickly arrive at new digital business models.

5.2. Customer orientation and expectations

The second tension arose from misalignments between customer expectations and supplier assumptions about what customers value (De Keyser et al., 2025). Suppliers across all B2B CJ types expressed the need to ensure that customers both recognize and pay for the benefits they receive. Customers, however, often preferred free, high-quality services, creating an imbalance between value perception and value capture (Arkadan et al., 2024; Homburg & Tischer, 2023; Wirtz et al., 2025). One supplier summarized this dilemma:

There is always a certain contradiction between the required performance and the actual optimal performance (...) Of course, if I am a salesperson, I say that I want every customer to be supplied ten times a day (...) I know very well that logistically that's not possible at all, because it's not feasible in terms of costs. So of course, there is always this balancing act, this tightrope, where you say, yes, customer orientation, but I also must manage my resources to some extent.

This "lack" of customer orientation did not go unnoticed by customers:

I occasionally ask the supplier if he understands that he is the supplier, not the customer.

Addressing "mismatches in customer relationship" (Witell et al., 2020), especially customers of *lean CJs* and, to a lesser degree, *co-created CJs*, raised concerns about price fairness and information asymmetry, demanding open-book calculations and intensified supplier competition (Arkadan et al., 2024). Suppliers likewise expressed frustration with rising customer demands and a declining tolerance for errors. Yet, they also acknowledged needing to invest in value-generating touchpoints for which customers are willing to pay:

If you provide certain services (...) that inspire a customer, he is more willing to pay for it. That's great, because we can then multiply that. (...) You always have to take a close look at what only we think would be great, but the customer doesn't even notice, then it's money thrown to the wind.

Aligning with the idea of holistic selling (De Keyser et al., 2025; Kalwey et al., 2025), both customers and suppliers of all B2B CJ types agreed that mutually beneficial outcomes are necessary for a long-term relationship, where suppliers can decline offers that are misaligned with their goals and customers can establish requirements that must be met.

5.3. Information and data exchange

A third tension concerned information and data exchange. Importantly, to better understand and align CXM with customer expectations (De Keyser et al., 2025), suppliers attempted to gather CX insights. Suppliers of *lean* and *co-created CJs* relied heavily on traditional measurement approaches (Tueanrat et al., 2021), like customer satisfaction surveys, often increasing their length and frequency. Customers, in turn, resisted or responded superficially:

Customers were not open and honest during survey calls. They responded merely to get the process over with. This became evident when their answers to different questions conflicted.

In response, suppliers—especially those in *co-created* and *transformational CJs*—aimed to know better their customers and shifted toward more engaging, non-intrusive ways of continuous digital monitoring (De Keyser et al., 2025; Durmusoglu et al., 2022; Lundin & Kindström, 2024), empathic listening (Arkadan et al., 2024), and personalized (Ruz-Mendoza et al., 2021) follow-up interactions (Tueanrat et al., 2021). One supplier described—though labor-intensive—taking customers positively by surprise with individualized callbacks:

Direct communication is essential. When we call customers, they are often surprised that we reach out at all. We take it a step further by providing personalized feedback—not a generic ‘thank you for participating,’ but a response that specifically addresses the points they raised. This is a very manual and intensive process, but it is crucial for truly engaging customers.

Relatedly and critical for suppliers of *lean CJs*, they partly struggled to convince customers to open digital interfaces or provide the necessary data for integrated touchpoints. In line with Tueanrat et al. (2021), they decided to increase transparency about how data is used and how it contributes to customer value (Witell et al., 2020). One interviewee summarized this balancing act:

If customers want to benefit, they need to be willing to make certain data available.

Suppliers of *co-created* and *transformational CJs* reported similar barriers when electrifying components or introducing digital touchpoints and thus gaining control over them (Lundin & Kindström, 2024). Customers often restricted access to avoid losing proprietary know-how. They did so because being the “master of this data” defined their competitive stance, an overlooked aspect of touchpoint control (Witell et al., 2020) that is partly symbolic, representing power, expertise, and strategic autonomy. Overall, both parties emphasized trust as indispensable for enabling collective actions (Lundin & Kindström, 2024; Wieland & Ivens, 2025) and a long-term relationship. In this sense, a customer replied:

In the case of innovation parts (...) the topic of know-how protection is a very important topic for us. We don't want to see parts that we develop with suppliers suddenly being sold on the spare parts market by the supplier, so to speak, or falling into the lap of the competition. That has a lot to do with trust.

5.4. Supplier management

A final tension emerged around supplier management practices. In *lean CJs*, customers often viewed their purchases as commodities and therefore saw little reason to maintain relational continuity (Wieland & Ivens, 2025). Instead, they raised competition among suppliers to secure better, lower-priced offers. Similarly, they employed a cherry-picking approach, issuing new tenders every year to suppliers that are easy to replace in a global market (e.g., Wirtz et al., 2025). Such practices clearly map onto mismatches between customers' expectations of transactional value and suppliers' seeking relational arrangements (Witell et al., 2020). Other customers, in contrast, acknowledged the risks and costs associated with frequent supplier changes, which continuously divert capacity to quality audits of new suppliers. These statements illustrate that *lean CJs* offering an “ordinary” rather than an extraordinary B2B CX (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) have a reason to exist.

Especially for *customers in co-created CJs*, the availability and flexibility of supplier capacity were significant concerns (Wieland & Ivens, 2025). For example, a customer described a bi-directional forecasting tool to align suppliers' capacities with customers' demand and vice versa. Addressing mutual dependence, a customer highlighted:

We also have suppliers (...) on whom we are dependent, so it's not just that we are the customer who orders and the supplier follows our lead. Still, we are also sometimes happy when we receive the parts, because our suppliers have other customers as well.

Finally, customers of *transformational CJ* emphasized suppliers' innovation profiles, lamenting an “incumbent's curse” when suppliers relied on the customer to drive innovation. This tension occurred when they felt that they were the only demanding customers:

Some suppliers stagnate, but demanding customers like us and others push them to come up with ideas, suggestions, and innovations on their own about what can be done.

6. Discussion

6.1. Research implications and future research avenues

Our identified B2B CJ typology contributes to recent calls for research (e.g., Purmonen et al., 2023; Wirtz et al., 2025) and overcomes the shortcomings of prior literature as shown in Tables 1 and 3. Using an abductive approach, we integrated insights from literature with interview data from both the customer and supplier sides (cf. Fig. 1), thereby representing a perspective largely absent from prior research. By explicitly considering how contextual factors shape joint variations in B2B CJ, CX, and CXM, our approach enabled us to investigate the alignment between B2B CX and CXM (i.e., operational convergence; De Keyser et al., 2025) at the CJ intersection to the mutual benefit for customers and suppliers. Furthermore, we advance understanding of pertinent contextual factors, which is essential for identifying the boundary conditions of B2B CJ, CX, and CXM and thereby supporting a more nuanced, yet comprehensive, understanding of the phenomenon (Jaakkola, 2020). Importantly, we moved beyond descriptive analysis toward empirically grounded combinations in the form of a B2B CJ typology (Table 4), offering the much-needed empirical work to this research field (Witell et al., 2020).

The detection of the three B2B CJ types contributes to current knowledge by addressing the key gaps identified in Table 3. Literature has described CJ stages and touchpoint characteristics (e.g., De Keyser et al., 2020; De Keyser et al., 2025; Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2025; Ruz-Mendoza et al., 2021) and highlighted the rise of digital CJs (Lundin & Kindström, 2023), but it has not examined which distinct CJ types arise from combinations of critical CJ stages, touchpoint nature, and initiation. Our typology discloses these combinations as *lean*, *co-created*, and *transformational CJs*. Likewise, although scholars acknowledge varied customer goals and CX responses in B2B contexts (Gounaris & Almoraish, 2024; Lemke et al., 2011; Purmonen et al., 2023), it remained unclear how they shape CJ variation. We show how customer goals and CX responses differ across the three CJ types. Finally, while research on CX orientation, CJ design principles, and CXM actions has established the foundations (Arkadan et al., 2024; Homburg et al., 2017; Kuehnl et al., 2019; Lundin & Kindström, 2024), there is limited insight into their contextual variation. Our findings indicate that the three CJ types rely on different B2B CX orientations and require attention to distinct CJ design principles and CXM actions. Overall, our typology moves the field from distinguishing the dimensions and elements of key concepts (CX, CJ, CXM) toward explaining how they combine to form meaningful B2B CJ configurations.

By disclosing four tensions in customer–supplier interactions, our findings affirm and extend Witell et al.'s (2020) conceptualization of B2B CXM challenges. Adding to De Keyser et al.'s (2025) discussion of operational convergence, we show how relationship expectations, interaction issues, and temporal dynamics manifest differently across *lean*, *co-created*, and *transformational CJs*. Our data reveals that these tensions are not obstacles but productive frictions that shape CJ evolution, supplier strategies, and the broader ecosystem of B2B value creation. For example, our findings reinforce that touchpoint responsibility in B2B CJs is not static but relationally negotiated, CJ-type dependent, and frequently contested (Gounaris & Almoraish, 2024). Likewise, we find that customer expectations are a moving target, prompting suppliers to navigate this tension by emphasizing value-offering touchpoints rather than merely operational ones. Fig. 2 summarizes these contributions.

Finally, our work not only contributes to B2B CJ, CX, and CXM literature but also to the evolving understanding of B2B buying processes (Steward et al., 2019). While it builds on the long-standing tradition of OBB and B2B marketing research, it differs in a crucial respect. Prior work has developed influential buyer typologies that classify how customer firms structure and approach purchase decisions, typically emphasizing internal processes, decision situations, or

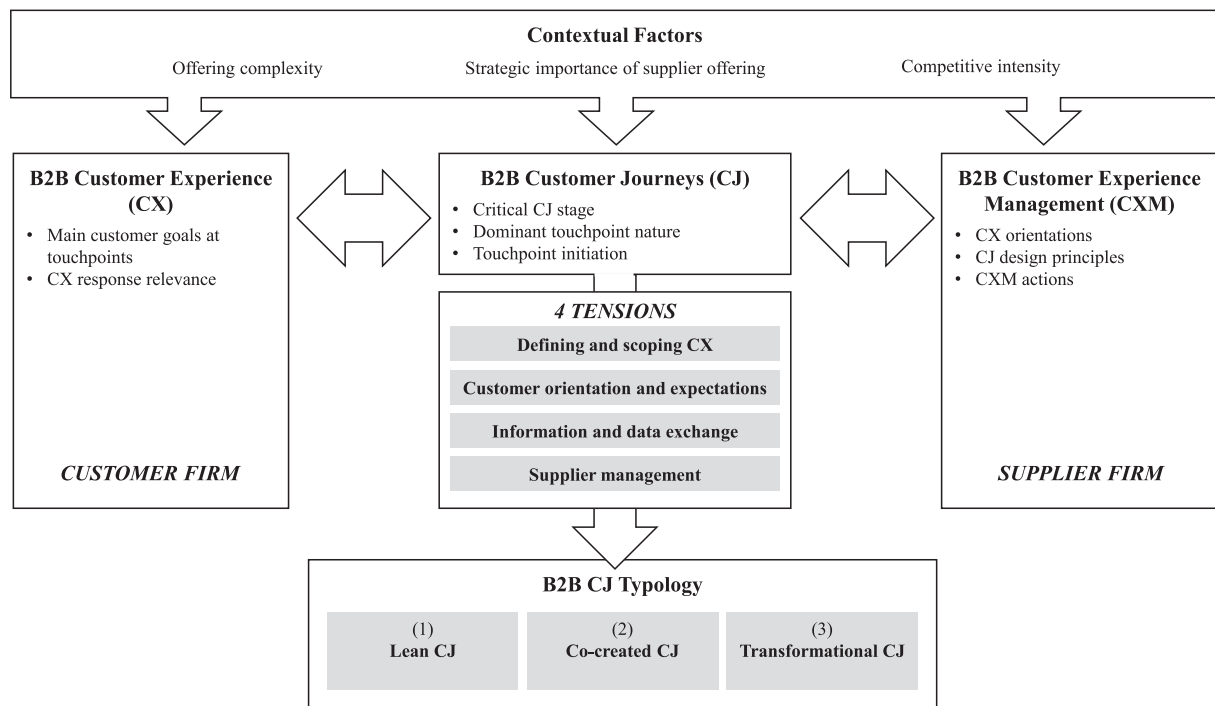


Fig. 2. Summary of findings and contributions.

organizational choice (e.g., Bunn, 1993; Robinson et al., 1967; Sheth, 1973; Webster & Wind, 1972). Adopting an interactive lens, our B2B CJ typology, in contrast, empirically examines the interactional paths that unfold between suppliers and customers at touchpoints along the B2B CJ (Steward et al., 2019) as they work toward mutually desired outcomes, what Kalwey et al. (2025) call holistic selling. In this sense, our B2B CJ typology is not reducible to a B2B buyer typology as it captures how both sides either conceive of or manage the CX, how touchpoints are orchestrated, and how contextual factors shape co-created dynamics.

Our study offers several avenues for future research. Having adopted a rigorous qualitative research approach, the next consequential step is to apply quantitative methods to validate the proposed B2B CJ typology. Large-scale surveys could also test the prevalence, effectiveness, and performance impact of the identified archetypes across different B2B industries. Additionally, a future longitudinal study could explore how B2B CJs evolve over time due to market changes, technological advancements, or shifting customer goals. Moreover, while our study identified three key contextual factors shaping the proposed archetypes, future research could examine additional contextual factors that might influence B2B CJ patterns. This could refine the typology further or uncover additional archetypes. In a related vein, future research may zoom in on the role of the actors involved in B2B CJs by, for example, elaborating more explicitly on the actors' active vs. passive involvement (cf. customer participation in the TCQ framework by De Keyser et al., 2020), the degree of involvement (Håkansson, 1982), or the role in the B2B buying center (cf. decision maker, user, etc.; Becker et al., 2023).

6.2. Managerial implications

Our CJ typology provides practitioners with valuable guidance for a differentiated B2B CXM, thus supporting a supplier's efficient resource allocation to touchpoints. Above all, contrary to prior literature (e.g., Wirtz et al., 2025), lean CJs show that even in rather hostile market conditions, striving to offer a good or ordinary B2B CX (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) is a valuable endeavor for differentiating from competitors.

In particular, suppliers need to place greater emphasis on aligning

their CXM approach with customers' goals, as illustrated by the three distinct CJ types in this study (De Keyser et al., 2025). Our findings guide decision-makers on how to most effectively deploy B2B CXM, depending on the CX, CJ, and contextual factors (cf. Table 4). It is important to note that large firms may operate across diverse market contexts: while they may engage in co-created CJs for strategically important purchases in less competitive markets, they might follow a different CJ type—such as a lean CJ—when sourcing more commoditized components for their business.

Finally, adopting the respective CXM approach for each CJ type may help suppliers to overcome tensions that arise in customer–supplier interactions. These findings contribute to and extend the key challenges for B2B CXM as identified by Witell et al. (2020). For example, offering the appropriate CJ type may be an efficient way to address “mismatches in business relationships,” acknowledging that B2B customers have diverse goals that need to be aligned with the respective CXM approach. Similarly, emphasizing the co-created CJ with the B2B CXM approach of multi-personal journey orientation, context sensitivity of touchpoints, and touchpoint prioritization and adaptation may be beneficial to overcome the challenge of “siloe customer experiences” in the relevant context. Likewise, transformational CJs and their CXM approach may reduce the risk of challenge “lack of touchpoint control” by proactively offering an innovative touchpoint built on an intense CX ecosystem orientation, value anchoring of touchpoints, and CJ transformation.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Grammarly in order to remove typos and grammatical incorrectness and improve writing. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Christina Kuehnl: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original

draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ekaterina Panina:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Moritz Tischer:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2026.116287>.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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