

Business Collective Action: An Integrative Review and Framework

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ABSTRACT Business collective action (BCA) has long been a topic of interest to management scholars. However, our theoretical understanding of this important phenomenon has been hindered by its fragmented development in the literature. To address this shortcoming, we conduct a comprehensive review of BCA across a wide range of disciplines in management, including corporate political activity, private regulation, strategic management, and organizational institutionalism. Based on this review, we develop an integrative framework that identifies the triggers, outcomes, and internal political arrangements associated with BCA. In doing so, we help develop a common vocabulary that unites different market and non-market forms of BCA, thus deepening our understanding of the role of business collective action in society.

Keywords: board interlocks, business collective action, collective strategy, consortia, corporate political activity, ecosystems, institutional entrepreneurship, private regulation, professional associations, trade associations

INTRODUCTION

Business collective action (BCA) – broadly described as the concerted effort of a group of competing firms to construct and advance a shared interest – has long been recognized as an important and unique phenomenon by social scientists (Mills, 1956; Olson, 1965) and has featured prominently throughout the history of management and organization studies (Astley and Fombrun, 1983; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Useem, 1984). Although it is widely accepted by scholars

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that collective action undertaken by business is of great consequence, our understanding of BCA has remained surprisingly underdeveloped in comparison to the collective action of social movements (Benford and Snow, 2000; Davis et al., 2005) or other more narrow forms of business collaboration (Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos, 2011; Salvato et al., 2017). Accordingly, there have been growing calls for more explicit and focused attention on the distinct phenomenon of BCA (e.g., Hartwell et al., 2023; Lawton et al., 2018; Walker and Rea, 2014).

Part of the reason for the lack of focused theoretical attention is because research in the area has developed in a highly fragmented manner. Indeed, BCA has featured in a number of disparate literatures including corporate political activity (Barley, 2010; Clawson et al., 1986; Jia, 2014; Mizruchi, 1989), private regulation (Buchanan and Barnett, 2022; King and Lenox, 2000; Yue et al., 2013), strategic management (Browning et al., 1995; Carney, 1987; Davis, 2016), and organizational institutionalism (Greenwood et al., 2002; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; van Wijk et al., 2013). Because of this fragmentation, many fundamental questions about BCA remain poorly understood. For example, we have little theory on when and why firms will pursue certain forms of BCA over others and when different forms may be used in conjunction. Additionally, we lack theory on the internal dynamics that shape the nature of business collective action. Questions of this nature can only be adequately answered by developing an integrative understanding of BCA that spans across disciplines.

With this objective in mind, we conducted a systematic review of the existing research on business collective action in management and organization studies. Drawing from articles published between 1981 and 2023 in 14 journals, we explore the different traditions of BCA research to develop an integrative framework in the area. We demonstrate how institutional and market forces trigger specific forms and combinations of market and non-market-focused BCA and describe their internal, external, and unintended outcomes. We then unpack the different internal political arrangements underpinning BCA, differentiating between representative BCA – collective action that largely reflects the interests of all participating firms – and controlled BCA – collective action that is shaped and influenced by a small subset of firms or a governing organization.

Our review offers two central contributions. First, our integrative framework demonstrates how different forms of BCA may be used in conjunction to respond to external forces in different but complimentary ways. This advances existing research, which has tended to focus on one form of collective action in isolation. In doing so, we create a bridge between market and non-market forms of BCA, which have previously been disconnected in the literature. Second, by unpacking the internal political arrangements that underpin BCA, we provide new insights into how and why BCA varies in its nature, scope, and impact. Specifically, we show how representative and controlled BCA have implications for what BCA aims to accomplish and whose interests it aims to serve. Overall, by developing an integrative model of BCA that spans disciplines, we provide a common vocabulary that helps clarify the concept of business collective action (Post et al., 2020) enabling future research to more deeply explore the role of business collective action in society.

DEFINING BUSINESS COLLECTIVE ACTION

Business collective action (BCA) can be broadly viewed as the concerted effort of a group of competing firms to construct and advance a shared interest. Central to this definition is the idea of collaboration between competing firms. In this way, BCA shares some similarities with other forms of business collaboration under the umbrella of interorganizational relations (Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos, 2011; Salvato et al., 2017) including joint ventures (Kogut, 1988), networks (Provan et al., 2007), alliances (Gulati, 1998), and coopetition (Bouncken et al., 2015).



However, what separates BCA from these other forms of collaboration is the *scope of its aims*. Specifically, BCA aims to achieve market or non-market outcomes that can affect entire industries or sectors. These outcomes include changes in legislation (Barley, 2010), the creation of industry standards (Garud et al., 2002), the development of collective innovations or technologies (Davis, 2016), or industry-wide private regulatory initiatives (Gunningham and Rees, 1997). These outcomes have implications for both the firms that are directly involved in the collective action as well as for those that are not (Barnett and King, 2008; Ingram and Inman, 1996). This distinguishes BCA from other forms of collaboration that have narrower aims focused primarily on the short-term organizational objectives of the firms involved in the collaboration (Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Bouncken et al., 2015; Salvato et al., 2017). This broad aim makes BCA resemble social movements in certain respects (Davis and Thompson, 1994), but the inherent competition between firms involved in BCA creates unique challenges for BCA and requires different coordinating mechanisms compared to social movements. We now provide a brief overview of these coordinating mechanisms.

Coordinating BCA

One of the unique aspects of BCA is the wide range of formal and informal mechanisms that are used to coordinate collective action (see Barley, 2010). Below we provide a brief overview of the landscape of these mechanisms. We move from more formal means of coordination, which are organized and centralized (Davis and Greve, 1997) and involve the creation of meta-organizations (Berkowitz and Bor, 2018), to more informal coordination which is relatively unorganized and decentralized (see Table I).

Trade and professional associations. Trade associations can be defined as ‘formal, multi-member organizations that represent business interests in a specific context’ (Lawton et al., 2018). Trade associations can be traced back to medieval Europe (Epstein, 1991), but began to grow during the second half of the 20th century, marked as the post-New Deal era in the US (Spillman, 2012). These organizations feature prominently in published empirical research on BCA (Buchanan and Barnett, 2022; Cloutier and Couture, 2024; Lawton et al., 2018; van Wijk et al., 2013). Trade associations have been found to play a critical role in helping to construct the shared interest that drives BCA (see Marques, 2017; Spillman, 2012). A related type of organization through which BCA is formally coordinated is the *professional association* (Lounsbury, 2002). Like

Table I. Coordination of business collective action

	<i>Coordinating mechanism</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example studies</i>
 More formally coordinated	Trade associations	Industry-specific organizations that represent member interests	Bartley (2007), Buchanan and Barnett (2022), Elsbach (1994), Litrico and David (2017), van Wijk et al. (2013); Yue and Wang (2024)
	Professional associations	Organization representing the interests of individual professionals	Greenwood et al. (2002), Knoke (1988), Lounsbury (2002), Micelotta and Washington (2013), Swan and Newell (1995)
	Peak associations	Multi-industry organizations that represent member interests	Akard (1992), Griffin et al. (1986), Jia (2014), Knoke and Pappi (1991)
	Ad Hoc organizations	Temporary organizations that are created and funded by business and focus on specific issues	Buhr (2012), Cho et al. (2011), Christiansen and Kroezen (2017), Martin (2010)
More informally coordinated 	Consortia	An entity that is formed to address a collective strategic need of a group of firms	Barnett et al. (2000), Bowen et al. (2018), Browning et al. (1995), Carney (1987)
	Ecosystems	A group of firms with varying multilateral, non-generic complementarities	Agarwal and Kapoor (2023), Davis (2016), Jacobides et al. (2018), O'Mahony and Karp (2022)
	Board interlocks	Shared membership of directors on multiple corporate boards	Benton (2016), Burris (2005), Mizruchi (1989), Yue (2016)
	Social ties	Informal ties facilitated through networks, class, clubs, or other social activities	Clawson et al. (1986), Erikson and Hamilton (2018), Haydu (2002), Yue and Ingram (2012)

trade associations, professional associations can be traced back centuries (see Carnegie and Edwards, 2001). These associations have a higher degree of independence from member interests than trade associations and have been found in multiple studies to be

powerful vehicles for business collective action (Greenwood et al., 2002; Micelotta and Washington, 2013; Swan et al., 1999; Swan and Newell, 1995).

Peak associations. Peak associations are structurally similar to trade associations but differ in that they span multiple industries or sectors. As Bennett (2011) documented, peak associations started to form in the 1700s as local chambers of commerce in places such as Liverpool and Glasgow. Most empirical research on peak organizations has focused on the US Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable that emerged in the 1970s. This was a critical time when BCA began to span industries in the USA in response to a perceived collective loss of business power to the social movements of the 1960s (Mizruchi, 2013). Accordingly, these organizations typically feature in studies that examine the political mobilization and activity of business (Akard, 1992).

Ad hoc organizations. Ad hoc organizations are temporary organizations that are created and funded by business and focus on specific issues (see Barley, 2010). Such organizations display considerable variation. For instance, Christiansen and Kroezen (2017) study what they refer to as ‘issue-based industry collectives’ in the alcohol industry to address the issue of alcohol-related harm. Other research has examined astroturf organizations (Cho et al., 2011) or corporate front groups (Apollonio and Bero, 2007) – ad hoc organizations that pose as grassroots organizations that are independent from business interests. Although these organizations may be ad-hoc in nature, they may endure for extended periods of time for larger-scale issues (see Buhr, 2012).

Consortia. Another organizational form that features commonly in BCA is the consortium. Consortia are wide-ranging and can be described as an entity that is formed to address a collective need of a group of firms (see Barringer and Harrison, 2000). Arguably, the most common form of consortium is research consortia that are created to coordinate research and development activities to address the collective needs of firms (Kanter, 1990). Carney (1987) distinguished between within-sector research consortia and across-sector research consortia in relation to telecom technology. Consortia may also exist in the non-market realm. For example, Barley (2010) identified think tanks as specific kinds of research consortia that are focused on collective political activity.

Ecosystems. Ecosystems are generally defined as ‘a set of actors with varying degrees of multilateral, non-generic complementarities without full hierarchical control’ (Shipilov and Gawer, 2020, p. 97). Research in management has explored many different ecosystems including business ecosystems (Agarwal and Kapoor, 2023), innovation ecosystems (Jones et al., 2021), circular economy ecosystems (Patala et al., 2022), and platform ecosystems (Kretschmer et al., 2022). Similar to business consortia, ecosystems often revolve around a shared vision or goal, such as creating a seamless customer experience, innovating in a particular industry, or lowering costs across the industry (Jacobides et al., 2018). Within an ecosystem, multiple firms, including suppliers, developers, and platform owners, collaborate for mutual benefits with the ecosystem owner or a few dominant firms setting the rules of engagement (Jones et al., 2021; O’Mahony and Karp, 2022). However, there is also

a significant informal element that involves sharing best practices in online communities and collaborating on open-source projects (e.g., Apple Developer Forums). This informal network helps sellers adapt and thrive in the ecosystem without formal oversight. As such, the relationship among ecosystem participants often involves a mix of formal agreements and informal collaboration, with the balance depending on an ecosystem's structure, goals, and maturity level.

Board interlocks. Board interlocks are a second mechanism to informally coordinate BCA. Useem (1984) famously argued that the networks created by interlocking directorates in the corporate elite 'generate a degree of cohesion' that is 'absent elsewhere' among business (p. 61). This cohesion, according to Useem, provides actors in this corporate inner circle with unique powers to mobilize corporate resources, link firms facing different circumstances, and act as a legitimate conduit between business and government (see Burris, 2005).

Social ties. Other research has focused on informal coordination of BCA through networks that stem from social ties (Dreiling and Darves, 2011; Mizruchi, 1989), class (Erikson and Hamilton, 2018; Prechel, 1990), or clubs (Kono et al., 1998). As Kono et al. (1998) noted, social 'clubs are foci for elite interaction that provide institutionalized informal settings in which elites are socialized and socially controlled to adhere to normative business attitudes and behaviours'. Organizations' embeddedness in communities and social networks often preserve a shared frame or reference which facilitates business collective action (Haydu, 2002). Moreover, these social ties ensure ongoing communication between firms which can help enable the development of a common set of interests (see Clawson et al., 1986). These mechanisms of coordination can be particularly effective in building up cohesion and facilitating business collective action surrounding more contentious ideas and practices.

REVIEW METHOD

We conducted our review of the literature using Ebscohost Business Source Complete. This database comprises 1300+ peer-reviewed business and management journals and offers abstract-based, keyword-based, subject-based, and full-text search of articles. Our target journals were a selection of journals from the FT50 list for which the authors agreed that they were potential outlets for research on BCA. In addition, we decided to add two top sociology journals that were not on the FT50 list as other potentially important outlets for BCA research by organization and management scholars. Our final journal list consisted of: *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies*, and *Strategic Management Journal*.

We searched for the following key words: 'business collective action', 'trade association', 'corporate unity', 'peak association', 'industry association', 'business association', 'business interest organization', 'meta-organization', 'private regulation', 'self-regulation', 'industry self-regulation', 'industry solidarity', 'peak organization', 'communal strategy', 'collaborative strategy', 'collective strategy', 'nonmarket strategy', 'social alliance',

‘cross-sector partnership’, ‘lobby’, ‘lobbying’, ‘astroturf’, ‘astroturfing’, and ‘industry association(s)’.

Through Business Source Complete, we ran separate searches using the key word (KW), subject (SU), abstract (AB) and full-text (TX) options, and stored all results. The searches in each case involved a query for the presence of the given search term anywhere in the text, article, key words, or other tag infrastructure operated by each journal/database. For example, ‘Business Collective Action’ was run as a search query through Business Source Complete five separate times: using Boolean AND operators with ‘KW’, ‘SU’, ‘TX’, ‘AB’ (i.e., ‘Business’ AND ‘Collective’ and ‘Action’), as well as a single string (‘Business Collective Action’) for full-text search.

Our initial search yielded an initial group of 8238 potentially relevant articles after de-duplication of identical records. Though we aimed to cast a wide net into multiple different literatures with our initial search, it was evident that most of the articles collected did not meet our criteria for inclusion. Specifically, while our focus was on empirical studies in which BCA played an important role whether implicitly or explicitly acknowledged in the studies’ theory, most articles in our initial search included one of our search terms (e.g., industry association, self-regulation) without focusing on BCA in any meaningful way. Based on this, we then went through each article manually to refine our search output based on this criterion. The first, second, and fourth authors examined each article from the initial list and labelled each as ‘in’, ‘out’, ‘theory’, ‘unsure’. We then investigated each of the ‘unsure’ articles as a group and either placed them in the ‘in’, ‘out’, and ‘theory’ folders. After this process, we ended up with 99 relevant empirical articles, which formed the basis of our review (see Table II for an overview by journal and geographical context), along with 37 conceptual articles which we also engaged with more informally throughout our analysis. We analysed and coded every article in our sample to identify the relevant emerging themes related to BCA.

TRADITIONS OF BUSINESS COLLECTIVE ACTION RESEARCH

Based on our review, we identify four traditions of BCA research: (1) collective corporate political activity; (2) collective institutional entrepreneurship; (3) strategic collaboration; and (4) collective private regulation. As we describe below, each of these traditions shares a focus on a large group of firms collaborating to advance a shared interest, while differing on how it is coordinated and what the primary area of focus is (see Table III).

Collective Corporate Political Activity

This tradition of BCA research is rooted in sociology and the corporate non-market strategy literature and focuses on the political activities of firms and industries. As regulations and policies affect entire industries, firms have incentives to organize collectively. The sociological line of research draws largely from class theories and shows that firms tend to be highly unified in their political behaviour (Useem, 1984). For instance, numerous studies in the area have focused on corporate unity in terms of donations

Table II. Review overview

<i>Outlet</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Geographic context</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Organization Studies	24	24%	U.S.	55	55%
<i>Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)</i>	12	12%	Canada	7	7%
<i>American Sociological Review (ASR)</i>	12	12%	U.K.	7	7%
<i>American Journal of Sociology (AJS)</i>	11	11%	Europe excl. U.K.	14	14%
<i>Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)</i>	6	6%	International (unspecified)	12	12%
<i>Organization Science</i>	12	12%	Australia/New Zealand	3	3%
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)</i>	6	6%	India, China, Japan, Iran	1	1%
<i>Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)</i>	7	7%			
<i>Human Relations (HR)</i>	2	2%			
<i>Journal of Management Studies (JMS)</i>	3	3%			
<i>Accounting, Organizations and Society (AOS)</i>	2	1%			
<i>Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)</i>	1	1%			
<i>Journal of Management (JOM)</i>	1	1%			
TOTAL	99	100%		99	100%

to Political Action Committees (Clawson et al., 1986; Mizruchi, 1989; Mizruchi and Koenig, 1986; Neustadtl and Clawson, 1988). Another group of studies moves beyond PAC contributions and has explored additional forms of collective corporate political activity, including lobbying and other means of political policy-shaping actions (Akard, 1992; Dreiling and Darves, 2011; Knoke and Pappi, 1991; Prechel, 1990).

The sociological line of research has emphasized the informal coordination of BCA, especially via board interlocks where directors share membership on multiple corporate boards (Burris, 2005; Yue, 2016). Additionally, research has found other social or network mechanisms that facilitate the coordination of collective corporate political activity. For example, Mizruchi and Koenig (1986) found that firms engage in collective and unified political behaviour when firms transact with one another regularly and when options for other firms to transact with are limited. Further, Mizruchi (1989) expanded the factors that contribute to unified corporate political behaviour, highlighting the role of networks between firms that stem from industry, geographical proximity, and market constraints. However, recent scholarship in the area has argued that this informal coordination has weakened substantially at the national-level (Benton and Cobb, 2019; Chu and Davis, 2016; Mizruchi, 2013)

Table III. Traditions of business collective action research

<i>Form of BCA</i>	<i>Primary coordinating mechanisms</i>	<i>Triggers</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>Example studies</i>
Collective corporate political activity	Board interlocks, social networks, class, peak associations	Regulatory pressure	Concerted political action, favourable regulatory outcome	Mizruchi (1989), Burris (2005), Akard (1992), Dreiling and Darves (2011), Prechel (1990), Murray and Nyberg (2021), Yue and Wang (2024)
Collective institutional entrepreneurship	Trade associations, professional associations	Disruptive events, incumbent resistance to new entrants	Legitimation of new entrants, market entry, institutional change, institutional repair, and maintenance	Greenwood et al. (2002), Gurses and Ozcan (2015), Micelotta and Washington (2013), van Wijk et al. (2013), Vermeulen et al. (2007), Huybrechts and Haugh (2018)
Strategic collaboration	Consortia, incubators ecosystems	Market turbulence, competitive threats, new innovations	Industry-wide innovations, standardization	Bresser (1988), Browning et al. (1995), Carter (1990), Davis (2016), Oliver (1988), Jones et al. (2021), Agarwal and Kapoor (2023)
Collective private regulation	Trade associations	Crises and accidents, social movement pressure	Reputational benefits, performance improvements	Barnett and King (2008), Ingram and Inman (1996), King and Lenox (2000), Lee (2009), Yue et al. (2013)

leading to less coordination of collective political activity by firms. Yet, Carroll (2010) has argued that this unification has simply moved beyond national borders to create a network of transnational corporate elites.

Meanwhile, research in non-market strategy has investigated market exchanges between firms and political actors as a means to obtain favourable regulatory outcomes (Jia, 2014; Yue and Wang, 2024). This research on non-market strategy on collective corporate political activity has generally reported on instances of BCA aimed at influencing government policies and legal frameworks that are coordinated through formal bodies such as trade and peak associations where efforts are centrally and visibly orchestrated (Drutman, 2015). According to the data provided by OpenSecrets, in 2023, trade associations accounted for over 66 per cent of lobbying expenses among the top 20 spenders of the USA, and their lobbying expenses at the federal level amounted to \$120 million. Overall, where sociological research on this topic has emphasized social

networks as the informal means of coordination in facilitating BCA, the non-market strategy literature has emphasized the role of trade associations in formally coordinating the process.

Collective Institutional Entrepreneurship

This tradition of BCA research is found primarily in organizational institutionalism and explores BCA's role in processes of institutional creation, change, and maintenance (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Studies in this area have examined the role of BCA in legitimating new actors, industries, or practices (Esparza et al., 2014; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018). In addition, this research has also highlighted BCA in protecting the institutional status quo when it is threatened (Elsbach, 1994; Micelotta and Washington, 2013; Vermeulen et al., 2007). Third, studies from this tradition have studied how BCA may be used to facilitate field-level change (Christiansen, 2018; Cloutier and Couture, 2024; Greenwood et al., 2002; Litrico and David, 2017; van Wijk et al., 2013). What binds this research together is the notion that successful institutional entrepreneurship is seldomly achieved by a single firm and instead requires collective action by an entire industry or collectivity of firms.

Collective institutional entrepreneurship has emphasized formal coordination of BCA through governing organizations like trade and professional associations. While overtly representing the 'industry voice', such associations put forward the collective view and position of their members and interact with government, regulators, the media, and the public (Cloutier and Couture, 2024; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Micelotta and Washington, 2013; Vermeulen et al., 2007). BCA of this nature is thus often well organized and coordinated through annual meetings, publications, and a clear governance structure that is embedded with bylaws and elected officers.

Strategic Collaboration

This tradition of BCA research is primarily based in strategic management and examines cases of BCA as a collaborative strategic response to threats and opportunities in the market environment (Carney, 1987; Jones et al., 2021). Beginning with a series of key studies in the 1980s (Astley, 1984; Astley and Fombrun, 1983; Bresser, 1988; Bresser and Harl, 1986; Dollinger, 1990; Oliver, 1988), collective strategy was defined as 'a systemic approach by collaborating organizations to deal with the variation in their interorganizational environment' (Bresser and Harl, 1986, p. 408). This initial research proved influential and spurred numerous bodies of scholarship on business collaboration in strategic management (see Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Gulati, 1998; Oliver, 1990). However, as this research has evolved, it has moved away from exploring the collective aims of BCA to focus more on firm-level outcomes stemming from strategic alliances (see Child et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding this, research in this tradition has focused its attention on two broad areas of BCA. First, a range of studies in the area has focused on the role of consortia in facilitating BCA. Browning et al. (1995) studied SEMATECH, a loosely coordinated R&D consortium in the semiconductor industry. More recently, this research has turned its attention to ecosystems as a vehicle for BCA. Business ecosystems consist of a network of interdependent entities including suppliers, distributors, complementors,

and competitors who collaborate to create and sustain mutual value (Jones et al., 2021; O'Mahony and Karp, 2022). Ecosystem collaboration is a form of BCA because it requires coordinated efforts among different actors to achieve common objectives, such as driving innovation, capturing new markets, or addressing complex challenges that no single entity could tackle alone (Shipilov and Gawer, 2020).

Collective Private Regulation

This fourth tradition of BCA research identified in our review focuses on the development and governance of private regulatory initiatives or schemes (Buchanan and Barnett, 2022). This research has its roots in institutional economics (North, 1990; Olson, 1965), which has examined BCA as an industry- or sector-level solution to collective action problems associated with a common dependency on a pooled resource (Barnett and King, 2008; Bartley, 2007; Ingram and Inman, 1996; King and Lenox, 2000; Lenox, 2006; Yue et al., 2013).

This type of BCA is focused on the concerted efforts of related firms to set standards and formally monitor firm compliance to address a wide range of issues that pose collective challenges to industries or sectors. For example, Ingram and Inman (1996) explored the creation of private regulatory institutions to solve collective action problems faced by hotels in Niagara Falls. Bowen et al. (2018) examined BCA by Canadian-based oil companies to create a private regulatory initiative around key environmental issues facing the industry. Additionally, a number of studies have explored the creation and ongoing impact of the chemical industry's Responsible Care program (Gunningham, 1995; Rees, 1997) and highlighted the benefits of such a program for both participating and non-participating firms (Barnett and King, 2008; Lenox, 2006).

This research is characterized by more formal coordination on the part of the organizations governing the BCA (Marques et al., 2023). Though private regulatory initiatives were initially viewed as decentralized, meaning they operated without formal controls (see Ingram and Clay, 2000), research has increasingly highlighted the important role of trade associations overseeing as well as shaping and influencing private regulation (Buchanan and Barnett, 2022; Gunningham and Rees, 1997; Rees, 1997). Taken together, these studies suggest that the creation of industry-wide private regulation requires ongoing coordination from governing organizations like trade associations.

Summary

Together, the four traditions of BCA research identified in our review cover the broad theoretical spectrum observed in the literature. It is important to stress here that, while previous research has tended to focus specific manifestations in isolation, in practice, BCA is likely to be multifaceted and to involve multiple forms that operate in conjunction. In the next section, we integrate insights from these different traditions to theorize (1) the external forces that motivate different forms and combinations of BCA; (2) the outcomes of BCA; and (3) the internal political arrangements that shape the nature and outcomes of BCA.

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK OF BUSINESS COLLECTIVE ACTION

Based on our review, we develop an integrative conceptual framework of business collective action (see Figure 1). We first conceptualize the external forces that nurture mutual dependence between firms and the potential to advance shared interests (see Casciaro and Piskorski, 2005). By integrating insights from across disciplines, we show how *institutional* and *market* triggers motivate different forms and combinations of collective action. We then identify the different outcomes associated with BCA. Finally, we describe the different internal political arrangements between firms and other actors (i.e., governing organizations) – which we characterize as *representative* and *controlled* BCA.

External Triggers and BCA

Our review identifies two broad forces from the external environment – institutional and market triggers – that motivate BCA by nurturing mutual dependence between firms (see Table IV). Though we make a distinction between institutional and market triggers,

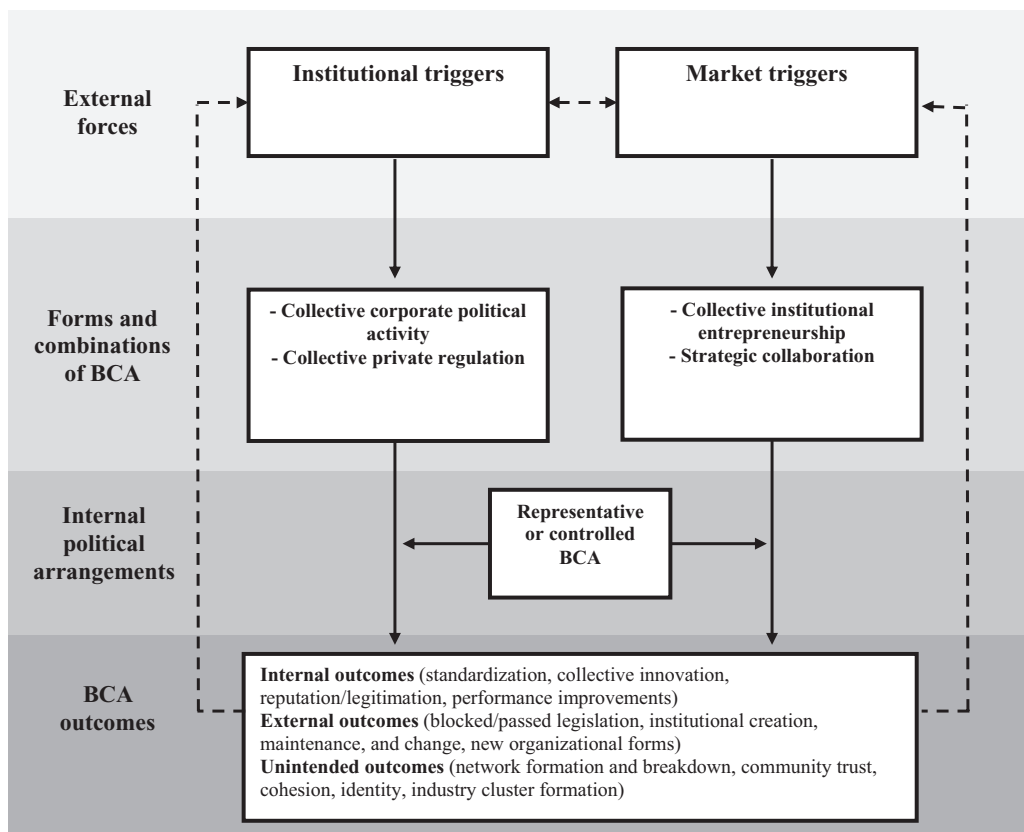


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of business collective action

in practice they may co-occur where market forces stimulate institutional pressures and vice versa.

Institutional triggers. Institutional triggers of business collective action can manifest from institutional threats – instances when there is a gap between shared stakeholder expectations and perceived firm behaviour – as well as institutional voids – situations where formal institutions or regulatory frameworks are insufficient, ineffective, or absent in addressing specific issues facing firms.

Institutional threats refer to the regulatory pressures that motivate firms to engage in BCA. These threats arise when firms face regulatory changes, mandates, or enforcement measures that have significant implications for their operations, profitability, or sustainability (e.g., Clawson et al., 1986; Mizruchi and Koenig, 1986; Murray and Nyberg, 2021; Neustadt and Clawson, 1988). For example, in Prechel's (1990) longitudinal study of the US Steel industry, he found that BCA was driven by 'the legal relationship between the steel industry and the state; the laws governing trade dispute settlement and the organizational structure of the state' (1990, p. 665). More recent work by Murray and Nyberg (2021) showed how the Australian mining industry engaged in BCA to influence public policy through mass media, to counter and postpone the introduction of a new tax. Accordingly, though political activity often occurs in an ongoing fashion, its most common trigger is regulatory pressures emerging from the state. Similarly, research on collective private regulation has shown how

Table IV. External triggers of business collective action

	<i>Institutional triggers</i>	<i>Market triggers</i>
Overview	BCA that is triggered from challenges and threats raised from the institutional environment including regulatory and normative pressures and/or challenges raised by institutional voids	BCA that is triggered from opportunities and challenges in the market environment including competitive pressures, disruptive innovations, and/or new markets
Most common associated forms of BCA	Collective corporate political activity (externally directed) Collective private regulation (internally directed)	Collective institutional entrepreneurship (externally directed) Collective strategy (Internally directed)
Example studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New laws/regulations (Buhr, 2012; Micelotta and Washington, 2013; Mizruchi and Koenig, 1986; Murray and Nyberg, 2021) • Stakeholders (social movement, NGO) targeting (Bartley, 2007; Buchanan and Barnett, 2022; Elsbach, 1994; King and Lenox, 2000) • Institutional voids (Yue et al., 2013; Yue and Wang, 2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive pressures/uncertainty (Carter, 1990; Davis and Greve, 1997) • New technologies and innovations (Agarwal and Kapoor, 2023; Jones et al., 2021; O'Mahony and Karp, 2022) • New markets (Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Hiatt and Park, 2022; Lee et al., 2017)

regulatory threats motivate BCA. This is evident in Kurland (1993), who showed how a defence industry initiative was drawn up in response to the Regan administrations 'recommendation' for defence contractors to adopt an ethics program. Under these conditions, industry players can be motivated to organize collective action to address these regulatory pressures.

Institutional threats may also come through normative pressure from NGOs, media, customers, employees, or other stakeholders. Elsbach (1994) showed how media pressure on the California cattle industry motivated BCA. Deegan and Blomquist (2006) explored the role of the World Wildlife Fund in motivating BCA in the Australian mining industry. Often BCA can be traced to a precipitating event that increases pressure on an industry, such as an accident or crisis (see Bartley, 2007; Lenox and Nash, 2003). Numerous studies have shown how the emergence of the Chemical Industry's Responsible Care initiative was driven by increased NGO scrutiny following the Bhopal disaster in 1984 (Barnett and King, 2008; Gunningham, 1995; King and Lenox, 2000; Rees, 1997). Similar pressures have been identified in the alcohol industry stemming from the new public health movement spearheaded by the World Health Organization from the early 90s and onward, motivating BCA and the emergence of issue-based industry collectives founded and supported by the industry and focused exclusively on engaging with the issue of alcohol-related harm (Christiansen, 2018; Christiansen and Kroezen, 2017). The role of normative pressures emerging from NGOs and other stakeholders is especially salient in transnational spaces where regulatory voids may exist and other actors play a critical role in monitoring business activities (Buchanan et al., 2023).

BCA can also emerge in response to institutional voids. Institutional voids can arise from weak governance, inadequate infrastructure, regulatory gaps, lack of enforcement mechanisms, or rapid technology changes outpacing institutional development (Doh et al., 2017). Through collective action, firms can mitigate these risks, reducing individual exposure and enhancing collective resilience. Institutional voids are often present when business activities span across national boundaries where a formal regulatory authority is absent. Similarly, in nascent industries where regulators and regulations have not yet formed, firms collaborate through consortia to address regulatory uncertainties, promote industry standards, and foster innovation. In the era before the formation of the Federal Reserve in 1914, banks in many US cities organized various forms of collective action to deal with bank runs and impose self-discipline (Greve and Yue, 2017). Similarly, in the modern blockchain and cryptocurrency industry, companies like Microsoft, JPMorgan Chase, and Intel have worked together through the Enterprise Ethereum Alliance (EEA) to develop blockchain solutions, educate policymakers, and establish best practices for blockchain adoption (Popper, 2017).

BCA in response to institutional triggers. Based on our review, institutional triggers tend to motivate two forms of BCA: collective corporate political activity and collective private regulation. While either form of BCA might emerge in response to such pressures, in certain cases, firms will engage in both of these strategies together where private regulation seeks to fill in the institutional voids and increase their collective reputation in the area while also engaging in collective political activity to defeat or alter proposed regulations facing the industry. Collins and Roper (2005) used the term 'strategic schizophrenia' to describe the 'contradictory strategies' that appear to work for competing objectives at the same time. Of course, these

two simultaneous forms of BCA are not contradictory at all when viewed as a response to institutional pressures. Indeed, both strategies may be thought of as a means of maintaining internal control of their operations while also shaping the broader regulatory environment.

We can also see these strategies as rather protective and reactive strategies focused on protecting the industry's interests and reputation. Indeed, private regulatory institutions seek to fill regulatory voids and aim to reduce external pressures on an industry whether it's by increasing transparency and communication (Barnett and King, 2008), increasing performance (Short and Toffel, 2010), or as a largely symbolic gesture (King and Lenox, 2000). Similarly, Buchanan and colleagues (Buchanan and Barnett, 2022; Buchanan and Marques, 2018) demonstrated how the Mining Association of Canada – the trade association representing the Canadian mining production industry – simultaneously engaged in developing the industry's private regulatory initiative, Towards Sustainable Mining, while lobbying to prevent regulations around the social performance of mining firms operating abroad.

Market triggers. Our review shows how BCA is also motivated by opportunities and challenges that emerge from the market environment. The first type of market trigger is competitive pressure and uncertainty (Carter, 1990). For example, Davis and Greve (1997) illustrated how a wave of hostile takeovers in the 1980's triggered BCA by large US corporations. Similarly, competitive uncertainty has been shown to incite small firms to engage in collective strategies such as joint planning, joint ventures, sharing facilities, and staff supports, while simultaneously engaging in firm-level responses (Carter, 1990). Interestingly, it is not only external competitive pressure that motivates BCA. Jones et al. (2021) recently showed that in innovation ecosystems, firms tend to increase their collaborative efforts in response to conflicts among cooperating firms.

The second type of market trigger that motivates BCA is disruptive innovations. Research on technology development and change has long argued that breakthrough innovation often inaugurates an era of ferment in which variations of the original breakthrough emerge and compete (Anderson and Tushman, 1990). Standards ensure that products, technologies, and systems from different manufacturers or providers can work together seamlessly. This promotes interoperability and compatibility, enabling customers to integrate diverse components, use interchangeable parts, and achieve greater efficiency in operations. Informal BCA such as coordinated R&D consortia can play an important role in shaping the emergence of the dominant design (see Garud et al., 2002). More recently, BCA has been argued to have played an important role in facilitating the formation of platform-based ecosystems (Kretschmer et al., 2022).

The third type of market trigger is new market emergence. Emerging industries or new entrants in existing industries often engage in BCA to create market infrastructures (Esparza et al., 2014; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015). Research on market creation has stressed that the collective construction and legitimation of a new market category requires that entrepreneurs engage in some form of BCA in combination with the promotion of a collective identity (Lee et al., 2017). Hiatt and Park (2022) introduced the concept of 'entrepreneurial shared fate' – the belief that competitors within the emerging field are bound together, facing communal threats. In their study of the US wood pellet market,

the authors described perceived shared risk or threats, as the central mechanism propelling BCA and the emergence of a new field. Another example is Huybrechts and Haugh's (2018) study of a European network of renewable energy cooperatives that showed how the new hybrid organizational form emerged to tackle climate change. The new form was anchored in several organizational forms (commercial, community, and environmental organizations) which allowed them to consolidate legitimation towards plural field-level audiences.

Together, market competition, disruptive innovations, and new market emergence provide opportunities for firms to collectively enhance their common goods and expand market size. Working together, firms can share the cost of building market infrastructure, increase their chances of winning standards wars, and enhance the cognitive legitimacy for their new ventures.

BCA in response to market triggers. Our review indicates that market forces primarily elicit collective institutional entrepreneurship and strategic collaboration. We can also see these strategies as rather proactive strategies focused primarily on developing new business models within and across an industry. As described earlier, this form of BCA involves the firms collaborating with each other to facilitate innovations, enforce standards, or set strategic priorities. As noted, this primarily occurs in consortia, ecosystems, and other spaces where competing firms engage in collaboration. Second, market triggers can also motivate collective institutional entrepreneurship. Indeed, the market pressures facing the accounting profession led to a massive jurisdictional expansion as a result of new innovations in the profession between 1977 and 1997, resulting in significant changes to the organizational field more broadly (Greenwood et al., 2002).

To summarize, our review suggests that the two factors primarily motivating BCA stem from both opportunities and pressures from the institutional and market environment. BCA can be both reactive and proactive in anticipation of upcoming events or shifts. Additionally, though our review of the literature has pointed to the separation of institutional and market motivations, these two forces may occur together in certain instances. Nevertheless, as we show below, the types of BCA that firms engage in tend to differ based on the nature of pressures firms face.

Outcomes of BCA

Though the outcomes of BCA are numerous and varied, based on our review we can broadly differentiate between internal outcomes – those directed towards the firms or industry engaging in the collective action – and external outcomes – those directed towards external actors and institutions (see Hartwell et al., 2023). We also discuss the unintended outcomes that BCA can have in certain instances.

Internal outcomes. BCA can increase the efficiency of business operations through developing an industry standard and promoting best practices (Garud et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2021). Standards promote efficiency by streamlining processes, reducing duplication of efforts, and minimizing errors or inconsistencies. Adopting standardized practices and

protocols can lead to cost savings in product development, supply chain management, and operations. Banking clearinghouses, for example, greatly simplified the check clearing process and reduced the amount of time and labour required for fund transfers across banks (Yue and Ingram, 2012). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) included companies such as Apple, Google, and Microsoft working together to develop web standards like HTML, CSS, and Web APIs, ensuring interoperability and compatibility across the Internet. These technological specifications laid down the foundation for the later explosive development of the Internet. In other cases, standards focus on industry performance. In Shu and Lewin's (2017) study, they studied BCA around the emergence and enactment of new emissions standards within the Japanese automobile industry.

Another group of studies has examined the creation and diffusion of technological innovations as an outcome of BCA (Agarwal and Kapoor, 2023; Davis, 2016; Swan et al., 1999). Platform-based technology ecosystems provide vigorous new ways of organizing interdependent innovation activities, by leveraging the capacity of the members, while they simultaneously act autonomously and serve a system level objective. These ecosystems are generally perceived to be superior to other vertically integrated business models due to the ecosystem's capacity to cultivate complementary innovation from the ecosystem contributors, which in turn extends the usage and value for the platform users (Agarwal and Kapoor, 2023). Earlier work has also proved that professional associations are central agencies in shaping the diffusion of innovation. Swan et al.'s (1999) comparative study of the adoption and design of Computer-Aided Production Management technologies in Sweden and the UK revealed that professional associations (and technology suppliers) were focal in promoting industry 'best practices'.

Third, in certain instances, it may improve an industry's collective performance in a way that prevents future accidents or crises from occurring (Yue et al., 2013). For instance, advertising industry private regulatory bodies, such as the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the UK or the National Advertising Division (NAD) in the USA, monitor and enforce standards for advertising practices. These bodies review complaints, assess whether ads are misleading or deceptive, and require companies to modify or withdraw ads that violate the standards. Finally, some studies in collective private regulation have found that BCA can be a means to improve collective industry performance on social and environmental dimensions (Barnett and King, 2008; Lenox, 2006), though other studies have shown that performance improvements resulting from private regulation are often rather limited (King and Lenox, 2000).

A fourth internal outcome of BCA is related to the legitimacy or reputation of firms. For example, research on private regulation has argued that a central outcome of such BCA is reputational (Barnett and Hoffman, 2008; King and Lenox, 2000; Lenox, 2006; Yue and Ingram, 2012). Similarly, research in organizational institutionalism has found that BCA aids legitimation processes (Esparza et al., 2014; Gurses and Ozcan, 2015; Lee et al., 2017). Building on these ideas, Gurses and Ozcan (2015) explored how BCA was used to help peripheral actors in a field enter a regulated market in the face of incumbent resistance. Similar to Greenwood et al.'s (2002) focus on theorization, the authors highlighted the key role of trade associations in framing

strategies to legitimize new entrants by building public, institutional, and regulatory support. Further, collective institutional entrepreneurship can also be used to legitimize new practices. As Hiatt and Park (2013) found, BCA was used to legitimize GMO practices in agriculture since BCA organizations were used by regulatory agencies as key sources of expertise and information.

External outcomes. External outcomes of BCA are those targeted towards actors and institutional arrangements outside of an industry. One of the most widely researched areas of BCA explores its impact on legislative outcomes (Barley, 2010; Buhr, 2012; Martin, 2010; Murray and Nyberg, 2021). For example, Akard (1992) traced the role of BCA in specific legislative outcomes, including failed labor law reform and consumer protection bills and the successful Economic Recovery Tax act of 1981. Similarly, Dreiling and Darves (2011) investigated the role of BCA in promoting US trade policy as the country moved towards neoliberal globalization. Beyond corporate political activity, Lee (2009) found that industry private regulation organizations affected the content of industry regulation, whereas Yue and Wang (2024) found that industry trade associations affected the locus of regulatory authority. In general, this research suggests that collective corporate political activity is a very powerful tool to secure specific legislative outcomes and is almost always more effective than individual corporate political activity.

Moreover, BCA can fill institutional voids and help to stabilize the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders. Businesses can establish private regulatory frameworks, such as The Responsible Business Alliance and the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, for supply chain management to ensure ethical sourcing and enforce labour standards. In particular, the Sustainable Apparel Coalition has developed the Higg Index, a standardized measurement tool for shareholders and stakeholders to understand the environmental, social, and labor impacts of making and selling a company's products. By increasing transparency and ensuring responsible practices, companies mitigate risks, build trust with stakeholders, and stabilize expectations regarding product quality and social responsibility.

Beyond specific regulatory outcomes, BCA may also have broader institutional impacts. For instance, Vermeulen et al. (2007) showed how trade associations actively prevented the creation of a new market in the Dutch concrete industry to protect the interests of their members. Similarly, Micelotta and Washington (2013) demonstrated how professional associations acted to repair institutional arrangements in the Italian professional services sector following disruptions instituted by the government. Finally, Barley (2010) argued that BCA to exerts control over government by creating an 'institutional field' of organizations committed to this objective. BCA also helps facilitate institutional changes. Greenwood et al. (2002) found that professional associations play a particularly important role in the theorization stage of institutional change where specification of the problem and justification of a solution occurs. Additionally, in van Wijk et al.'s (2013) study of institutional change in Dutch sustainable tourism, they showed how in fields targeted by activists, the goal of BCA – and trade associations in particular – is to 'maintain industry control over the pace and direction of the change process' (p. 378).

Finally, the institutional impact of BCA might also be the emergence of new organizational forms. Huybrechts and Haugh (2018) illustrate how BCA materialized in a new hybrid organizational form, the renewable energy corporative in Europe. Astroturf organizations have also been highlighted as an organizational form to emerge from BCA as, for instance, seen in reported cases where this form appeared to help with the successful promotion of business interests around environmental protection (Cho et al., 2011). A similar point is made by Christiansen (2018) who described how BCA materialized in the formation of the ‘issue-based industry collective’ Drinkaware, a UK trust founded, funded, and financed by the alcohol industry to tackle the issue of alcohol-related harm.

Unintended Outcomes. BCA can also have outcomes beyond those directly intended by participants. BCA can have a feedback effect on the coordination mechanism of collective action. For example, when the early banking industry organized collective action to pool resources during financial crises, there was a problem of the ‘exploitation of the big by the small’ (Olson, 1965, p. 35). After a financial crisis, big banks tended to dissolve their board interlocks with small banks to alleviate the exploitation problem (Yue, 2016). In other situations, BCA has long-term impacts on the culture and trust within a community. Greve and Yue (2017) showed that the success or failure of banks’ collective action in surviving financial crises shaped cohesion and trust among members of a community. BCA can also lead to the emergence of industry clusters where interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, and associated institutions are geographically concentrated in a particular area (Saxenian, 1994). The collective actions of automotive companies in Detroit, for example, have shaped the city’s culture and norms around manufacturing and labor (Sugrue, 2004). This influence has in turn led to a strong sense of community identity and pride.

To summarize, BCA can have internally and externally directed outcomes as well as unintended consequences. However, as we describe in the next section, the link between BCA and these outcomes is impacted by the internal political dynamics between firms and the other actors involved in the collective action.

Internal political arrangements in BCA

As shown above, external forces motivate different forms of BCA, with each producing its own outcomes. Yet, our review also indicates that the internal political arrangements of BCA – the power dynamics and relations between firms and other actors (i.e., governing organizations) engaging in collective action – also have implications for the nature, scope, and impact of BCA. Based on our review, we identify two such internal political arrangements – one in which BCA represents member interests more or less equally and another where BCA is controlled by a specific set of actors. We refer to these as representative BCA and controlled BCA, respectively (see van Waarden, 1992). Within each of these broad arrangements, different forms exist. Moreover, representative and controlled BCA have distinct associated features, means of influence, and impacts on the nature of business collective action (see Table V).

Table V. Internal political arrangements in BCA

	<i>‘Representative’ BCA</i>	<i>‘Controlled’ BCA</i>
Overview	The nature of BCA represents the interests of individual firms	The nature of BCA is controlled by a specific group of actors
Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representation coordinated by governing organization• Representation informally coordinated by firms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Control by governing organization• Control by large elite firms
Power imbalances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medium to high
Common characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emerging industries/fields• Large number of small firms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mature industries/fields• Few large and powerful firms among smaller ones
Implications	BCA must reflect the interests of all firms which results in more conservative activities aimed at preserving existing arrangements/protecting the status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BCA need not reflect the interests of all firms which can lead to more novel forms of BCA focused on changes in rules, norms, and practices.• Exploitation inherent in control may hinder the efficacy of BCA
Example studies	Benton and Cobb (2019), Gurses and Ozcan (2015), Ingram and Inman (1996), Davis (2016)	Buchanan and Barnett (2022), Greenwood et al. (2002), van Wijk et al. (2013), Yue et al. (2013)

Representative BCA. Representative business collective action refers to instances where the nature, scope, and focus of collective action reflect the interests of the firms engaging in it. In other words, the internal political arrangement of such BCA involves equal representation of participating firms. This mode of BCA reflects the Olsonian tradition of collective action in which BCA is the aggregation of the collective interests of firms (van Waarden, 1992).

Based on our review, representative is the most common form of BCA in the literature and can be observed in each of the traditions of BCA research. Additionally, representative BCA can occur both occur with and without the presence of governing organizations like trade associations. For example, BCA is often representative in cases where there are strong social ties between firms, including board interlocks (Benton and Cobb, 2019) or class (Mizruchi, 1989). Similarly, representative BCA in ecosystems tends to increasingly represent the interests of their members as the eco-system matures, even without formal coordination (see Shipilov and Gawer, 2020). Similarly, Representative BCA can also occur with coordination by a governing body such as a trade association, professional association, peak association, or other organization. In these cases, the governing organization is often minimalist in its form and structure (Aldrich et al., 1990) and is portrayed as a largely passive vehicle for member interests (Spillman, 2012).

Representative BCA appears most likely to occur in cases where power is relatively balanced between the actors involved in collective action (Casciaro and Piskorski, 2005). In these instances, it is more difficult for anyone actor to push for collective action that is not aligned with the interests of other members. For this reason, representative BCA is commonly observed in emerging industries or fields where new entrants are engaging in collective action (Esparza et al., 2014). Gurses and Ozcan (2015) capture this dynamic in their study of how certain entrepreneurs from the pay TV market successfully entered the US broadcasting industry by engaging in various forms of collective action. Their analysis demonstrates how new entrants can *use* industry associations for a number of different purposes, including lobbying and public relations. This highlights both the representative nature of the BCA and the passive role of governing organizations in enacting the will of these firms. Furthermore, representative BCA appears more likely to occur in cases where a large number of small firms are engaging in collective action (Buchanan, 2016). In these cases, there are less likely to be power imbalances between firms, and governing organizations are less likely to be able to exert a strong influence over a large number of firms (van Waarden, 1992).

The central implication of representative BCA is that the collective action must satisfy the interests of all firms involved. In doing so, this form of BCA is inherently conservative since it must satisfy a wide range of members with diverse interests (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). As research on collective private regulation has shown, the larger the number of firms that need to be satisfied creates a ‘lowest common denominator’ effect where private regulatory efforts must satisfy the least progressive member (see Buchanan et al., 2023; Conzelmann, 2012). Similarly, in collective corporate political activity where the requirement to represent the interests of numerous firms tends to moderate the scope and intensity of the political activity (Drutman, 2015). In our review, representative BCA tended to focus more on efforts to maintain or preserve the institutional status quo or resist external pressures for change (Barley, 2010; Benton and Cobb, 2019; Mizruchi, 1989).

In summary, representative BCA emerges out of low power imbalances between actors involved in BCA, which makes it most common in emerging industries and/or those populated with a large number of smaller firms. In aiming to represent the interests of all members, the bar is often set low, which limits the scope and intensity of BCA.

Controlled BCA. The second mode of BCA that we identify based on internal political arrangements – controlled BCA – refers to instances where the nature, scope, or focus of the collective action is controlled by a particular group of actors and is therefore not necessarily representative of the whole collectivity of firms. We identify two broad forms of controlled BCA – one where large and/or elite firms exert control over the nature and scope of the collective action and one where governing organizations exert control over the nature and scope of the collective action.

First, collective action that is controlled by large and/or elite firms has been well documented in the literature (Barnett, 2013; Yue et al., 2013). Yue et al. (2013) studied the evolution of New York Clearing House Association (NYCHA) from a representative

BCA towards a controlled one in which large, elite banks monopolized the membership and resource allocations in the pre-Federal Reserve era. More recently, controlled BCA by large and/or elite firms is observed in research on ecosystems where traditional governing organizations are often not present, and where leading firms such as Apple, Amazon, Google, and Expedia provide the basic infrastructure in the ecosystem. As Cusumano et al. (2021) wrote, 'platform leaders can adopt more versus less 'open' technical standards by themselves or consortium partners...They can institute governance rules determining who can and cannot access the platform'. Indeed, platform owners such as Apple and Google usually play an outsized role in setting up norms and rules of collaboration (Rahman et al., 2024).

It should be noted that while governing organizations are often present in instances when BCA is controlled by a small group of firms, they are primarily tools of the controlling firms. In Greenwood et al.'s study of institutional change in the accounting profession, they noted the professional association coordinating the collective action 'did not initiate change' and was 'responding to the jurisdictional and organizational movements of the profession's largest firms' (2002, p. 73). Similarly, Vermeulen et al. (2007) found that 'associations that were instruments of large, incumbent firms' (p. 533). Further, in Kaplan's (2024) recent study of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, he found that large, elite firms were the most likely to be included in the invitation only membership. Finally, Barnett (2013) showed that trade association spending was associated with lower performance of the four largest firms in the industry and not that of an entire industry, suggesting trade associations serve the interests of the dominant firms in an industry.

This form of controlled BCA most commonly emerges in industries and fields where there is a small number of large firms alongside a larger number of small firms (Buchanan, 2016). Such a composition creates relatively strong power imbalances where small firms can be subjected to coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures emerging from larger firms (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Such cases are particularly common in established and mature industries where specific firms have been able to assert dominance in the market (Greenwood et al., 2002). In situations of controlled BCA, smaller firms are either excluded from collective action or play a relatively passive role. Smaller firms are willing to participate in BCA that benefits bigger firms more because they may be otherwise unable to organize to advance their interests.

The second form of controlled BCA we identified through our review reflects the neo-corporatist view of BCA and involves collective action that is shaped and influenced by governing organizations – most commonly trade associations – independent of specific firm interests (van Waarden, 1992). This dynamic has been observed in research on collective private regulation. As van Wijk et al. (2013) illustrated, effectively responding to social movement pressure required that the governing organization 'acted against its wider membership base to take a leading role in pushing for change desired by the movement' (2013, p. 379). Recently, Cloutier and Couture (2024) examined how governing organizations facilitated field settlements by swaying certain members through calibrating practices that worked to change firms' 'perceptions of the feasibility and urgency of changes called for by challengers that are required to close a perceived legitimacy gap' (p. 885).

This form of controlled BCA can occur through both coercive and normative means. In some cases, this form of controlled BCA stems from resource dependence between firms and a governing organization. As noted by Gupta and Lad (1983, p. 422), with regards to private regulation, '[t]he greater the self-regulatory body's power vis-a-vis a firm, the more likely the firm's acceptance of and compliance with the self-regulatory standards'. In van Wijk et al.'s (2013) study, the trade association was 'protected from member backlash by its powerful consumer brand; its tour-operator members depended upon [the trade association's] label for legitimacy in the market' (p. 379). In other cases, governing bodies can exert control in a more informal manner. For example, Gunningham and Rees (1997) argued that trade associations' ability to control these institutions required them to develop an 'industrial morality', such that the norms and practices become taken-for-granted by their members. This normative suasion has long been viewed as the key feature of governing organizations like trade and professional associations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Spillman, 2012).

Although this form of controlled BCA is less commonly observed in the existing literature, our review identifies some key features that may contribute to it. First, such action is more likely to emerge in mature industries or fields since governing organizations tend to take on a more formalized and professional structure that is necessary to exert control over member firms over time (van Waarden, 1992). In these more professionalized and formalized associations, staff tend to be made up of independent executives without any background in the specific industry (Galambos, 1966) and without formal ties to member firms. In these cases, the unique institutional embeddedness of the association staff further contributes to their likelihood to differ from their member firms (Pache and Santos, 2013). Second, this form of controlled BCA is likely in associations comprising a small number of larger firms (Cloutier and Couture, 2024). In general, large firms may give more leeway to governing organizations since they have greater resources than smaller firms (Spillman, 2012). Moreover, as the size of a governing organization's membership grows, it decreases the likelihood of interest alignment between members and the ability of the association to exert an influence over member firms compared to a tighter-knit membership composition (Buchanan, 2016). Taken together, both the features of the governing organization and the composition of firms comprising the membership impact this form of controlled BCA.

The fundamental implication of controlled BCA is that it does not always reflect the interests of most member firms as is the case in representative BCA. This gives controlled BCA more latitude in how it can proceed. Our review revealed that many of the most vivid and large-scale forms of BCA stemmed from instances where it was controlled by a smaller group of firms or actors (e.g., Buchanan and Barnett, 2022; Greenwood et al., 2002; van Wijk et al., 2013). Strikingly, these examples involved BCA aimed at pushing changes in largely conservative industries. This differed from our review of representative BCA which tended to focus on BCA aiming to preserve the status quo or prevent changes being pushed by external actors. At the same time, however, controlled BCA might pose risks to the stability and ultimate impact of BCA (e.g., Buchanan, 2016). In Yue and colleagues' studies, elite banks pushed small banks out of the collective (Yue, 2016) and denied other banking institutions such as trust companies the opportunity to participate and enjoy mutual insurance during financial crises (Yue et al., 2013).

The institutional exclusion eventually backfired and hurt the interests of elite banks (as well as that of the entire banking industry) after the market crisis originating from banks outside of the collective escalated and spread to member banks. Similarly, controlled BCA in ecosystems also poses risks to the efficacy of the collective action. Apple, for example, has been sued by app developers for taking a 30 per cent cut of all revenue generated on its iOS platform (Nicas, 2021). These lawsuits drew regulators' attention and led them to launch probes over Apple's monopoly over its ecosystem (Leswing and Goswami, 2024).

In summary, controlled BCA occurs when there are large power imbalances between firms engaging in BCA or between firms and the governing organizations coordinating BCA. Accordingly, controlled BCA is more common in mature industries or fields where size differences between firms are common and where governing organizations tend to be more formalized and professionalized. Controlled BCA has more latitude in its scope and form than representative BCA, which can lead to more striking and potentially disruptive collective action. However, it also has the potential to hinder the impact of BCA in cases where it ignores or exploits some firms involved.

DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Business collective action (BCA) is widely acknowledged as an important but often hidden phenomenon that has been undertheorized in management and organization studies. Our objective has been to integrate previously disconnected bodies of literature to develop a conceptual framework of BCA that captures the common triggers, outcomes, and internal arrangements. In doing so, we aim to build a common vocabulary that spans specific disciplines and helps clarify the concept of business collective action in order to advance understanding in the area and stimulate future research (Post et al., 2020).

Our integrative framework provides a means to understand when and why different forms of BCA may operate in conjunction. Namely, we show how collective corporate political activity and private regulation are the most common responses to institutional forces such as regulatory voids or pressures from regulators, stakeholders, NGOs, and social movements. In contrast, collective institutional entrepreneurship, including the legitimization of new entrants and organizational forms, along with collective strategizing in consortia and ecosystems, are the most common responses to market forces, including new innovations, competitive shifts, and economic shocks. Though these combinations of internally and externally directed BCA may seem contradictory on the surface, they are complementary when viewed as internally and externally directed responses to common institutional or market triggers. While early conversations focused on the motivations for firms to engage in BCA (Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1990), our review explains how and why firms engage in specific combinations of collective action in response to different triggers from the broader environment.

In this way, we bring together market and non-market forms of BCA into an integrative framework. While BCA has largely been viewed as a non-market activity (Barley, 2010; Walker and Rea, 2014), we highlight the commonalities between non-market forms of

BCA like collective corporate political activity with market-based forms of BCA that focus on industry-wide innovations and standards and are coordinated through consortia and ecosystems. While extant research has placed these market-based forms of BCA under the umbrella of strategic alliances (Shipilov and Gawer, 2020), our review shows that the antecedents and aims of these actions share important commonalities with non-market activities like collective private regulation or political activity that should not be overlooked. This integration, we suggest, provides a novel way to think about BCA and its objectives more generally.

Second, in unearthing the differing internal political arrangements underpinning BCA, we shed new light on the underlying mechanisms that shape the nature and scope of BCA. Previous research has widely assumed that BCA emerges out of unified and aligned business interests (Clawson et al., 1986; Dreiling and Darves, 2011). While this occurs in cases of representative BCA, in cases where BCA is controlled, collective action may occur when interests are not necessarily aligned and instead hinge on the coercive or normative influence of a small group of firms or governing organizations. These political arrangements impact BCA in distinct ways. Our review indicates that representative BCA tends to be associated with protecting and reproducing the status quo (Barley, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2023; Vermeulen et al., 2007), whereas controlled BCA tends to be associated with more potentially disruptive, albeit unstable, forms of BCA which can trigger evolution and change in industries and fields (Greenwood et al., 2002; van Wijk et al., 2013). Thus, unpacking the internal political arrangements that drive BCA adds critical insights into what shapes the nature, scope, and impact of BCA.

Third, by distinguishing between the formal and informal means through which BCA is coordinated, we provide insights into how and why BCA can vary based on how it is coordinated. While many forms of BCA are highly visible and coordinated through trade and professional associations or consortia, other forms of BCA are much less visible and play out behind the scenes through more informal means like board interlocks, social ties, and class-related networks. In this way, our review identifies both the ‘front-stage’ and ‘backstage’ means by which BCA is coordinated. Barley (2010) captured this dynamic nicely but restricted his focus to collective corporate political activity, whereas our framework provides the scaffolding to explore the interactions between multiple forms of formally and informally coordinated collective action. At the same time, the means of coordination do not always align with its visibility or lack thereof. For example, corporate front groups are formally coordinated but often aim to hide the identities of firms they act on behalf of (Cho et al., 2011), whereas ecosystems tend to be more informally coordinated but are often highly visible. Nevertheless, unpacking the coordination of BCA in a systematic fashion contributes to developing a more holistic understanding of the phenomena.

Overall, in advancing an integrative framework of business collective action, we aim to enhance the understanding of the role that BCA plays in society and specifically its role in addressing complex social and environmental issues such as climate change, human rights, inequality, and working conditions. Many scholars have viewed BCA as an impediment to addressing social and environmental issues given that firms often collectively mobilize to prevent regulatory efforts to address such issues (Akard, 1992; Barley, 2010;

Griffin et al., 1986; Kaplan, 2024; Murray and Nyberg, 2021; Prechel, 1990; Walker and Vasi, 2022) or as a form of greenwashing (Bartley, 2007; King and Lenox, 2000). At the same time, other scholars have noted that, in addition to regulatory changes, effectively addressing complex social issues *requires* the collective mobilization of industries since actions by individual firms are likely to be insufficient (Berkowitz and Bor, 2018; Lawton et al., 2018; Marques et al., 2023). We believe that our framework helps contribute to resolving this debate by deepening the understanding of why BCA occurs, how it varies, and what factors shape its ultimate objectives and impacts. Accordingly, we believe that our integrative review takes a meaningful step towards further understanding the relationship between business collective action and addressing the pressing social issues facing society.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some notable limitations to our conceptual framework that open the door for future research in the area. First, our typology and conceptual framework provide a means to understand what types of BCA co-occur and how they might be used in conjunction. However, the studies that comprise our review seldom explore multiple forms of BCA in conjunction, leaving many questions unanswered. First, though different forms of BCA may co-occur, our framework cannot account for the conditions in which they may conflict with each other. For example, does collective strategizing aimed at developing industry-wide innovations conflict with institutional entrepreneurship aimed at gaining market share from incumbent firms? Further, our review does not account for how stakeholders respond to different combinations of BCA. In particular, we do not account for how firms manage resistance when external stakeholders perceive different forms of BCA to appear to be in conflict (see Buchanan and Barnett, 2022; van Wijk et al., 2013). We encourage future research to build on our framework and empirically examine how different types of BCA may emerge and operate (or not operate) in conjunction.

Second, though a key element of our review is to unpack the different internal political arrangements that underpin BCA, we cannot offer definitive insights into how these different political dynamics impact the nature and scope of BCA. While our analysis of the literature suggests that representative BCA tends to be more conservative in its scope and controlled BCA tends to be more disruptive, it does not tell us much about the intent or objectives of the BCA. We leave it to future research to unpack this in more detail. Further, we believe understanding controlled BCA in more detail is critical given its scant attention in the literature. In particular, it would be useful to unpack how normative (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Gunningham and Rees, 1997; Spillman, 2012) and coercive control (see Lenox and Nash, 2003) develop and unfold in BCA. Furthermore, more deeply unpacking the dynamics between elite firms and governing organizations – who compete with each other to control BCA (see Buchanan, 2016; Cloutier and Couture, 2024) – will further help to understand how internal political dynamics shape BCA.

Third, our review does not offer insights into the temporal ordering of BCA and how and why it unfolds the way it does. BCA can evolve from a representative towards a controlled form as an industry matures and becomes concentrated (van Waarden, 1992; Yue

et al., 2013). In other scenarios, one course of BCA can affect the emergence of another course (Greve and Yue, 2017). As BCA facilitates the development of trust and networks among participants, businesses can accumulate experience from past BCA activities and improve their coordination capabilities through organizational learning. We encourage future research to explore BCA from a longitudinal perspective to offer insights into the evolution of BCA.

Fourth, our framework does not formally engage with the finding that there has been growing business fragmentation in recent years leading to changes in how BCA is coordinated and unfolds (Benton and Cobb, 2019; Chu and Davis, 2016; Mizruchi, 2013). Specifically, future research might explore if shifts between representation and controlled BCA have occurred in this period of fragmentation. Similarly, has the controlling power of governance organizations been diminished in this period? Answering these questions will have important implications for research in a wide variety of areas in management and organization studies.

Finally, our review tends to emphasize research done in a North America, the UK and Europe (see Table I). Hence, our framework is built on the institutionalized norms for BCA in these contexts. Political contexts with a higher level of government control will likely have different BCA norms and practices. For example, Jia's (2014) study of private and collective political actions in China points to the central nature of business-government relations, due to the immense influence of the state in the establishment and development of markets in China. Future research should unpack how BCA may work differently in other sociopolitical environments. Further, our framework is based on articles from a selected list of journals selected. Though we aimed to cast a wide net, we acknowledge that considerable research on BCA exists outside of these journals. We encourage future research to leverage and build on the initial insights we provide.

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