

# Designing Solutions Around Customer Network Identity Goals

When companies fail to account for collective and relational goals in customer solutions, a mismatch can occur between firms' solutions and those that customers envision. Understanding the integration processes of customer networks is essential to improving solution design. This investigation draws on depth interviews with 21 families, the focal customer network, to generate collective and relational vacation narratives that contextualize their accounts. The authors identify four customer network integration processes: offerings assembled around prioritized goals, alternate participation, concurrent participation, and offerings assembled around separate coalitions. The findings reveal that the resulting mix of integrated products and services, or the solution, is shaped by customer network identity goals, goal management approaches, and constraints. The authors conclude with recommendations for how firms can use this information to improve solution design, identify new network partners, and revise value propositions.

**Keywords:** customer networks, family decision making, value cocreation, identity goals, solutions

The Samson family took a vacation to Disney World with goals of reasserting their family identity, securing idealized family memories, and having a final family holiday before the oldest daughter went off to college. However, Disney World offered so many activities tailored to the individual, such as "princess autographs" for the youngest daughter and "big rides" for the older kids, that the family actually spent very little time together, despite their intentions. Instead, the Samsons were thwarted by how the activities in Disney's offering were structured. To compensate for these shortcomings, the family integrated Disney World's activities with those of numerous other firms' products and services (e.g., Universal Studios, private condominium, parasailing service, and a public beach) that were more responsive to collective goals. (vignette compiled from interview data)

Companies are increasingly recognizing the need to focus not on individual products or services but rather on solutions—"offerings that integrate goods and services to provide customized outcomes for specific customers" (Sawhney 2006, p. 365; see also Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). To design product and service offerings as solutions, marketers need to map the entire customer experience to uncover what the customer is trying to accomplish (Christensen, Cook, and Hall 2005; Sawhney 2006; Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). Companies such as Kodak, Intuit, and Procter & Gamble have developed compelling solutions by segmenting around the job to be

done rather than the customer (Christensen, Cook, and Hall 2005). For example, by "tracing the full stories of how real customers buy, use, and consume products," Kodak has shifted from offering a digital camera to offering solutions that expand to image editing software, online albums, and framing services to satisfy customers' goals, such as modifying, storing, and reliving memories (Sawhney 2006, pp. 372–73). Despite the promise of this approach, however, when examining the practitioner and academic literature, we find that solutions in the business-to-consumer market have been oriented around individual goals and not the "intentional acting by a collectivity" (Bagozzi 2000). We empirically demonstrate that solutions must account not only for individual goals but also for relational and collective goals.

Companies struggle with and often fail to design solutions that match those that customers desire (Hagi and Yoffie 2009; Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). Explicitly, firms must decide which products and services to integrate into a solution and when and how to partner with other firms to provide them (Lusch, Vargo, and Wessels 2008; Sawhney 2006). The term "integration" refers to the processes of bringing together potentially diverse products and services in ways that create value. Integration processes describe how networks arrange and interact with these assortments to serve multiple goals over the course of an experience. When firm solutions fall short of expectations, customers may integrate their own solutions by combining offerings from multiple firms, as the opening vignette illustrates. Previous research has shown that firm- and customer-designed solutions likely differ (Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007).

The purpose of the current research is to empirically explicate, from the customer network's point of view, the integration processes used to design solutions. We define a "customer network" as a social structure made up of indi-

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viduals who are connected by one or more specific types of formal and informal ties linked to purchase and consumption activities (Achrol and Kotler 1999). Examples of customer networks include families, organizations, brand communities, and subcultures. Because families represent a tightly linked customer network, with prominent relational and collective goals connected to a broad array of purchase and consumption activities, they offer an appropriate focus for our study.

Our findings uncover three reasons firms' solutions fail. First, companies tend to focus too narrowly on individual customer goals and miss the relational and collective goals of customer networks. We develop a typology of network goals at three levels (collective, relational, and individual) that motivate network choices. We further demonstrate that when firms segment on individual goals, they include a different structure and array of products and services in their solutions than they would integrate if they also considered the network's collective goals. Second, companies fail to recognize how the dynamics within the network, including synergy and discord among network goals, shape solution design. That is, the degree of overlap observed among individual, relational, and collective goals drives the number, heterogeneity, and flexibility of offerings integrated into solutions. Third, firms undervalue the notion that company and customer networks integrate solutions in fundamentally different ways (Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007; Wind 2008). In particular, customers may view solutions from a more relational perspective that moves *across* supplier firms and incorporates a different mix of products and services than a single firm offers. Paying attention to how customers design solutions can uncover nonintuitive partnerships for firms or help them adjust their mix of offerings to improve network satisfaction.

Our investigation is distinct in explicitly adopting a customer network approach to understanding solutions. That is, we examine how customer networks manage the interplay among individual, relational, and collective identity (Epp and Price 2008) around three research questions: (1) What are the identity goals of the focal customer network? (2) How do customer networks manage multiple identity goals (individual, relational, or collective)? and (3) How do the goal character, goal structure, and synergy/discord among these identity goals shape customer networks' integration processes? Coconstructed among members, identity encompasses the qualities and attributes that distinguish them from others (Epp and Price 2008). We define identity goals broadly as "conscious or unconscious pursuits" related to how people define themselves (Coulter and Zaltman 2000, p. 264). Although other types of goals, such as economic, experiential, and hedonic goals, are likely relevant, we narrow the focus of our investigation to identity goals to make the undertaking and framework development feasible. This narrowed scope is appropriate given (1) the nature of our data, as narratives are likely to reveal identity goals in particular (Escalas and Bettman 2000), and (2) prior research that suggests that identity goals are higher-order, central drivers of consumption (Coulter and Zaltman 2000).

In the following section, we review and critique the theoretical groundings that led to our research questions.

Next, we provide an overview of our method for understanding the interplay among collective, relational, and individual goals. Then, we introduce a theoretical framework that organizes our findings and propose a set of research propositions. Finally, we discuss the theoretical contributions, elaborate on how our findings could change solution design for managers, and offer applications of our framework in other contexts.

## A Shift to Integrated Solutions

Emergent research highlights the value of firms generating solutions that address a range of customers' goals (Christensen, Cook, and Hall 2005; Hagi and Yoffie 2009; Sawhney 2006; Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). Much of this research occurs in business-to-business settings, in which firms take on the primary function of integrating (Chandler and Vargo 2009; Sridhar 2009). However, scholars acknowledge that both firms and customers act as integrators (Ghosh, Dutta, and Stremersch 2006; Lusch and Vargo 2006) and have called for studies on "the interrelated themes of firm-consumer resource integration" (Kohli 2006, p. 290). Given the acknowledged departure between how firms and customers envision solutions (Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007), further research that uncovers integration processes from a customer network's point of view is needed. Again, integration processes capture how networks arrange and interact with assortments during a bounded experience. For example, when remodeling a home, customers might enlist labor, how-to workshops, building materials, paint, installation, and furnishings from various stores. Understanding these processes is important because integration is heralded as central to value creation and provides a key source of competitive advantage (Lusch, Vargo, and O'Brien 2007; Lusch, Vargo, and Wessels 2008). We address this gap by demonstrating that customer networks use distinct integration processes that produce different solutions than those offered by firms.

There is substantial evidence that firms working in a business-to-consumer context also design solutions. Anecdotal examples suggest that the innovative and profit potential of segmenting around consumers' goals rather than around predefined customer segments has not escaped managers' attention (Christensen, Cook, and Hall 2005; Sawhney 2006). Additional support comes from the proliferation of tools to manage the total customer experience. Firms are differentiating themselves from the competition by offering complete solutions that stem from a deep "understanding of the customer's journey—from the expectations they have before the experience occurs to the assessments they are likely to make when it's over" and everything in between (Berry, Carbone, and Haeckel 2002, p. 85; see also Schmitt 2003). However, it is clear from analyzing these accounts that current solutions are focused on *individual* consumers' pursuits and experiences. Even in a relational setting, such as "capturing memories" for Kodak, in which relational and collective goals would likely surface, tools focus on mapping an individual customer's experience of modifying, storing, and reliving photos (see Sawhney 2006).

We speculate that one of the reasons for this individual customer focus in solutions is that conventional treatments of choice and decision making, even in group settings such as families, focus most often on individuals. Studies of family decision making in particular disregard collective identity tensions and, instead, emphasize how individuals attempt to influence other family members (e.g., Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985; Corfman and Lehmann 1987; Cotte and Wood 2004; Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980; Palan and Wilkes 1997; Su, Fern, and Ye 2003), take on different roles during the group decision (e.g., Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985; Davis 1970; Davis and Rigaux 1974), predict spousal and revise individual preferences (e.g., Aribarg, Arora, and Bodur 2002; Davis, Hoch, and Ragsdale 1986), or change individual purchases when considering other family members (Aaker and Lee 2001; Hamilton and Biehal 2005). In turn, solutions derived for end consumers tend to direct attention to what individuals within networks are trying to accomplish, masking goals that exist at the relational and collective level.

The shift to thinking about networks may help us reframe conventional wisdom about family decision making. In particular, recent work suggests that family decision-making research could benefit from considering how relational and collective goals shape choice (Bagozzi 2000; Epp and Price 2008; Fischer, Otnes, and Tuncay 2007). To date, these collective and relational goals have received little empirical attention (Epp and Price 2008). Although Fischer, Otnes, and Tuncay (2007) do not explicitly address this in their study, relational discourses of infertile couples reveal that shared goals of creating family led them to enlist assisted reproductive technologies and other medical remedies. This suggests that if, instead of mapping individual pursuits to design solutions, companies mapped collective consumption experiences, we would observe how choices are linked to relational and collective goals. The series of choices made within the span of a collective consumption experience represent the products and services customer networks integrate into a solution to support multiple goals. That is, family choices collect into a solution from the customer network's point of view that may differ from a firm's solution.

Consumers choose marketplace offerings that help them manage multiple and varied identity goals (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Epp and Price 2008; Huffman, Ratneshwar, and Mick 2000). Thus, we conceptualize integration processes as goal directed. Many researchers recognize that when consumers have multiple salient goals that conflict, they adjust their choices in ways that help them resolve this tension (Laran and Janiszewski 2009; Ratneshwar, Pechmann, and Shocker 1996). Despite this, calls remain for understanding how consumers trade off goals at multiple levels (Huffman, Ratneshwar, and Mick 2000), and few studies offer insight into how these trade-offs affect decision making. In particular, customer networks manage overlapping and competing identity goals that emerge among individuals, relational units, and the collective (Epp and Price 2010). Understanding the interplay of network identity goals clarifies how families make choices about which products and services to integrate, as some offerings are

pulled into the solution when identity goals collide while others are not incorporated.

In constructing solutions, customer networks inevitably meet with constraints. These tangible and intangible barriers to integrating specific products or services may be physical, cultural, or attitudinal in nature (Constantin and Lusch 1994; Lusch, Vargo, and Wessels 2008). In addition, constraints arise both in the form of barriers, such as stock-outs or unavailable services and in the form of potentially positive trade-offs networks might make in response to limited resources (e.g., time, money, knowledge). For example, collective and relational goals compete for the scarce resource of vacation time, such as in the Samson family previously described. We should not disregard the role of constraints, given their likely importance in shaping integration processes. Customer networks always act as the integrator of last recourse because they shuffle new offerings to stand in for those that are unavailable from the firm's solution. Therefore, constraints may offer collaborative opportunities for improving value propositions (Lusch, Vargo, and O'Brien 2007).

## Method

As previously mentioned, we chose families as our focal customer network because they are of substantial importance to solutions providers, comprise dense ties, and are of a tractable size for in-depth inquiry. We adopt a broad definition of family: "networks of people who share their lives over long periods of time bound by ties of marriage, blood, or commitment, legal or otherwise, who consider themselves as family and who share a significant history and anticipated future of functioning in a family relationship" (Galvin, Bylund, and Brommel 2004, p. 6). This definition acknowledges the diversity of membership assortments that constitute families. Rather than relying on researcher-imposed definitions of family, participants in the study identified who they consider family.

We selected family vacations as a context. Consider the vast potential for integration on a family's vacation: transportation (e.g., airlines, taxis), accommodations (e.g., hotels, campgrounds), activities (e.g., public recreation, amusement parks), provisions (e.g., restaurants, snacks), and memorabilia (e.g., souvenirs, photos). In addition, this setting emphasizes that families have potentially divergent and overlapping network identity goals. Vacations provide a collective experience that helps families develop a sense of identity (DeVault 2000), enact or produce family relationships, and find much needed time to bond (Gardyn 2001). However, disagreements about where to go and what to do frequently arise as family member interests and goals deviate. Given this, family vacations also present opportunities to examine the benefits and drawbacks of solutions; service providers, such as resort hotels and theme parks, often adopt something-for-everyone approaches in response to the potentially divergent interests of family members. Among others, examples of solution providers from our study include Disney, Marriott Resorts, Universal Studios, and Fillenwarth Beach.

Given that the literature on integration processes is in its infancy, we adopted a discovery-oriented, grounded theory approach, and our analysis followed the procedures outlined for this method (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). We employed two phases of data collection: eliciting collective narratives and follow-up questions with the family, subgroups, and individual family members about their experiences. We alternated the chosen subgroups across families to ensure representation of couples, siblings, parent-child, and other relational units. Our purpose was to generate group and relational narratives to gain an emic understanding of the complexity of integration processes from multiple perspectives and to explore the lived experiences of informants (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). Families collectively make sense of important consumption events through narratives (Bruner 2004). In addition to helping people understand the past, stories have prospective, performative, and constructive functions; “a past event is relived in relation to present concerns and projected toward an envisioned future” (Thompson 1997, p. 442). Narrative content can reveal higher-order identity goals (Escalas and Bettman 2000), so family stories provided rich textual data to this end. A key missing link to understanding networks is analysis of the stories that characterize them. Networks cannot be understood except as embedded in domains, and those can only be identified through the stories and discourses that uncover who belongs, their roles, and their identities (Knox, Savage, and Harvey 2006). Because open-ended questions are likely to elicit narratives with contextual detail (Riessman 1993), interviews offered an appropriate method.

We interviewed 21 families (88 members) that represented a diversity of family forms and vacation types. We continued interviewing until theoretical saturation occurred (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Table 1 offers additional details about families, and pseudonyms protect families’ anonymity. Interviews took place in participants’ homes to facilitate autodiving, a form of photo elicitation, by showing vacation photos, recordings, and other memorabilia of family vacations to the families and asking them to give accounts or discuss the contents (Heisley and Levy 1991). The interview duration ranged from 50 to 155 minutes, with the average interview lasting 92 minutes. In addition, to allow for detailed analysis and to capture the nonverbal interaction among family members, we video- and audiotaped the interviews.

## Organizing Framework

We briefly introduce Figure 1 as an organizing framework for our findings. Figure 1 depicts integration processes from the customer network’s perspective. Our focal customer network (families) for the study is featured at the top of the framework, and we emphasize the interplay among collective, relational, and individual identity goals. We also consider three constructs directly relevant to this interplay: goal character, goal structure, and synergy/discord among network goals. Character is linked to the family’s practices and reflects shared activities, traits, and values; structure describes the level at which a goal occurs (collective, rela-

tional, or individual); and synergy/discord considers the degree to which network goals overlap and depart (Epp and Price 2008). According to Figure 1, the degree of synergy/discord among families’ identity goals determines which goal management approaches they adopt. In turn, these shape families’ integration processes. The resultant solutions vary in the number and heterogeneity of the mix of offerings and in the structural flexibility (policies, access) necessary. We summarize the implications for solution design in an adjoining box. In the next section, we elaborate on the specific relationships outlined in our organizing framework.

## Findings

We unfold the findings using a series of illustrative family cases. These cases represent the patterns emergent in the broader data set but allow us to give background information and context for each family to best demonstrate how the components of our framework work together (Mead 1953). The complete data set provides a general understanding, and the cases offer more nuanced details of the integration processes involved. Throughout the findings, we specify how the cases link to the broader data set and offer negative cases that help us understand the intricacies of the framework.

We selected four families as illustrative cases on the basis of their place on a continuum of goal synergy and discord (see Figure 2). To assess the degree of synergy/discord, we considered both the character and the structure components of a network’s goals. For example, families’ goals could synergistically overlap with regard to both structure and character if goals generally occurred at the same level (e.g., collective) and involved the same practices (e.g., camping). Conversely, families’ goals could be highly discordant with regard to both structure and character if goals generally occurred at different levels (e.g., collective, relational, and individual) and involved diverse practices (e.g., camping, shopping, and visiting museums). In addition, families’ goals might reveal a mix, with overlapping goal structure (e.g., all collective goals) but discordant character elements (e.g., camping, shopping, and visiting museums) or with overlapping character elements (e.g., all focused on camping) but discordant goal structure (e.g., mix of collective, relational, and individual goals).

### ***Focal Customer Network: Identity Goals***

Because the primary contribution of this study is to examine customer networks’ integration processes and their implications for solution design, we briefly outline the goal-related components of Figure 1 here and then offer more details within the context of each section to highlight how different approaches to goal management play out in integration processes. We also demonstrate how firm solutions fall short in meeting customer networks’ goals, prompting families to integrate outside offerings.

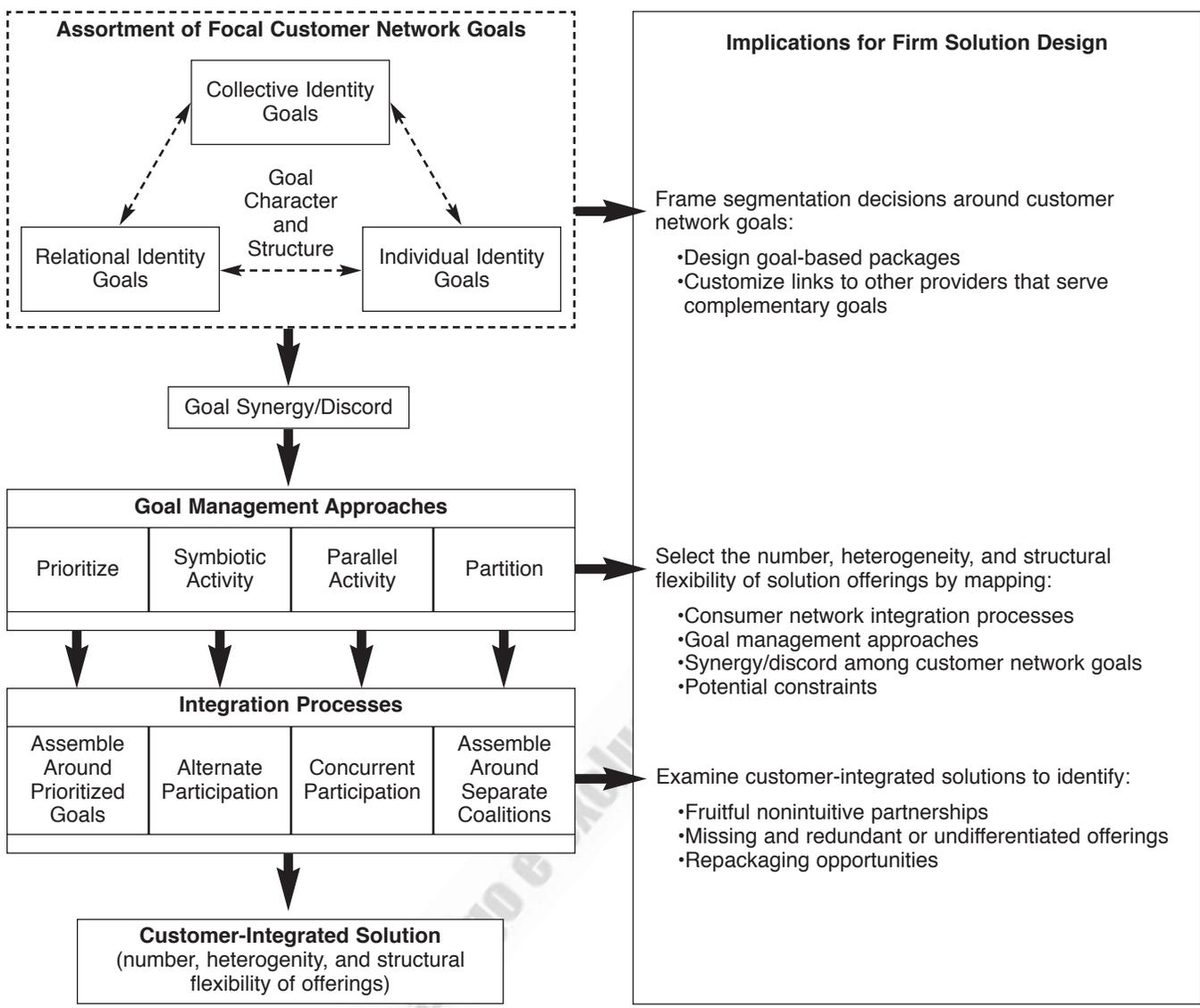
Each of the families revealed multiple identity goals. For many families, vacations represented a time to reassert a family identity that is not easy to enact in everyday life (e.g., camping) but at the same time allowed families to try

**TABLE 1**  
**Participants**

#	Family Name	Family Form	Family Members (Relationship, Age, Occupation)	Destination
1	Mason	Traditional	Peter* (father, 41, certified public accountant); Cathy* (mother, 41, bank compliance); Bob* (son, 8); Addison* (daughter, 11)	Black Hills, S.Dak.
2	Kramer	Traditional	Jake* (father, 44, director of services); Kelly* (mother, 39, billing specialist); Brady* (son, 10)	San Diego
3	Dodge	Traditional	Matt* (father, 51, statistical analyst); Mary* (mother, 53, director of human services); Madeline* (daughter, 13)	China; family cabin
4	Locke	Traditional	Glen* (father, 51, stay-at-home dad); Callie* (mother, 49, certified public accountant); Beau* (son, 14)	Western Nebraska/South Dakota
5	Murray	Traditional	Patrick* (father, 40, contractor); Fran* (mother, 43, office coordinator); Michael* (son, 10); Jaylin* (daughter, 8)	Colorado
6	Hardy-Harrison	Blended	Dan* (father, 37, financial planner); Kendra* (mother, 41, anesthesiologist); Delilah* (daughter—mom's, 8); Dana* (daughter—mom's, 5); Mandy* (daughter—dad's, 5)	Colorado (skiing)
7	Taylor	Traditional; twins	Jared* (father, 41, magnetic resonance imaging technician); Cara* (mother, 42, dental hygienist); Hayden* (son, 9½); Maggie* (daughter, 9½)	Lake Okoboji, Iowa
8	Wilson	Traditional	Derrick* (father, 43, architect); Kayla* (mother, 43, administrative assistant); Cassie* (daughter, 13); Valerie* (daughter, 11)	African safari
9	Carter	Single-parent; adoptive (all); multiracial	Lacey* (mother, 47, day care provider); Abbie* (daughter, 19, part time); Jackson (son, 17); Sallie* (daughter, 14); Madison* (daughter, 13); Ajay* (son, 12); Delsin* (son, 8, American Indian); Gillian* (daughter, 3)	St. Louis
10	Horton	Blended	Shane* (father, 42, talk radio host); Meredith* (mother, 40, stay-at-home mom); Holly* (daughter—mom's, 8); Avery* (son—mom's, 11); Hilary* (daughter—both, 4); Lexi (mom's niece, 22)	Disneyland
11	Haws	Single-parent	Sadie* (Mother, 33, director of marketing); Elise* (Daughter, 7); Kali* (Daughter, 5); Grandparents	Disney World
12	Dawson	Single-parent	Candice* (mother, 38, administration); Cameron* (son, 13); Abby (daughter—lives with dad, 16)	Godstock (Nebraska)
13	Diggerty	Adoptive; multiracial	Todd* (father, 42, deputy); Tandy* (mother, 42, office manager); Daren (son, 21, U.S. Navy); David* (son, 17); Katie* (daughter, 15); Paxton* (son—adopted, 9, Black); Deacon* (son—adopted, 8, Black)	Chicago
14	Halpert	Traditional	Jason* (father, 41, internal auditor); Tonia* (mother, 42, homemaker); Jeremy* (son, 11); Kenton* (son, 9); Libby* (daughter, 7)	Boston/New York
15	Metcalf	Adoptive; multiracial	Ronda* (mother, 46, registered nurse); Mike* (father, 51, teacher); Maddy* (daughter—adopted, 5½, Asian); Sephora* (daughter—adopted, 4, Asian)	Bei Dai He (China)
16	Samson	Traditional	Scott* (father, 50, self-employed); Tara* (mother, 47, dental hygienist); Sabrina* (daughter, 19); Beth* (daughter, 17); Kira* (daughter, 12); Jocelyn* (daughter, 8)	Disney World/beach
17	Higgins	Blended	James* (father, 49, programmer); Malina* (mother, 46, graphic designer); Philip* (son—dad's, 14); Chad* (son—mom's, 12); Keith (son—mom's, 15); Aimee (daughter—dad's, 11); Nash (son—mom's, 26)	Park City, Utah/Yellowstone
18	Tanner	Single-parent	Leslie* (mother, 33, veterinary technical assistant); Clay* (son, 10); Dylan* (son, 7)	Disneyland
19	Navarro	Traditional; Hispanic	Nardo* (father, 50, phlebotomist); Rita* (mother, 35, customer service); Genoveva* (daughter, 12); Serena* (daughter, 9); Adriano* (son, 7); Alameda (grandmother)	Worlds of Fun (Kansas City, Mo.)/El Salvador
20	Quigley	Blended	Curtis* (father, 48, truck driver); Dina* (mother, 44, personal banker); Bryson* (son—both, 14); Karston* (son—both, 11); Craig (son—mom's, 24); Evan (son—mom's, 20); Juliet (daughter—dad's, 26); Jonah (son—dad's, 20)	Colorado
21	Warren	Blended; multiracial	Gary* (father, 30, Chilean, mortgage broker); Christi* (mother, 28, management trainer); Katie* (daughter—dad's, 6)	Denver

\*Indicates family members who participated in the interviews.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Integration Processes in a Customer Network**



out new identities (e.g., being adventurous). Blended, divorced, and adoptive families in our study often used their vacations to build collective identities (“It’s really made us a family” [Higgins family, mother]) but also to preserve relational identities within the family (“We have our time [as a couple]” [Higgins family, mother]). Table 2 summarizes the types of identity goals that emerged. For each type, families offered examples related to both structure and character.

To illustrate, consider the Hardy-Harrisons, a recently formed, blended family that took their first vacation together to accomplish a family goal of building a new collective identity. Dan, a financial planner, brings one daughter to the marriage (Mandy, 5), and Kendra, an anesthesiologist, brings two daughters to the marriage (Delilah, 8, and Dana, 5):

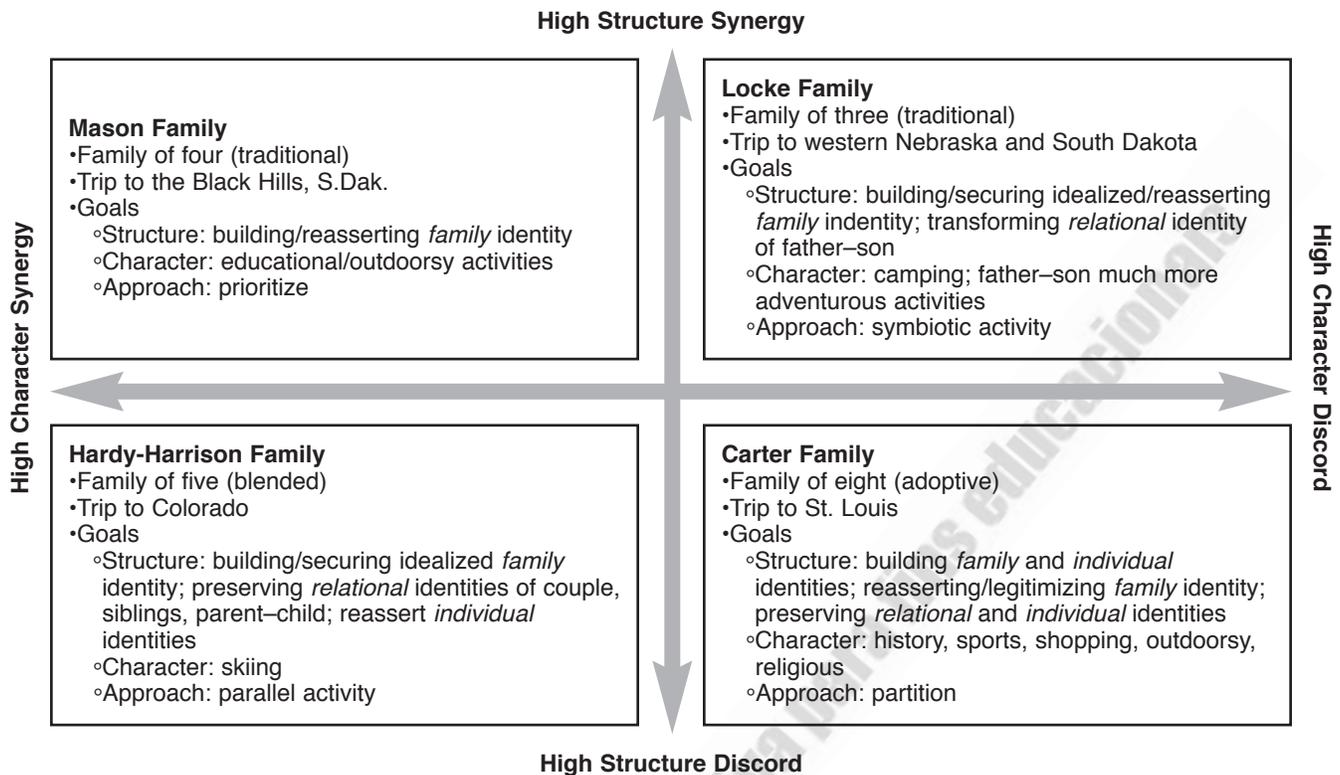
“That [vacation] was the first time we actually did something as a group ... where it was just us. And you know,

have the two families merge. It was good to get them all together, and get them, kind of, in that mind frame.” (Hardy-Harrison, father)

This building goal led the family to enlist offerings that allowed them to spend time as a group (“Ski Cooper,” “Target,” and “condo”). In addition to this collective building goal, the Hardy-Harrisons also had a goal of securing an idealized family identity; they envisioned being a skiing family. To achieve this goal, Dan and Kendra enrolled all three of their daughters in Ski Cooper’s Panda Patrol ski school. As Dan said, “[The vacation] was geared more toward getting the kids involved in skiing ‘cause we wanted them to learn how to ski.”

This skiing theme emerged repeatedly during the Hardy-Harrison vacation narrative, indicating that the practice of skiing is central to how the family characterizes itself. Thus, we observe skiing as central, not only to collective goals but also to the many relational goals the family

**FIGURE 2**  
**Illustrative Cases**



articulated. As was common with blended families, the Hardy-Harrisons were attempting to build a new family while preserving the identities of relational units within the family, including the couple, siblings, and parent-child identities. The following dialogue illustrates how skiing supported each of these relational groupings:

“I had taken my kids, my two, to Oregon over Christmas, and we’d gone skiing one day up there. And then we went Thanksgiving, the day after Thanksgiving with her [points to husband’s daughter, Mandy].” (Hardy-Harrison, mother)  
 “We went [skiing] twice before, didn’t we? Just you and I?” (father) “Yeah.” (mother)

Finally, Ski Cooper enabled Kendra to achieve her individual goal of reasserting her “active, adventurous” identity.

“I worked an extra job when I was in high school so I could go buy skis.... I was committed to this ski thing [so] then I worked up on the mountain for two years teaching skiing.... I could ski whenever I wanted.” (Hardy-Harrison, mother)

Although skiing had been important to her identity throughout her life, it was not a practice she could engage in during her everyday life.

Central to understanding how the Hardy-Harrison family managed multiple goals is the extent to which these goals are synergistic with versus discordant from one another. We observe high character synergy because each goal is focused on the practice of skiing. However, with regard to structure, we observe high discord. Although the

building and securing idealized goals are at the same level (collective), the preserving (relational) and reasserting (individual) goals occur at different levels. As a result, the vacation focuses on skiing, but the family carves out time to spend as a family; time to be in smaller groupings, such as when the siblings go to ski school together while the couple skies; and time for Kendra to ski more difficult trails alone.

We uncover four approaches families used to manage multiple identity goals: prioritizing, symbiotic activity, parallel activity, and partitioning. Table 3 offers definitions and examples from our data for each approach. Furthermore, we examine each approach in the following sections to link these more contextually to the integration processes we outline next.

### **Illustrative Case Studies: Integration Processes**

Directed by efforts to manage overlapping and distinct network identity goals, families engaged in four integration processes: (1) assembling offerings around prioritized goals, (2) engaging in alternate participation, (3) engaging in concurrent participation, and (4) assembling offerings around separate coalitions. These are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Instead, families may engage in multiple integration processes during a vacation experience. As we unveil in the following section, integration processes were linked to the families’ approach to managing multiple identity goals, synergy/discord, and potential constraints. Furthermore, each of these elements altered the resulting solution assembled by the families.

**TABLE 2**  
**Types of Identity Goals**

Identity Goal	Definition	Structure Example	Character Example
Building	A pursuit to establish a new family, relational, or individual identity in either structure or character or to assimilate new family members into existing practices.	James/father: "It [the vacation] has gotten us closer.... It's really made us a family ... our time together, nobody else's." (Higgins family)	Christi/mother: "[During the vacation,] we would just go run or walk or something in the morning." Gary/father: "Yeah." Christi/mother: "We go to the gym separately. Yeah, so that was kind of nice running together." (Warren family)
Transforming	A pursuit to alter family, relational, or individual identity in either structure or character.	Leslie/mother: "Being separated.... It [vacation without my husband] helped give me a chance to get away with the boys, clear my head, see everything in focus. And then it was right after that when we came back that we left their father [son Dylan nods to confirm]." (Tanner family)	Ronda/mother: "We rented bikes, and we rode into some of the residential areas.... where you see people selling live chickens and fish and the typical wares and food of China.... We wanted to see the culture ... the heartbeat, I guess, of the area, and see where the people live ... for the girls to look at the culture, to be in it, smell it, look at it, get it on you, yeah." (Metcalfe family)
Preserving	A pursuit to maintain family, relational, or individual identity in either structure or character.	James/father: "She has her kids twice during the week; I just have my kids every other weekend...." Malina/mother: "They kind of like to do their own thing.... these two [nods toward father and his son Philip] watch sports together and it's like I'm gone." (Higgins family)	Lacey/mother: "[The retreat was] for people that had adopted, and it was a Native American theme, so it was to educate about Native Americans and to help people that are not Native American who adopt them into their families to not forget their culture." (Carter family)
Reasserting	A pursuit to reestablish a family, relational, or individual identity that has previously ceased in either structure or character.	Dina/mother: "Our most important feeling on this [vacation] was—Curtis's children. We missed a lot of time with them because of some issues. Now, we have this opportunity to regain that relationship back." (Quigley family)	Mary/mother: "I absolutely find myself more relaxed with our family in our little cabin in the mountains;... that just feels like it's a centering piece.... We've been going to the same place for, before Madeline was born." (Dodge family)
Securing idealized	A pursuit to ensure either a romanticized past or a future family, relational, or individual identity in either structure or character.	Dina/mother: "We see we're getting older, and the [grand]babies are being born, you just don't want to miss out on any of that. And we had the discussion one night that, I don't want Eva [granddaughter] to not know us;... we just made that decision that we need to start trying to go out [to Colorado]...." Curtis/father: "She can look through pictures and see us, and know that we were there." (Quigley family)	Dan/father: "I think [the vacation] was geared more towards getting the kids involved in skiing 'cause we wanted them to learn how to ski. We wanted them to get excited about it because we're [points to Kendra/mother] going to go ski, and whether they ski or not is irrelevant. They're going with us, so [Kendra smiles]...." (Hardy-Harrison family)
Legitimizing	A pursuit to justify family, relational, or individual identity in comparison with a cultural ideal.	Ronda/mother: "We come from different ethnic groups, and so that's always a big thing in China—people noticing that Maddy and Sephora were with us.... We don't have a—the traditional, maybe what you might call traditional—get married and have your own kids.... [father nods], biologically anyway. I think that's one of our defining family characteristics." (Metcalfe family)	Candice/mother: "We went on the one trip, and I took all these [neighborhood] kids with me, and people were like, 'okay, that's really weird.' We just love being with kids [and] church is our biggest thing;... we've got youth group.... We'll help with the outreaches, and stuff like that." (Dawson family)
Parting	A pursuit to leave behind or discard family, relational, or individual identity in either character or structure.	Sabrina/daughter: "[Our goal was to] just kind of spend family time before I went to college." [Kira, Beth/daughters confirm.] Tara/mother: "Yeah." Scott/father: "Kind of figured it'd be the, the, the last time." (Samson family)	Todd/father: "When you guys are all home, you'll kind of get into a fight and then carrying on about some things.... 'Cause I mean you guys would fight in the yard in your underwear over a shirt!... That would go down as a good one [vacation] because the kids kind of grew up. Everybody kind of grew up." (Diggerty family)

**TABLE 3**  
**Goal Management Approaches**

Identity Goal Management Approach	Definition	Example
Prioritize	Giving precedence to some goals over others; this is <i>elective</i> when all agree and <i>imposed</i> when conflict occurs.	"We don't really go our own directions.... We both work, so we think family vacations should be all of us doing things together." (Mason family, father)
Symbiotic activity	Interacting with the same offering in close proximity, but through <i>alternate</i> activities to achieve multiple goals simultaneously.	"We went out after that and went shopping." (Christi/mother). "Christi got some shoes and some makeup, while the kids played." (Gary/father). "Where did you go?" (interviewer). "Just the outlet malls there in Silverthorne." (Christi) "Did everybody go shopping?" (interviewer) "Yeah!" (Katie/daughter) "Except me, I worked while they were at Silverthorne." (Gary) "That's true, but he was there." (Warren family, mother)
Parallel activity	Participating in the <i>same</i> activities but with limited direct interaction of the whole group (instead may participate as coalitions and individuals) to achieve multiple goals simultaneously.	"[On our flight to Africa, we were] watching movies on the plane;... each of our seats had a screen on it, so you could plug in, with a choice of like 30 movies and TV shows and music." (Wilson family, father)
Partition	Breaking the group apart into coalitions that focus on separate goals.	"Oh, and you and me went to, the church." (Abbie/daughter) "Yeah, went to a mass." (mother) "I remember Six Flags! My aunt wouldn't let me go on the rides. She thought I was too short." (Madison/daughter) "Yeah. We split up." (Carter family, mother)

*Assemble offerings around prioritized goals: Mason family.* The Masons are a family of four. Peter and Cathy tend to the daily rigors of work as a certified public accountant and a bank compliance manager, respectively, and their two children, Addison (11) and Bob (8), are active in school and sports activities. The family took a trip to Black Hills, S.Dak., with two primary goals: reasserting and building family identity. In opposition to everyday life, which pulls the family members apart, the vacation was a time to reconnect and "be a family." Furthermore, Peter and Cathy had been to this destination before as children and as a couple, so the vacation was an opportunity to assimilate Addison and Bob into the couple's practices, that is, a way to build family identity through shared experiences. To manage multiple goals during their vacation, the Masons prioritized collective identity goals over all potential others. As Peter explained, "We don't really go our own directions;... we think family vacations should be all of us doing things together."

With regard to integration processes, families who adopted a prioritizing approach typically assembled offerings around the prioritized goals. The Mason family spent nearly the entire trip together engaging in collective activities ("We did everything together"), which led them to integrate offerings from across firms and public venues:

"You get up in the morning together. You're in the same room. You have just one motel room.... We did everything together. We usually swam every night...." (mother) "We went to Mount Rushmore...." (daughter) "We did a hike...." (mother) "Then we went to the cave...." (father) "After Dairy Queen, we went to Evan's Plunge...." (mother) "You're forgetting we went through the national park with the buffalo." (father)

Thus, even in the simplest case, when goals are relatively straightforward and synergistic (same structural level and

character components), families still moved outside a single firm's solution to satisfy multiple goals.

In relation to the broader data set, families regularly prioritized a subset of their identity goals during their trip. For example, the Murrays prioritized the couple: "[Our trip] was more for Patrick and I... We did every golf course up there" (mother). In contrast, the Diggertys prioritized their son Daren's individual identity goals: "We kind of let Daren be in charge this time;... it was kind of about him" (mother). Prior research indicates that when multiple identities are relevant, people prioritize some identities over others to manage identity conflict (Ahuvia 2005). Our findings expand this work to acknowledge that families also prioritize particular identities, but their task is more complicated given that the relevant identities not only are as individuals but also reflect collective and relational identity goals. In contrast with the Masons, prioritizing one or more identity goals was sometimes forced when met with discord from other coalitions whose goals were shifted to the background. For example, brothers Bryson and Karston Quigley's goal of trying out a new relational identity (snowboarding in the Rockies) was put on hold when they prioritized a goal of reasserting with their father's estranged children following a divorce. As the mother said, "Our most important feeling on this [vacation] was ... wanting to get that time in with the kids that we missed out on in the last 13 years."

Family vacation packages are dominantly configured to offer a plethora of choices for smaller relational coalitions or individuals, but for families who prioritize collective goals, this may be counterproductive. Recall the Samson family from our introductory example whose goals were mostly collective but highly difficult to achieve given the amount of time the family members spent apart. In part, this distance was manufactured by how Disney structured the

experience (separate activities targeted at multiple members). For these families, offering an array of diverse activities may act as a constraint to enacting collective goals. This can be likened to feature fatigue in products (Rust, Thompson, and Hamilton 2006), except that rather than decreasing the product's usability, the outcome of too many offerings directed at individuals is an inability to achieve the family's goals. In terms of the customer networks' solutions in our data, families frequently shifted offerings in support of prioritized goals. With high synergy and few constraints, such as in the Samson family, options that restrict the array and flexibility of a solution's offerings may better satisfy network goals.

*Alternate participation: Locke family.* Another common integration process occurred when families engaged with the same primary offering simultaneously but did so in different ways. We link this to the goal management approach of engaging in symbiotic activity. The term "symbiotic" comes from biology and typically refers to intimate connections among diverse organisms. Marketers have adopted the term to describe how dissimilar products, firms, or resources can work in concert for mutual benefit (Varadarajan and Rajaratnam 1986). Accordingly, we use symbiotic to describe instances in which families bring together dissimilar activities within the same context or close proximity to achieve common goals.

The Locke family, which includes Glen, a stay-at-home father, Callie, a certified public accountant, and Beau, their 14-year-old son, offers a useful case. Camping is one of the primary ways the family defines itself, though Glen and Beau have a much more adventurous and outdoorsy view than Callie. Her version of camping is staying in a trailer and driving to nearby restaurants. The Locke family expressed multiple goals for their camping trip to South Dakota. They described a building goal of assimilating Beau into the family's ideal of leaving nature more pristine than originally found:

"We've tried to instill in him a good outdoor ethic ... taking care of where we're camping. We're leaving that better than we found it. [Beau smiles] So, we always try to, uh, incorporate some environmental lessons into our vacation." (Locke family, father)

The family also articulated several other goals, including securing idealized family memories ("[We want to] have good memories of being together" [mother]), reasserting the family's camping identity as apart from the rigors of work and daily activities ("Our motivation is to just do things as a family" [mother]; "We're avid campers" [father]), and transforming Glen and Beau by trying out new activities such as tubing and go-carts. Given that most of the goals were collective in structure but differed in character, the Lockes were able to manage multiple goals by engaging in symbiotic activity. As Callie explained, "We don't usually feel like we all have to do the same thing, but we're always together when we're doing it."

Character discord often led to alternate participation, such as when Glen went to the mall with his family but hung out on a bench while Callie and Beau visited stores. Simi-

larly, Callie read, watched, and photographed her family as they played in the pool next to her.

"When we go swimming, she stays on the deck..." (father) "I just usually get a book and sit in a lawn chair.... I would never stay in the motel by myself and they go off; that just would never happen.... If they do go-carts, I'll go with 'em and I'll..." (mother) "Stand on the bridge or whatever..." (son) "And watch 'em ... and take the pictures." (mother)

When structure synergy is high but character discord exists, alternate participation allows family members to resist the particular offering chosen (e.g., pool) while still supporting the family's overall identity goals (e.g., building, securing idealized, and reasserting collective identity) by engaging in the same primary offering in different ways (e.g., reading by the pool while the rest of the family swims). This allowed the Lockes to be together to accomplish collective goals, even as Glen and Beau worked toward their relational goal of trying new activities.

Alternate participation was common across families, and in many contexts, families needed to supplement the firm's solution with outside products and services (e.g., bringing a DVD player). In addition, firm policies could offer more flexibility to encourage alternate uses of offerings. For example, the Navarro family was similar to the Lockes in that most of their goals were at the collective level; however, the character elements of goals differed. Genoveva, a 12-year-old daughter, expressed an individual-level transforming goal of getting over her fear of heights ("I wanted to see if I can go on all the extreme rides [at Worlds of Fun]"). Although her father adamantly disliked roller coasters, he needed to be at the amusement park for the family to accomplish its other goals (e.g., preserving, reasserting, and securing idealized family identity):

"I don't like roller coasters at all." (father) "I love roller coasters. It's like really my life." (daughter) "Big, big rides? I don't like it..." (father) "What were you [father] doing while they were [riding the Boomerang]?" (interviewer) "Well, I was watching. I say, 'No, I'm not going.'" (father)

By considering how symbiotic activity operates in families' choices, firms could integrate offerings that support various forms of participation into their solution. For example, Worlds of Fun might consider new ways for the Navarro father to support his daughter's transforming goal without riding the roller coaster, such as providing opportunities to document and mark her success (e.g., souvenir awards, photos). This strategy may improve the families' overall evaluation of the experience, which is currently framed as a win-lose proposition, with Genoveva being satisfied with the experience and her father feeling dejected. It also differs from a something-for-everyone approach because the intent is to offer activities that complement one another in support of network goals and to maintain proximity rather than entice members to go their own way.

*Concurrent participation: Hardy-Harrison family.* Recall that the Hardy-Harrison family is a newly blended family of five who went skiing in Colorado for their first vacation since the couple married. The Hardy-Harrisons'

identity goals overlapped dramatically in character (all related to skiing) but departed with regard to structure (collective goals of building and securing idealized family identity; relational goals of preserving couple, parent–child, and sibling identities; and an individual goal for Kendra of reasserting her adventurous identity). As such, the Hardy-Harrisons often skied as a couple, as siblings, and as individuals, participating concurrently in the same activity but in diverse groupings and at different times and places. We link concurrent participation to the parallel activity goal management approach. We borrow the term “parallel”—first used by the child psychologist Mildred Parten (1932) to describe how children became absorbed in playing *beside* rather than *with* one another, and later used by Eleanor Maccoby (1951) to describe how children watch television together without interacting—because it wholly captures the behavior families described. Privatized technologies (e.g., iPods) frequently enabled parallel, rather than interactive, activity within the same context. This resonates with Belk’s (2007) discussion of the atomization of some previously shared possessions within families, such as the family television giving way to privatized, individually owned devices. Parallel activity offered a goal management approach that enabled the Hardy-Harrisons to manage multiple goals simultaneously.

“We went [skiing] the year before.... This is really a vacation that was geared more toward getting the kids involved in skiing.... We wanted them to get excited about it because we’re [points to wife Kendra] going to go ski.... They’re going with us, so [Kendra smiles]....” (Hardy-Harrison, father)

This quotation illustrates that skiing enables the parents to build a new and secure an idealized family identity by assimilating the daughters into a practice that was important to them, both now and in the future. Simultaneously, we know that skiing is important to the couple and to the parent–child coalitions (e.g., mother and her daughters) and also preserves these relational identities. Finally, skiing was central to Kendra’s individual identity and enabled her to reassert this aspect of her character. The continuity offered by ensuring that all members engage in the same activity helped the family build collective identity through shared experiences.

Rather than forcing choice among or prioritization of identity goals, concurrent participation enables families to achieve multiple goals at different structural levels simultaneously. For the Hardy-Harrisons, Ski Cooper and Panda Patrol ski school provided them with the necessary offerings to carry out their goals. Currently, the family is not loyal to any particular ski resort; they refer to Cooper’s ski school as “better than Breckenridge, better than Copper, [and] better than Winter Park.” In addition, they went outside of Ski Cooper’s solution to integrate necessary products and services. Several opportunities exist for the firm to revise its solution to better match what the Hardy-Harrisons seek and improve their overall satisfaction. For example, building in more flexibility for families to participate in different groupings at different skill levels would present a unique solution that differentiates Ski Cooper from other resorts. This could take the form of central meeting points

and one- to two-hour time slots in which children could ski with others at their level and then meet back up with older siblings or parents.

Parallel activity was a common approach families adopted in the broader data set when character synergy and structure discord among goals were high. The Wilson family all watched movies on the plane to Africa but did so from individual screens with headphones. The Dodge family went to the street markets in Nanjing, China, and to the Shanghai Museum in different groupings and as a family at different times throughout their trip.

“When we went into the Shanghai museum when we took Madeline back to a piece of that because there were some parts of it we really thought were just fascinating and thought she should see, but Matt had been there earlier.” (Dodge, mother)

As with other solutions based on a goal management approach of parallel activity, the number and heterogeneity of offerings would be limited, while the structure would need to be flexible.

*Assemble offerings around separate coalitions: Carter family.* For some families, rather than prioritizing certain goals over others, partitioning identity goals enabled smaller coalitions or individual members to accomplish their own goals. With a partitioning approach, families often broke into smaller groups for a portion of their vacation and assembled separate offerings around these coalitions. For example, in the Higgins family, the father and his two sons went bike riding together without the mother. In the Murray family, the father and son went to GameStop, while the mother and daughter went to Build-A-Bear.

The Carter family offers a more in-depth look at this integration process. Lacey Carter is a single mother of seven adopted children, ranging in age from 3 to 19 years. The children are multiracial, joined the family at different times, and embrace backgrounds and interests spread as widely as their ages. The Carters took a summer vacation to St. Louis. They had multiple goals, few of which overlapped in either structure or character. Collective goals such as legitimizing and reasserting group identity competed with individuals’ and smaller groups’ preserving goals (i.e., some defined by an interest in fashion/shopping, others by an interest in competitive activities, and still others as history enthusiasts) articulated by family members.

Consistently, we observed more partitioning when discord among identity goals was high. To illustrate, the Carter’s collective goals required the family to engage in group activities and allow for time to reconnect as a family, and the latter goals required the family to disband into relational coalitions. Rather than enlisting a firm with a broad mix of offerings that allowed members to all go to the same place, the Carters frequently broke into smaller groups to support their discordant identity goals and enlisted different service providers.

“We went to the Holocaust Museum.... They went into the kids’ one, and I went to the rest. I’m pretty big on that stuff [history].” (Abbie, 19) “I’d rather go tubing....” (Sallie, 14) “I’d rather watch sports....” (Ajay, 12) “You and me went to, the church.” (Abbie, 19) “Yeah, went to a

mass...” (mother) “I remember Six Flags.” (Madison, 13) “Madison, who’d you go with, to the planetarium?” (interviewer) “My sister took her [and] some of the kids. I probably stayed back with some.... We split up.” (mother)

As this excerpt reveals, the family assembled diverse offerings around separate coalitions. Considering the necessary volume of products and services used to manage the family’s many identity goals, solutions were elaborate, both in number and in heterogeneity, when adopting this integration process. Unlike with symbiotic activity when family members wanted to stay together despite character discord, families who assembled offerings around coalitions mostly embraced discord and chose separate offerings for individuals or smaller groupings.

Prior research suggests that firms attend to individual interests and assemble offerings in an ad hoc way to accommodate as many people as possible (Goldstein et al. 2002). Our data reveal that customer networks pay attention to goals at multiple structural levels and related to diverse character elements. The Carter family, along with others, integrated offerings from across firms, rather than opting into one firm’s solution. As such, we propose that attempts to appeal to individual network members, based mostly on character elements (e.g., a spa for mom, golf for dad, crafts for the kids), are not the most appropriate approach to reach families that have complex network identity goals. Instead, firms appealing to families that have adopted a partitioning approach should allow them to customize offerings around multiple coalitions. That is, firm solutions should consider packaging deals with broad partners that may not be intuitive but serve similar identity goals (e.g., the Holocaust Museum, the planetarium, and Six Flags) and should allow families to opt in to and out of relational and collective activities.

Several propositions emerged from our findings for further investigation and testing in other contexts. Table 4 summarizes our research propositions, provides a rationale for each, and offers examples of how these might extend to other types of family decisions as well as to other types of networks. We find that the degree of synergy/discord among networks’ identity goals drives the goal management approach selected. In turn, this has implications for the number, heterogeneity, and structural flexibility of offerings that firms should integrate into their solutions to improve overall network satisfaction.

## Discussion

The pervasiveness of networks picking and choosing certain elements of one firm’s solution and then seeking additional offerings outside the solution to supplement their experiences provides empirical evidence of the disjuncture between firm solutions and those envisioned by customer networks. Service providers that pay attention to how families assemble solutions and, more narrowly, to how families integrate a particular firm’s offerings can revise existing value propositions to capitalize on these opportunities.

### *Theoretical Contributions*

Prominent in each of the families we studied and in contrast with the family decision-making literature was the presence

of relational and collective goals. This departs directly from the common assertion in family decision research that members go into group decisions with the intent of influencing or coercing others into concessions (Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985; Cotte and Wood 2004; Su, Fern, and Ye 2003). Instead, families made choices about which products or services to integrate into their solutions based on their collective and relational goals. Prior work on business-to-consumer solutions has focused more narrowly on individual pursuits (Christensen, Cook, and Hall 2005; Sawhney 2006), even in settings in which relational goals are likely prominent. We contribute a typology of seven identity goals consolidated across a diversity of family types that better capture what customer networks are trying to accomplish.

Our findings not only establish the importance of relational and collective goals in designing solutions that better mirror family choices but also highlight the consequential role of synergy and discord among these goals. Specifically, we identify two dimensions, goal character and structure, that are absent from extant literature. Although character elements are often captured when firms attend to individual goals, structure elements only surface when we account for relational and collective goals. By considering the extent to which character and structure elements overlap and depart, we generated a framework and research propositions that categorize how networks manage multiple identity goals and offer implications for how this changes solution design. Specifically, we identify four primary integration processes from the customer network’s point of view that emerge from the goal management approach they adopt: (1) Prioritizing some goals over others drives networks to assemble offerings around prioritized goals, (2) symbiotic activity results in alternate participation, (3) parallel activity results in concurrent participation, and (4) partitioning goals drive networks to assemble offerings around separate coalitions. Identifying these processes and further linking them to solution design contributes a much needed customer network perspective to the emerging literature on integration (Ghosh, Dutta, and Stremersch 2006; Lusch, Vargo, and Wessels 2008; Sridhar 2009; Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). We elaborate further on how each of these four approaches requires reevaluation of solution designs that incorporate changes to the architecture and policies that characterize firm solutions.

### *Managerial Implications*

Our findings demonstrate that firm solutions fall short of what customer networks envision primarily because firms privilege individual goals as the central organizing framework for segmentation (Reed and Bolton 2005), which can and does undermine relational and collective goals. In our findings, we illustrate specific cases of how firm solutions fall short and what firms might do differently to better meet customer needs. In this section, we move beyond specific cases to provide guidance and tools for improved solution design.

Fundamentally, we propose a shift in managerial thinking from individual to customer network satisfaction. Such a shift explicitly recognizes that customer networks are not simply an aggregation of individual goals, but instead a dynamic interplay of individual, relational, and collective

ones. Our work empirically demonstrates what Bititci et al. (2004) theorize—that network value propositions can differ from individual (network member) value propositions. To enhance customer network satisfaction, managers need a

deeper understanding of the dynamics, structure, and character of network goals. Our findings uncover two concrete tools that managers can use to enhance customer network satisfaction and improve solution design.

**TABLE 4**  
**Research Propositions**

Proposition	Rationale	Family Example	Other Network Example
P <sub>1</sub> : Networks <i>electively</i> prioritize goals with high structure and character synergy.	When network members agree to emphasize particular structure (e.g., collective) or character (e.g., outdoorsy) goals, prioritizing those goals flows naturally. It is voluntary rather than contested.	A family with adolescents feels disconnected because of competing individual activities. To <i>reassert</i> family identity, they prioritize a Monday family game night, leaving the weekend nights for individual and coalitional pursuits.	Annual performance evaluations reveal that newly hired sales representatives feel detached from the company and its mission. To <i>build</i> corporate identity, the company prioritizes a monthly morning coffee.
P <sub>2</sub> : Networks partition or prioritize goals with high structure and character discord.	When conflict arises between both the level of goals and the preferred activities, network members must decide whether to break into smaller groupings to accomplish multiple goals (partitioning) or trade off some goals for others (imposed prioritizing).	Discord between teenage daughters from prior marriages with “nothing in common” leads their parents to impose a collective vacation in New York City where the girls share a room (to help <i>build</i> a coalitional identity), but they partition activities to <i>preserve</i> separate parent–daughter relationships.	An office manager has younger workers who employ a multitasking, multitechnology work style that upsets and alienates older workers. By arranging task forces around these different work styles, the smaller groupings have less conflict and accomplish more.
P <sub>3</sub> : Networks use symbiotic activity when goals have high structure synergy and character discord.	When goals occur at the same level (e.g., collective) but network members vary in their preferred activities, the network adopts this approach to accomplish multiple goals simultaneously. Proximity allows members to address collective or relational goals by interacting together while engaging in separate activities.	The children have drifted out of the family room (where the television is located) into the study space (where the computer is located). To <i>secure</i> their <i>idealized</i> family structure, the family redesigns their family room as a multipurpose space so even if everyone is doing something different, they are together.	To pursue a more collective identity ( <i>transform</i> ), a marketing department made up of ambitious and diverse network members creates an attractive communal work/play space. In this communal space, people can interact together while engaging in separate activities.
P <sub>4</sub> : Networks use parallel activity when goals have high character synergy and structure discord.	When goals link to similar activities but occur at different levels, the network adopts this approach to accomplish multiple goals simultaneously. By participating in the same activity as coalitions or individuals, networks can address goals at different levels while solidifying the character elements that unite them.	Everyone in the family loves to run but at different paces and times of day. To <i>preserve</i> the collective commitment to running, the family creates their own Facebook page with network member updates, photos, and links.	To <i>build</i> collective, relational, and individual identities within the Harley-Davidson brand community, the online Harley Ride Planner allows members to coordinate rides in small group or as individuals, allowing for flexibility in time and distance while providing a common experience to all.
P <sub>5</sub> : When networks use a prioritizing approach, the opportunity to restrict member access contributes to overall network satisfaction.	When networks emphasize a narrow set of collectively engaged goals, being able to opt in to a lower number of less diverse offerings may make it easier to achieve them.	To <i>reassert</i> family identity, the family agrees on a multiday, river-rafting trip. The family would need to rely on one another and would not be tempted away with their privatized technologies (e.g., game boys, cell phones).	A company might prioritize a goal to <i>transform</i> its corporate identity to highlight sustainability efforts by restricting its suppliers to a limited number of vendors.
P <sub>6</sub> : When networks use a symbiotic approach, using multipurpose virtual and physical spaces contributes to overall network satisfaction.	Using multipurpose spaces creates proximity to allow network members to address collective or relational goals while engaging in separate activities.	The major impetus for the new Children’s Hospital was to use recovery spaces in a multipurpose way for critically ill children to facilitate family activities in these spaces. The hospital hopes to contribute to patient welfare by making it easier for families to be together with their ill children.	Some day cares now offer parents the opportunity to observe and connect virtually with their children from work. Day cares on the work site are highly valued because they facilitate relational goals without compromising professional ones.

**TABLE 4**  
Continued

Proposition	Rationale	Family Example	Other Network Example
P <sub>7</sub> : When networks use a parallel approach, facilitating structural flexibility for the same activity contributes to overall network satisfaction.	When goals link to similar activities but occur at different levels, flexible individual, coalitional, and collective groupings make it easier to solidify the character elements that unite the network.	The whole family loves movies. However, their preferences vary with the particular grouping of family members. TiVo and Netflix only allow a single profile, rather than offering an interface that allows the family to select different subsets of members involved in each movie choice. The family would be happy if there were a more effective way to customize.	To reassert a corporate identity of good citizenship, an organization sponsors a volunteer day and encourages employees to sign up for various time blocks in small groups or as individuals to give back to their community.
P <sub>8</sub> : When networks use a partitioning approach, diverse offerings with structural flexibility contribute to overall network satisfaction.	When networks break apart into separate coalitions and attempt to achieve a broader set of goals simultaneously, a larger number of more diverse offerings are required to achieve them.	The family has an array of meals that are designed for four, two, or one person and include options with different dietary goals in mind. Provisioning meals for different groupings of members who eat different diets at different times of day has become a major shopping challenge.	Small groups within the Star Trek subculture separately take on multiple <i>legitimizing</i> and <i>reasserting</i> goals. Utopia themes stimulate fan fiction, religious themes engender evangelism, military themes prompt trial of martial arts, and competitive themes drive showmanship at conventions (Kozinets 2001).

First, we introduce an identity goal typology in Table 2 that managers could use as a simple tool to appeal to prominent customer network identity goals. In the same way that companies design offerings around activities and amenities, they could customize offerings around these identity goals. The difference between this approach and the current design offerings is most prominent in the structural component of identity goals. That is, when rock climbing is less about the individual activity and more about reasserting or building collective trust and efficacy (Wells, Widmer, and McCoy 2004), solutions should be structured around ways to engage coalitions and groups. Certainly, some firms design solutions around structural identity goals. For example, organizations employ rope courses to build community, integrating new members or discordant members into a shared team built on dependency and trust. However, with our identity goal typology, firms could do much more to systematically design and communicate their offerings in ways that appeal to customer network identity goals. When the majority of offerings are designed around arrays of activities and/or amenities, appeals that promise and deliver on helping networks build, transform, legitimize, part, and so on, offer distinctive value propositions for customer networks.

Second, we identify four identity goal management approaches in Table 3 that managers could strategically use to deliver enhanced network satisfaction. Modifying firm solutions to mirror customer integration strategies more directly would reduce constraints and the labor of integration that families face (Goldstein et al. 2002). What distinguishes these four goal management approaches from current firm offerings is explicit recognition that synergy and discord among focal customer network goals dramatically shape solution design. As we posit in our research propositions summarized in Table 4, goal management approaches are formulated in response to structure and character synergy/discord among customer network goals. To better mark the

difference between employing these identity goal management approaches and current design offerings, we consider each in turn.

When the customer network has high structure and character discord among identity goals and uses a partitioning approach, current amenity and activity offerings may require little or no modification. In this case, everyone does their own thing when and how they want, and a something-for-everyone approach may accommodate them. It is important to note that though this is the most prominent firm-designed solution, in the context of family vacations, it is also a residual solution built around *not* being a customer network but rather a collection of free agents. Few families set out on their vacation hoping that this will happen. Within the families that did embrace this approach, solution designs often went beyond the boundaries of a single firm, so firms that seek nonintuitive partnerships that repeatedly surface in customer network solutions and establish flexible access and communication among these would likely improve network satisfaction.

When there is high structure and character synergy, prioritization of goals flows naturally. Current designs that segment along gender, age, or group size may be viewed as obstacles that families need to overcome for them to reach their goals together. In many cases, this would require relatively modest adjustments to amenity and activity offerings already in place. For example, infrastructures that accommodate customer networks comprised of diverse genders and ages who all want to do activities together will help them reach their goals. In addition, with little added expense, many vacation venues could provide “opt-out alternatives” to help families avoid temptations. Currently, opting out of a minibar key or parental controls on televisions is common, but with improved understanding of what families are trying to accomplish, firms could identify other temptations families could avoid.

Similarly, when networks impose a prioritizing goal management approach (e.g., when they have discordant character and structure goals), they face enormous challenges. Researchers suggest that if families are forced to share in activities, it not only helps build, maintain, or reestablish collective identity but can have payoffs to individual well-being as well (DeVault 2000; Epp and Price 2011). For these customer networks, vacation venues that restrict access to individual pursuits and force them to interact in common spaces and activities may be attractive value propositions. Again, packages that allow networks to opt out of individual or relational activities in advance would help them achieve this structural rigidity without high additional costs to the firm. Although rigid structures may not be ideal for all firms, those with activities that lend themselves to this approach could more actively deliver on this value proposition.

The richest opportunities for designing new firm solutions to enhance customer network satisfaction are when customer networks use a symbiotic activity, parallel activity, or imposed prioritizing goal management approach. In each of these cases, the customer network in part or as a whole has discord but also aspires to attain collective goals. A review of theory and research on “family time” suggests that managing discordant individual and relational goals to attain collective goals is a pervasive problem for families in the United States (Epp and Price 2011). When networks have high structural synergy coupled with high character discord, firms can enhance overall network satisfaction by using multipurpose amenities and activities to enable networks to employ a symbiotic activity goal management approach. To do so, managers should design infrastructure that facilitates *activity* flexibility within common virtual or other spaces. Because activity partitioning is a common template for space design, such a shift in thinking could dramatically alter the organization and layout of many vacation venues from hotel rooms to theme parks. Certainly, some firms design solutions attentive to this approach. For example, when a restaurant sets aside an area in which young children can romp, watch videos, and play with toys, they are using the space in a multipurpose way to make it easier for families to enjoy a meal. However, our framework provides managers with the conditions under which this approach is most appropriate and direction for how to design more effective solutions around symbiotic activity.

Finally, when networks have high character synergy coupled with high structure discord, facilitating *structural* flexibility around the same activity would enhance overall network satisfaction. Managers could facilitate a parallel goal management approach with simple changes in how they design activity packages. By building activity packages that enable easy movements among and between individual, coalitional, and collective groupings, such as the ski resort example we described previously, managers would be aiding rather than running interference with customer network goals. In addition, by underscoring the synergistic character goals across different coalitions, they could help networks build or reassert collective identity. In this section, we have focused on two tools that vacation industry management firms could employ to improve solution design and enhance

collective family satisfaction: a typology of identity goals and four distinct goal management approaches. In the next section, we argue that these two tools offer theoretical windows for improving firm solution design in varied contexts (other than vacations) and multiple customer networks (not just families).

### **Applications to Other Family Decision Contexts**

The four goal management approaches extend to other family decision contexts that involve interplays of family, relational, and individual identity goals. Consider the important public policy challenge of getting families to exercise. Marketing scholarship tends to focus on individual goal pursuit (e.g., Tanner and Carlson 2009), but it is understood that behavior change is powerful when it is a collective pursuit and families play an important role in success or failure. Traditional decision frameworks point to the roles of individual family members during purchase (e.g., daughter initiates, mother purchases, father uses; Webster and Wind 1972) or to the relative influence of family members on the decision to buy workout equipment for the home, with the final decision hinging on the outcome of previous purchases (Su, Fern, and Ye 2003), product category expertise and involvement (Spiro 1983), effectiveness of negotiation strategies (Palan and Wilkes 1987), and power structures within the family (Commuri and Gentry 2005; Davis 1970). Our framework extends and challenges these perspectives to consider how relational and collective goals help better understand families’ choices. For example, families might prioritize collective identity goals by hiking or bike riding as a family. Symbiotic activity would prompt families to go to the gym together but participate in different workouts. Parallel activity might occur in families that emphasize a particular type of exercise (e.g., a running family) but plan their runs for different times in smaller groups or as individuals to accommodate busy schedules. Finally, for families with distinct workout preferences and relational or individual goals, partitioning allows them to engage in separate activities.

Family food and grocery purchase decisions also illustrate the applicability of our framework. What constitutes family dinner can be questioned as family goals collide with those of coalitions and individuals. Making family dinner a priority is a common narrative in marketing campaigns aimed at rescuing this tradition from the pulls of daily life. Using a prioritizing approach, families sit down at the table to share a meal. However, families might also use a symbiotic approach, eating together around the table but eating different meals based on distinct food preferences and allowing smart phones and other distractions at the table. Solutions that would satisfy these families include diverse meals that can be prepared simultaneously in smaller portions. Many families employ a parallel approach with members eating the same basic meal but in different locations and times. In such cases, family traditions such as “spaghetti and meatballs on Tuesdays” still service collective goals, even though members may be eating later or watching television separately. Other families adopt a partitioning approach. For example, mother and son eat pasta together when she gets home from work, daughter grabs

fast food after soccer practice, and father heats up frozen pizza after work. Each goal management approach prompts a different array of grocery choices for families. Meal-assembly chains that enable families to prepare large meals in advance and freeze them, such as Dream Dinners, help families that use a prioritizing or parallel approach but do not satisfy families that adopt a symbiotic or partitioning approach. Again, the goal management approach is distinct from a relative influence framework that reveals individual family members' negotiating and persuading one another about which groceries to buy. It also departs from research on individual food choices within group settings, in which individuals are swayed by variety needs or the unanimity of group opinion (Ariely and Levav 2000; Quester and Steyer 2010). When goals are relational or collective and not just individual, our framework provides unique insights over prior decision-making research.

### **Applications to Other Customer Networks**

Future investigations could apply our propositions and framework to other types of networks (see Table 4). Here, we further consider applications and outline potential boundaries. Prior research reveals many similarities between families and other customer networks, such as organizations, brand communities, and subcultures. First, comparable to families, these other groups have similar structures that include a collective, smaller internal groupings, and individuals. Organizations house departments, teams, units, or regions (Bell, Tracey, and Heide 2009; Fang et al. 2008). Brand communities make distinctions among subsets of members (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009). Subcultures also contain internal groupings differentiated by their commitment to and participation in the group (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Second, these customer networks are likely to have overlapping and divergent goals that occur at distinct levels, making the potential for synergy/discord among goals probable (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Mathieu et al. 2008). Finally, these networks must manage multiple goals, with implications for how they will integrate offerings into solutions.

Diverse studies provide evidence that our identity goal typology could be robust across networks. Consistent with brand communities striving to achieve the goals outlined in our framework, Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould (2009) compare nine brand communities to identify a set of value-creating practices. Welcoming practices that pull new members into the fold of the community point to building goals (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009). Milestone practices mark rites of passage and are likely preceded by transforming goals (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Staking practices, also found in subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), are used to distinguish membership among different groups within the community, indicating the presence of preserving goals. Justifying practices, described as "deploying rationales generally for devoting time and effort to the brand," signal that brand communities have legitimizing goals (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009, p. 44; see also Kozinets 2001). Furthermore, organizations reassert collective identity through company retreats, and the flow of turnover and new hires necessitates both parting and building goals. Our typology

may open up additional research areas when applied to other customer networks.

Families differ from other customer networks in ways that highlight boundary conditions. Families are typically smaller in membership and more tightly linked through blood, marriage, or moral/social ties, and intergenerational relationships may be more prominent than in other customer networks (Galvin, Bylund, and Brommel 2004). To illustrate, both organizations and brand communities have concerns about their legacies, but the intergenerational nature of families may be more salient than in other customer networks. By definition, families have a past and a future, but new organizations or emerging brand communities have yet to develop a sense of history. Thus, legitimizing goals may be more prevalent in emerging organizational and brand community contexts. Furthermore, given that membership is more fluid and voluntary, such as when lifestyle changes prompt movement out of subcultures or experience and expertise fuel changes in employment, parting goals may play a greater role in these customer networks than in families.

We also speculate about extensions and boundaries of our goal management approaches. Organizations and brand communities prioritize some goals over others in either imposed or elective ways. However, in nonfamily contexts, motivations to prioritize certain collective or relational goals might require incentives beyond collective well-being. The prevalence of caring and sharing within families continues to distinguish them from organizations in which motives are more often linked to exchange benefits (Belk 2010). As in families, political and power structures affect which goals are prioritized when the choice is imposed. In brand communities, status incentives, rather than ensuring long-term group functioning, may result in prioritizing particular relational or individual goals over others.

Symbiotic approaches also are likely to generalize to other networks. An organization might focus on all organizational-level goals, but teams or business units would contribute different competencies and activities toward achieving collective goals. Solutions would accommodate alternate participation from different groups while encouraging proximity that promotes the easy exchange of information and collaboration. For subcultures and brand communities that adopt a symbiotic approach, companies should facilitate collective goals while offering and rewarding diverse ways to contribute. For example, brand community members may want to *preserve* Apple's innovative reputation by improving the usability of the newly released iPhone. To enable alternate forms of participation, Apple could host a competition for designing new applications, create forums for providing ratings/feedback, and offer free trials to community members who write blogs. Proximity could be simulated through online forums and news releases that keep members informed about the group's collective activities.

Because brand communities and subcultures are organized around a specific brand or activity (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), character synergy among goals is likely for these networks. Furthermore, these networks frequently are geographically dispersed, with less formal ties than families or organizations, so they often participate in activities in

smaller groupings or as individuals rather than as an entire group. Thus, brand communities regularly would engage in parallel activity to manage multiple goals. Although this approach may be much less likely in organizations that hire for distinct competencies rather than like-mindedness, there are examples in which structure discord might be high and character synergy may surface, such as in a university context in which research activity happens concurrently in smaller coalitions and as individuals.

Discord and tensions are natural within a healthy community, and embracing distinctions among groups can actually strengthen a brand community (Fournier and Lee 2009). Thus, partitioning is likely, and companies should offer a diversity of ways for brand community members to

get involved to support the distinct goals of smaller groupings. Organizations also may adopt a partitioning approach, such as when business units within a company pursue separate goals to make efficient use of specialized skills. However, as in families, this approach may produce negative downstream consequences for organizations, such as fostering a silo mentality, promoting competition among business units, and engendering disputes over shared resources. Solutions could incorporate structural flexibility, allowing employees to move across cross-functional project teams. Similarities and distinctions between families and other types of customer networks, as we outline here, offer potentially fruitful avenues for further research.

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