Rethinking Participation in Strategy and Innovation:

Attention- and Practice-Based Perspectives

Cumulative Dissertation

For the Degree of Doctor rerum politicarum (Dr. rer. pol.) at the University of Bamberg, Faculty of Social Sciences, Economics and Business Administration, Chair for Strategy and Organization Studies

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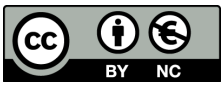

Summary

This doctoral thesis focuses on a critical yet often taken for granted phenomenon in management research: participation, i.e. actors' (voluntary) involvement in organizational and strategic processes. Prior research has largely converged on the benefits of participation for organizations, such as enabling strategic renewal, facilitating the development of superior strategies, and enhancing innovation outcomes by harnessing the wisdom of the many. More recently, we have seen the rise of open forms of strategizing and innovating, which fundamentally revolve around participation. For instance, firms increasingly employ what came to be called Open Strategy, including actors beyond top managers to contribute to the strategy process. Despite the importance of voluntary participation in such initiatives, it has widely remained an implicit and taken for granted phenomenon in the literature without being explicitly theorized. This doctoral thesis builds upon the attention-based view of the firm (ABV) and practice-theoretical perspectives to develop novel theoretical insights into voluntary participation in organizations. It consists of five papers employing review, conceptual, qualitative, and quantitative approaches: Paper I is a literature review of the ABV, providing the foundation for the subsequent papers. Paper II draws on the ABV to theorize (non-) participation in Open Strategy as the result of 'attention contests'. It is grounded in the observation that, although firms invite the crowd of employees to participate, only a small fraction ultimately chooses to do so. Paper III focuses on voluntary participation in strategy work with important implications for open strategy and strategy-as-practice. The conceptual paper draws upon practice theory in order to develop a process model of voluntary participation as an ongoing accomplishment. Paper IV is a qualitative paper that explores (non-)participation choices in an internal innovation contest through an ABV and sensemaking lens. Internal innovation contests typically present incoherent attention structural conditions: They encourage participation while simultaneously requiring employees to sustain attention to their regular work. The paper theorizes participation in corporate innovation as the interplay of incoherent

attention structures and sensemaking practices. Paper V takes another perspective on participation, focusing on the effects of participation in social media on managers. Using an experimental approach, it demonstrates that exposure to strategic conversations on social media significantly influences managers' strategic preferences. The paper stresses social media participation as a powerful means of shaping strategies from outside a firm's boundaries. Each of the papers makes several theoretical contributions to distinct literatures, while offering important practical implications. For instance, the thesis highlights that inviting the crowd to participate in strategy and innovation does not automatically result in diverse participation, as tacit structural constraints may exclude particular actors. The doctoral thesis concludes with broader reflections on the potential and limits of voluntary participation in organizations.

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Christoph

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Paper I – Chapter 5

The attention-based view: Review and conceptual extension towards situated attention.

Christoph Brielmaier – University of Bamberg
Martin Friesl – University of Bamberg

Published in: *International Journal of Management Reviews (IJMR)*

Recipient of: *Top Cited Article 2022-2023 in IJMR*

Paper II – Chapter 6

Pulled in all directions: Open strategy participation as an attention contest

Christoph Brielmaier – University of Bamberg
Martin Friesl – University of Bamberg

Published in: *Strategic Organization (SO)*

Presented at: 41st SMS Annual Conference, Toronto 2021 (virtual) and 37th EGOS Colloquium, Amsterdam 2021 (virtual).

Paper III – Chapter 7

Taking individual choices seriously: A process perspective of self-selection in strategy work

Martin Friesl – University of Bamberg
Christoph Brielmaier – University of Bamberg
Leonhard Dobusch – University of Innsbruck

Published in: *Organization Theory (OT)*

Presented at: 42st SMS Annual Conference, London 2022, 38th EGOS Colloquium, Vienna 2022, and 47. WK Org Workshop, Linz 2023.

Recipient of: *SMS Best Paper Award, Strategy as Practice IG (2022)*

Paper IV – Chapter 8

To Participate or Not to Participate: Making Sense of Incoherent Attention Structures in Corporate Innovation Contests

Christoph Brielmaier – University of Bamberg

Submitted to: *Journal of Management Studies* (under Review)

Presented at: 83nd Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (AoM), Boston 2023 and 43st SMS Annual Conference, Toronto 2023.

Recipient of: *SMS Best PhD Paper Award Strategy as Practice IG (2023)*, *SMS Annual Conference Best Paper Prize (honorable mention) (2023)*, and *AoM Pushing the Boundaries Award Strategy as Practice IG (2023)*

Paper V – Chapter 9

Who sits at the table? Social media exposure biases managers' situated attention and strategic preferences.

Christoph Brielmaier – University of Bamberg
Moritz Reis – University of Wuerzburg
Martin Friesl – University of Bamberg
Roland Pfister – Trier University
Submitted to: *Long Range Planning* (under Review)

Presented at: 48th WK Org Workshop, Lueneburg 2024 and 36th BAM 36th Annual Conference Manchester 2022 (as developmental paper).

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1. Introduction

This doctoral thesis focuses on a critical yet often taken for granted phenomenon in management research: participation, i.e, actors' (voluntary) involvement in organizational and strategic processes (Friesl et al., 2023; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). Across theoretical perspectives, participation has long been acknowledged as a fundamental element in organizations (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Cohen et al., 1972; Simon, 1947).

For instance, scholars have emphasized that middle managers' and operational actors' voluntary involvement in autonomous initiatives enables strategic renewal and firms' adaptation to changing environments (e.g., Burgelman & Grove, 2007; Dutton et al., 2001; Friesl et al., 2019; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Burgelman (1983b, p. 232) argues that firms' long-term survival ultimately depends on such unmandated activities, initiated by so-called "product champions". Moreover, research suggests that participation of actors beyond top management in strategy facilitates its implementation (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Mintzberg, 1994), whereas their exclusion may lead to dissatisfaction and demotivation (Westley, 1990).

The importance of participation in strategic processes has been reinforced by a recent trend that came to be called 'Open Strategy'. Firms increasingly open up their strategy process to lower-level organizational actors (Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011). By expanding opportunities for participation in strategy—traditionally considered as the domain of top management or strategic decision-makers (e.g., Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Ocasio, 1997; Williamson, 1970)—Open Strategy promises two significant benefits (Seidl et al., 2019): First, consistent with prior strategy practice and process research (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000), it is expected to facilitate strategy implementation (Denyer et al., 2011; Stieger et al., 2012). Second, by harnessing the strategic ideas and expertise of the many, it promises to foster the development of superior strategies (Hautz et al., 2017; Mack & Szulanski, 2017). However, the

realization of these potential benefits rests on the fundamental condition of course: The participation of the newly included actors (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023b).

The arguments above show how prior strategy practice and process literature has touched upon participation, emphasizing its positive implications for organizations (e.g., Floyd & Lane, 2000; Whittington et al., 2011). Yet, despite its (widely implicit) importance to the literature, our understanding about participation has remained limited. Participation of particular actors has often been 'taken for granted' and – with very few exceptions (Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Tavella, 2021) – non-participation has been treated as a "nonissue" in strategic processes (Mantere & Vaara, 2008, p. 342). In particular, we still know little about voluntary participation in these processes, often referred to as 'self-selection' (Ketkar & Workiewicz, 2022). The notion of self-selection emphasizes the role of individual agency (versus structural conditions) in contexts where participation is not mandated (Friesl et al., 2023; Plotnikova et al., 2021).

It is surprising that previous literature in this domain has largely glossed over the issue of (non-)participation. As mentioned above, the promises of inclusive forms of strategy hinge on the voluntary participation of actors (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023b). This voluntary participation, however, is particularly contested in the realm of strategy, often underpinned by an elitist and exclusive discourse (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Langenmayr et al., 2024). Also, it requires actors in typically specialized functional roles to enact a strategist role that is concerned with broader issues such as future trends (cf., Mantere & Whittington, 2021). Furthermore, research on innovation has already highlighted that actors face manifold challenges and tensions when deciding whether to participate in innovation initiatives or not (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2020; Malhotra et al., 2017). For instance, participation in internal innovation initiatives requires actors to divert time, effort, and attention to the initiative which may undermine their daily work (Nittala et al., 2022); processes that may also play an important role in participation decisions in strategy (Hautz et al. 2017). Notably, also in widely studied inclusive approaches to

innovation “we know relatively little about those actors that choose not to participate” (Chesbrough et al., 2018, p. 935).

Thus, a closer examination of the dynamics and effects of (non-)participation in strategy and beyond promises important theoretical and practical insights into organizational and individual conduct. This is the main focus of this doctoral thesis. The five papers of this thesis employ different methodological approaches (review, conceptual, qualitative, and experimental research) and are grounded in different theoretical lenses, predominantly the attention-based-view of the firm (ABV, Ocasio, 1997) and practice-theoretical perspectives (e.g., Giddens, 1984). Table 1 at the end of this section provides an overview about the five included papers.

Paper I serves as foundation of paper II, IV and V. It is a literature review of the ABV. Ocasio’s (1997) seminal paper has generated an extensive, complex and incoherent body of research. At its core, the ABV posits that organizational actors’ focus of attention in specific situations determines their actions. These situations, and consequently the issues and answers to which actors allocate attention, are governed by so-called ‘attention structures’ (March & Olsen, 1979). The review paper consolidates existing ABV research into a unifying framework. Furthermore, the paper proposes ‘situated attention’ as a central avenue for ABV-based research by integrating practice-based perspectives into the ABV. The concept of situated attention, a key contribution of Ocasio (1997, 2025), has largely been lost over the last decades. The paper is published in the *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

Paper II focuses on (non-)participation in Open Strategy through the lens of the ABV. It is inspired by the observation that, although firms invite the crowd of employees to participate, only a small fraction ultimately chooses to do so. The paper theorizes that participation and its enactment are the results of ‘attention contests’. Such attention contests emerge as the attention structures of the main organization and open strategy initiatives (as quasi-temporary organizations, see Bakker et al., 2016) compete for actors’ limited attention. This competition gives rise to four tensions: process ambiguity, status transitions, time constraints, and identity

shifts which shape whether and how actors participate in Open Strategy. The paper further argues that the impact of these tensions varies depending on the type of Open Strategy initiatives—analog versus digital practices (Hautz et al., 2019). The paper offers an important contribution to the Open Strategy community by advocating for conceptual clarity between inclusion and participation. It defines inclusion as a moral offer (which can be accepted or rejected), while participation is conceptualized as the actual uptake of this offer. The paper is published in *Strategic Organization*.

Paper III builds upon and extends Paper II of this thesis. The paper focuses on voluntary participation (i.e. self-selection) in strategy work with important implications for open strategy and strategy-as-practice. The conceptual paper draws upon practice theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984) in order to develop a process model of self-selection as an ongoing accomplishment. It differentiates two participative trajectories; shifting trajectories, increasing the variety of participants and stabilizing trajectories, reducing the variety of participants in the strategy process. The process model suggests that over time shifting trajectories stabilize as certain 'rules of participation' and therefore structural constraints emerge, potentially undermining firms' intent of harnessing the ideas of a broad variety of actors. The paper is published in *Organization Theory*.

Paper IV explores (non-)participation choices in an internal innovation contest at a low-cost location of a large multinational corporation by drawing on extensive qualitative data. In order to do so, the paper draws upon the ABV (e.g., Ocasio, 1997) and a sensemaking perspective (e.g., Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Within the ABV, attention structures guide actors' time, effort and attention by attaching 'value' and 'legitimacy' to particular decisions. Despite the growing importance of internal innovation contests for organizations, research on these contests, particularly on participation has remained scarce (e.g., Beretta & Søndergaard, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2017; Ruiz & Beretta, 2021). Internal innovation contests typically feature incoherent attention structural conditions: They encourage participation while simultaneously

requiring employees to sustain attention to their regular work. These competing demands create ambiguity about participation in such contests (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2020). The paper reveals that actors create meaning of incoherent attention structures by drawing on two distinct sensemaking practices: anchoring in identity and modulating attention regulators. These sensemaking practices allow actors to construct individual value and organizational legitimacy of the decision alternatives available (participation versus non-participation). The paper further reveals that these sensemaking practices are contingent on the nature of particular attention regulators (tacit versus material). The paper contributes to the intersections of the ABV and sensemaking addressing the observation that "there is very little research that examines their relationship" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 108), a statement that is still valid today (Ocasio, 2024). Furthermore, it advances our theoretical understanding of attention structures, a fundamental concept in the ABV for which "there is much research and theoretical developments that remain to be done" (Ocasio et al. 2023, p. 2). Finally, the paper sheds new light on participation in internal innovation contests, a fundamental phenomenon in such settings "current research has not systematically explored" (Beretta & Søndergaard, 2021, p. 543) let alone theorized. The paper received multiple best paper awards and has been submitted to *Journal of Management Studies*.

Paper V explores the effect of top managers' social media consumption on managers attention allocation and strategic conduct by drawing on the ABV. While research has emphasized that social media enables broad participation in firms' strategy conversation (e.g., Baptista et al., 2017), the (potential) effects of activities on social media on managers' strategic decisions have largely remained unexplored. Previous studies have predominantly taken a 'volitional view' on social media, focusing on how top managers' communicate through social media and its strategic effects. Conversely, this paper adopts a 'recipient view' on social media, investigating the effect of social media on top managers themselves. The study employs a preregistered experimental design (Logg & Dorison, 2021) that simulates social media use

(specifically, LinkedIn) embedded in a decision-making situation. The paper demonstrates that social media consumption significantly affects managers' strategic preferences. The paper thus reveals that seemingly subtle and negligible characteristics of strategic situations—such as a social media post viewed before a strategy meeting—can bias strategic preferences by directing attention to specific strategic answers. Moreover, the paper has implications for research on openness and participation in strategy. It suggests that actors outside an organization can influence strategic decision-makers. This finding renders social media a powerful tool for shaping strategies from outside the firm, extending the boundaries of participation in strategy-making. The paper has been submitted to a top-tier management journal and is under review at the time of this thesis submission.

The doctoral thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background, providing an overview of current research on participation in strategy and innovation research to situate the thesis within the broader academic discourse. Then chapter 3 discusses the theoretical perspectives underpinning the five papers included in this thesis: The 'ABV' and 'practice theory'. Subsequently, chapter 4 provides a concise overview of the research methodologies employed across the papers, which include review, conceptual, qualitative, and experimental approaches. Chapters 5 to 9 form the core of this thesis and consist of the fives papers (see Table I for an overview). Chapters 10 continues with an exploration of the broader theoretical and managerial implications of the research conducted and chapter 11 draws a conclusion of the doctoral thesis.

Table I. Overview about the papers included in the doctoral thesis.

Category	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV	Paper V
Title	The attention-based view: Review and conceptual extension towards situated attention	Pulled in all directions: Open strategy participation as an attention contest	Taking individual choices seriously: A process perspective of self-selection in strategy work	To Participate or Not to Participate: Making Sense of Incoherent Attention Structures in Corporate Innovation Contests	Who sits at the table? Social media exposure biases managers' situated attention and strategic preferences
Author(s)	Christoph Brielmaier, Martin Friesl	Christoph Brielmaier, Martin Friesl	Martin Friesl, Christoph Brielmaier, Leonhard Dobusch	Christoph Brielmaier	Christoph Brielmaier, Moritz Reis, Martin Friesl, Roland Pfister
Keywords	attention-based-view, situated attention, practice theory, systematic review	attention-based-view, attention structure, open strategy, participation, inclusion	open strategy, self-selection, strategy-as-practice, strategy process, strategy work	attention-based-view, attention structures, sensemaking, participation,	attention-based-view, social media, situated attention, experimental research
Research Gap	Since Ocasio's (1997) seminal paper, the ABV has developed into a cornerstone of management research. Over the last decades, the ABV has attracted substantial scholarly attention. This has led to an incoherent and complex body of research, requiring us to take stock and look ahead.	Participation is critical in open forms of strategizing. Previous research shows that participation remains contested in these settings, with non-participation being more common than participation.. This paper explores the conditions that give rise to (non-) participation in Open Strategy.	Extant strategy practice and process research highlights the positive effects of inclusive forms of strategy work. Ultimately, the success of such forms of strategizing depend the actors that 'get voluntarily involved'. Despite their importance processes of self-selection have remained an implicit phenomenon in the literature without being explicitly theorized.	Internal innovation contests are increasingly popular among firms, with their success dependent on employees' participation. Yet, our understanding of participation in these contexts remains limited. Moreover, these contests offer the opportunity to explore attention structures and the intersections of the ABV and sensemaking, areas that have received limited research attention.	Previous strategy research has focused on the strategic effects of top managers' communication on social media. However, we know little about the effects of social media consumption on top managers themselves and their strategic conduct.
Theoretical Perspective	ABV and Practice Theory	ABV	Practice Theory	ABV and sensemaking	ABV
Research Method	Systematic Review	Conceptual Paper	Conceptual Paper	Embedded Single Case Study	Preregistered Experimental Study

Category	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV	Paper V
Key Findings	• The paper unifies existing ABV research into a unifying framework • It identifies 'situated attention' as a key area for future research • Building on theories of practice to conceptualize main particular contexts that may affect situated attention allocation (materiality, social dynamics, temporality, and framing of the strategic setting) • The paper spotlights individual actors in the ABV and provides research avenues beyond an information-processing perspective	• Conceptualization of (non-) participation in Open Strategy as the result of attention contests, leading to four tensions (process ambiguity, status transitions, time constraints, and identity shifts) • The impact of these tensions on participation and its enactment depends on the practice of an Open Strategy initiative (digital versus analog practices) • Offering different mechanisms how organizations can mitigate these tensions and foster meaningful participation • The paper offers conceptual clarity to the Open Strategy community by differentiating inclusion and participation	• Self-selection has become increasingly important in today's strategy work • Building on practice theories, the paper offers a process model on self-selection as an ongoing social accomplishment • The model suggests two different participative trajectories (stabilizing and shifting) with important emergent outcomes. • The paper theorizes that intended variety in strategy is undermined by emerging tacit constraints. These constraints emerge as self-selection processes stabilize over time • The paper suggests that focusing on the actors involved (and why they became involved) offers important research avenues for strategy-as-practice scholars. This is because practices cannot be separated from the actors present	• The paper shows the incoherency of attention structures in an innovation contest, pulling actors toward participation and non-participation simultaneously • Actors draw upon two distinct sensemaking practices (anchoring in identity and modulating of attention regulators) to create meaning of this ambiguous situation • By anchoring in identity, actors actively construct the individual value of a decision alternative, enabling them to transcend structural demands • By modulating attention regulators, actors actively construct the organizational legitimacy of a decision alternative, enabling them to create structural coherence • (Non-)participation is theorized as the interplay of (attention) structure and agency (sensemaking practice)	• The paper demonstrates that social media consumption significantly biases managers' strategic preferences • This effect persisted when controlling for several individual factors but substantially increased for senior-level managers • The effect was particularly pronounced for social media posts from lower-level actors with a high number of likes and comments • The paper shows that it may be the small, often taken for granted characteristics of a situation that affect strategic decision-makers and their behavior • The paper points to the potential of effective strategy participation from actors outside a firm, regardless of their hierarchical rank

2. Participation: A fundamental and enduring phenomenon in management research

Participation has long been acknowledged as a fundamental concept in organizing and organizations (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978). In classical management literature, 'questions of participation' were already prominently addressed. For instance, Barnard (1938) identifies the opportunity to participate in organizational processes as a key incentive for employees to cooperate and foster their alignment to organizational goals. In a similar vein, Simon (1947) emphasizes the potential of employee participation to reduce feelings of alienation from the firm and its objectives as well as to lower resistance to change (see also Argyris, 1964). Furthermore, he discusses the ways in which participation in decision-making may increase employee satisfaction and productivity. Notably, decision rights have recently been highlighted a core dimension of 'open organizing' (Splitter, Dobusch, et al., 2023, see below). Simon (1947, p. 110) further argues that for firms to work as 'social organizations' opportunities of participation must be regulated by what he calls "attention directors" (see also March & Olsen, 1979).

While the field of management and organization has differentiated in various sub-fields over the past decades (e.g., strategy, innovation, organizational behavior, human resources etc.), participation has remained a central theme across them. In the recent decade, we even see the rise of several new concepts that fundamentally revolve around participation, its conditions, processes and implications. These concepts include Participative Leadership (Huang et al., 2010), Open Innovation (Chesbrough, 2003), Open Strategy (Whittington et al., 2011), Open Organizing (Splitter, Dobusch, et al., 2023), Open Government (Janssen et al., 2012), Democratized Work (Battilana et al., 2022) or Collaborative Governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008), among others. Each of the subfields and concepts, of course, explores participation from different perspectives and in distinct contexts. Yet, while participation comes in different flavors across these areas, central questions remain similar: Why do actors choose to not

become involved in these processes (e.g., Open Strategy: Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023b; Open Innovation: Chesbrough et al., 2018)? What is the role of different incentives for participation with which effect (e.g., Open Innovation: Franke et al., 2013; Open Government: Axelsson et al., 2010)? Who should be invited to participate for an optimal outcome (e.g., Open Strategy: Hautz et al., 2017; Collaborative Governance: Ansell et al., 2020)? In the following sections, we present a comprehensive overview about participation in two key sub-fields of management research: Innovation and Strategy. This focus is driven by two considerations. Innovation and in particular strategy serve as either context or focus of the research papers, presented in chapters 5-9 of this thesis. Furthermore, open forms of innovation have inspired the emergence of open notions of strategy (Whittington et al, 2011). Accordingly, the next section will present a brief overview of participation research in innovation, followed by a more detailed exploration of participation research in strategy.

2.1 Participation in innovation research

It is widely accepted that firms must continuously innovate to adapt to a changing environment and survive in the long run (e.g., Agarwal et al., 2002; Banbury & Mitchell, 1995; Cefis & Marsili, 2006). For instance, a study by Ortiz-Villajos and Sotoca (2018), based on two hundred leading British firms founded in the 19th and 20th centuries, demonstrates that innovations increase the likelihood of long-term firm survival. In the last two decades, we see a notable trend. To foster innovation, firms increasingly tap into the collective wisdom of both external and internal actors; efforts that have been variously labeled as Open Innovation, crowdsourcing, idea contests, or innovation communities, among others (e.g., Afuah & Tucci, 2012; Chesbrough, 2003; Franke & Shah, 2003; Hutter et al., 2015; Malhotra et al., 2017). This trend has challenged the prevailing practice of purely internal R&D activities and the exclusivity of these activities to specialized departments and its actors (e.g., Enkel et al., 2009; West & Bogers, 2014), thereby shifting scholarly attention toward participation as a central phenomenon.

2.1.1 Open Innovation and participation

Indeed, since Chesbrough's (2003) seminal work on Open Innovation, participation has gained substantial attention in innovation research. The concept emphasizes that participation from diverse actors within an organization and across the value chain (e.g., customers, suppliers, and even competitors), fosters the creation of innovations and thereby enables firms to successfully adapt to the environment (e.g., Chesbrough, 2006; Laursen & Salter, 2006). This idea has its foundations in the 'variance hypothesis', arguing that more diverse input results in more innovative outcomes (Dahlander et al., 2016). The realization of such diversity and thus success of open forms of innovation rests on a fundamental premise: Internal and external actors choose to participate in opened up innovation processes.

Consequently, numerous studies have explored the underlying reasons as well as consequences of participation in various open forms of innovation, with a particular focus on the individual-level (e.g., Chesbrough et al., 2018; Frey et al., 2011; Piezunka & Dahlander, 2019; Stouras et al., 2022). These studies investigated various factors, such as the effects, design, and context-dependency of incentives on participation choices (Alexy & Leitner, 2011; Hofstetter et al., 2018; Terwiesch & Xu, 2008), the impact of personality (e.g., Hutter et al., 2015) or how the selection of winning ideas influences such choices (e.g., Chen et al., 2020). For instance, the results of Cason et al. (2010) suggest that distributing prizes proportionally to participants' achievements may attract more participants than awarding prizes solely for winning ideas. Recently, the discussion around Open Innovation and related concepts like external crowdsourcing has increasingly put emphasis on limitations of these approaches. While recognizing the significant benefits of external knowledge for innovation, this line of research highlights challenges such as undesired knowledge-spillovers or difficulties of knowledge transfers (e.g., Bogers, 2011; Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Grimaldi et al., 2021; Purdy et al., 2023). These considerations have led to a growing academic interest in internal

innovation initiatives, where participation is restricted solely to a firm's employees (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2017; Nittala et al., 2022).

2.1.2 Internal innovation initiatives and participation

Internal innovation initiatives represent a viable alternative to Open Innovation or crowdsourcing but have been far less explored (e.g., Beretta et al., 2023; Beretta & Søndergaard, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2017). These initiatives promise various advantages: Employees typically have a better understanding of a firm's market and capabilities than external actors and may therefore, be more likely to contribute feasible and commercially relevant ideas (Dos Santos & Spann, 2011). Additionally, transferring employees' ideas into new products may be less challenging than incorporating external ideas, which are often less readily accepted by firms (Ruiz & Beretta, 2021). However, like open forms of innovation including external actors, internal innovation initiatives' rely on actors' participation (e.g., Dos Santos & Spann, 2011; Zhu et al., 2019). Our understanding of participation and its dynamics in such initiatives has remained underexplored, as several recent studies have highlighted (Beretta & Søndergaard, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2020; Malhotra et al., 2017). When studied, research has focused predominantly on individual-level factors (e.g., Wendelken et al., 2014), leaving structural conditions and their interplay with individual-level factors largely untheorized. Yet, in the context of internal innovation initiatives, it is the incoherent and fragmented structural conditions that prove critical. For instance, in these initiatives firms invite employees to participate who are typically involved in routine tasks and immediately money/value generating projects, rendering participation choices highly contested and challenging (Nittala et al., 2022). Consequently, participation may lead to tensions with their direct managers, who may demand that time, effort, and attention remain focused on daily responsibilities. Furthermore, actors may struggle to step out of their often clearly defined functional roles which come with specific expectations and transition into the ambiguous field of innovation (cf. Ashforth, 2000). An internal innovation initiative and actors' participation

choices are the context of Paper IV of this thesis. Drawing on the ABV, the paper spotlights the incoherent attention structures present in such an initiative, exploring how actors navigate these inconsistencies, pulling them in different directions simultaneously (participation and non-participation).

In the following section, I provide an overview of the development of participation research in strategy work, leading to open forms of strategizing. The latter, known as Open Strategy, was originally inspired by the concept of Open Innovation outlined above (Whittington et al., 2011). The section serves as foundation for Papers II, III and V of this thesis.

2.2 Participation in strategy research

As outlined above, participation has long been a central concept in management research, dating back to its early foundations (e.g., Simon, 1947). Nevertheless, in the development of strategic management as a distinct academic field, participation in strategy (beyond the top management team) was either not a subject of scholarly interest or was treated as an inherent element of strategy-making, without being explicitly theorized, for a significant portion of its history. This is evident in the seminal books of strategy research, Chandler's (1962) *Strategy and Structure* and Ansoff's (1965) *Corporate Strategy*. Ansoff (1965, p. viii) was not concerned with participation in strategy, understanding strategy as a set of top management decisions (e.g., diversification of the firm), determining "what kind of business the firm should seek to be in". In Chandler's (1962) analysis, while not being directly addressed, participation played a fundamental role for the emergence of strategy. For instance, in his case study of DuPont, the voluntary participation of actors beyond the top management was decisive for the development of a new strategy and thus structure that aligned with the changing requirements of the environment (see Friesl & Kwon, 2017). These takes on participation have stayed with the field as it further developed and differentiated in two key streams: strategy content and strategy process (Chakravarthy & Doz, 1992).

2.2.1 Strategy content research and participation

The 'strategy content' stream is focused on the 'scope of the firm', its strategic positions and competitive advantages in the market, determining a firm's performance across environmental contexts (e.g., Fahey & Christensen, 1986). The unit of analysis is typically at the firm- or industry-level, with large sets of secondary data being quantitatively analyzed, following the research tradition of economics (Chakravarthy & Doz, 1992). Key figures in this stream include Michael Porter and Jay Barney, although their underlying assumption about the development of competitive advantages and consequently firms' performances (and differences thereof) differ. With the risk of overgeneralizing, for Porter (1980, 1981, 1985) a firm's performance is primarily determined by the industry structure within it competes and how it is able to strategically position itself in the industry; thus it is the external environment that matters for competitive advantages and strategic choices. In contrast, Barney (1991) posits that a firm's internal characteristics—specifically the value, rarity, inimitability, and substitutability of its resources—are crucial for generating a competitive advantage.

Naturally, given the research focus, the unit of analysis, and underlying theoretical traditions, strategy content research has not been concerned with phenomena such as individual-level participation. Nevertheless, participation in strategy may still be important to consider in strategy content research. For example, this stream of research could investigate whether firms that adopt participative approaches to strategy development outperform those whose strategy formulation is confined to corporate elites, or vice versa. There are arguments supporting both potential relationships, likely to depend on the specific situation of a firm or industry. Engaging various actors in strategy creation might enable firms to access distant knowledge, which can be advantageous for innovation and adaptation, particularly in dynamic environments (e.g., Afuah & Tucci, 2012; Katila & Ahuja, 2002). However, it may also increase intra-organizational complexity, impede effective decision-making or undermine sustained organizational attention on core activities that have the highest potential for superior

performance (e.g., Ocasio & Joseph, 2018). Point in case is the study by Schäper et al. (2023) on Open Innovation. The authors demonstrate that high degrees of openness in innovation may harm firms' performance, depending on the characteristics of the industry and firms' environment.

2.2.2 Strategy practice and process research and participation

The research stream of 'strategy process', later termed 'strategy practice and process' (Burgelman et al., 2018), has a distinct focus on micro-level processes that shape strategic decisions, ultimately leading to a firm's competitive advantage (Chakravarthy & Doz, 1992; Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Whittington, 2006). Key figures in this research stream include Henry Mintzberg and Andrew Pettigrew, emphasizing for instance that, in practice, realized strategies substantially differ from intended or planned strategies (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) or highlighting the role of politics in strategy-making (e.g., Pettigrew, 1973, 1977). For decades, questions of participation have been an inherent, yet implicit aspect in strategy practice and process research (Friesl et al., 2023; Laine & Vaara, 2015; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Put differently, most of this research has taken the (non-)presence of actors for granted, without theorizing why (non-)participation might occur (for a notable early exception see, Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Strategy practice and process research has converged on recognizing the positive effects of participation beyond top management for strategic renewal, as well as for strategy formulation and implementation.

Strategic renewal. The concept of strategic renewal, i.e. 'the [strategic] activities a firm undertakes to alter its path dependence" and thereby ensure long-term survival (Schmitt et al., 2018; Volberda et al., 2001, p. 160) has been central to various debates and across theoretical perspectives in strategy research (e.g., Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Friesl et al., 2019; Simons, 1994). Although often not explicitly labeled as such, strategy practice and process research has highlighted the critical role of actors beyond top management in contributing to strategic renewal. For instance, Mintzberg emphasizes that

for the most part realized strategies are shaped by both planned activities and emergent activities that were initially not intended (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). These emergent activities typically arise when actors outside top management are unable to fully translate those high-level plans into their actions and voluntarily engage in promising strategic opportunities, not reflected in strategy plans and without being mandated to do so. Burgelman (1983a, 1983b) shows that an organization's ability to adapt to a changing environment depends on this voluntary engagement of lower-level actors in product initiatives these actors consider promising; so-called 'autonomous initiatives', that may ultimately become part of the firm's formal strategy. The process of integrating autonomous initiatives into the formal strategy depends on both the structural conditions of an organization, the "selection environment" (Burgelman, 1991), as well as the willingness and ability of these actors to sell these initiatives to the top management (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al., 1997; Dutton et al., 2001). Without such participation of ranks beyond the top management in autonomous initiatives, a firm's ability to adapt itself to changing conditions in the environment and thus renew itself dwindles over time (Burgelman, 2002). Thus, Mintzberg (1994) and Burgelman and Grove (2007) argue that organizations should balance top-down strategy as well as bottom-up strategic initiatives to enable organizational learning and renewal while simultaneously keeping control and focus. While these bottom-up initiatives—fundamental for strategic renewal—rely on the voluntary participation of actors throughout the organization (Regnér, 2003), research on the underlying mechanisms and social processes of participation has remained limited for decades and continues to be so today (Friesl et al., 2023; Tarakci et al., 2018).

Strategy formulation and implementation. Numerous studies have focused on the participation of middle managers in the strategy process and its effects. Floyd and Wooldridge have differentiated between two types of strategic behavior of middle managers inherent in their role, namely convergent and divergent strategic behavior (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997, 2000). Convergent strategic behavior refers to translating top-down strategic plans and intents to lower

levels, thereby enabling strategy implementation. Divergent strategic behavior refers to the engagement in initiatives beyond the formal strategy, thereby developing new strategic options and influencing top managers' strategy formulation. This behavior is akin to what Burgelman (1983) calls autonomous initiatives.

Previous research highlights that middle managers' participation in the strategy process has a positive impact on convergent behaviors (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992a; Nutt, 1989; Raes et al., 2011). This argument is already present in classical management literature, emphasizing that participation enables commitment and support to top managements' strategic endeavors (Argyris, 1964; Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1947). In a large scale study, Ketokivi and Castaner (2004) demonstrate that participation of middle managers in strategic planning facilitates the subsequent integration of different goals within an organization and consequently strategy implementation by reducing the position bias, i.e. actors' orientation towards the tasks and goals specific to their position in the organization. The importance of participation of middle managers along with that of lower-level actors in successful strategy implementation has also been stressed across recent reviews on strategy implementation (Friesl et al., 2021; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Weiser et al., 2020).

Furthermore, previous research also suggests that participation of middle managers in divergent behaviors leads to the formulation of superior strategies. Middle managers occupy a distinct position between top management and operational actors in an organization. This intermediate position enables them to recognize opportunities and trends arising from the operational business and align them with broader, more abstract strategic trends, rendering middle managers' (voluntary) initiatives particularly valuable for organizations and their long-term success (e.g., Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994; Wooldridge et al., 2008). For instance, in a quantitative study across 20 organizations, Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) show that the participation of middle managers in the formulation of strategy is positively related to corporate performance, yet the significance of middle managers' participation varies

depending on the firm's strategic situation (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). The reasons why middle managers choose to participate have remained widely unexplored, with insights into participation often emerging as incidental to other findings. For instance, Mantere (2005) argues that the feeling of being included and heard by top managers increases middle managers' willingness to engage in divergent behavior. In a subsequent study, Mantere (2008) adds nuance to this argument, revealing that top managers' role expectations are crucial for shaping middle managers' engagement in divergent behavior. Very few studies have explicitly focused on participation. Mantere and Vaara (2008) identify six strategy discourses within an organization that enable or constrain participation in strategy of actors beyond the top management (for a micro-level account on the discursive conditions of participation see Tavella, 2021). In another systematic study on participation, Tarakci et al. (2018) show that social performance comparisons to peers are a key driver whether middle managers choose to engage in divergent strategic behavior or not.

2.2.3 Open Strategy: Spotlight on participation

In recent years, a new trend has emerged in strategy practice and its research. Enabled by advancements in information technology and influenced by broader societal developments, favoring a departure from strictly hierarchical systems, firms are increasingly opening up their strategic processes to actors beyond top and middle management (Ortner et al., 2024; Whittington et al., 2011). This trend termed 'Open Strategy' (in reference to Open Innovation, Chesbrough, 2003) represents the culmination of a long-term shift in both strategy practice and research. Traditionally responsibility in strategy has been considered as the exclusive domain of top management (Ansoff, 1965; Williamson, 1970). This perspective was later superseded by strategy practice and process research, which highlighted the critical role of middle managers in the strategic process (e.g., Burgelman, 1983b; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Friesl et al., 2019; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) and recognized strategy-making as a set of distributed activities across different organizational levels (e.g., Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Regnér, 2003).

Open Strategy further extends these perspectives, viewing strategy as the potential responsibility of all employees, involving frontline workers, as well as actors beyond a firm's boundaries (e.g., Baptista et al., 2017; Laura Dobusch et al., 2019; Leonhard Dobusch & Kapeller, 2018). In its initial conceptualization, Open Strategy revolves around two key dimensions (Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011): 'Transparency' which refers to the sharing of strategic information both inside and outside the organization (e.g., Brielmaier et al., 2024; Whittington et al., 2016) and 'inclusion' which involves the participation of actors beyond top management in strategy-making processes (e.g., Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023b; Langenmayr et al., 2024). In a recent paper, Splitter, Dobusch, et al. (2023) propose 'decision rights' as further key dimension of Open Strategy. This dimension points to the permission of included actors not only to contribute strategic ideas but also to influence how these ideas are incorporated into the firm's actual strategy. Building upon prior strategy practice and process research, Open Strategy, in its different dimensions, is assumed to bring two key benefits (e.g., Seidl et al., 2019; Splitter, Jarzabkowski, & Seidl, 2023; Stjerne et al., 2024): First, by inviting various external and internal stakeholders to contribute to strategy-making, Open Strategy promises the development of superior strategies that can identify opportunities that may otherwise remain unnoticed (e.g., Stieger et al., 2012). Much like the appeal of Open Innovation, this promise is ultimately grounded in the 'variance hypothesis' (Dahlander et al., 2016). Second, the involvement of actors in strategy-making as well transparency throughout the process is expected to facilitate strategy implementation (e.g., Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004). As outlined above, this argument has been prominently featured in prior strategy practice and process research (see section 4.2).

Ultimately, the dimensions and benefits of Open Strategy are inherently tied to participation. This connection brings participation into the spotlight as a fundamental aspect of Open Strategy research. For instance, firms are only able to tap into the wisdom of the crowd if individuals within this crowd choose to contribute their wisdom. Similarly, transparency throughout the

strategy process can only realize its potential positive effects on implementation if actors choose to actively engage with the information provided. While the dimension of inclusion is explicitly linked to participation, the dimensions of transparency and decision rights are implicitly connected to participation. Transparency can be framed as employees' opportunity to participate in strategic information, enabling them to better understand a firm's strategic orientation and thus support, critique, or even undermine it (see, Whittington & Yakis-Douglas, 2020). Decision rights can be understood as employees opportunity to participate in strategic decision-making processes beyond providing novel strategic ideas (Hautz et al., 2017; Splitter, Dobusch, et al., 2023).

2.2.4 Different views on participation in strategy practice and process research

The sections above demonstrate that participation, with its conditions, processes, and implications, has been and, with the rise of Open Strategy, is an increasingly important area of strategy practice and process research. However, the sections also reveal that participation remains a somewhat vague umbrella concept, encompassing various meanings without being precisely conceptualized, let alone explicitly theorized. A closer look into the literature reveals four implicit perspectives that are currently blended into the term participation. These perspectives depend on actors' freedom to choose whether to join the process or not (Friesl et al., 2023) and their ability to influence it (Splitter et al. 2023): participation as informed involvement, participation as symbolic involvement, participation as mandated involvement, and participation as voluntary involvement. Below, I unpack these implicit views on participation in the literature. Figure 1 summarizes them in a 2x2 matrix.

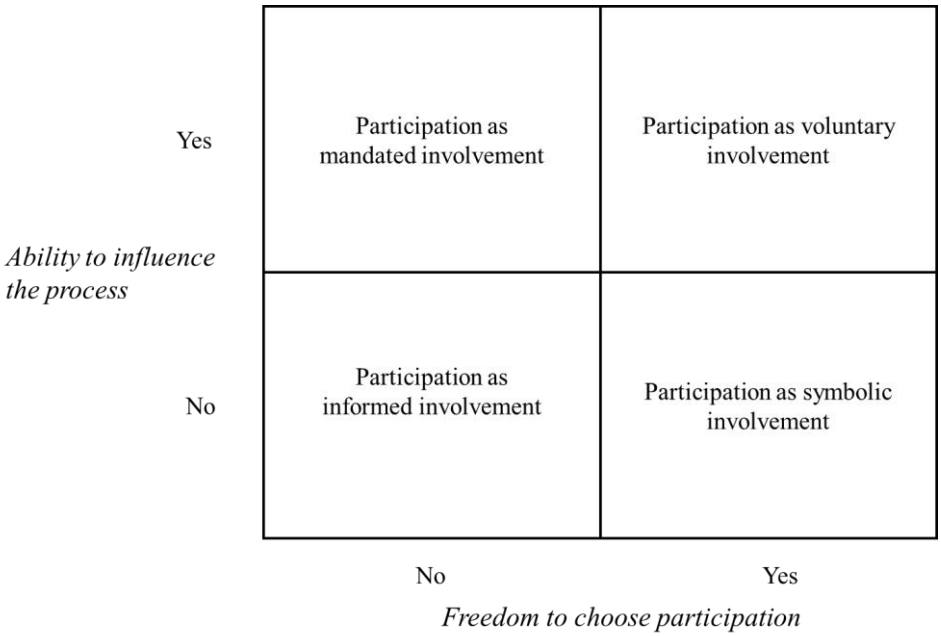

Figure I. Different perspectives on participation in strategy practice and process research.

Participation as informed involvement. This perspective on participation refers to contexts where employees have neither the choice to engage nor the ability to influence the strategy process. However, they are involved by being informed and guided through the process, with positive implications for strategy-making. This perspective on participation is particularly prevalent in the literature focusing on middle managers' downward strategic influence (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Middle managers enable strategic change and implementation by making employees part of the process, in other words giving them their share in it. They do so by, for instance, disseminating and communicating strategic information to employees (e.g., Floyd & Lane, 2000), translating strategy into terms that are relevant to them (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997), or by justifying and explaining strategy to their employees (e.g., Rouleau, 2005).

Participation as symbolic involvement. This perspective on participation refers to contexts where employees are free to join the strategy process, yet cannot influence it. The notion of 'participation as symbolic involvement' is related to what Vaara et al. (2019, p. 34) call "open-washing" and is prevalent in critical perspectives on participation, emphasizing that top managers ultimately retain control over the strategy process, despite volitional efforts by other

actors to gain influence. For instance, Westley (1990) highlights that middle managers that are free to raise strategic issues but dominated by top managers and thus unable to unfold impact on the strategy process feel de-energized and dissatisfied, limiting their willingness to pursue future initiatives. In a study about open strategic planning in the city of Sydney, Kornberger and Clegg (2011) show that while initially multiple stakeholders such as citizens, local business or media representatives could join the process, it was dominated and shaped by strategy experts and consultants, reducing others' influence to symbolic means.

Participation as mandated involvement. This perspective on participation refers to contexts where employees are ex ante selected to participate in the strategy process and are able to influence it. Research focus in these contexts is the enactment of participation rather than the dynamics of why certain actors choose to participate or not (see participation as voluntary engagement). This perspective on participation is prevalent in the emerging literature of Open Strategy (e.g., Hautz et al., 2019), but it is also present in the middle managers debate, concerned with the predefined 'involvement' of actors in the strategy process (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992b; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). For instance, in a recent study, Splitter et al. (2024) show how ex ante selected lower-level employees over time develop the discursive competence to gain the CEO's attention and influence the strategy process.

Participation as voluntary engagement. This perspective on participation refers to contexts where employees can choose whether to participate in the strategy process or not and are (at least theoretically) able to unfold influence. Research focus in these contexts is concerned with the underlying dynamics of why certain actors choose to participate as well as the enactment of participation of actors that became voluntarily involved. The perspective on participation of 'participation as voluntary engagement' is highly prevalent in the literature of Open Strategy, but also is an essential, yet implicit part in the debate on emergent strategy and autonomous initiatives (e.g., Burgelman & Grove, 2007; Mintzberg, 1978). For instance and as described in greater detail above, Burgelman, 1983b) highlights that the volitional engagement of actors

beyond the top management is crucial for strategic renewal. In the context of Open Strategy, firms often invite the crowd of employees to become involved in order to enrich the strategy process with fresh and distant ideas (e.g., Whittington et al., 2011). In reality, however, most organizational actors seem to abstain from the opportunity to participate in strategy (e.g., Bjelland & Wood, 2008; Stieger et al., 2012), rendering questions of self-selection critical for the Open Strategy debate (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023b; Friesl et al., 2023). This issue is equally relevant for open forms of innovation (e.g., Chesbrough et al., 2018; Nittala et al., 2022).

These different perspectives of participation raise different research questions. For instance, in contexts where an understanding of 'participation as symbolic involvement' prevails, scholars might explore the effects on individual actors who are invited to participate merely for ceremonial purposes, as well as the long-term impact of such practices on actors' strategic commitment, strategy implementation or the sustained involvement in innovation initiatives. Additionally, researchers could investigate how such practices evolve, starting with an initially honest effort to incorporate the input of voluntarily engaged or ex ante selected actors in the strategy process (see Kornberger & Clegg, 2011).

The notion of 'participation as voluntary engagement' is the dominant perspective on participation in this thesis, exploring the core question of why actors choose to self-select into the strategy process or not with which consequences. Paper II, building on the ABV (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023a; Ocasio, 1997), theorizes why actors may not become involved in Open Strategy initiatives. Paper III, building on a practice perspective, offers a process model of self-selection in strategy, illuminating how self-selection dynamics may give rise to inertia or strategic change. Paper IV, while not directly situated in the context of strategy, demonstrates that reconciling incoherent attention structures is crucial for the decision to participate or not in internal innovation contests. Paper V takes a different view, offering insights into how the voluntary engagement on social media of actors outside a firm's boundaries may influence top managers' strategic preferences.

3. ABV-based and practice-based perspectives on participation

As indicated above, this thesis builds upon two key theoretical perspectives in order to explore voluntary participation and its effects in strategy and innovation: the attention-based-view of the firm (ABV, Ocasio, 1997) and practice theories (e.g., Giddens, 1984; Nicolini, 2012; Whittington, 2006). These two perspectives, while grounded in different onto-epistemological assumptions, are complementary and not incommensurable (Kuhn, 1962). The attention-based view has predominantly been interpreted through an information-processing lens (e.g., Barnett, 2008; Nicolini & Korica, 2021), in the tradition of the behavioral theory of the firm, emphasizing cognitive limitations—particularly limited attention—of individual actors (Cyert & March, 1963; Gavetti et al., 2012; Simon, 1947, 1957). Practice theories highlight that human activities are 'socially embedded', focusing on the social and material contexts of actions rather than actors' cognitive limitations (e.g., Nicolini, 2012). However, notably, in his outline of the ABV, Ocasio (1997) emphasized the social nature of attention allocation by drawing on Weick (1995). Theorizing how actors allocate attention in particular situations, Ocasio's (1997, p. 204) "central contribution", Brielmaier and Friesl (2023) highlight potential benefits of integrating a practice-theoretical perspective into the ABV (see also Nicolini & Korica, 2021; Nicolini & Mengis, 2023; Plotnikova et al., 2024). They argue that practices understood as "situated patterns of activities that shape social conduct" are "in essence encompassing attention" (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023a, p. 120).

Before presenting the research approach as well as the individual papers of this thesis, I provide a comprehensive overview of these two key theoretical perspectives.

Attention-Based-View of the firm. Deeply inspired by the work of the Carnegie School (e.g., Cyert and March, 1963; Simon, 1947, 1958), the ABV positions attention as a central yet limited resource in organizational and strategic decision-making (Ocasio, 1997). Due to the limited nature of attention, decision-makers can neither address all issues in the environment simultaneously, nor can they rationally calculate the optimal answer. This consideration forms

the foundation of the ABV and its precursors as "structural" perspectives (Barnett, 2008, p. 2008): In order to regulate and efficiently distribute valuable attentional resources, organizations set up so-called 'principal premises' (Simon, 1947), or 'attention structures' (March & Olsen, 1979), that consist of four interrelated and organizational-level attention regulators (Ocasio, 1997): 'rules of the game', i.e. the (in)formal principles of action guiding attention (e.g., Crilly & Sloan, 2012), 'players', i.e. certain actors able to shape others' attention allocation (e.g., Fu et al., 2020), the structural position, i.e. actors' functional roles and the identities attached to these roles shaping individual's attentional focus (e.g., Nicolini & Korica, 2021), and the 'resources', i.e. the (in)tangible assets confining attention to a particular set of relevant issues and answers within firms (e.g., Hendriks et al., 2018). Based on the idea of firms as attention distribution systems, Ocasio (1997) provides a multilevel framework of organizational attention allocation: Although individuals ultimately focus their attention on specific issues and answers in particular situations, these situations are governed by organizational attention structures. Organizational attention structures channel situated attention allocation and decision-making into specific communication channels, structure the right to participate these channels, and provide participating actors with a predefined perspective on which issues and answers are considered valuable and legitimate and thus more salient compared to others (Ocasio, 1997, p. 192f.).

Participation has played an important role in Ocasio's (1997) work and the work of his precursors (March & Olsen, 1979; Simon, 1947). For Simon (1947) the fundamental challenge was the integration of individuals (with their different interests, values, aspirations etc.) into the social construct of an organization. For him, this meant that in order to function, organizations must provide employees with clear 'attention directors' and expectations that shape where to (not) participate and how to (not) behave. March and Olsen (1979) explicitly argue that attention structures specify the participation rights in a choice opportunity, an argument that is also present in the ABV. For them, the decisions made depends on which actors are permitted

to participate (see also Cohen et al. 1972). Thus, within this stream of literature participation is recognized as a fundamental phenomenon, shaping which decisions are taken in organizations. Given its importance for organizational outcomes, participation rights in (strategic) decision-making are considered as widely regulated by the structural conditions set up by an organization (Ocasio, 1997; Simon, 1947). Paper I, published in the *International Journal of Management Reviews* (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023a), offers a comprehensive overview of the ABV, serving as the foundation for the subsequent ABV-based papers of this dissertation. Paper II draws on the structural notion of the ABV to theorize non-participation in Open Strategy initiatives.

Practice-theoretical perspectives. Besides the ABV, this thesis draws upon practice theoretical perspectives. It is important to emphasize that practice theories do not constitute a coherent theoretical perspective; as Schatzki (2001, p. 2) states, "there is no unified practice approach". Despite their differences in vocabulary and basic assumptions, practice theories, share some fundamental and interrelated similarities (Nicolini, 2012) three of which particularly stand out: First, practices, not practitioners and their situated activities are the central unit of analysis (Nicolini, 2009). Second, practices are not to equate with situated activities often referred to as praxis (Rouleau & Cloutier, 2022; Whittington, 2006). While the latter one may describe what a decision-maker does in a particular situation within a particular organization, practices refer to the broader, organized patterns of actions that transcend individual instances, thus emphasizing their "trans-" or "extra-organizational" nature (Whittington, 2006, p. 620). Third, practice-based perspectives highlight individuals' agency, emphasizing their capacity "to be able to 'act otherwise'" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14) even within the constraints of structural conditions (Nicolini, 2012). Among the various practice theoretical approaches (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Schatzki, 2001), paper III builds upon Giddens' (1979, 1984) structuration theory. Giddens argues that social practices are produced by structures, which are, in turn, reproduced through those very practices, in his words structures "are both the medium and the outcome of the practices" (Giddens, 1979, p. 69). This 'duality of structures' implies that actors' actions

are not just the outcome of structural conditions, they are able to 'act otherwise' and, in doing so, resist, modify, and reconstitute the structures that surround them.

This, of course, has significant implications for how participation in organizational settings can be understood and theorized. Actors are 'knowledgeable' and, as a result, are able to voluntarily engage in strategy or innovation initiatives, even when structural conditions may constrain such behavior. This is for instance evident in Burgelman's (1983b) account on autonomous strategic initiatives at Intel. Although Intel's structures opposed such voluntary participation, actors still chose to act otherwise and were able to positively influence Intel's adaptation to a changing environment. However, their actions often came with career risks (see also Bower, 1970), leading Burgelman to label them as "tragic hero[s]" (p. 241). Also, while paper II explains how structural conditions may impede participation in Open Strategy, they emphasize that actors may still choose to engage despite these constraints. Drawing on Giddens (1979, 1984), paper III theorizes voluntary participation through the 'duality of structures', illuminating that such participation is not only shaped by existing structures but may also produce new structures. These new structures, while enabling certain actors to participate, may simultaneously hinder others from participating, leading to stabilized patterns of participation over time. This perspective highlights the recursive nature of structure and agency, where voluntary participation of particular actors can have unintended consequences for the future participation of other actors (Friesl et al., 2023). While not explicitly drawing on Giddens' structuration theory, paper IV provides an interesting case of how actors respond to structures, simultaneously enabling and constraining voluntary participation in the context of an internal innovation contest. In order to come to a decision within these incoherent structures, actors draw on their identity as an 'innovative engineer', thus activate their agency, and adapt the structures surrounding them accordingly, by either reinforcing or mitigating them.

4. Research approaches of thesis papers

In order to investigate questions of participation, primarily in the context of strategy but also innovation, this thesis employs a diverse range of methodological approaches. Specifically, it encompasses the dominant methods in management research and beyond, including review-based, conceptual, qualitative, and quantitative approaches. Below I provide a comprehensive overview about these approaches and how these approaches were applied in the different papers of this doctoral thesis (see Table II).

Table II. Summary of research approaches employed across thesis papers.

Paper	Research Approach	Overview
Paper I: The attention-based view: Review and conceptual extension towards situated attention	Review Research ('narrative review')	Synthesis of ABV research and theoretical insights on situated attention. The paper is systematic in its approach to literature, yet focuses on one community of practice (ABV-based research). The paper thus can be, most appropriately, classified as a narrative review (Cronin & George, 2023).
Paper II: Pulled in all directions: Open strategy participation as an attention contest	Conceptual research ('essay' / 'theoretical provocation')	Theorizing non-participation in Open Strategy by drawing on the ABV. The paper combines different theoretical perspectives (ABV and Open Strategy) and can be classified as an 'essay', often referred to as 'theoretical provocation' (Cornelissen et al., 2021).
Paper III: Taking individual choices seriously: A process perspective of self-selection in strategy work	Conceptual research ('process theorizing')	Theorizing self-selection in strategy work and contributing a process model of self-selection to the strategy literature. The paper thus can be classified as 'process theorizing' (Cornelissen et al., 2021).
Paper IV: To Participate or Not to Participate: Making Sense of Incoherent Attention Structures in Corporate Innovation Contests	Qualitative Research ('embedded single case study')	Theorizing how participation and non-participation emerge by analyzing a single case study of an innovation contest in a low-cost location of a multinational corporation. The paper compares characteristics of participants and non-participants, constituting an embedded case study (Yin, 2009). Given that the context is both a) highly unusual and b) previously unexplored, a qualitative single case study is well-suited for developing theory (Ozcan et al., 2017; Yin, 2009).
Paper V: Who sits at the table? Social media exposure biases managers' situated attention and strategic preferences.	Quantitative Research ('laboratory experiment')	Exploring the effects of social media consumption on managers' strategic preferences by drawing on laboratory experiments. Following recent advances in experimental research, it a) preregisters the study design, hypotheses, and planned data analyses prior to data collection, and b) ensures transparency by providing access to all collected data and analysis scripts afterward (Briker & Gerpott, 2024: Logg & Dorison, 2021).

4.1 Review research

Literature reviews synthesize existing research within a particular field, providing a structured overview of the current state of knowledge. By consolidating existing findings, addressing and discussing fragmentations, and developing an agenda for future research, they play a crucial role in shaping the direction of future research efforts (Cronin & George, 2023; Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2005).

Literature reviews have a long tradition and are applied across a wide range of research disciplines such as psychology (e.g., Chun et al., 2011, *Annual Review of Psychology*), anthropology (e.g., Pedersen et al., 2021, *Annual Review of Anthropology*), or medicine (e.g., Wilens et al., 2002, *Annual Review of Medicine*). Literature reviews have become increasingly prominent in management research over the last two decades due to the field's diverse theoretical and methodological approaches and the fragmentation of insights this diversity entails (Kunisch et al., 2023). The growing prominence of literature reviews in management research is evidenced by the establishment of specialized journals such as the *International Journal of Management Reviews* (founded in 1999) or the *Academy of Management Annals* (founded in 2007) and their high impact factor. In management research, literature reviews typically have a distinct focus. They not only summarize research in a particular area, rather the structured synthesis of the literature serves as a foundation for new theoretical insights (Alegre et al., 2023; Breslin & Gatrell, 2023; Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2018). As Jones and Gatrell (2014, p. 256) note, reviews in this field, particularly those for reputable journals, are expected to be "analytical rather than descriptive". Different 'ideal types' of literature reviews can be distinguished based on their purpose and approach; narrative reviews, meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and integrative reviews (Cronin & George, 2023).

In their ideal form, systematic reviews offer a complete overview, typically about a particular topic within a single community as practice. Alongside meta-analyses, which focus on the synthesis of multiple quantitative studies in a particular field to determine overall effects

between independent and dependent variables (e.g., Field & Gillett, 2010), systematic reviews are widely applied in clinical research (see *New England Journal of Medicine*, review article section), enabling for instance a detailed overview about a particular disease and adequate treatment options. For both meta-analyses and systematic reviews defining appropriate inclusion criteria is crucial as they directly impact the validity of the results and the reliability of the recommendations (Cronin & George, 2023). Narrative reviews focus on a single community of practice; however, unlike meta-analyses and systematic reviews, their goal is to organize findings and, from this organization, develop new theoretical insights rather than determining what holds true under different circumstances (Cropanzano, 2009). Integrative reviews, while similar to narrative reviews in their focus on organizing knowledge rather than establishing causal relationships, differ in scope. Unlike narrative reviews, integrative reviews aim to contrast and bridge insights from different communities of practice, developing new theory through this broader synthesis (Cronin & George, 2023).

Paper I is a review article that, while systematic in its approach to the inclusion of relevant literature, can be most appropriately classified as a narrative review. It synthesizes previous ABV-based research, thus focusing on a single community of practice, into an overarching framework. Building on this framework, the paper identifies 'situated attention' as a key area for future ABV research and, drawing from practice theory, develops new theoretical insights on how situated attention may unfold in organizations. The paper has been published in the *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

4.2 Conceptual research

While also not relying on uniquely gathered empirical data, conceptual research fundamentally differs from literature reviews in their core objective (Cropanzano, 2009; Kilduff, 2007). According to LePine and King (2010) the central aim of conceptual papers is to challenge and clarify existing theories, to raise novel theoretical problems or to develop new theory based on

recent advances in the literature or novel phenomena, rather than synthesizing previous research to derive theoretical insights.

Conceptual or theory papers have a long tradition across social sciences such as psychology (e.g., *Psychological Review*), political science (e.g., *American Political Science Review*) or sociology (e.g., *Sociological Theory*) and also management science (e.g., *Academy of Management Review* and *Organization Theory*) with distinct journals or places in top journals dedicated to such work. While focused on the development of novel theoretical insights by "making informed knowledge claims", i.e. the qualified and logical nature of arguments against existing explanations and understandings (Cornelissen et al., 2021, p. 3), conceptual articles in management research can differ significantly (e.g., Barney, 2018; Cornelissen, 2017a; Delbridge & Fiss, 2013). Conceptual papers can take various (ideal) forms of theorizing, including essays, also referred to as 'theoretical provocation', propositional theorizing, or process theorizing, among others. These approaches to theorizing in conceptual papers can be distinguished by the knowledge interest, the style of reasoning, the involvement and visibility of the researcher, as well as the level of abstraction (Cornelissen et al., 2021).

Essays allow authors to introduce novel, sometimes provocative or even critical, ideas by bridging different theoretical perspectives or research communities to illuminate a particular phenomenon (e.g., Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023b), to discuss and extend existing methodologies (e.g., Vesa & Vaara, 2014) or by enabling a more personal and engaged approach from the authors (e.g., Cunliffe, 2022). In some cases, essays offer a platform for authors to reflect on their experiences, which can spark critical discussions that might otherwise be overlooked in the academic discourse (e.g., Korica, 2022). While essays often permit a personal and involved stance, they can also adopt an 'objective' approach, resembling more traditional forms of propositional and process theorizing, though typically maintaining a less formal tone and style of reasoning (e.g., Friesl & Kwon, 2017; Huy, 2012).

Propositional theorizing in conceptual papers has been widespread in management research for decades and described as "standard style" of theorizing (Cornelissen, 2023). In their editorials for *Academy of Management Review*, Kilduff (2006, p. 254) reminded authors to "not cram in unnecessary propositions" based on the mistaken belief that propositions are required in conceptual papers, while Delbridge and Fiss (2013) even expressed the concern that propositional theorizing has become overly dominant, crowding out other approaches to theorizing within the journal. Propositional theorizing refers to translating theoretical assumptions and ideas into formal propositions that typically capture causal relationships between independent and dependent variables (Cornelissen, 2017a). As such, propositional theorizing is frequently associated with a positivist orientation (Kilduff, 2006), adopting a formal-analytical style of reasoning and requiring authors to maintain an objective and neutral stance (Cornelissen et al., 2021).

Process theorizing has become another dominant approach to theorizing in both empirical and conceptual management research over the last decades (e.g., Cloutier & Langley, 2020; Langley, 1999; van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Conceptual papers that involve process theorizing aim to unpack the generative mechanisms that lead to a particular set of outcomes (Cornelissen, 2017a). Process theorizing spotlights how 'things' unfold over time and how and when outcomes based on these dynamics come into place. Therefore, the primary focus of this approach to theorizing is not on the outcomes themselves (as it is in propositional theorizing) but, as its name implies, the underlying 'processes', their conditions and temporality (e.g., Cloutier & Langley, 2020). Process theorizing aims at providing a 'process model' articulated in a 'narrative style' (Cornelissen, 2017a). Process theorizing requires authors to be highly analytical in their arguments and maintain an objective and neutral stance (Cornelissen et al., 2021). It thus shows similarity in style to propositional theorizing and differences to 'theoretical provocations' via essays.

This thesis incorporates two conceptual papers (Paper II and Paper III). Paper II classifies as an essay, although it employs an analytical style of theorizing and maintains a neutral stance. Drawing on various examples, it illustrates that, despite invitations to participate in an open strategy process, only a small fraction of actors accepts the offer. The paper theorizes why non-participation tends to be the norm rather than the exception in Open Strategy. The essay introduces the ABV as a useful perspective to the Open Strategy community, thereby "embracing pluralism" as Nigam and Guerra (2023, p. 498) reflect in their discussion of the paper. Paper III employs 'process theorizing': By drawing on practice theory, it offers a process model to the strategy practice and process community, illuminating how self-selection unfolds over time and the emergent outcomes that arise from it. Paper II has been published in *Strategic Organization* and Paper III in *Organization Theory*.

4.3 Qualitative research

While sometimes still being contested and defending itself (see for instance, Pratt et al., 2020 or Cornelissen, 2017b), qualitative research has been widely accepted, common and published across prominent journals in management for decades (e.g., Bettis et al., 2015; Bluhm et al., 2011). Already in 1979, van Maanen noted in a guest editorial for *Administrative Science Quarterly* that "a renewed interest in and felt need for qualitative research has slowly been emerging" (p. 522). Qualitative research is prominently applied in the research streams and theories in which this thesis is embedded. It is the dominant approach in strategy practice and process research (Burgelman et al., 2018; Kohtamäki et al., 2022) and has also been consistently applied in ABV-based research (e.g., Joseph & Wilson, 2018; Ocasio & Joseph, 2008).

Qualitative research promises novel and in-depth insights into organizational phenomena, by adopting a interpretivist and naturalistic approach (Rynes & Gephart, 2004). It seeks to contribute to our understanding of organizations by exploring their 'inner workings' and 'processes' through the observation and interpretation of organizational actors within their natural environments (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In order to develop theories about

management and organization, qualitative research draws on and often triangulates a variety of different data sources from a particular case or cases, including ethnographic data (e.g., Rond et al., 2019), secondary data such as posts from online communities or emails (e.g., Friesl & Silberzahn, 2017), video recordings (e.g., Jarzabkowski et al., 2015), or, of course, interview data (e.g., Knight & Jarzabkowski, 2023) with each of these data sources having its strengths and weaknesses. For instance, while ethnographic data may allow in-depth insights into the inner workings and specific dynamics within an organization that may be otherwise difficult to observe (e.g., Watson, 2011), it may also raise significant questions of credibility and trustworthiness (cf., Pratt et al., 2020).

Qualitative studies typically rely on what came to be called 'case study research' (Yin, 2009). In the history of qualitative research in management, two distinct approaches to case studies have been widely applied: Multiple case studies, which compare different entities and thereby explaining variance (Eisenhardt, 1989a) and single case studies, which typically trace and unpack particular processes over time (Langley, 1999). While single and multiple case may differ in their objectives, they also share key commonalities in theorizing. Case study research does not inherently exclude deductive, theory testing approaches (e.g., Bitektine, 2008; Eisenhardt, 2020). Instead, it much more commonly follows an inductive approach to theorizing, i.e. deriving theory directly based on the data collected without relying on prior expectations and theoretical models (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Thomas, 2006), or an abductive approach to theorizing, i.e. deriving theory based on the interplay of existing theories and emerging data (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Thus, if we imagine a continuum ranging from deductive to inductive approaches based on the importance of a priori theory, abductive approaches are positioned between the two, building upon and enriching existing theories with the insights from the qualitative data collected (Eisenhardt, 2020). Below, I present an overview of multiple and single case study designs as key

approaches to qualitative research, and situate the qualitative study of this thesis (Paper IV) within these approaches.

Multiple case studies are widely accepted and applied in management research (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989b; Hanel & Friesl, 2024). Multiple case studies have different loci of data collection. In management research, such data collection typically takes place across different firms. Early reflections on multiple case study designs have highlighted advantages of this approach over single case studies; multiple case studies would allow a more robust theorizing and increased generalizability (Eisenhardt, 1989a; Herriott & Firestone, 1983), in particular by enabling a replication logic (e.g., Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Other scholars, however, have argued that a multiple case study design may limit the opportunity to explore particular phenomena and processes in-depth, thus risking to remain at the surface and miss the core point of qualitative research (e.g., Dyer Jr & Wilkins, 1991; Siggelkow, 2007). Despite these caveats, multiple case studies promise a significant and unique benefit for theory development, as they enable scholars to explain and theorize variance across firms (Eisenhardt, 2021; Yin, 2009). For instance, by tracing five early-stage start-ups and comparing their success in the market, McDonald and Eisenhardt (2020) develop theory about how startups active in similar areas differentiate themselves from their peers.

Similar to multiple case studies, single case studies are widely used in qualitative management research (e.g., Laine & Vaara, 2007; Langenmayr et al., 2024). Most notably, single case studies have a singular locus of data collection, focusing for instance on the open strategy process of one single company (e.g., Splitter et al., 2024) or the underlying mechanisms of growth of one particular corporation (e.g., Joseph & Wilson, 2018). Although theory development based on single case studies has faced criticism, particularly due to concerns that findings and theorizing from a single case may be biased and less generalizable due to the idiosyncrasies of a singular setting (Eisenhardt, 1989a; Pettigrew, 1990), scholars have emphasized their crucial importance for management research under particular circumstances

(e.g., Langley, 1999; Yin, 2009). Ozcan et al. (2017) identify four situations in which single case studies are especially suitable for theory building. They highlight that single case studies are appropriate when addressing an unusual phenomenon, a setting that has not been previously accessed or investigated by researchers, when a case can be observed longitudinally, or when a highly detailed, fine-grained account of a particular phenomenon is essential for developing new theory. Thus, in single case studies a careful case selection is considered key (Elman et al., 2016). It is important to emphasize that while data is collected from a singular case, single case studies may involve (comparative) analyses of different subunits within this case, for instance exploring differences in individuals' strategic practices in a particular organization. Yin (2009) refers to this design as 'embedded single case studies'.

Paper IV is a qualitative study that can be classified as such an 'embedded single case study'. It unpacks individual actors' decisions whether to participate or not in a firm's internal innovation contest. In line with recommendations of the literature (e.g., Elman et al., 2016; Ozcan et al., 2017), the selection of this single case followed a clear rationale. The study is situated in a highly unusual and contested context that has not been explored in previous research—an innovation contest in a low cost location.

4.4 Quantitative Research

While qualitative research has become increasingly popular in management research (e.g., Bansal & Corley, 2011; Cornelissen, 2017b), there has been an "an apparent "dominance" of more quantitative-based methodological tools" in the field over the last decades (Bluhm et al., 2011; Hoskisson et al., 1999, p. 447). Although quantitative methods can support exploratory analysis, such as examining relationships among numerous variables within big data contexts (Bamberger & Ang, 2016), they are primarily associated with a deductive, theory testing approach to scientific inquiry (e.g., Bettis et al., 2014; Shaw, 2017). As such, quantitative research typically follows a positivist tradition, assuming an objective and measurable reality,

which contrasts with the interpretivist tradition underlying qualitative research (e.g., Bluhm et al., 2011; Lin, 1998).

Quantitative research serves as an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of different methods and approaches such as surveys, secondary data research, quasi-experiments or controlled experiments, among others. All of these methods ultimately aim to establish causal or correlational relationships between independent variables i.e., the 'predictors' and dependent variables, i.e. the 'predicted outcomes' (Black, 1999). For simplicity and clarity, I broadly distinguish between non-experimental and experimental quantitative approaches in the next paragraph.

Non-experimental quantitative approaches most prominently include surveys and secondary data research. While survey designs have been widely employed in early management research including strategy process research (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992b, 1997; Hodgkinson et al., 2006), their use has become increasingly contested over the last decades (e.g., Conway & Lance, 2010; Krosnick, 1999; Podsakoff et al., 2003). In surveys, independent as well as dependent variables are typically measured via self-reports, enabling for instance insights into underlying psychological factors such as personality or motivation commitment (Schwarz, 1999). Two major issues of surveys stand out, the 'common method bias' (Podsakoff et al., 2024) as well as '(non-)response biases' (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008). Simply put, the 'common method bias' suggests that measuring the independent and dependent variable with the same tool biases the results, for instance as participants provide social desirable responses rather than answering based on their true perceptions, attitudes or feelings (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Spector, 2006). The (non-)response bias refers to the issue that results of surveys may be distorted as only particular individuals may choose to participate in a survey, limiting their validity and generalizability (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008; Krosnick, 1999). In an editorial for the *Academy of Management Journal*, Bamberger and Pratt (2010, p. 668) highlight another issue with response biases; it may implicitly hinder scholars from "opportunities to look where no one, or

very few, are looking" and thereby undermine efforts to develop novel and meaningful theories. Secondary data research, also referred to as archival research, grounded in economics and drawing on large data sets, is highly common in management research until today (e.g., Bettis et al., 2014; Phelan et al., 2002). It explores relationships such as the link between firms' diversification experience and firms' product and international diversification (Mayer et al., 2015), thereby providing in-depth insights into key macro-level management phenomena. While secondary data research is not prone to social desirability or response biases, it presents other challenges such as a widespread lack of data transparency and replicability concerns (Bergh et al., 2017) as well as the dependency of the results on data selection (Short et al., 2002). In a more recent study, Ketchen Jr et al. (2013) highlight another key issue with secondary data research. This type of research often relies on high-level proxies to measure constructs like experience or innovativeness. This raises questions of validity: Does the proxy really measure what it intends to measure? For instance, in ABV research, scholars usually use shareholder letters as proxies for CEO attention (e.g., Ahn, 2020; Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Yadav et al., 2007). However, this is questionable as a shareholder letter is an organizational artifact collaboratively produced by individuals with diverse attentional foci. Disaggregating this artifact, the result of intertwined attentional processes, to reflect the attentional focus of a single individual—albeit the most important decision-maker—inevitably becomes an issue of construct validity.

Experimental quantitative approaches include methods such as field experiments, quasi-experiments or the controlled laboratory experiments (see Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019 for an overview). In this paragraph, I particularly focus on laboratory experiments that shares strong commonalities with the other approaches. Laboratory experiments are often considered as the gold standard of scientific evidence as they enable scholars to establish causal relationships (Chalmers, 2013; Kaibel & Biemann, 2021). Despite this compelling advantage, laboratory experiments have been relatively rarely used in management research in general and strategy

research in particular (e.g., Bolinger et al., 2022; Di Stefano & Gutierrez, 2019). This particularly holds true for strategy practice and process research and, with very few exceptions (e.g., Laureiro-Martinez et al., 2023), for ABV-based studies as well. Despite opportunities to test the causality of particular mechanism derived from large qualitative data sets, strategy practice and process research has, until now, been hesitant to adopt this methodological approach. In laboratory experiments, scholars randomly assign participants to different manipulated conditions, reflecting the independent variables, and measure the effects of these manipulations on the dependent variables (Ryan & Morgan, 2007). In recent years, findings from experimental designs have increasingly come under contest and scrutiny as many of them could not be replicated (Maxwell et al., 2015; Shrout & Rodgers, 2018). This has led to the establishment of new practices that shall lead to higher replicability and thus credibility of experimental findings. With so called 'pre-registrations', authors transparently present the hypotheses of their study, the sample size, or planned statistical analyses on platforms such as the Open Science Framework (OSF) before conducting their experiments (e.g., Logg & Dorison, 2021). Furthermore, a growing number of reputable journals such as *Nature Human Behavior*, *Psychological Science*, or *Academy of Management Discoveries* are accepting 'registered reports'. This format, as an extended version of pre-registration, entails that peer review and the editorial decision about the manuscript are made prior to data collection (Briker & Gerpott, 2024).

Paper V applies the new format of preregistration in its experimental approach. The study design, hypotheses, and planned analyses were registered in the OSF before data was collected: https://osf.io/4kepg/?view_only=a7d5adad747846299c56e53153b91d4c. Furthermore, all data as well the materials used in the experiment were also registered in the OSF repository: https://osf.io/juhzg/?view_only=e709b200572149749e561513eb34e01f. The study explores how social media consumption affects strategic preferences, drawing on a sample of $N = 200$ managers. The experimental design simulates two key characteristics of social media posts as

between-subject factors; the hierarchical position of the posts' author ('Junior Engineer' versus 'CEO') and the posts' social resonance ('10,000-15,000 likes and 200-250 comments' versus '10-15 likes and 2-5 comments', the exact number was randomly assigned). As within-subject factor, we manipulated which out of two key strategic approaches ('organic growth strategy' versus 'inorganic growth strategy') was presented to the study participants. In the next sections, the five papers of the doctoral thesis are presented.

5. The attention-based view: Review and conceptual extension towards situated attention

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The attention-based view: Review and conceptual extension towards situated attention

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Abstract

Over two decades ago, William Ocasio introduced the attention-based view (ABV) of the firm with a powerful argument: firm-level behaviour is the result of the situated distribution and allocation of managerial attention, embedded in broader organizational structures and the environmental context. ABV-based research has received substantial and increasing scholarly attention, resulting in a complex and incoherent body of research. In order to address this issue, this paper takes stock of extant research on the ABV and consolidates key debates. Based on a systematic review of 173 articles, we synthesize existing research into a unifying framework. Drawing on this framework, we propose situated attention as a central theme for future research. We elaborate on four situational factors (materiality, social dynamics, temporality and what we call framing of the strategic setting), which may influence how actors' attention is situated in the particular context.

INTRODUCTION

Over two decades ago, William Ocasio (1997) introduced the attention-based view (ABV) of the firm with a powerful argument: deeply inspired by the Carnegie School (March & Olsen, 1979; Simon, 1947), he argues that firm-level behaviour is the result of the situated distribution and allocation of managerial attention, embedded in the broader organizational structures. Thus, according to the ABV, organizational structures distribute decision-makers' attention and attention, in turn, determines actions (Cyert & March, 1963; March et al., 1958; Simon, 1957). Overall, the ABV has developed into an extensive theoretical framework that provides deep insights into the antecedents and consequences of managerial attention allocation. But something seems to be missing.

Since Ocasio's (1997) seminal article, the ABV has left an enormous imprint on organization and management research (Ocasio, 2011). The ABV has triggered a plethora of theoretical and empirical research illuminating highly diverse organizational phenomena, such as resource allocation in multinational enterprises (MNEs) (e.g. Andrews et al., 2022; Belenzon et al., 2019; Plourde et al., 2014), adaptation to radical change (e.g. Kammerlander & Ganter, 2015; Maula et al., 2013), responses to grand challenges (e.g. Galbreath, 2011; Pinkse & Gasbarro, 2019) as well as the foundations of organizational innovation (e.g. Filiou & Massini, 2018; Li et al., 2013; Rhee & Leonardi, 2018). Overall, while research based on the ABV has received substantial and increasing scholarly attention over the last decade, it also resulted in a complex and incoherent body of research. The importance of the ABV for organization and management studies, and the fragmentation of the field, requires us to take stock and look ahead.

Thus, to address this issue and develop new avenues for future research, this paper provides an extensive review

of 173 articles based on the ABV. In order to synthesize this body of research, we draw on Ocasio's (1997) fundamental attention-allocation framework. This multilevel framework argues that decision-making and organizational outcomes are determined by individuals' attention focus in particular situations. These particular situations are regulated by a firm's economic and social structures, so-called 'attention structures', which are embedded in the broader external context.

Our review reveals that the situatedness of attention, an argument at the very centre of this multilevel framework, seemingly got lost on the way in leading journals. Indeed, Ocasio (1997, p. 204) considers the introduction of situated attention as the ABV's 'central contribution'. While prior research provides a nuanced picture of the structural antecedents of attention allocation (e.g. Plambeck, 2012; Ren & Guo, 2011; Souitaris & Maestro, 2010; Stevens et al., 2015), our understanding of the 'situational characteristics' of attention allocation in organizations is still very limited. Accordingly, prior ABV-based research has strongly focused on organization-level attention, behaviour and outcomes (e.g. Fu et al., 2020; Maula et al., 2013; McCann & Bahl, 2017; McCann & Shinkle, 2017) while overlooking settings in which attention in organizations is actually allocated: in particular situations such as board meetings or just in front of the computer. For instance, previous ABV-based research found that the degree of diversity in top management influences its attention allocation and, subsequently, organizational performance metrics (e.g. Fu et al., 2020; Koryak et al., 2018; Umashankar et al., 2021). However, these (organization-level) findings do not explain differences between companies with similar top management compositions and, ultimately, cannot exclude other possible explanations. For instance, an overall shift in firms' attentional direction (Ocasio, 2011) may be causal to both the change of diversity in top management and the reported changes in performance metrics. Therefore, focusing on how attention is situated in particular contexts may provide new explanatory mechanisms of organization-level outcomes that remain otherwise obscured.

Thus, we propose situated attention as a central theme for future research. Based on a practice perspective (e.g. Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Whittington, 2006), we elaborate on four situational characteristics (materiality, social dynamics, temporality and what we call framing of the strategic setting), which may influence how actors' attention is situated in the particular context. Considering situated attention has wider implications: it spotlights individual actors across the organization. Moreover, it has the potential to connect the ABV to the broad research stream of sociomateriality (e.g. Orlikowski, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) and thus give rise to the idea of attention as a (materially mediated) social accomplishment (Nicolini & Korica, 2021; Ocasio et al., 2017). With this review, we hope to move ABV-based research forward and revive the idea of situated attention.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE ABV

To appreciate the contribution of the ABV requires an understanding of its conceptual roots. Over 70 years ago, Herbert Simon (1947) broke with the omnipresent idea of rational choice in business and economic research. Simon (1947) argued that humans' bounded rationality results from limited attentional capacity. The Carnegie School gave rise to the behavioural theory of the firm (BTF), which highlights the explanatory power of limited attention in order to understand decision-making under uncertainty in an information-overloaded world (Cyert & March, 1963; Simon, 1947, 1957, 1973; for reviews see Argote & Greve, 2007; Gavetti et al., 2012). The BTF assumes that paying attention is a necessary condition of decision-making. Due to attentional deficits, humans cannot include all action alternatives in their decision-making process and, thus, cannot simply choose the best option (Cyert & March, 1963). In his early work, Simon (1947) discussed the implications of this assumption. He argued that firms develop structures, so-called 'principal premises', to effectively channel valuable but limited individual attentional resources. March and Olsen (1979) later specified these 'principal premises' as so-called 'attention structures'. Attention structures are essential to understand decision-making within firms as they distribute and regulate attention, determining an individual's behaviour.

Drawing on these ideas, Ocasio (1997) established the ABV, which conceptualizes firms as attention distribution systems. The ABV acknowledges limited attentional focus as the antecedent to imperfect decision-making and extends the idea of attention structures distributing attention and, hence, influencing decision-making within firms. The ABV defines attention broadly as 'the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort by organizational decision-makers on both (a) issues: the available repertoire of categories for making sense of the environment and (b) answers: the available repertoire of action alternatives' (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189). Overall, the ABV is based on three metatheoretical principles, which shape the distribution of attention within an organization.

Focus of attention (level of individual cognition). The individual's focus of attention is exclusive to certain issues and answers and determines individual action. In other words, what actors do depends on their limited attention (Cyert &

March, 1963; Simon, 1947, 1957). Consequently, firm-level behaviour as an aggregation of individual actions can be considered as the outcome of attentional focus.

Situated attention (level of social cognition). Situated attention indicates that the focus of attention, rather than being a purely intra-individual phenomenon, largely depends on the context an individual is located in at a certain point in time. In other words, the situational characteristics, shaped by the organization and embedded into the broader environment, afford a particular individual attentional focus. Ocasio (1997) argues that any situation comprises spatial, temporal and procedural dimensions (Stinchcombe, 1967) that influence which issues and answers become available and salient. Situated attention thus links the two other principles as the individual focus of attention depends on the situation and the situation is, in turn, shaped by the organization.

Structural distribution of attention (level of organization). This principle indicates that the situations in which individuals focus their attention are created and regulated by social, economic and cultural attention structures (March & Olsen, 1979). More specifically, Ocasio (1997) proposes that these attention structures consist of four interrelated attention regulators on the level of the organization which govern decision-makers' attention: structural positions, rules of the game, resources and players.

Thus, taken together, the ABV has established a nuanced theoretical framework in order to analyse the individual, contextual and structural antecedents of attention allocation, resulting in decision-making and organizational outcomes. Ultimately it is the individual attending to issues and answers that matters. Yet, the extent to which this occurs depends on the situations, embedded in organizational attention structures and the broader environmental context.

Based on these interrelated premises, the ABV provides a highly comprehensive theoretical framework that operates on different ontological levels and incorporates multiple and partly disparate constructs. In his seminal article, Ocasio (1997) described this circumstance as 'both a virtue and a weakness' (p. 204). Twenty-five years after its publication, we see the prognostic validity of this quote: on the one hand, the ABV's generality and high level of abstraction have led to broad connectivity to diverse topics and research areas (see Ocasio, 2011). Indeed, while originating in strategic management research, the ABV has been applied across various disciplines ranging from research on business ethics (e.g. Muller & Whiteman, 2016), human resources (e.g. Campion et al., 2020) and supply chain management (e.g. Lechner et al., 2020) to marketing (e.g. Kyriakopoulos et al., 2016) and sales (e.g. Friend et al., 2020).

Moreover, scholars have extended the ABV beyond its original scope. While the ABV explains attentional focus with structural and situational aspects (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189ff.), scholars have drawn on individual-level factors to approach attentional focus (see Taylor & Fiske, 1978). For instance, scholars have demonstrated a relationship between narcissism and top management's attention patterns (Chen et al., 2019; Gerstner et al., 2013). Similarly, in a rare application of the ABV to family business research, Kammerlander and Ganter (2015) show how family CEOs' attention allocation is influenced by their individual-level non-economic goals.

Overall, the ABV has become like a 'passe-partout'; it has allowed scholars to focus selectively on specific parts of the theory while ignoring others. Scholars have drawn heavily on the concept of attention structures and attention regulators (e.g. Brielmaier & Friesl, 2021; Ren & Guo, 2011; Stevens et al., 2015), while research on one of Ocasio's (1997) key concepts, 'situated attention', is in its infancy. Thus, this paper consolidates previous research and moves 'situated attention' to the centre of attention.

METHODOLOGY

In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the extant ABV-based research and suggest meaningful avenues for future ABV research, we conducted a systematic 'narrative review' of the field (Cronin & George, 2020). To do so, we identified and classified relevant articles in six steps (see Figure 1 for details). First, we used the Web of Science database (e.g. Maseda et al., 2021) to extract all peer-reviewed articles which cite Ocasio's (1997) seminal article. Second, we filtered all articles published in leading journals. Following multiple other reviews (e.g. Dean et al., 2019; Mallett et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2017), we defined leading journals as journals being rated at least as a 3 in the Academic Journal Guide of the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) from 2021. The rating is based on the journal's standardized impact factor. Journals that are rated 3 publish well-executed research and are highly regarded. We acknowledge recent criticism surrounding the use of academic journal guides (e.g. Tourish & Willmott, 2015), yet these guides provide a valid quality indicator (e.g. Baldacchino et al., 2015; Mallett et al., 2019) and thereby suit our purpose to provide a systematic review about the dispersed and extant ABV research (Andrews et al., 2022). Third, we excluded all articles not including the term *attention* in the title, abstract or keywords. Hence, our approach included articles that used variations such as 'inattention' or 'attentional'. Fourth, we reviewed the full text of 315 articles to exclude all those

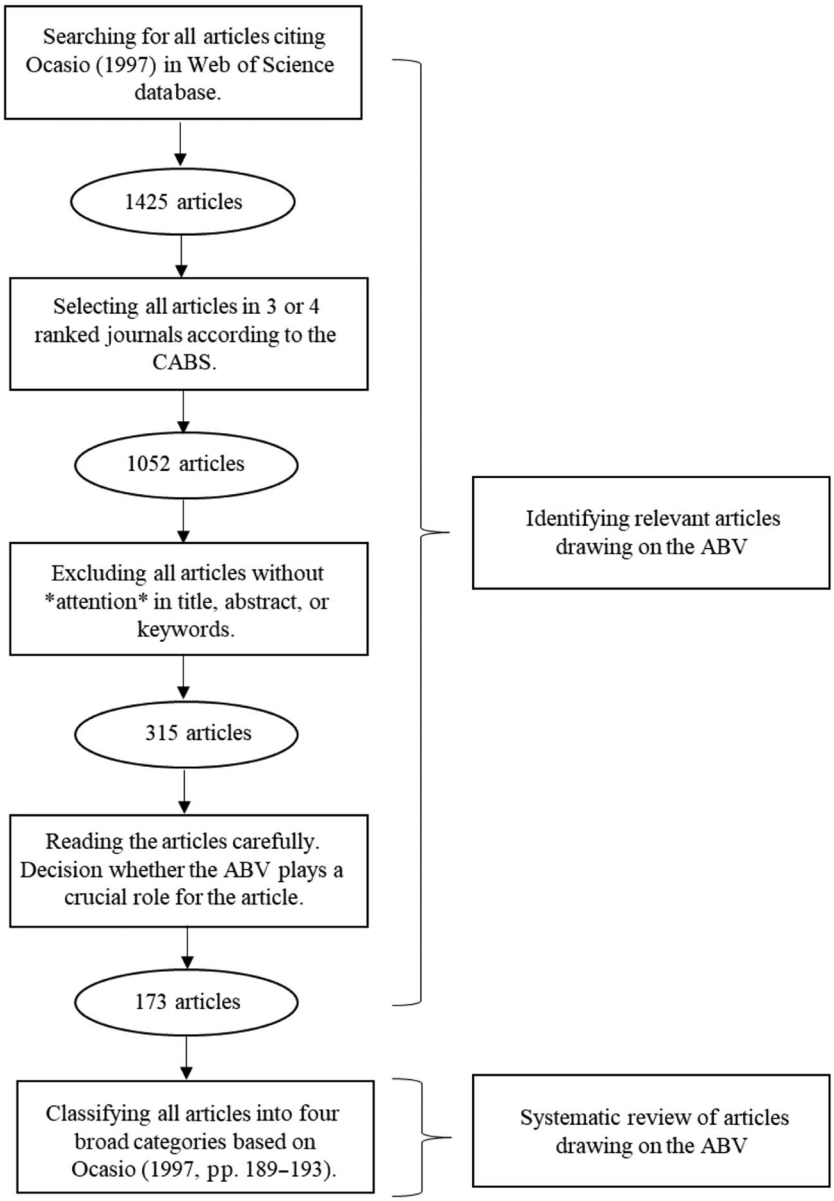

FIGURE 1 Review process

not actually building on the theoretical ideas of the ABV. This left us with 173 articles. Fifth, we organized the wide array of research based on the ABV. We did so by drawing on Ocasio's (1997, pp. 189–193) fundamental framework of attention allocation in organizations: while ultimately actors focus attention, they do so in particular situations shaped by organizational attention structures and embedded in the broader (environmental) context. This gives rise to four categories: focus of attention (I); attention structures (II); environmental embeddedness (III); and the particular situation (IV). Finally, we clustered similar research findings within these categories to further systematize the current state of ABV research. In particular, this allowed us to highlight research areas that are particularly advanced and those that constitute a gap for further research.

REVIEW OF ABV-BASED STUDIES

As described above, the following subsections draw on four categories to organize ABV-based research. Our approach implies two different understandings of attention. While research classified into the category 'focus of attention' understands attention as a variable to explain firm outcomes and firm behaviour, research in the other

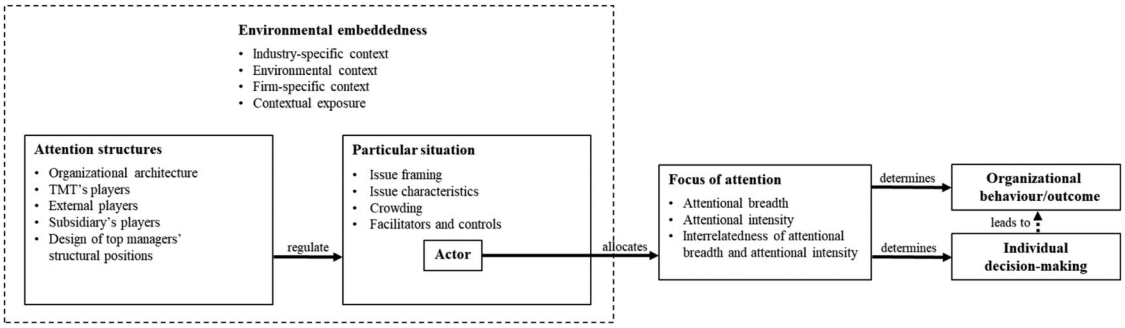

FIGURE 2 Consolidated model of the ABV and ABV-based research

three categories understands attention as a variable to be explained and thus draws on the very essence of Ocasio (1997). Figure 2 consolidates this research into a unifying framework of the ABV.

Focus of attention (I)

A substantial body of ABV-based work is devoted to 'focus of attention' to explain individual decision-making as well as strategic and organizational phenomena. This idea is predominantly grounded in the Carnegie assumption that 'what decision-makers do depends on what issues and answers they focus their attention on' (Ocasio, 1997, p. 188) and resonates with the core idea of environmental scanning in the upper-echelon literature (e.g. Hambrick, 1982). Scholars, exploring the consequences of attention focus, have considered themes of relevance to management and strategy such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) (e.g. Ahn, 2020; Muller & Whiteman, 2016), innovation (e.g. Chen et al., 2015; Srivastava et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2007), headquarters–subsidiary relationships (e.g. Ambos & Birkinshaw, 2010; Bouquet et al., 2009; Y. Yu et al., 2019) and performance (e.g. Posen & Martignoni, 2018; Surroca et al., 2016; Walrave et al., 2017).

These studies have (mainly) drawn on two forms of attention focus in order to explain these outcomes: attentional intensity and attentional breadth, which both imply attentional selection (cf. Ocasio, 2011). Table 1 provides an overview of these studies.

Attentional intensity

Attentional intensity describes the amount of attention focused on a selected issue (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kahneman, 1973). In an early study, Yadav et al. (2007) show that the intensity of CEOs' attention allocation to objects outside the firm (external focus) and events in the future (future focus) explain differences between firms' innovation outcomes. Similarly, for a sample of Chinese firms, Chen et al. (2015) demonstrate that the amount of top management's attention to innovation is related to a firm's innovative outcomes. Overall, innovative outcomes seem to depend on a certain minimum attention of decision-makers (e.g. Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Yadav et al., 2007) and seem to be sensitive to the diversion of attention to unrelated issues (Mithani, 2017; Srivastava et al., 2021).

Attentional breadth

Attentional breadth describes the amount of issues selectively attended to at a particular time (Pringle et al., 2001; Rowe et al., 2007). In an early study, Levy (2005) demonstrates that top management's attentional focus to diverse issues ('attentional breadth') of the external environment—such as competitors, customers or strategic partners—explains a firm's degree of internationalization. Muller and Whiteman (2016) find that firms' philanthropic action as a response to humanitarian disaster can be explained by top management's attention to people inside the organization. This effect is, however, contingent on top management's simultaneous attention on affected locations and practices of philanthropy in general. Similarly, Ahn (2020) demonstrates that CEOs' attentional breadth to diverse areas—specifically environmental, social and governance domains—is related to a firm's sustainability performance. Overall, firms' internationalization and CSR activity seems to be associated with top managers' attention to multiple different issues (e.g. Ahn, 2020; Levy, 2005).

Interrelatedness of attentional intensity and attentional breadth

Most recent studies, however, do not study 'attentional breadth' and 'attentional intensity' in isolation but as interrelated constructs. Due to the finite nature of attention,

TABLE 1 Illustrative ABV-based studies exploring the consequences of attentional focus

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	Explained outcome	Key finding(s)
Attentional intensity				
2007	Yadav et al., *Journal of Marketing*	CEO	Innovation performance	CEOs' attentional intensity on future related aspects and the external environment explains a firm's innovation performance.
2009	Eggers and Kaplan, *Organizational Science*	CEO	Timing of a firm's entry into a new technology	CEOs' attentional intensity on new technology accelerates firms' market entry in new technology. The effect is strengthened by the firm's degree of (attentional) orientation (cf. Ocasio, 2011) towards the industry in which the new technology is emerging.
2010	Ambos and Birkinshaw, *Management International Review*	TMT (of HQ)	Subsidiary performance	The intensity of HQ attention explains subsidiaries' performance if these subsidiaries have a high level of strategic choice.
2015	Chen et al., *Journal of Business Research*	TMT	Innovation performance	CEOs' attentional intensity on innovation is related to firms' innovation performance.
2016	Surroca et al., *Strategic Management Journal*	CEO	Firm performance	Groups of CEOs in an industry focus attention in a similar way (see Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001: industry-level attention). This focus of attention (and its intensity) explains firms' performance. The study has important implications for the measurement of attention with shareholder letters.
2017	Brown et al., *Journal of Business Research*	TMT	Firm value	TMT attentional intensity on trade shows is related to a higher firm value.
2019	Yu et al., *Long Range Planning*	HQ	Subsidiary reverse knowledge transfer	HQ attention is related to the subsidiary's reverse knowledge transfer. The authors argue that the knowledge transfer addresses higher performance expectancies coming along with HQ attention.
2019	Frankenberger and Sauer, *Long Range Planning*	TMT	Business model innovations	Business model innovations depend on which stimuli are selectively attended to with which intensity.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	Explained outcome	Key finding(s)
Attentional breadth				
2005	Levy, *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*	TMT	Internationalization	TMT's attentional breadth to different aspects of the external environment is related to a higher degree of internationalization.
2016	Muller and Whiteman, *Journal of Business Ethics*	Organization	Philanthropic action	Organizational attentional breadth to people, places and philanthropy explains firms' philanthropic actions.
2019	Lee and Griffiths, *Journal of International Marketing*	Organization	Firm growth	MNE's simultaneous attentional focus on country-specific customer engagement and standardized marketing strategy implementation is positively related to MNE's growth.
2020	Ahn, *Journal of Business Ethics*	CEO	Sustainability performance	CEO's attentional breadth on diverse CSR dimensions is related to a firm's overall sustainability performance.
Interrelatedness of attentional intensity and attentional breadth				
2008	Bouquet et al., *Journal of International Business Studies*	TMT (of HQ)	MNE performance	The relationship between international attention of the headquarters' TMT and MNE performance is inverted u-shaped. High attentional intensity on internationalization issues goes at the expense of attention to other performance-relevant issues.
2013	Li et al., *Academy of Management Journal*	TMT	New product innovations	TMT search based on selective attention (search selection) on unfamiliar, distant and diverse stimuli is related to more new product introductions, while attention intensity (search intensity) on these stimuli reduces new product introductions.
2017	Mithani, *Long Range Planning*	Organization	Financial performance	Due to limited organizational attention resources, the effect of R&D on a firm's performance is undermined by a simultaneous attentional focus (attentional breadth) on CSR.
2018	Ford et al., *Industrial Marketing Management*	Organization	New product innovations	Deep embeddedness with (high attentional intensity to) either customers or suppliers is positively related to new product innovations. Due to limited attentional resources, intensively attending both parties simultaneously is inhibiting innovations.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	Explained outcome	Key finding(s)
2018	Rhee and Leonardi, *Strategic Management Journal*	Employee	Good ideas	Contrary to the variance hypothesis, employees with a constrained network develop good ideas if they intensively focus their attention on new information. Employees with a broad network develop good ideas by broadening their attention to the various inputs they receive.
2018	Filiou and Massini, *R&D Management*	Organization	Innovation performance	Inverted u-shaped relationship between number of intra (inter)-industry alliances and innovation performance. Intra (inter)-industry alliances offer less (more) distant knowledge but require lower (higher) attentional intensity to make use of his knowledge.
2020	Wang et al., *European Journal of Marketing*	Organization	New product innovations	Internal R&D and external knowledge acquisitions can be substitutes in emerging markets. Broadening attention to both simultaneously overstrains limited attentional resources.
2021	Eklund and Mannor, *Academy of Management Journal*	Top manager	Performance	Attentional breadth of top managers (in comparison to attentional intensity) is associated with superior firms' performance in weak (in comparison to strong) opportunity environments.
2021	Srivastava et al., *Journal of Business Venturing*	CEO	New product innovations	CEO's attentional intensity on R&D, customers and competitors, as well as CEO's alertness (see vigilance, Ocasio, 2011) explain new product innovations. The relationship between CEO alertness (to opportunities) and new product innovations is inverted u-shaped as broadening attentional focus on too many opportunities hurts the ability to realize them due to limited (attentional) resources (cf. Belkhouja et al., 2021).

attending to multiple issues and answers at a particular time limits the amount of attentional resources which can be devoted to each of these issues and vice versa (cf. Kahneman, 1973). Indeed, Bouquet et al. (2009) explain multinationals' performance with headquarters executives' international attention. The authors find an inverse u-shaped relationship between international attention and overall performance. This indicates that an overinvestment of limited attention on internationalization (high attentional intensity) issues goes at the expense of attention to other strategic imperatives (less attentional breadth), impairing the firm's overall performance. In a pioneering article, Li et al. (2013) provide a nuanced case of how top management's attentional breadth and intensity is translated into innovative outcomes. They assume that how the top management team (TMT) invests their limited attention determines the design of the organizational search process, which explains product innovations; selective search based on attentional selection and search intensity based on attentional intensity. Simplified, the authors find that the TMT's selective attention to unfamiliar, distant and diverse stimuli explains new product innovations, while a high intensity of the TMT's attentional focus on such stimuli is negatively related to new product innovations. The latter finding was contrary to the authors' hypothesis. An explanation for this unexpected result might be that devoting a significant amount of limited attention (more attentional intensity) to selected stimuli implies less attention for other stimuli (less attentional breadth). This may reduce the search breadth and variance connected to fewer innovation outcomes. Yet, evidence regarding these arguments is mixed (Belkhouja et al., 2021; Dahlander et al., 2016; Eklund & Mannor et al., 2021; Rhee & Leonardi, 2018; Wu, 2014), calling for future research on how attentional breadth and attentional intensity explain firm outcomes in different contexts.

Overall, limited attentional resources imply the existence of a 'sweet spot' of attentional breadth and attentional intensity (cf. Dahlander et al., 2016; Li et al., 2013). If the greatest amount of organizational attention is devoted to a narrow set of issues, implying scant attention to other issues, negative consequences for firms may occur (Bouquet et al., 2009; Filiou & Massini, 2018; Rerup, 2009). However, the same applies if organizational attention is allocated to multiple issues simultaneously, implying low attentional intensity on these stimuli (Bauer & Friesl, 2022; Ford et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020; Wu, 2014) and the risk of 'attentional overload' (Castellaneta & Zollo, 2015).

To sum up, this research demonstrates the importance of attention allocation for organizational and strategic outcomes. As attention is scarce, in Simon's (1973, p. 270) words, 'the chief bottleneck in organizational activity', small differences in how decision-makers allocate attention to issues and answers might have a dramatic effect on firm behaviour and outcomes (Dessein & Santos, 2021). This highlights the significance of explaining how attention (with a certain intensity) to (diverse) issues and answers emerges—the core point the ABV makes.

Attention structures (II)

In this subsection, we review studies that investigate the structural conditions of attention allocation. Rediscovering the work of Simon (1947), the ABV emphasizes the role of structural characteristics for distributing limited attention within firms. More specifically, the particular situation in which individuals are located in and how they attend to its issues and answers depends on the firm's economic, cultural and social structures, or the 'attention structures' in Ocasio's (1997) words. He proposes that these attention structures consist of four broad 'attention regulators': the rules of the game, resources, structural positions and players. These regulators influence attention allocation to a limited number of issues and answers according to priorities, translate them into clear channels and provide individuals with 'ready-made' systems of identities and interests. The idea of firms structuring the attention of their members and thus their actions has led to a plethora of studies from diverse areas (see Table 2 for an overview).

Organizational architecture

Several studies examined how organizational architecture influences attentional allocation. Drawing on a broad set of data, including archival data, Ocasio and Joseph (2008) describe how different CEOs of General Electric between 1940 and 2006 created different, as the authors call it, 'governance channels' shaping how corporate executives allocated attention to strategic planning tasks. Overall, the authors demonstrate that governance channels following certain rules of the game and including certain players occupying certain positions with access to certain resources were an instrument for different CEOs to regulate individuals' attention and drive their own strategic agenda. Similarly, Joseph and Ocasio (2012) analyse how the organizational architecture and its governance channels influenced strategic adaptation at General Electric between 1951 and 2001. The authors reveal that cross-level governance channels that were both specialized and cross-functional allowed General Electric to integrate different attentional foci ('attention integration') of different corporate and business units. By fostering collective interactions, these channels enabled the alignment of units' different perceptions and the coordination of specialized

TABLE 2 Illustrative ABV-based studies explaining attention with a firm's attention structures

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
Organizational architecture				
2001	Newburry, *Journal of International Business Studies*	Employee	Office structures	The office structure guides employees' attention on potential career benefits emerging from the firm's global activity. Employees in offices with greater (lower) interdependence to other offices rather attend to positive (negative) career aspects of their firm's global activity.
2008	Ocasio and Joseph, *Long Range Planning*	Strategic planner	Governance channels	GE's CEOs shaped specialized 'governance channels'. These governance channels were an instrument to focus attention on strategic planning tasks in a certain manner and thus to form and control the strategic agenda.
2012	Joseph and Ocasio, *Strategic Management Journal*	Business unit	Organizational architecture	GE's organizational architecture (between 1951 and 2006) affected adaptive change at the business unit level. The presence of cross-functional and specialized channels allowed GE attentional integration between business units and specialized attention of business units, which allowed them to coordinate and realize the adaption to change.
2016	Vuori and Huy, *Administrative Science Quarterly*	Top manager and middle manager	Fear across organizational structures	Due to fear of competitors, Nokia's top managers exerted pressure on middle managers. They were afraid of their supervisors and top management influencing attending to threats and communication of threats. Due to the shared fear, attentional integration failed. Top managers were over-optimistic about technological capabilities, neglecting necessary investments.
2018	Joseph and Wilson, *Strategic Management Journal*	Business unit	Organizational tensions between business units	Attention structures (enabling attentional integration and attentional specialization; see Joseph & Ocasio, 2012) give rise to constructive and destructive organizational tensions. Constructive tensions may lead to attention on new issues and answers, resulting in the delineation of new, specialized subunits.
2019	Dutt and Joseph, *Academy of Management Journal*	HQ and subsidiary	Corporate structure	The corporate structure influences attentional processing and thus strategic agendas in times of regulatory uncertainty. In such times, HQ are more willing to direct attention to alternative strategic actions than subsidiaries.

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
TMT players				
2006	Cho and Hambrick, *Organization Science*	Organization	Changes in TMT	Airlines particularly increased their attention on entrepreneurial issues, particularly after changes of TMT composition (e.g. increase of TMT heterogeneity) following a substantial regulation change (see IIIa, industry-specific context).
2010a	Tuggle et al., *Academy of Management Journal*	Board of directors	Director diversity	Tenure variance, firm/industry background heterogeneity, weak faultlines (see Lau & Murnighan, 2005) and the proportion of directors with output-oriented backgrounds are related to attentional intensity on entrepreneurial issues in board meetings.
2016	Bjornali et al., *Long Range Planning*	TMT	TMT diversity	TMT diversity (e.g. education and founding experience) is related to TMT effectiveness. TMT diversity may be related to attentional breadth, including attention to distant but valuable opportunities (see also van Doorn et al., 2013).
2018	Koryak et al., *Research Policy*	TMT	TMT diversity	TMT diversity (regarding expertise and background) is related to attention to exploration. This is strengthened by TMT team size, increasing attentional breadth on opportunities.
2018	Galbreath, *Business Strategy and the Environment*	Board of directors	Stakeholder debate and women on the board	The presence of stakeholder debates (as norms for the rules of the game) is related to boards' attention on sustainable corporate development. This effect is strengthened by the presence of female players on the board.
2020	Fu et al., *Strategic Management Journal*	TMT	Presence of a CSO	The presence of a CSO in the TMT channels TMTs' attention on CSR issues, resulting in stronger CSR performance.
2021	Umashankar et al., *Journal of Marketing*	Board of directors	Presence of marketing players	The presence of marketing players on the board of directors channels the board's attention to customer-related issues, mitigating the negative effect of mergers and acquisitions on customer satisfaction.
2021	Lee, *Academy of Management Perspectives*	TMT, board of directors	Presence of HR players	The presence of HR players on the board of directors or TMT may broaden the TMT's or board's attention to HR-related issues, which otherwise may be neglected.
2021	Evans et al., *Business & Society*	Organization	Presence of community influentials	The presence of community influentials on a board can increase a firm's attention to CSR and thus a firm's performance in this domain. This effect is contingent on the number of other board ties of community influentials and a firm's prior CSR performance.

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
External players				
2018	Maula et al., *Organization Science*	Top managers	Heterophilous and homophilous ties	Organizations' heterophilous ties to external players (e.g. to venture capitalists due to co-investments) are related to top managers' timely attention to technological discontinuities. This effect is moderated by the status of the external partner.
2020	Dhanorkar et al., *Management Science*	Organization	Regulatory agencies' tactics	Regulatory agencies (as external players) are able to direct attention to environmental improvement implementations depending on timing, severity and relatedness of punitive tactics complementing supportive tactics
2020	Zhong et al., *Academy of Management Journal*	Top managers	Customers	Major customers channel top managers' attention to familiar issues and answers, resulting in deep search in this area while decreasing search breadth in new areas.
Subsidiaries' (players) and HQ's attention allocation				
2008	Bouquet and Birkinshaw, *Academy of Management Journal*	HQ	Players and position of subsidiary	A subsidiary's voice (players engaging in profile-building and initiative-taking) and weight (structural position of subsidiary) explain HQ's attention to the subsidiary.
2014	Plourde, *Strategic Management Journal*	HQ	Expatriates	Expatriates are able to draw HQ's attention to their host subsidiary. This is the case in the specific context of growth (see IIIb, firm-specific context).
2015	Monteiro, *Journal of International Business Studies*	HQ manager	Subsidiary manager	HQ managers tend to favour attending familiar opportunities stemming from subsidiaries. Subsidiary managers active in issue-selling help to redirect HQ managers' attention to distant opportunities and thus overcome this familiarity bias.
2021	Weng and Cheng, *Global Strategy Journal*	HQ	Procedural justice	HQ's procedural justice is negatively related to attention disparity (i.e. the unequal distribution of HQ's attention to subsidiaries). This effect is moderated by factors such as subsidiary initiative or subsidiary capability.

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
Design of top managers' structural positions				
2010b	Tuggle et al., *Strategic Management Journal*	Board of directors	CEO duality	CEO duality reduces boards' attention to monitoring (deviation from prior performance increases boards' attention to monitoring; see IIIb, firm-specific context).
2015	Knockaert et al., *Journal of Business Venturing*	Board of directors	CEO duality	CEO duality diverts the board's attention from service tasks in early-stage high-tech firms.
2018	Deman et al., *Journal of Small Business Management*	Board of directors	CEO duality	The study specifies earlier results on board monitoring and CEO duality: CEO duality reduces boards' attention on behavioural control tasks, while the other monitoring tasks are not affected.
2021	Torres and Augusto, *Tourism Management*	Organization	CEO duality	CEO duality allowed CEOs to vectorize organizational attention to CSR. This was related to higher resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector.
Attention regulators and other outcomes				
2011	Ren and Guo, *Journal of Management*	Middle manager	Attention structures/regulators	Theoretical article that uses the notion of attention regulators to consider how middle managers allocate their attention to different types (exploratory and exploitative) of opportunities. For instance, they argue that middle managers occupying boundary-spanning structural positions are more likely to attend to exploratory, distant opportunities outside the organization.
2012	Crilly and Sloan, *Strategic Management Journal*	Organization	TMT's stakeholder conceptualization	The qualitative study proposes that how top managers conceptualize the relationship between the firm and the society (in other words, which rules of the game they create) determines a firm's ability to focus attention on multiple stakeholders simultaneously (see also Crilly & Sloan, 2012).
2015	Stevens et al., *Strategic Management Journal*	CEO	Ocasio's (1997) four attention regulators	Firms with a low utilitarian identity (as rules of the game), the availability of slack resources and CEOs (as players) scoring high on other-regarding values pay more attention to social goals (in comparison to economic goals).
2021	Brielmaier and Friesl, *Strategic Organization*	Employee	Clash between different attention structures	This theory article argues that participation in open strategy initiatives is the result of 'attention contests'. These attention contests emerge as tensions between the attention regulators of the regular organization and the open strategy initiatives that occur.

tasks ('specialized attention'). This ultimately facilitated successful strategic adaptation. In a related pioneering study, Vuori and Huy (2016) show how Nokia failed to achieve attentional integration across its organizational structures, with serious consequences for its competitive position. This was because fear across different organizational levels prevailed. Top managers experiencing fear of external threats exerted pressure on middle managers, exacerbating their internal fear. This led middle managers to focus on avoiding negative internal consequences by diverting attention away from external threats and not communicating openly with top managers. In line with Joseph and Ocasio (2012), fear undermined the purpose of governance/communication channels in aligning different levels and enabling strategic adaption. In another related study, Joseph and Wilson (2018) provide an attention-based view on firm organic growth. The authors explain how (organizational) attention structures, allowing attention integration between units and attention specialization within a unit (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012), give rise to organizational tensions. These tensions may be both destructive and constructive. For instance, if units focus on a similar problem with another solution, constructive tensions in the form of fruitful competition (over technology, resources, the right activities along the value chain, etc.) may emerge. The authors propose that such constructive organizational tensions may allow firms to overcome established patterns of attention to focus on new issues, reflected in the delineation of new specialized subunits.

TMT players

In recent years, multiple studies have explored how different players in the TMT influence organizational attention and behaviour differently (Ocasio, 1997, p. 197). Cho and Hambrick (2006) show that, following a substantial regulation change in the industry, airlines increased their attention on entrepreneurial issues (see IIIb, industry-specific context), especially after personal changes on the level of the TMT. For instance, shorter tenures of players in the TMT, more output-oriented functional experiences and an increase of demographic diversity were related to an airline's increased entrepreneurial attention. Similarly, a recent study by Fu et al. (2020) suggests that the appearance of a new player in the TMT influences its attentional processing and thus a firm's performance. Drawing on a sample of S&P 500 firms, the authors show that the presence of a chief sustainability officer is positively associated with corporate social performance. More precisely, firms with a chief sustainability officer are more intensely engaged in reducing socially irresponsible activities than in increasing socially responsible activities. This points to a negativity bias in how limited attention is allocated by the top management (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Similarly, Umashankar et al. (2021) find that marketing players on the boards of directors direct a firm's attention to customer-related issues. Specifically, marketing players mitigate the negative effect of mergers and acquisitions on customer satisfaction, which emerges as top managers' attention is diverted away from customers to financial figures. Lee (2021) draws on a similar argument. He argues that firms would profit from HR players on boards or TMTs as they would influence decision-makers' attention to otherwise not considered but relevant HR-related issues and answers. The underlying idea of these studies is that diverse players in the TMT help to increase a firm's attentional breadth to otherwise unattended issues and answers, and thus extend the firm's behavioural repertoire (see also Bjornali et al., 2016; Brandes et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2020; Galbreath, 2018).

External players

In addition to internal players, research has also provided insights into the role of external players for how issues and answers are attended to. Maula et al. (2013) examine how a firm's relationships with external players influence top management's attention to discontinuous technological change. Heterophilous ties (with high-status venture capitalists) are positively related to timely attention to discontinuous technological change, while homophilous relationships (e.g. alliances with peers) have no impact on timely attention to discontinuous technological change. Dhanorkar et al. (2018) examine when external players like regulatory agencies are able to foster environmental initiatives in firms with punitive tactics to force this change or supportive tactics to encourage it. Their key finding is that the timing of the different tactics is crucial to direct managerial attention to environmental efforts. Punitive tactics before the initiation of environmental initiatives, followed by supportive tactics, are more likely to lead to successful environmental initiatives.

Subsidiary players and headquarters' attention

International business scholars have applied the concept of attention structures to study why headquarters (HQ) allocate more attention to some subsidiaries in comparison to others (see Andrews et al., 2022). Bouquet and Birkinshaw (2008), for instance, show that HQ's attention to subsidiaries is channelled by (a) the voice, alias the managerial players of the subsidiary engaging in profile-building and initiative-taking and (b) the weight, alias

the structural position a subsidiary occupies in the corporation due to its strategic significance (cf. Gorgijevski et al., 2019). The impact of subsidiary voice on HQ's attention is moderated by geographical distance and downstream competence (see IIIb, firm-specific context). For instance, increasing geographical distance strengthens the effect of subsidiary players' initiative-taking to win HQ's attention. Plourde et al. (2014) add expatriates as players to the equation. They show that expatriates are particularly helpful in drawing HQ's attention to their host subsidiary if the subsidiary and its market are growing. Monteiro (2015) demonstrates that the efforts of the subsidiary managers ('players') are not only crucial to win HQ's attention for their subsidiary, but also to guide HQ's attention to distant knowledge generated in subsidiaries. This is particularly important as HQ prefer to attend to familiar knowledge over distant knowledge (cf. Piezunka & Dahlander, 2015) coming from subsidiaries (Monteiro, 2015).

Design of top managers' structural positions

Studies have also explored the influence of the design of structural positions on attention allocation. More specifically, several studies have investigated the influence of board duality on attention allocation. Tuggle et al. (2010b) find that the presence of CEO duality reduces the board of directors' attention to monitoring. The authors argue that CEO duality is related to a climate or, in other words, to 'rules of the game', in which it is considered inappropriate to monitor or question the CEO's work due to her/his extensive power. Similarly, Knockaert et al. (2015) reveal that the presence of CEO duality is negatively related to board service involvement. Deman et al. (2018) specify the results regarding CEO duality for privately held firms. The authors find that CEO duality is negatively related to the board's attention on behavioural control, while the board's attention on other monitoring tasks is not influenced. Behavioural control means directly controlling the CEO's efforts and behaviour.

Environmental embeddedness (III)

Besides organizational factors, the ABV highlights the importance of the broader external context, or what Ocasio (1997, p. 194) calls 'environmental embeddedness', to explain how attention to issues and answers emerges. Prior ABV research makes four distinct arguments regarding the influence of environmental embeddedness on attention allocation (see Table 3).

Environmental context

Several studies have examined the influence of broader environmental contexts on organizational attention allocation. For instance, McCann and Bahl (2017) investigate the influence of the competitive and regulatory context on a firm's new product development by drawing on the ABV. They find a positive relationship between the level of informal competition and new product development activities, suggesting that informal competition directs attention to new product development as an adequate answer to this form of competitive pressure. The relationship is weakened by the level of formal competition diverting attention away from internal competitors as well as the regulatory context, such as the prevalence of irregular payments to regulatory officials making other options than new product development available. In another study, McCann and Shinkle (2017) examine the contextual conditions of firms setting (not profit-maximizing) fair prices. They reveal that attention to fair prices, and thus their realization, is more likely in an institutional context with a greater humane orientation and a weaker rule of law due to less established institutions as well as (perceived) relational fairness between a firm and its suppliers and customers.

Industry-specific context

In early ABV-based studies, Cho and Hambrick (2006) as well as Nadkarni and Barr (2008) demonstrate empirically that managerial attention is situated in the broader industry context. Cho and Hambrick (2006) show that the TMT's attention allocation in the airline industry shifted if industry-specific deregulations took place. Nadkarni and Barr (2008) show that the industry context, specifically the industry velocity, influences managerial attention focus, reflected in the speed of strategic responses to environmental changes.

Firm-specific context

Moreover, apart from the industry-specific and broader environmental context, prior research has also studied the firm-specific context on attention allocation. In an early ABV-based study, J. Yu et al. (2005) consider the influence of the firm-specific context instead of the industry or broader environmental context on managerial attention. Drawing on an 8-year ethnographic study, they examine top management attention distribution in meetings after a merger in the healthcare sector. They show that the post-merger integration context directed the top

TABLE 3 Illustrative ABV-based studies explaining attention with a firm's environmental embeddedness

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
Industry-specific context				
2006	Cho and Hambrick, *Organization Science*	Organization	Industry-specific change	Industry-specific deregulation in the airline industry led to a change in airlines' attention allocation.
2008	Nadkarni and Barr, *Organization Science*	Top manager	Industry-specific velocity	The industry-specific velocity top managers are confronted with influences their attentional focus and their causal logic about their environment, which in turn influences strategic action.
2022	Ghobadian et al., *British Journal of Management*	Organization	Industry-specific dynamics	The industry-specific dynamic moderates whether organizations attribute the causes of disruption to COVID-19 and thus allocate attention to it. This finding holds for US but not Chinese firms, with stronger focus on government and market demands.
Environmental context				
2017	McCann and Bahl, *Strategic Management Journal*	Organization	Informal competition and institutional context	Informal competition directs attention to new product development. This effect is weakened by the formal competition and institutional context (prevalence of irregular payments and regulatory optimism), diverting attention from the answer of new product development.
2017	McCann and Shinkle, *Journal of Management Studies*	Organization	Institutional context	Firms' attention to fair prices is related to the greater humane orientation in the broader firms' environment, less developed institutions (i.e. weaker rule of law) and fair treatment between supplier and customers.
2021	Lingens et al., *Long Range Planning*	Organization (in an ecosystem)	Environmental uncertainty	By drawing on the ABV, the authors make several propositions regarding ecosystems. For instance, environmental uncertainty may reflect in an ecosystem's smaller size and multilaterality as an orchestrator's attentional resources are bound to deal with this uncertainty.
Firm-specific context				
2005	Yu et al., *Organization Studies*	Top manager	Post-merger integration context	The post-merger integration in which the firm was embedded directed top managers' attention to integration issues while attention was diverted from essential tasks around patient care.
2010b	Tuggle et al., *Strategic Management Journal*	CEO	Performance below aspiration level	(Firm's specific context of) negative deviation from prior performance directs a board's attention to monitoring.

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
2015	Stevens et al., *Strategic Management Journal*	CEO	Performance below aspiration level	Performance below the aspiration level negatively impacts CEO's relative attention to social goals in for-profit social enterprises.
2016	He and Fang, *Corporate Governance: An International Review*	Board of directors	Firm-specific contextual conditions	If executive compensation disclosure is mandatory, the firm is index-included and the firm is younger, board of director's attention is directed to overpaid CEO as cause of poor firm performance.
2016	Behrens and Patzelt, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*	Managers	Firm's growth	The context of firm growth negatively influences managers' attention allocation on project terminations.
2017	McCann and Shinkle, *Journal of Management Studies*	Organization	Performance below aspiration level	Performance below the aspiration level negatively impacts firms' attention to fair prices.
2020	McCann and Shinkle, *Journal of Management Studies*	Organization	Performance below aspiration level	Performance below the aspiration level triggers attention to the straightforward, heuristic solution of product termination.
Contextual exposure				
2013	Fernhaber and Li, *Journal of Business Venturing*	Young venture	Internationalization of peers	The internationalization degree of geographically proximate firms or (substitutive) alliance partners, in other words the contextual exposure to internationalization activities, draws young ventures' attention to this strategic option.
2015	Durand and Jacqueminet, *Journal of International Business Studies*	Subsidiary	CSR activities of peers	Greater conformity of external peers to external parties' (e.g. local authorities') norms channels subsidiaries' attention to these norms, while greater conformity of internal peers to the HQ's norm channels attention to both the HQ's as well as the external parties' norms. With regard to the latter point, focusing on both norms may have complementary effects in increasing subsidiaries' visibility to the HQ.
2020	Angulo-Ruiz et al., *Journal of Business Research*	Social hybrid firm	Internationalization of peers and local ties	The internationalization degree of peers channels social hybrid firms' attention to internationalization activities, while (local) social networks and (local) government support make the strategic option of internationalization less available.

management's attention to internal integration issues of the one business unit while diverting attention away from core topics like patient care or the integration between the business units. Likewise, in their article on attention to fair prices, McCann and Shinkle (2017) also reveal such a diversion effect. They find that prior performance below the aspiration level is related to economic, profit-maximizing prices—suggesting that attention is diverted away from non-profit goals. These findings are mirrored by Washburn and Bromiley (2012) and Stevens et al. (2015). Relatedly, McCann and Shinkle (2020) demonstrate a positive relationship between product termination decisions in small and medium enterprises and performance below aspiration. The authors argue that managers with scarce attentional resources are attracted by the straightforward, heuristic solution of product termination. Overall, these papers indicate how attention allocation is shaped by a complex set of different firm-specific contextual factors. They involve a firm's current performance level (McCann & Shinkle, 2020), its inclusion in a stock index (He & Fang, 2016) or if a firm is occupied with the integration of acquired firms (J. Yu et al., 2005).

Contextual exposure

Prior research also shows that a firm's exposure to certain issues and answers via its context influences how firms attend to these issues and answers. For instance, in the context of young ventures, Fernhaber and Li (2013) find that internationalization is positively associated with the degree of internationalization of geographically proximate firms as well as alliance partners. They argue that contextual exposure to internationalization efforts of other organizations in their vicinity directs managers' attention to internationalization opportunities; in other words, it makes them more available. Based on the same theoretical argument, Angulo-Ruiz et al. (2020) show that social hybrid firms are more likely to internationalize if other social hybrid firms in their environment are active in international markets. In contrast, the authors of this study also suggest that social network ties, as well as government support, reduce internationalization activity, making local answers more available and thus directing organizational attention in this direction.

Particular situation (IV)

Finally, we focus on studies considering the characteristics of a particular situation to explain attention allocation. Indeed, prior research in social psychology implies that characteristics of a particular situation are more powerful to explain attentional processing than the characteristics of a person (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). As described above, the notion of 'situated attention' is the central contribution of the ABV. It emphasizes the salience of particular situations. Within these particular situations, individuals' attentional focus as a prerequisite of behaviour (Cyert & March, 1963; March et al., 1958; Simon, 1957) is shaped by organizational attention structures (March & Olsen, 1979; Simon, 1947). Still, despite its prominence in the ABV, few studies have focused on how attention unfolds in particular situations, or how the peculiar issues embedded in situations affect actors' attention allocation (see Table 4 for an overview).

Issue framing

One group of studies has examined when issues are able to capture top managers' attention. For instance, Dutton et al. (2001) showed that how issues are framed explains whether top managers' attention is attracted in specific situations. For instance, issues tied to valued goals and presented in a recognized logic had a higher probability of winning top management's attention. Similar results were reported by Gorgijevski et al. (2019), highlighting the importance of presentation tactics and issue bundling for attracting HQ managers' attention for subsidiary initiatives. Another important factor in attracting HQ managers' attention is the right timing of initiatives' 'non-disclosure' to avoid HQ managers' negative attention in the early phases of the initiatives and 'initiative selling efforts' (Cavanagh et al., 2021).

Issue characteristics

Other studies have focused on the characteristics of issues to explain how attention is situated in a particular context. In their theory article, McMullen et al. (2009) propose that the characteristics of threats that middle managers are exposed to are decisive for their situated detection and communication. More negative and recent threats—in other words, salient threats—are more likely to attract middle managers' attention and lead to stronger appeals of middle managers. Similarly, Haas et al. (2015) explain attention allocation of employees in an online community in which knowledge providers are invited to answer to problems of other community members. They show that situated attention allocation to problems depends on the characteristics of the potential knowledge provider, as well as the characteristics of the problem. The congruence of the problem to the knowledge provider's expertise is related to the probability that the provider pays

TABLE 4 Illustrative ABV-based studies explaining how attention is situated in the particular context

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
Issue framing				
2001	Dutton et al., *Academy of Management Journal*	Top manager	Presentation of issues	Issues that are bundled with other, strategically relevant issues and that are presented with a certain logic at a certain time are more likely to win top managers' attention.
2019	Gorgijevski et al., *Journal of International Management*	Top manager (of HQ)	Presentation of issues (by subsidiary top manager)	Transfer of Dutton et al.'s (2001) results to subsidiary HQ level. Subsidiary top managers bundling issues with other, strategically relevant issues and presenting them with a certain logic are more likely to win HQ's attention.
2021	Cavanagh et al., *Global Strategy Journal*	Top manager (of HQ)	Presentation of issues (by subsidiary top manager)	Subsidiary top managers' timing (see situation's temporal dimension, Ocasio, 1997, p. 195) in issue-selling is crucial to winning HQ top managers' attention.
Issue characteristics				
2009	McMullen et al., *Journal of Management Studies*	Middle manager	Threat characteristics	Whether a threat captures middle managers' situated attention may depend on its recency and negativity. See negativity bias (e.g. Rozin & Royzman, 2001).
2015	Haas et al., *Academy of Management Journal*	Employee	Characteristics of a problem and its fit to an employee's expertise	The knowledge provider's focus of attention on problems in online communities is linearly related to the fit to her/his expertise and curvilinearly related to the characteristics of a problem with respect to its length, breadth and novelty.
2015	Madsen and Rodgers, *Strategic Management Journal*	Stakeholder	Characteristics of CSR activities	Stakeholders are more likely to focus their attention on CSR activities following an environmental disaster that shows characteristics of legitimacy, urgency and enactment.

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Year	Author and journal	Who pays attention?	What explains attention?	Key finding(s)
2021	von Janda et al., *Journal of Business Research*	Firm	Characteristic of a customer complaint	Firms are less likely to focus attention on customer complaints with improvement ideas (vs without) and from long-term customers (vs first-time).
Crowding				
2010	Sullivan, *Organization Science*	Organization	Amount and characteristics of problems	In the rule-proposal stage, the Federal Aviation Administration focused attention on problems of the domain (human vs non-human) with the highest number of problems. In the rule-finalization stage, attention was guided by the flow of new problems (urgency) and the significance with regard to public interest or economic impact (priority) of the problems.
2010	Desai, *British Journal of Management*	Organization	Amount of complaints	Organizational attention to complaints about focal issues is diverted away if complaints about other issues emerge. Different issues compete for an organization's attention and thus resources to address an issue.
2015	Piezunka and Dahlander, *Academy of Management Journal*	Organization	Amount of suggestions	Organizations receiving a large number of suggestions rather focus attention on familiar than distant suggestions. The stronger the crowding of suggestions, the more organizations narrow their attention to familiar suggestions.
(Situational) facilitators and controls				
2009	Fredberg, *Long Range Planning*	Customer	Availability of different channels	The producers of the TV reality show Big Brother created multiple different channels to make the reality show highly available in daily life and thus facilitate customers' attention in multiple different situations.
2010	Stanko and Beckman, *Academy of Management Journal*	Employees (members of the US Navy)	Availability of communication technology	The US Navy restrained the use of communication technology (e.g. social media), absorbing and distracting attention from work. They did so by setting up three forms of situational controls: monitoring (tracking attention), contextualization (cultivating attention) and deflection (restricting attention).

attention to a problem. Moreover, they report a curvilinear relationship between the knowledge provider's focus of attention and the characteristics of a problem with respect to its length, breadth and novelty. In other words, short, narrow and routine problems, due to lacking salience, as well as long, broad and novel problems, due to relatively high cognitive demands, rather fail to attract the provider's attention in particular situations. These two articles constitute rare attempts to explain attention allocation (and the resulting behaviour) of ranks beyond top management. Madsen and Rodgers (2015) examine which characteristics of firms' CSR activities in response to an environmental disaster lead to stakeholder attention. This stakeholder attention is a prerequisite that the positive financial effects CSR activities promise can be realized. The authors find that (situated) stakeholder attention is attracted by activities involving a non-governmental organization (legitimacy), in-kind contributions (enactment), as well as the fast timing of the activity (urgency).

Crowding

Another phenomenon with respect to situated attention is 'crowding'. Several authors have examined how attention within organizations emerges in 'situations of crowding'. The term 'crowding' denotes situations in which several stimuli simultaneously compete for attention (Piezunka & Dahlander, 2015). Sullivan (2010) examines how crowding influences the proposition and finalization of safety rules in the US airline industry. He finds that the Federal Aviation Administration shifted attention to this domain (non-human vs human issues) with the greatest number of problems at the rule proposal stage. Moreover, urgency induced by a flow of new, incoming problems directs attention to finalizing proposed rules instead of distracting attention to addressing new problems. In the context of the California nursing home industry, Desai (2010) shows that organizational attention on focal complaints (here, complaints about the shift plan) is driven away if other complaints (e.g. violations of patient rights) come up. Generally, only anonymous complaints received attention, leading to the investment of significant resources to trigger organizational learning and solve the issue. Similarly, with a longitudinal dataset consisting of 105.127 crowdsourced suggestions for 922 organizations, Piezunka and Dahlander (2015) show that organizations confronted with situations of crowding narrow their attention and filter out distant suggestions. This implies a familiarity bias in dealing with the high attentional demands of crowdsourcing (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

(Situational) facilitators and controls

Few studies have explored how situated attention to particular issues and answers is facilitated or controlled. Fredberg (2009) examines how the producers of the reality TV series Big Brother created multiple and diverse channels to continuously attract attention to the show. These channels materialized in, for instance, interactive chatrooms, a theme song and a weekly talk show making Big Brother omnipresent, in other words, highly available for customers in multiple different situations. Stanko and Beckman (2015) examine how the US Navy tried to deal with their members' ubiquitous private use of information and communication technology, distracting attention from work-related activities. The US Navy used three forms of 'situational controls': monitoring (tracking attention), contextualization (cultivating attention) and deflection (restricting attention) in order to redirect their members' attention to the particular work situation.

It is notable to highlight that, with the exception of Stanko and Beckman (2015), the studies presented above do not explicitly consider which factors influence an individual's attention in immediate situations, such as top management meetings or workshops with strategy consultants. These studies rather indicate which factors may be important to understand how attention is situated. For instance, the way issues are presented or made available, the perceived legitimacy of an issue or the fit between a problem's requirements and an individual's expertise may be relevant to whether and how an individual allocates attention to an issue in a particular situation.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Over the last 25 years, the ABV has resulted in a substantial body of research informing a plethora of intellectual debates in the strategy and organization field. ABV-based studies have considered both the consequences (e.g. Bouquet et al., 2009; Yadav et al., 2007) and the antecedents of attentional focus in organizations (e.g. Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Stevens et al., 2015). By synthesizing extant ABV research, our review depicts a clear picture: despite its centrality in Ocasio's (1997) seminal work, situated attention has hardly attracted any scholarly attention in leading journals. In order to address this significant gap, we suggest a conceptual extension towards situated attention in the following subsection. Therefore, we highlight the value of considering situated attention and provide a fresh perspective. To stimulate future research, we elaborate on four main factors: the situation's materiality, social dynamics,

temporality and the framing of the strategic setting, which may explain how attention is situated in the particular context. Finally, we discuss the wider implications for future research implied by our approach to situated attention.

Situated attention: The value of rediscovering the central contribution of the ABV

Our understanding of how individual decision-makers' attention actually emerges in particular situations is nascent, at best. This is remarkable as the idea of 'situated attention' is a key contribution of the ABV, extending the Carnegie School's reflections on attention in the context of organizations (Cohen et al., 1972; Cyert & March, 1963; March & Olsen, 1979; March et al., 1958; Simon, 1947, 1957, 1973). But why is considering 'situated attention' so important? Considering situated attention allows disentangling the underlying mechanisms of organization-level outcomes and thereby offers new explanatory mechanisms, as the following example illustrates.

Fu et al. (2020) show that the presence of a chief sustainability officer as a new player in the organization is positively related to a firm's CSR efforts. However, we do not know why this effect occurs. Specifically, it is not clear how a firm's chief sustainability officer influences other decision-makers to focus attention on CSR-related issues and answers in specific situations such as board meetings. Is the presence of the chief sustainability officer causal to the higher CSR efforts, or does another underlying variable explain this finding? Answering such questions is highly important as another explanation is possible. For instance, a firm's stronger attentional direction towards CSR (Ocasio, 2011) may explain both the recruitment of a chief sustainability officer and the increased CSR efforts.

Moreover, understanding the dynamics of situated attention allocation may give us new insights into why attention allocation differs across seemingly similar firms and environmental pressures. So, why do some firms with a chief sustainability officer engage more substantially in CSR than other firms with a chief sustainability officer? This question also resonates with the concepts of 'attentional breadth' and 'attentional intensity' we discussed above. Are these CSR effort differences rooted in situational variances of attentional intensity to CSR, and what explains such variances? Exploring how attention is situated in the particular context promises highly valuable insights by specifying and extending current organization-level findings. Thus, in the following section, we conceptually extend Ocasio's (1997) notion of situated attention by mapping four domains of situated attention.

Towards a research agenda of situated attention: The role of materiality, social dynamics, temporality and framing of the strategic setting

To fully understand attention allocation in organizations requires researchers to conceptually capture the dynamics of individual action in particular situations. We argue that theories of practice offer a nuanced perspective to describe and theorize these dynamics. After all, practices can be described as situated patterns of activities that shape social conduct (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006), thus in essence encompassing attention allocation. It is the very characteristics of practices that therefore offer the opportunity for further enquiry on situated attention.

Indeed, practices are enacted in specific circumstances and these circumstances matter. The way practices are enacted is shaped by social dynamics, that is, the relationship among different actors (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Nicolini & Korica, 2021), but also the material conditions under which they are performed; be it the physical environment of a location or the characteristics of a particular tool or piece of software (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Also, theories of practice reveal that the performance of practices may follow distinct temporal patterns (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) that are consequential for outcomes of those practices. For instance, in the context of product development at Alessi, Salvato (2009) shows that the sequence of development activities shaped different types of product-level innovations. Finally, and importantly, theories of practice acknowledge that while the behaviour of actors is shaped by societal practices, they are not determined by them. Rather, actors play an active part in the way practices are enacted; for instance, by interpreting and framing situations (e.g. Kaplan, 2008). Thus, a practice perspective points towards four key situational characteristics relevant for further research on situated attention: materiality, social dynamics, temporality as well as the framing of a strategic setting. In the following subsections, we elaborate on these four situational characteristics and how they are related to actors' attention allocation. Based on this, we present questions for future research in Table 5.

Materiality

An important characteristic of a particular situation is its 'materiality'. We understand materiality as a situation's material artefacts (e.g. a flipchart or a virtual dashboard) and material environment (e.g. a building or a boardroom), while acknowledging the interdependence of materiality

TABLE 5 Illustrative questions for future research exploring situated attention

Situative factor	Sample explaining variable	Sample research questions
Materiality	Material artefacts	How do material artefacts such as electronic devices or printed presentations influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
	Material environment	How does the material environment (e.g. rooms and buildings) but also digital or hybrid work settings influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
	Digital tools/channels	How do different digital channels and tools (and the issues and answers they make available) influence how attention is allocated in particular situations? How does the attentional demand of different digital channels and tools influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
Social dynamics	Power	How does hierarchy and status of others influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
	Social psychological processes	How do firms deal with 'attentional narrowing' on certain issues and answers due to social phenomena like groupthink?
	Social diversity and new actors	How does the presence of new actors (both internal and external) or social diversity influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
Temporality	Temporal structures	How do different temporal structures such as meeting schedules or project deadlines influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
	Time pressure	How does time pressure in particular situations influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers?
	Timing	How does the timing of issues and answers (e.g. at the beginning vs at the end of a meeting or after a negative vs positive experience) influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
Framing of the strategic setting	Competitive environment	How does (the enactment of) change in the competitive environment (e.g. the entry of new competitors) change how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
	Firm's performance	How does the (enactment of) previous performance (below or above aspirations) influence how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?
	Structural context	How do (enactments of) changes in organizational attention structures (e.g. a change of the organizational structure or organizational 'rules of the game') change/impact how attention is allocated to issues and answers in particular situations?

and social actions (e.g. Orlikowski, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Prior research has shown that the 'materiality' underpinning a particular context is crucial to understanding situated attention allocation. In famous studies, Hutchins (1995a, 1995b) demonstrates how technical devices (and their respective characteristics) guide individuals' attention and cognition in the complex tasks of navigating ships and aeroplanes. The author highlights that different jobs on board require attention to different aspects of these devices. Kaplan (2011) shows how the materiality of (digital) PowerPoint slides allowed different actors to discuss, recombine and align strategic ideas in particular situations. From an ABV perspective, these PowerPoint slides served as attention integration devices (cf. Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Mazmanian et al. (2013) examine the implications of the usage of mobile email devices for professionals. The authors report that the technical device fundamentally changed how actors attended to issues and answers. On the one hand, the professionals were able to attend to emails more flexibly regarding time and location; on the other hand, the technical device increasingly soaked up attentional resources. Professionals internalized requirements to sustain attention on the technical device with its digital channels and to be constantly accessible across various situations. In a series of experiments, Kay et al. (2004) provide specific insights into how

material artefacts influence situated attentional processing. Their results suggest that the mere presence of material artefacts in a particular organizational context may serve as 'material primes' leading to automatic, unconscious and potentially unwanted effects on an individual's action. While often taken for granted and thus ignored, the material environment of a situation also influences how actors attend to issues and answers (Dameron et al., 2015). A famous example demonstrating the importance of the material environment is the home-field advantage in sports (Jamieson, 2010). This effect is related to facilitated attentional processing of affordances in a familiar environment (Meagher, 2020). Overall, materiality may have an implicit and explicit influence on which issues and answers become available and salient for decision-makers, impacting subsequent behaviour (cf. Kahneman, 1973). This gives rise to various opportunities for future research. For instance, how do digital or physical artefacts guide and shape attention in particular situations? Or how does the material environment, such as the characteristics of a building or a room, influence situated attention and action?

Social dynamics

The social dynamics underpinning the situational context are also an important avenue for further research on situated attention allocation (cf. Ocasio et al., 2017). In order to highlight the relevance of social dynamics for attention formation in particular situations, we point to famous studies grounded in a practice perspective and social psychology. For instance, in the context of strategy-making, Kaplan (2008) demonstrates that actors' negotiation and alignment of cognitive frames was situated in social interactions. These framing practices allowed establishing a collective attentional direction (Ocasio, 2011) which led to collective strategic action. Similarly, Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) show how social interactions and their manifestation in material artefacts continuously and recursively directed and restricted actors' situated attention to certain aspects of the environment, enabling a unified strategic planning process. Thus, attention to issues and answers in strategy-making seems to be continuously negotiated among actors. As a recent study of Nicolini and Korica (2021) indicates, power may play a crucial role in such processes. The authors show that actors in higher hierarchical positions are able to determine or 'subcontract' situated attention of other, lower-level actors and thereby set a firm's (attentional) direction. More broadly, social psychology has a long tradition of examining how situations' social dynamics influence an individual's attentional processing and behaviour (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). For instance, the classic experiments of Sherif (1937) and Asch (1961) imply that even humans' basic situated attending to the environment is socially mediated. A prominent example in this regard is the widely known phenomenon of groupthink (for reviews, see Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Esser, 1998). Groupthink describes how people situated in a group setting tend to agree on (even clearly irrational) decisions without proving valid alternatives appropriately due to their desire for conformity and harmony (Janis, 1972). Groupthink is related to selective information-processing biases. Thus, issues and answers fitting the group's overarching ideas are preferably attended to, while other issues and answers are ignored (e.g. Janis & Mann, 1977). This gives rise to several questions for future ABV research. For instance, how do high-power actors impact the attention of others in strategy meetings? Or related to the organization-level findings of Cho and Hambrick (2006) or Fu et al. (2020), how does social diversity influence attending and thus decision-making in board meetings?

Temporality

Another important characteristic of a situation is its temporality. Like materiality and social dynamics, temporality is an elusive concept which has been a major theme in organization and strategy research (e.g. Ancona et al., 2001; Bansal et al., 2022). We focus on three aspects related to a situation's temporality, which influence how actors attend to issues and answers: temporal structures, time constraint and timing. In a classic study, Roy (1959) shows how factory workers created fixed times such as 'peach time' or 'fish time', which enabled them to shift attention from their monotonous work to other issues. Gersick (1988, 1989) shows how the continuous and shared assessment of deadlines guided group members' situated attention and action in order to complete a task. Orlikowski and Yates (2002) call this 'temporal structuring'; individuals' situated attention and thus their situated activities shape and are shaped by temporal structures (e.g. meeting schedules or project deadlines). These temporal structures may induce 'time pressure' for actors. Psychological research has long demonstrated that time pressure in a particular situation influences how actors attend to issues and answers (e.g. Payne et al., 1993). For instance, scholars find that in situations of time pressure, actors tend to shift attention to negative information (Wright, 1974), accelerate (Zur & Breznitz, 1981) and become more selective in their attentional processing (Payne et al., 1988). Similarly, following the attention focus model (Karau & Kelly, 1992), time pressure narrows individual group members' situated attention to task-related issues and answers while others are filtered out (Kelly & Loving, 2004). Generally, decision-makers

are confronted with a continuous stream of issues (e.g. Cohen et al., 1972; Simon, 1973). Within this stream, the timing—that is the presentation/appearance of an issue at a particular time—influences how actors attend to and act upon an issue (e.g. Cavanagh et al., 2021; Dhanorkar et al., 2018; Dutton et al., 2001). Timing may impact individuals' attentional processing in various situations in organizations. For instance, there may be differences in how actors attend to an issue brought up at the end compared to at the beginning of a demanding meeting. Danziger et al. (2011) offer a compelling example in this regard. They found that judges are more likely to accept parole requests of prisoners at the beginning of a workday and after lunch breaks. This gives rise to various questions for future research on situated attention. For instance, how does time pressure, and relatedly 'attentional overload', influence actors' situated attention and thus situated decision-making in organizations? Or how does timing of issues and answers (e.g. at the beginning of a workday or meeting vs at the end of a workday or meeting) influence how decision-makers attend to them in particular situations?

Framing of the strategic setting

Finally, the framing of a firm's strategic setting may influence how attention is allocated in particular situations. Our understanding of the strategic setting includes the firm's generic broader context, such as the industry velocity or environmental uncertainty, as well as a firm's specific conditions, such as its prior performance or competition. Our review shows that prior ABV-based research has highlighted relationships between this strategic setting, organizational attention, and firm-level outcomes (e.g. Hendriks et al., 2018; McCann & Bahl, 2017; McCann & Shinkle, 2017). As firm-level outcomes are contingent on how decision-makers focus their attention in particular situations, the strategic setting should ultimately unfold its effect there. However, how the strategic setting influences situated attention allocation depends on the meaning attributed to this strategic setting in a particular situation; in other words, how this strategic setting is invoked. Prior research has emphasized the importance of this (situational) framing on (situated) attention allocation and decision-making (e.g. Bazerman, 1984; Daniel & Tversky, 1984; Ocasio, 1995). For instance, in the context of strategic transformation, Gilbert (2006) demonstrates that the framing of environmental change as either threat or opportunity resulted in different attention allocation to this change. Framed as an opportunity, key aspects of the change were not attended to, while framed as a threat, the change captured managerial attention leading to (rigid) actionism (see Whyte, 1986). It is important to highlight that the framing of a strategic setting is related to the power dynamics we described above. Not just the subject and the direction of the framing is crucial, but also who does the framing. Framing of the strategic setting by high-power actors may have a different effect on situated attention allocation than framing by low-power actors (George et al., 2006). This gives rise to multiple questions for future research in order to understand situated attention allocation: for instance, how does (the enactment of) performance below aspirations impact attending in a strategy meeting? Or how does the (enactment of the) industry-specific context influence how actors attend to issues and answers in such meetings?

Implications for future research on situated attention

Based on a practice perspective, we have argued that situated attention is shaped by four situational characteristics: the materiality and temporality of the circumstances, social dynamics and the framing of the strategic setting. Extending the structural distribution of attention by a more nuanced understanding of situated attention allocation mechanisms has wider implications for ABV-related future research.

First, situated attention shifts research focus to individual actors. Our extensive review shows that ABV-based research has focused strongly on organization-level attention, behaviour and outcomes (e.g. Choi et al., 2019; Dhanorkar et al., 2018; Dutt & Joseph, 2019; Fu et al., 2020; Galbreath, 2018; McCann & Bahl, 2017; McCann & Shinkle, 2017; Oh & Barker III, 2018; Umashankar et al., 2021). However, these macro-level phenomena are ultimately based on how individuals allocate their attention in particular situations with particular characteristics. Thus, how individuals' situated attention allows them to detangle and better understand the realization of macro-level phenomena such as a firm's performance (e.g. Bouquet et al., 2009; Castellaneta & Zollo, 2015) or CSR activity (e.g. Fu et al., 2020; Mithani, 2017) that prior ABV research has focused on. Therefore, future research should consider individual actors across different hierarchical levels. So far, ABV-based research has mainly considered top managers and CEOs (see Tables 1–4). While these actors and their attention allocation are crucial for a firm's attentional direction (Ocasio, 2011), lower-level actors such as 'middle and divisional management, workers and their union representatives […]' (Ocasio, 1997, p. 197) influence and, in the first place, implement this attentional direction in particular situations.

Second, our review ties the ABV to the growing and well-elaborated stream of sociomateriality research (e.g.

Kohtamäki et al., 2021; Orlikowski, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). It may not be possible to reduce situated attention to singular causes. Rather, situated attention is likely to be the outcome of the interrelated influence of a situation's material, temporal and social characteristics. Consequently, situated attention implies an understanding of attention as an ongoing (and materially mediated) social accomplishment (i.e. the 'how' of situated attention), within a socially constructed strategic setting (i.e. the 'where' of situated attention) at a particular time (i.e. the 'when' of situated attention). This resonates with a recent, pioneering study of Nicolini and Korica (2021) considering attention allocation as a practice. Thus, our arguments give rise to a new perspective on the ABV, which has mainly been considered from an information-processing perspective, highlighting limited attentional capacity (e.g. Li et al., 2013; Mithani, 2017; Piezunka & Dahlander, 2015).

Finally, while we draw on practice theory in order to elaborate our conceptual extension to the ABV, future research on situated attention is not limited to practice-theoretical work. Situated attention is a highly complex and multifaceted phenomenon that requires research to take different theoretical perspectives with different assumptions. While a practice-based perspective enables scholars to understand attention as a dynamic social phenomenon (see also Ocasio, 1997, p. 200; Ocasio et al., 2017), it can be insensitive to individual characteristics as well as cognitive and attentional constraints. Similarly, while an information-processing perspective accounts for individuals' cognitive and attentional biases, it may be considered as 'unsocial' and blind for social dynamics. Thus, this review invites a broad range of approaches and theories to unpack the black box of situated attention.

CONCLUSION

The ABV plays a central role for researchers aiming to understand the behavioural underpinnings of activities and decisions in organizations. This review shows that since Ocasio's (1997) seminal article, in which he formulated the major principles of an ABV of the firm, a substantial body of research has emerged. Scholars have used the conceptual toolkit of the ABV and contributed to further unpacking the antecedents of attention allocation on the level of the individual as well as the organization (Ocasio, 2011). This paper picks up a thread that plays a prominent role in Ocasio's (1997) original article but, as of now, has only received scant scholarly focus: situated attention. Indeed, while we agree that structural conditions are a powerful means to explain attention allocation, any decision and any strategic action is always situated in a particular context, the properties of which are likely to affect the outcomes. Therefore, this paper argues that a conceptual extension of the ABV is warranted in order to fully understand the situational dynamics that govern attention allocation in organizations.

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6. Pulled in all directions: Open strategy participation as an attention contest

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Pulled in all directions: Open strategy participation as an attention contest

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Abstract

In this article, we investigate a crucial factor in open strategy research: participation. By drawing on the attention-based view, we argue that the degree of participation in both analog and digital practices of open strategy is the result of "attention contests." These attention contests arise as the attention structure of Open Strategy initiatives (as quasi-temporary organizations) and the attention structure of the main organization compete for actors' limited attention. As these attention structures collide, four tensions emerge (process ambiguity, status transitions, time constraints, and identity shifts). We argue that the impact of these tensions is contingent on the type of Open Strategy practice; digital or analog forms of Open Strategy-making. Therefore, we offer a new theoretical understanding of why and how actors participate in Open Strategy initiatives. Based on this, we offer various mechanisms of how firms can facilitate meaningful participation in these different practices. This essay opens up promising avenues for future Open Strategy and participation research.

Keywords

attention-based-view, attention structure, open strategy, participation, inclusion

Introduction

"Sometime they'll give a party and nobody will come."

modified from Carl Sandburg

In 2002, IBM's CEO Sam Palmisano invited all 350,000 employees to participate in developing a new corporate value system guiding IBM's future strategic direction (Palmisano, 2004; Whittington et al., 2011). While an impressive 50,000 people checked out the new format, almost 86% of employees have not logged into the community forum. And, even if we assume that every comment came from a different employee, still more than 97% of IBM's workforce did not engage actively. Similarly, in 2009, the non-profit organization Wikimedia announced an open strategic

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planning process and called for participation. From its millions of users, 9299 registered to take part in Wikimedia's Open Strategy (OS) initiative, with 3096 actually attending. The top 11 voluntaries produced more than 40% of all contributions (Dobusch et al., 2019). We are aware of the slight hyperbole in how we frame those examples. Still, successfully harnessing the wisdom of the many for strategy-making (e.g. Hautz et al., 2017; Plotnikova et al., 2020; Stieger et al., 2012) rests on a key condition: participation.

Drawing on the recent advances in the attention-based-view (ABV) of the firm, we propose that the degree of participation of internal actors in OS is the result of "attention contests." These contests arise as the attention structures of OS in the form of analog or digital practices (Hautz et al., 2019), as well as the attention structure of the main organization compete for actors' limited attention (Ocasio, 1997; Simon, 1947). These structures shape how and to which extent individuals pay attention to certain events and, hence, how they strategically behave (e.g. Ren and Guo, 2011; Stevens et al., 2015).

As the attention structures of analog and digital OS practices and the existing organization collide, the attention contests become manifest in the following four main tensions: process ambiguity, status transitions, time constraints, and identity shifts. We argue that the impact of these tensions varies across analog or digital forms of OS as these practices typically display different logics of participation, such as the timing of self-selection (Hautz et al., 2019). Therefore, we provide a new theoretical understanding of how and why participation in both analog and digital forms of OS occurs.

This essay contributes to the growing field of OS. First, the notion of attention contests opens up new avenues for empirical research but also raises important practical implications for how firms may try to intervene in the distribution of attention and influence participation. Second, we contribute to the understanding of how participation in analog and digital OS practices may play out differently due to the differences in their underlying attention structures. Third, we suggest considering participation a key condition of OS and conceptually differentiate participation from inclusion. Extant research on OS has been concerned with inclusiveness (e.g. Hautz et al., 2017; Mack and Szulanski, 2017; Seidl et al., 2019; Whittington et al., 2011). While inclusiveness is a key to create variety, it is still dependent on participation. Finally, we answer calls for research regarding the underlying mechanisms of participation by extending research on the "participation problem" in the strategy process (Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Tavella, 2020).

Open strategy: what do we know about participation?

Our understanding of the strategy process has changed over the decades. While previously, strategy-making has been considered the domain of an exclusive elite (e.g. Chandler, 1962; Williamson, 1970), this view was superseded by a plethora of studies showing that strategy-making is distributed across the organization (e.g. Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014; Regnér, 2003), highlighting the role of actors on different levels (e.g. Burgelman, 1983; Friesl et al., 2019; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990). Enabled by the advances of information technology (IT), yet another shift in strategy-making is noticeable; the strategy process debate of the 21st century manifests in what came to be called OS. Many organizations deliberately open up their strategy process and become more inclusive in their approach to strategy-making (Whittington et al., 2011).

To realize the inclusion of a wider range of actors in the strategy process, firms deploy both analog and digital practices, depending on their goals and the strategy process stage (Hautz et al., 2019). In analog practices, participation is mostly limited to a selected group of actors (Mack and

Szulanski, 2017; Seidl and Werle, 2018). In contrast, digital practices can typically cater for large groups (e.g. Hutter et al., 2017; Plotnikova et al., 2020). In such cases, it is up to each individual to self-select into the process and participate (Felin et al., 2017).

OS promises two key benefits. It enables the distribution of valuable strategic knowledge across different levels of a firm (e.g. Plotnikova et al., 2020), facilitating the implementation of a strategy (e.g. Denyer et al., 2011; Seidl et al., 2019; Stieger et al., 2012). Also, OS initiatives allow leveraging the expertise of a wide range of actors and thus promise the creation of superior strategies (e.g. Hautz et al., 2017; Mack and Szulanski, 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017). Indeed, due to actors' bounded rationality, the top management team cannot consider all possible options to choose the "perfect" strategy (Cyert and March, 1963; March et al., 1958). OS allows extending the range of options by allowing internal and external stakeholders to contribute to the strategy process (e.g. Haefliger et al., 2011; Mack and Szulanski, 2017; Seidl et al., 2019).

The condition for realizing the benefits of OS practices sounds almost trivial: participation. Indeed, using distributed knowledge to create superior strategies presupposes that actors possessing this knowledge invest their attention to share it. Despite its importance, only a few scholars have distinguished participation from inclusion (Plotnikova et al., 2020; Stieger et al., 2012). In the emerging literature on OS, there are currently three different approaches to participation: participation as a consequence of inclusion, participation as inclusion with lower intensity, and participation as an essential challenge of OS.

First, actors' participation is often implicitly considered a given consequence of inclusion and hence, not examined as a phenomenon in its own right (e.g. Hutter et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017). Symptomatic for this is Whittington et al.'s (2011: 532) seminal paper. They define inclusion as "the range of people involved in making strategy" (p. 532). In this definition, participation is implicitly assumed to be a consequence of inclusion. Second, for Mack and Szulanski (2017), participation and inclusion are independent dimensions. While participation aims to maximize actors' input to improve strategic decisions at a given time, inclusion aims to sustain actors' long-term engagement in the strategy process. This perspective provides a new understanding of the consequences of participation but does not explain how and why participation in OS occurs. Finally, a third perspective on participation is represented by Plotnikova et al. (2020) and Stieger et al. (2012). They show how actors' participation in online communities is an essential challenge of OS. However, they do not specify the mechanisms that underpin participation in analog or digital OS practices.

Attention please: participation in open strategy as an attention contest

Drawing on the ABV, we argue that participation in analog or digital practices of OS is influenced by attention contests. We see OS initiatives as quasi-temporary organizations that mostly exist for a restricted period of time and for a particular purpose (e.g. Bakker et al., 2016; Grabher, 2004). We argue that the tensions between the attention structures of OS practices and the attention structures of the main organization influence actors' degree of participation in OS. Below we will show how attention contests are manifest in analog and digital forms of OS. While in digital OS practices actors typically self-select into the process, in analog settings participation is usually invited (Hautz et al., 2019). Yet, self-selection is still present in analog settings. It particularly takes place "in the way" actors participate, for example, whether they speak up or stay silent in OS workshops. The next section explains how participation in analog and digital OS practices is shaped by the collision of attention structures.

Managerial attention and attention structures

Attention is a limited and valuable resource within organizations (Ocasio, 1997; Simon, 1947). To capture the role of attention for strategy-making, Ocasio (1997) established the ABV. Ocasio (1997) particularly emphasizes the role of attention structures that shape the distribution of individual effort, time, and attentional focus within organizations (Ren and Guo, 2011; Stevens et al., 2015). Attention structures consist of four broad attention regulators, which are fundamental to understand participation in OS.

First, the "Rules of the Game," as Ocasio (1997) calls them, represent the firm's mostly implicit principles like norms, values, and incentives. These principles guide actors' attention in their interpretation of organizational reality and constitute a logic of action (e.g. Nigam and Ocasio, 2010; Ocasio and Thornton, 1999). Thus, the rules of the game create a framework in which coordination and conflict take place (e.g. Bower, 1970; Mintzberg, 1985). Second, attention is also regulated by actors "Structural Position" in the organization; this means their formal roles and social identity. Structural positions are connected to hierarchy and, hence, actors' status and power (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993). Moreover, structural positions are part of the organizational architecture and thus result in a specific attentional focus (Joseph and Ocasio, 2012) which in turn influences decision-making (Jensen and Zajac, 2004). Third, attention is regulated by firm-level "Resources and Routines." These are the building blocks of firms' value-creating activities (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Wernerfelt, 1984). Resource allocation and deployment as well as the performance of organizational routines are substantial parts of organizational life and thus consume actors' attentional focus. Finally, the fourth attention regulator is the "Players." Players are the actors influencing a firm's decision-making. These actors are embedded in the structures and social fabric of an organization which shape the beliefs and values that underpin strategy development (e.g. Hart, 1992) and reflect in a firm's attentional direction (Ocasio, 2011).

Colliding attention structures lead to attention contests

Why should OS research care about attention structures? We argue that OS initiatives collide with the attention structure of the main organization leading to attention contests. Thus, the degree of participation in digital or analog OS practices is substantially shaped by these attention contests. What exactly are the mechanisms that give rise to these contests? (see Figure 1).

Attention contests based on process ambiguity: An organization's rules of the game help actors in dealing with ambiguous information by providing a logic of action guiding actors' attention. This logic of action creates a narrow framework regulating how to behave appropriately and succeed in the organizational game (e.g. March and Olsen, 1989; Ocasio and Thornton, 1999). However, for OS, the rules of the main organization may be suspended, and other rules may apply altogether. In OS, clear and transparent procedural rules are essential to establish and maintain openness in strategy-making (Dobusch and Dobusch, 2019; Dobusch et al., 2019). This is important as OS initiatives are often designed to create options that break with the current logic of action (e.g. Hautz et al., 2017). For actors, this switch of the organizational "rule book" may result in substantial ambiguity regarding the appropriateness of actions in this context and how to be effective in shaping strategic conversations.

New actors in the organizational game have to learn what to say but also what not to say (van Maanen and Schein, 1977) as providing critical input may be regarded as "boat rocking" or "dissident behavior" (e.g. Redding, 1985; Sprague and Ruud, 1988). Thus, actors may avoid challenging the status quo as they do not want to be labeled as "troublemaker" or "complainer," impairing relationships within the organization (Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison and Milliken, 2000). The

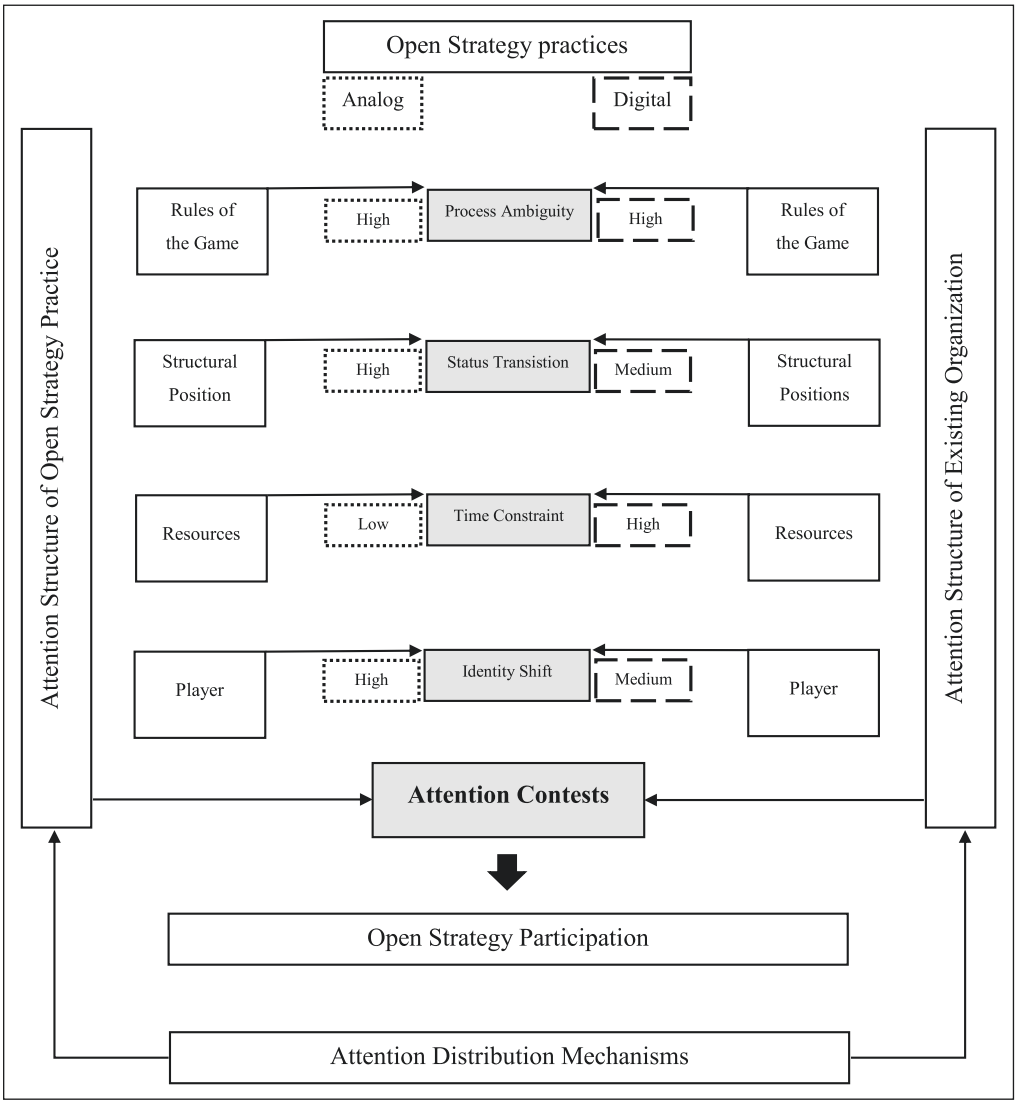

Figure 1. Attention contests and open strategy participation in analog and digital open strategy practices.

same issues may arise in digital and analog OS practices thwarting their value in capturing broader knowledge for strategy-making. In digital settings, actors may be reluctant to self-select into the process due to the ambiguity of how to behave appropriately. In both practices, actors may be reluctant to provide critical input or breaking with the logic of action due to the expectancy of negative consequences in the organizational game (Denyer et al., 2011). This self-restriction may be more prevalent in analog face-to-face settings in which the rules of the main organization are likely to become more salient and thus suppress the rules that should ideally prevail in OS settings.

Attention contests based on status transitions: OS values actors' input regardless of hierarchy, authority, or structural position. This stands in contrast to daily organizational life, in which,

decision-making is influenced by hierarchical relationships associated with power, status, and influence (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993; Thompson, 1961). In practice, the status transition that occurs as actors participate in OS initiatives may create tensions. For lower level employees, these tensions arise as they transition into a role in which the stakes are higher due to additional accountability for the firm's strategy (Hautz et al., 2017). This may play an important role for participation in analog and digital practices. For higher level managers, participation in digital OS practices may be accompanied by a perceived loss of power and status, decreasing the willingness to attend. Besides, higher level managers may restrict their attention on these OS initiatives as—due to their position—their contribution may have a disproportionately strong influence (Plotnikova et al., 2020). In analog settings, hierarchy and associated status and power may become even more salient than in digital settings as in the latter case technology might partially mitigate the effect of status differences (Denyer et al., 2011). Therefore, in analog settings, higher ranking managers may explicitly or implicitly maintain status differences by signals of power (e.g. Detert and Treviño, 2010; Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Redding, 1985), controlling and restraining the participation of lower levels (Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Tavella, 2020).

Attention contests based on time constraints: A feature of organizational life is processes and routines (Nelson and Winter, 1982). They are the means through which resources are allocated and deployed (Eggers and Kaplan, 2013), yet may also be a major tax on individuals' time and attention (Cyert and March, 1963; March et al., 1958). From this perspective, the hurdles to self-select into digital OS initiatives are high. Actors are deeply embedded in routines (Nelson and Winter, 1982) as they guide, legitimize, and give meaning to everyday activities (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). Digital OS practices demand the investment of attentional resources besides everyday activities actors are absorbed in (Hautz et al., 2017) but do not fulfill the functions of these established activity patterns. For instance, participation in a digital strategy community may not allow actors to officially account for their time in the same way as day-to-day routines (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). Therefore, digital OS practices compete with everyday routines for actors' limited time and attention, influencing participation. The situation is different with analog OS practices. Time constraints may only play a subordinate role as time is explicitly freed up and legitimized.

Attention contests based on identity shifts: The very idea of OS is that actors from all levels have the potential to become strategists. Yet, the transitioning out of operative roles into strategic roles implies a shift in actors' self-image, their identities. Indeed, participating in the strategy process requires a "strategist identity" associated with a special mind-set and specific skills that underpin strategic conduct (Mantere and Whittington, 2020). Embracing contributions to OS initiatives as part of one's professional identity might be challenging. Lower level actors usually focus on high-detail and short-term operational tasks, whereas strategy-making requires a broad and long-term orientation (c.f. Bansal et al., 2018). A lack of this "strategist identity" may lead to uncertainty, timidity, and even embarrassment resulting in reluctance to participate in OS initiatives (Mantere and Whittington, 2020). Hence, we propose that the identity shifts triggered by changes to what it means to be a "player" in the strategy process may affect participation in OS practices. In this regard, analog settings may be even more challenging for lower levels as they enter the direct, synchronous strategy dialogue, potentially without the experience and prior exposure that would enable comfortable and self-confident participation (Mantere and Whittington, 2020).

Process ambiguity, status transitions, time constraints, and identity shifts simultaneously affect the degree of participation in OS practices. This matters as any such initiative comes with expectations about who should optimally participate and in which way. Thus, empirical research on attention contests has the potential to better understand participation in digital and analog OS practices. Attention contests may help explain why some actors in digital OS practices self-select into the process while others are not. Moreover, by investigating attention contests in analog OS practices,

we can gain new insights into the underlying mechanisms that shape participation in the form of situated contributions to strategic conversations.

How to deal with attention contests in open strategy? Attention distribution mechanisms

If participation in OS is indeed affected by attention contests, an important question remains: How should firms deal with attention contests to facilitate participation in OS? The argument presented above would suggest that this requires mechanisms of attention (re-)distribution: The managerial actions involved in mitigating the consequences of process ambiguity, status transitions, time constraints, and identity shifts on participation. Empirically, attention contests might be resolved through a plethora of activities contingent on whether OS initiatives build on analog and digital practices. Yet, to illustrate our point, we provide three examples of what attention distribution mechanisms might look like.

Incentives as an attention distribution mechanism: Firms can create material and immaterial incentives to mitigate the attention contests and promote participation in OS practices (Plotnikova et al., 2020; Stieger et al., 2012). Incentives may weaken attention contests by reducing tensions between the attention structures of the main organization and the OS initiative. For example, in a digital setting, Ericsson awarded highly engaged contributors with titles like "thought leader" triggering social dynamics of peer reputation (Plotnikova et al., 2020). Such immaterial incentives potentially mitigate the negative effect of process ambiguity and strengthen the confidence of non-strategists to participate—an approach that can be transferred to analog practices. Moreover, incentives may mitigate time constraints by legitimizing time spent on digital OS practices. Nevertheless, firms have to be aware of the unintended consequences of incentivizing OS initiatives. Giving an award to the best idea implies not rewarding the mass of other ideas carrying the risk of user frustration (Baptista et al., 2017), demotivation, and de-energization (Westley, 1990). Still, further research on different types of incentives promises valuable insights into participation in OS initiatives.

Organizational climate as an attention distribution mechanism: Research shows that raising criticism with superiors is associated with fear of retaliation leading to reluctance and silence as dominant behavior (e.g. Milliken et al., 2003; van Dyne et al., 2003). The implications for OS are clear: To ensure valuable participation in OS, the initiatives have to be a "safe place" with a climate of openness (Detert and Burris, 2007). Creating such an environment is more difficult as it seems. Firms using OS, either in digital or analog forms, have to be aware of the fact that even well-intentioned managers are influenced by implicit stereotypes about lower levels (Milliken et al., 2003) and tacit authority structures limiting a climate of openness (Detert and Treviño, 2010). In digital OS practices, we see two levers for firms to address this issue: First, actors must have the possibility to provide ideas anonymously or through independent intermediaries. Second, the exclusion of high-power actors is an option to facilitate attending OS initiatives (Plotnikova et al., 2020). However, reflecting the dilemmatic nature of OS, this approach may lead to a legitimacy loss and surely contradicts the very idea of inclusion (Hautz et al., 2017). In analog practices, creating a climate of openness is even more difficult as process ambiguity and status transitions may become more salient in face-to-face settings. To reduce this effect, firms could select the participants such that personal dependencies are minimized.

The design of OS as an attention distribution mechanism: Finally, the materiality of digital and analog practices (c.f., Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015), such as the characteristics and affordances of physical spaces (Gibson, 1979) and the "perceived ease of use" of IT tools (Davis, 1989) may

act as an attention distribution mechanism. In analog practices, small things like the seating arrangement in workshops may further exacerbate or mitigate hierarchical relationships influencing the inherent process ambiguity in OS. In digital practices, low perceived ease of use leads to user frustration reflecting in a lower degree of participation (Hutter et al., 2017). Low perceived ease of use is associated with higher effort (Davis, 1989), reinforcing the time constraint. Thus, it is essential to design OS platforms as user-friendly as possible. Highly complex digital platforms could implicitly exclude actors lacking digital capabilities inhibiting them from participating. This can lead to a legitimacy loss of the results of OS initiatives. Moreover, a digital divide could occur, resulting in conflicts within an organization.

Discussion

This essay highlights a fundamental condition of OS initiatives: participation. We theorize the degree of participation as the result of attention contests that emerge as the attention structures of OS practices and the main organization collide. Overall, we make the following contributions to future research.

Our essay provides a fresh perspective on participation in OS specifically and the strategy process research generally (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). It complements OS research by framing participation as the outcome of attention contests and the management of participation as the (re-) distribution of attention. Applying the ABV to analog and digital OS practices opens up further research questions with high practical relevance: How can OS practices be designed such that actors participate in a meaningful manner? How do authority and status shape different OS practices and influence the degree of participation? How do non-strategists build a strategist identity by engaging in different OS practices? Which attention distribution mechanisms are the most suitable for which OS practice?

Moreover, the focus on participation creates further conceptual clarity in research on OS. Currently, research has largely focused on "inclusion" and "transparency" as underlying characteristics of OS (Hautz et al., 2017; Mack and Szulanski, 2017; Seidl et al., 2019), for example. While inclusiveness is a "moral" intent and a central means to use the variety of skills and perspectives distributed within an organization for strategy-making (e.g. Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011), participation is the actual uptake of this offer and the necessary condition to realize these benefits. The mechanisms through which participation unfolds may be contingent on the OS practices chosen. Thus, focusing on participation provides the opportunity to explore the practices involved in harnessing the creative power of OS.

Our approach has certain limitations. Our notion of attention contests assumes that OS initiatives are time-bound. However, there are also examples of "born open" organizations. In these organizations, strategy-making is wired into the organizational DNA and is practiced continuously (Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017; Luedicke et al., 2017). Thus, participation is not influenced by the result of colliding attention structures but rather the result of a particular culture (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). Also, for the purpose of this essay, we simplified our theorization of digital and analog OS practices by arguing that digital practices are based on self-selection while analog practices are associated with ex-ante selected participation. Moreover, while we separated the effects of digital and analog practices, OS may involve hybrid approaches. In such instances, which attention contests arise is an interesting question for future research. Finally, while we focus on internal actors as participants, we acknowledge that OS practices may also include actors outside the organization's boundaries (Malhotra et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011). In such cases, attention contests may still arise yet are highly contingent on the attention structures of the respective external organizations. While, for example, invited scientists may contribute independently from existing

authority structures, representatives of a supplier may be exposed to tensions to a particularly high degree.

Conclusion

Strategy work often comes with a halo. It is linked to the corporate elite and the use of strategy discourse as a symbol of influence and power (Knights and Morgan, 1991). This is underpinned by the assumption that being part of the strategy process is attractive. The reality, however, turns out to be different. Strategy work in general and OS in particular happens in a contested space. In digital OS practices, the tentative empirical evidence available depicts the following picture: Firms invest substantial resources in virtual infrastructure to discuss strategic issues, yet only a fraction of actors participates. In analog practices, insights from the "speak up" literature (Milliken et al., 2003; van Dyne et al., 2003) indicate that participating in a critical way is highly challenging. Moreover, in both analog and digital practices, the identity question becomes crucial: Are non-managerial employees able and ready to enter the strategy game? Therefore, OS is always at risk of becoming a marginal activity, or worse still, a mechanism of top-down communication. Framing participation as the result of attention contests highlights the fact that organization members are pulled in all sorts of directions, and actors make choices, whether deliberate or not, on how to participate. By drawing on ABV, our essay starts to reveal how attention for strategy work is wired into the very fabric of organizations. Understanding this wiring is crucial for successful OS initiatives and other strategy processes. Just imagine, people are invited to do strategy, and they all participate.

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7. Taking individual choices seriously: A process perspective of self-selection in strategy work

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Taking Individual Choices Seriously: A process perspective of self-selection in strategy work

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Abstract

An increasing body of work investigates the participation of a diverse set of actors in strategy making. We argue that extant research tends to gloss over a fundamental condition underpinning such participation: while participation may reflect a hierarchical mandate, insofar as it relates to the actual involvement of employees, it is the result of a process of self-selection. From this perspective, forms of participative strategizing are neither fully the outcome of deliberate top-down choice, nor do they form a random pattern that is subject to the whims of individual employees. Such forms of strategizing are rather, as we argue in this paper, based on an endogenous logic of whether and how an individual self-selects, and in turn involves her/himself in the process, or not. To conceptualize the broader phenomenon of strategy participation, we draw on practice theory to conceptualize how individuals knowingly choose to involve themselves in strategizing events and we develop in turn a process model of self-selection as an ongoing social accomplishment. This model elaborates different patterns of participation in strategy making (stabilizing and shifting trajectories) with variable emergent outcomes. We end the paper by discussing the implications of our theorizing for ongoing research on open and participatory strategizing, and for the body of work on strategy as practice.

Keywords

open strategy, self-selection, strategy-as-practice, strategy process, strategy work

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Introduction

How is strategy work coordinated and accomplished? Traditionally, research assumed that accountability for firm strategy was located at the level of corporate elites (Chandler, 1962) and that strategy work was carried out as part of a rationally planned process involving environmental scanning and budgeting decisions (Bower, 1970). Over the last four decades, strategy practice and process research has substantially challenged this understanding by showing how planned forms of strategy formation are complemented or even replaced by emergent forms of strategizing (Mintzberg, 1978; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). This stream of research has shown how the very creation of strategic issues is shaped by a diverse set of actors (e.g. Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Rouleau, 2005), potentially as an autonomous activity (Burgelman, 1983a, 1983b) and often involving skilled political bargaining among the individuals involved (Dutton et al., 2001). These findings and insights resonate with the current trend of widening participation in strategy making, giving rise to what has since come to be called 'open strategy' (Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011). Open forms of strategizing aim by definition to be inclusive and often involve catering to actors across the organization with an intrinsic motivation to participate (Dobusch et al., 2019).

To date, the findings of extant practice and process research seem to converge regarding the positive implications of these emergent and inclusive forms of strategy making. Such participative forms have been found to foster variety (Whittington et al., 2011), facilitate the development of new capabilities (Pandza, 2011), allow firms to break out of strategic inertia (Burgelman, 2002), facilitate strategic change (Dutton et al., 2001) and mitigate the risk of disruption (Huy, 2011). Importantly, current research findings furthermore build a coherent picture of the strategic importance of involving individual actors across organizational levels (Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006), emphasizing that wider participation in the strategy process seems to be a means to corporate renewal and firm success (Stadler et al., 2021). Still, prior research also tends to gloss over a fundamental condition underpinning such types of participative strategizing: regardless of the structures for participation that have been put in place by an organization, participation is ultimately the result of actors 'getting involved voluntarily', a process often called 'self-selection' (Ketkar & Workiewicz, 2021; Raveendran et al., 2022). Such wilful involvement interacts with, and in some cases, reconfigures the structures for participative strategy making in an organization, giving rise to emergent, and in some instances unforeseen, strategizing dynamics.

From this perspective, the more fundamental question to ask is when and how do individuals select themselves into processes of strategizing, in particular when there is no top-down mandate to do so? An answer to this question seems of crucial importance for strategy research. In the absence of a clear mandate for participation, strategy work is not the outcome of a top-down and enforced choice. Yet, when we consider the various ways in which individuals may involve themselves, it does not form a random pattern either. Rather, the form that strategy processes take is shaped by an 'endogenous' logic, based on how and why actors get involved (Borjas, 1987). In other words, it is the specifics of the individual choices made and the social dynamics of self-selection over time, that ultimately determine specific participatory dynamics and lead to strategic outcomes (Anand et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2016). The overall aim of this paper is to offer such a process understanding of self-selection in strategy work.

To be clear, taking individual choices seriously by focusing on the process of self-selection is not an attempt to reduce participation to individual-level choices that maximize the utility of actors (Coleman, 1990). Drawing on structuration theory (Giddens, 1984, 1991), we instead develop a process understanding of self-selection as an ongoing social accomplishment. This perspective emphasizes that individual

action is always enabled and constrained by structural characteristics (Giddens, 1984; Jarzabkowski, 2004). We argue that actors make participation choices by 'morally evaluating' the 'selection context' of particular strategy events. This context comprises the set of formal and informal rules of participation. For instance, such an informal rule may be that only staff with a certain level of seniority are expected to participate. While these rules of participation may be deliberately set, they will also be shaped over time based on emergent patterns of voluntary participation. Yet, how the selection context shapes individual choices depends on actors' engagement with these formal and informal rules. We argue that this engagement takes the form of 'moral evaluating' (see Thévenot, 2001). We use this notion to capture the fact that self-selection is always shaped by actors' evaluation of prior as well as future strategizing events, based on individuals' values, beliefs and aspirations. Self-selection into strategizing events is thus shaped both by the selection context and actors' moral evaluating. This conceptualization of self-selection allows us in turn to theorize different patterns of participation in strategy making: stabilizing trajectories lead to decreasing variety in participation (due to the reproduction of participation rules) and shifting trajectories are characterized instead by an increasing variety in participation. Moreover, we also describe the transition between these patterns of participation. We argue that such transitions are triggered by 'critical participatory situations'; situations in which rules of participation become dysfunctional and are explicitly questioned by individuals, such that they may lead to overt changes to the selection context and give rise to a new stabilizing trajectory.

Our conceptualization of processes of self-selection and the strategizing dynamics they give rise to has implications for different theoretical discussions in strategy research. First, our paper contributes to the growing body of research on the conditions, processes and outcomes of participation in strategy formation. Indeed, the recent open strategy debate is built on the very premise of self-selection (Whittington et al., 2011). This paper critically examines the partially normative assumptions underpinning open strategy, highlighting instead the social dynamics of self-selection as an important empirical question that helps to illuminate how and why participatory forms of strategizing succeed or fail. To illustrate, a focus on self-selection promises insights into the unintended participatory consequences of open forms of strategizing (such as the unintended exclusion of certain actors). Second, a growing debate in strategy research is concerned with the conditions that enable participation in strategy work (e.g. Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Seidl & Werle, 2018; Tavella, 2020). The process understanding of self-selection developed in this paper complements this stream of research. It develops valuable insights into the social accomplishment of participation and its contextual constraints. In particular, we contend that the set of formal and informal rules that may remain unquestioned over long periods of time are subject to moral evaluating and ultimately shape choices of participation. Finally, while strategy-as-practice research has mainly focused on strategic practices and their implications for organizational outcomes (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), our focus on self-selection offers an additional perspective on how strategic practices are enacted. Thus, our paper adds theoretical nuance to practice perspectives on strategy by addressing a simple but important question: why do actors get involved in strategy making in the first place?

Self-selection in Strategy Work: What Do We Know?

For decades, issues of self-selection have been an inherent, yet mostly implicit, part of strategy practice and process research. This body of work has been concerned with unpacking the practices through which individual actors shape strategy formation (e.g. Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006); both enabled and

constrained by wider organizational and societal contexts (e.g. Burgelman, 1983a, 1983b; Pettigrew, 1985). Thereby, scholars have emphasized the importance of individual actors beyond the top management launching strategic initiatives and fostering strategic change (e.g. Dutton et al., 2001; Friesl et al., 2019; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). This argument, however, rests on a key condition: it implies that the 'right actors', the 'change champions' (Balogun, 2006), 'product champions' (Burgelman, 1983b) or 'project champions' (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014), become involved in strategic initiatives that potentially affect a firm's strategic direction. Remarkably, such processes of volitional participation, or what we term self-selection, may come with significant consequences for the actors involved. In particular, in instances where such wilful actions challenge the existing strategic intent of the organization, these individuals may take career, credibility and reputational risks (e.g. Dutton et al., 2001), as well as risk being excluded, marginalized or ridiculed (e.g. Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Westley, 1990), making them, as Burgelman (1983b, p. 241) put it, 'tragic hero[es]'. Consequently, Floyd and Wooldridge (1997, p. 470) highlight that 'upward [strategic] influence is probably not something that middle managers pursue with equal intensity at all times or that all middle managers engage in equally at any particular point in time' – a statement we deem to be even more true for non-management employees invited to participate in strategy processes. Therefore, the crucial questions arising from these core findings of strategy practice and process research are: what are the social processes that influence why certain actors become involved in strategy making and what are the participatory implications for strategy work?

Despite being a fundamental aspect of strategy, self-selection largely remains an implicit phenomenon in the literature without being explicitly theorized. Prior strategy research offers a fragmented array of insights into the possible reasons why individuals become involved in strategy processes (e.g. Pandza, 2011; Tavella, 2020). To some extent, it also shows how those choices may be affected by contextual constraints which, however, do not yet form a unified model of self-selection. These scholars have approached self-selection in the strategy process literature by drawing on individual or social conditions of choice. For instance, at the level of the individual, Burgelman (1983b, pp. 234, 241) cites actors' extrinsic career ambitions to become general managers as a reason for self-selection, while Friesl et al. (2019, p. 73f.) refer to the intrinsic motivations and emotions driving the 'tragic hero'. With regard to social aspects, Chandler's (1962) DuPont case illustrates how autonomous actions arose out of collectively felt grievances. Relatedly, Pandza (2011), drawing on social identity theory, highlights how unfavourable social comparisons between groups explain why R&D teams take the initiative to develop new capabilities. And, building on the behavioural theory of the firm, Tarakci et al. (2018) find that performance comparisons to peers and other organizational units, as well as individual performance deviations moderated by organizational identification, are important drivers of actors' self-selection into strategy work.

Prior research has also highlighted the importance of broader structural conditions for individual choices to get involved in strategy work. For instance, Mantere and Vaara (2008) identify several strategic discourses which, when present in an organization, may facilitate or inhibit self-selection in an organization's strategy process. In the case of open strategy, Brielmaier and Friesl (2022) point to structural factors such as an organization's prevailing 'rules of the game' in order to explain when actors may be caught between their functional roles and participation in strategy work. Similarly, the growing body of work on open strategy emphasizes that the creation of inclusive and supportive contexts entices actors throughout the organization to participate (Hautz et al., 2017). Yet, at the same time, and despite such proclamations, we do not have a detailed understanding of how such contexts affect individual choices of participation in strategy work (Dobusch et al., 2019).

This brief overview of extant strategy practice and process research shows that although it is a fundamental aspect of a number of classic strategic phenomena, self-selection in strategy work remains poorly understood. As shown above, in prior research (and particularly in the growing debate on open strategy), participation is largely a normative presupposition, such that the reasons why individuals become involved is largely an implicit assumption that remains untheorized. Thus, this paper aims to fill this conceptual void by directly theorizing processes of self-selection and the participatory dynamics that in the aggregate they give rise to. In this way we model strategy participation as a social accomplishment that puts the interplay of choices of participation and contextual characteristics at the centre. The conceptual building blocks of the practice theory perspective underpinning our theorizing are developed below.

Building Blocks of a Practice Theoretical Perspective of Self-selection

It is tempting to consider self-selection as a rational choice that maximizes the utility of individual actors (Coleman, 1990). Yet, below, we argue that self-selection can be considered a social process that is shaped by explicit and implicit rules of participation. We draw on a practice approach (Giddens, 1984; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006) to theorize self-selection as a social process that envelops individuals. This perspective does not render strategy work as one-off events but as an ongoing social accomplishment (Rouleau & Cloutier, 2022), 'grounded in the reflexive rationalization of action' as Anthony Giddens (1977) put it (p. 130). Such a perspective is therefore sensitive to the characteristics and dynamics of social events and the intricacies of how and why choices are made across individual actors (Cloutier & Langley, 2020; Werle & Seidl, 2015). Taking this approach allows us to put the individual at the centre of strategy work without neglecting the significance of the wider organizational environment. Below, we outline the main theoretical principles that inform our theorizing of self-selection.

For practice theory 'a fundamental component of day-to-day activity is [. . .] *choice*' (Giddens, 1991, p. 85); hence any analysis of human conduct needs to be sensitive for the subtle social forces that constitute the very 'potential for action' to occur (Giddens, 1984, p. 6). Based on this perspective, self-selection unfolds as a duality of structure and agency. Action is influenced by structural conditions, such as particular norms and values regarding how or by whom strategy work is legitimately conducted. These structures enable yet also constrain individual action, in our case self-selection (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984). At the same time, structures are maintained by the actions that gave rise to them, while also potentially changing them. This is because actors are knowledgeable and purposeful and are thus able to act accordingly. Individual actors aspire to achieve objectives (individually or for the firm) and thus 'choices will be influenced by their consideration of what is possible' (Jarzabkowski, 2004, p. 532). This requires actors to constantly '*monitor* aspects social and physical, of the context in which they move' (Giddens, 1984, p. 5). It is in this reflexive monitoring that actors' values, intentions (Thévenot, 2001) and social identity (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) come to bear on their subsequent actions, such as their wilful choice of participating in strategy making.

In the following sections, we build on Giddens' structuration theory to develop a process perspective of how actors self-select into strategic events. We will develop our argument in three steps: (1) We will argue that strategy work may involve events of participation that are not mandated by the leadership or management of the organization. This point is important as (2) practice theory informs that self-selection is subject to formal yet also subtle informal social rules (the 'selection context') that influence, yet do not determine, whether participation is considered appropriate. Finally, (3) we argue that actors' monitoring of this selection context can be theorized as, what we

call, 'moral evaluating'. Actors evaluate how these social norms relate to their own personal beliefs and aspirations. It is this interplay of participation rules (selection context) and 'moral evaluating' that gives rise to or undermines self-selection into strategy events. Below, we elaborate on these theoretical arguments in greater detail.

Strategy work may involve events of unmandated participation

This paper rests on the conceptual assumption that the conduct of strategy work involves strategic events that encompass various degrees of individual choice and that this choice may or may not be subject to formal mandates. The short reflection on strategy practice and process research above highlights the importance of self-selection in strategy work. On the one hand, strategy making may, of course, be driven by clear objectives and defined mandates regarding which individual or collective actors are involved (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Such mandates may be based on top-down perceived capabilities or functional roles (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000), hierarchy or political affiliation (Cyert & March, 1963). Furthermore, they may be temporally bounded (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) for the purposes of a particular strategic initiative or project. On the other hand, strategy making may also be emergent, lack any top-down intent (e.g. Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) and ultimately depend on the voluntary contribution of individuals (e.g. Burgelman, 1983b; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Thus, an inherent characteristic of strategizing events may be that unmandated participation can also be legitimate (Lave & Wenger, 1991) – that any individual actor in the organization may have the potential to participate and make a contribution to strategy work. Based on these arguments we consider choices of self-selection as the unmandated decision to participate in strategy work. Still, while individuals may not have a mandate, self selection does not happen in a social void, as we point out below. Furthermore, even when participation in strategy work is mandated, the actual involvement and commitment still depends to a substantial degree on intrinsic motiviation that can – by definition – not be mandated; to some degree, self-selection is thus relevant for any strategy process, whether formally mandated or not.

Selection context: Managed or unmanaged rules of participation

Theorizing self-selection based on the recursive interplay of structure and agency requires us to elaborate on the characteristics of the structural context ('self-selection context') that shapes and is shaped by specific choices of self-selection (cf. Giddens, 1984). For the purpose of a process theory of self-selection, we focus on two key aspects of the selection context within which self-selection occurs: rules of participation and the extent to which these rules are deliberately managed.

Rules of participation. We argue that the self-selection context can be considered as a portfolio of rules of participation. Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration argues that social conduct is shaped by structure. By that he refers to the rules (and also resources) that underpin social interactions. While such rules may take the form of formalized laws, most rules have a different quality. They are shared assumptions about what is appropriate in particular settings that have emerged over time. Such rules permeate everyday life (such as what constitutes punctuality or politeness), and compliance with such rules reinforces them (Jarzabkowski, 2004). By the same token, such rules also shape participation in certain events (such as strategy meetings, workshops, and so on). For any actor, these rules are reflected both in past as well as future strategizing events (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). While most of these rules are not formalized and implicit, they might still become manifest in the way certain events are set up (e.g. Johnson et al., 2010). This for instance

might refer to the timing and place of such events and the people who have participated in the past. These aspects may constitute cues for participation rules. This implies that the historicity of strategizing events matters as actors reflect upon prior as well as future strategizing events, their role in it, as well as the specific social setting of the events (Giddens, 1984). For instance, such rules may imply that strategizing events are competitive settings in which different political agendas clash, attracting those actors confindent in political manoevring This can be illustrated by prior research on self-selection. Actors may avoid self-selection into particular situations because they consider it a competition (Chen & Gong, 2018) viewing other actors as more capable than them (Brown, 2011). Thus, the selection context provides cues for rules of participation that actors may act upon.

Managed and unmanaged selection context. While many (participation) rules in organizations have emerged over time and may be part of an organization's cultural background (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977), they may also be deliberately set to instigate particular forms of participation. Thus, the selection context may be managed or unmanaged shaping how participation rules become manifest and guide actors' activity. Below we describe managed and unmanaged self-selection in strategy work in greater detail.

Managed self-selection is an oxymoron. While firms aim to benefit from the power of individual choice and initiative, at the same time they often try to limit such choices to a specific group of actors (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Splitter et al., 2021). Thus, the invitation to participate is often linked to articulated rules such as roles, a certain skillset or a specific background. Managed self-selection has an anticipatory and purposive character with obvious appeal. By inviting several actors deemed most valuable to particular strategic questions, firms are able to embrace a focused search process while at the same time benefitting from a certain degree of variance (e.g. Hardy et al., 2006). For instance, Seidl and Werle (2018) show that collaborators in inter-organizational strategy workshops invited further actors to participate by balancing the need for diversity and efficiency. Splitter et al. (2021) furthermore provide an extreme case in this regard. In their study, employees were initially free to apply for an open strategy initiative, yet ultimately, top management decided which people were most suitable for the strategy process (by balancing various characteristics they deemed important).

A second form of self-selection underpinning strategy work is 'unmanaged self-selection'. Born open organizations (Luedicke et al., 2017), such as Wikimedia (Dobusch et al., 2019), and also open strategy online communities in large organizations (Plotnikova et al., 2020) are examples of how strategy work is accomplished by largely unmanaged self-selection, meaning that it involves the participation of an unsolicited group of people and without a deliberate setting of boundaries. Unmanaged forms of self-selection also face constraints, yet with an important difference: in unmanaged settings, self-selection is is even more strongly subject to individual backgrounds as well as personal and societal circumstances in addition to the wider set of rules around strategy work in a particular organization. However, these rules have not deliberately been decided upon and, rather than as an antecedent, are thus an emergent characteristic of unmanaged strategizing events.

Moral evaluating of the selection context

In the previous section, we argued that the selection context comprised managed or unmanaged rules of participation matters for self-selection into strategizing events. Yet, how does the selection context come to bear on individual choices to participate in such events? After all, the selection context only provides the grounds for choice (Giddens, 1991); it 'envelops what people can do' but without directly determining behaviour (Seidl & Whittington, 2014, p. 1414). This view implies that self-selection into strategizing events is neither fully determined by the

selection context and its set of participation rules, nor simply the result of actors' idiosyncratic choices. Rather, it is important to note that participation in strategy work is shaped both by individual aspirations (such as career choices, strategic goals, and so on), as well as the selection context which, as mentioned, comes with certain rules of participation. Practice theory thus, in the way in which we have developed it here, provides us with the means to unpack how both individual aspirations and beliefs as well as rules come to bear on specific selection choices. We call this process 'moral evaluating'.

Indeed, theories of practice inform us that actors understand the framework of rules and norms within which they operate and that they can reflexively monitor and evaluate (Giddens, 1977, 1984) past and future strategizing events with its set of formal and tacit rules. In the words of Thévenot (2001, p. 59), the 'moral element [values, beliefs, aspirations etc.] is crucial [. . .]. [It] drives both the agent in his conduct and determines the way other agents take hold of or seize this conduct'. This understanding must not be mistaken for calculative rationalization. Rather, it rests upon actors' idiosyncratic system of values, beliefs and aspirations that influences how they make sense of participation rules governing prior and future strategizing events (Arieli et al., 2016; Weick, 1995). How rules of participation come to bear on choices of participation very much depends on individual-level characteristics. For instance, if an unwritten rule of strategizing events is that it constitutes a competitive setting of vested political interests, it is likely to entice those actors to self-select who consider themselves capable of performing under such conditions. Thus, the very reason that entices some actors to self-select in strategy work and participate in a strategy workshop, for instance, becomes the reason for others to withdraw.

Thus, self-selection rests upon the assumption that actors are capable of acting in self-determined ways, pursuing individual goals and preferences (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) by striving for and being 'committed to a particular good' (Thévenot, 2001, p. 60). At the same time, strategy settings may be characterized by specific strategic objectives, a particular understanding of corporate purpose and, with that, a set of explicit or tacit rules of participation. Such a setting may trigger actors to reflect on their own values, beliefs and aspirations and therefore informs subsequent decisions (Banerjee et al., 2015; Roach & Sauermann, 2010). Thus, strategizing events may involve 'moral' tensions between actors' own and somewhat idiosyncratic set of values, beliefs and aspirations and the characteristics of strategizing events that actors use to judge the situation (Wynn, 1999). Prior research already provides tentative insights into these dynamics. For instance, Beech and Johnson (2005) show how organizational-level choices are often underpinned by a CEO's individual identity. Similarly, Friesl et al. (2019) show how an actor's view of the firm's purpose and his aspiration to change how the organization in question operates shaped her/his engagement in strategy work. Moreover, research in the healthcare sector provides several examples of how individual-level values and aspirations underpin self-selection (e.g. Kolstad & Lindkvist, 2013).

Theories of practice also suggest that the practice of moral evaluating encompasses both strategizing events that have already happened and those that are about to happen in the future. In theoretical terms, self-selection is based on actors' reflective (Weick, 1995) as well as anticipatory evaluations of the selection context (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). Indeed, strategy work in organizations is not a one-off exercise that is limited to the here and now. Like other activities in organizations (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002), strategy work itself is an ongoing accomplishment that has a history, a manifestation in present activity and also projects into the future with regard to any planned activities (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013). And, in fact, both past and future events are characterized by a set of participation rules. It is through such reflective and anticipatory moral evaluating that actors form tentative assumptions about the rules of participation and how this relates to, for instance, personal aspirations (Weick et al., 2005).

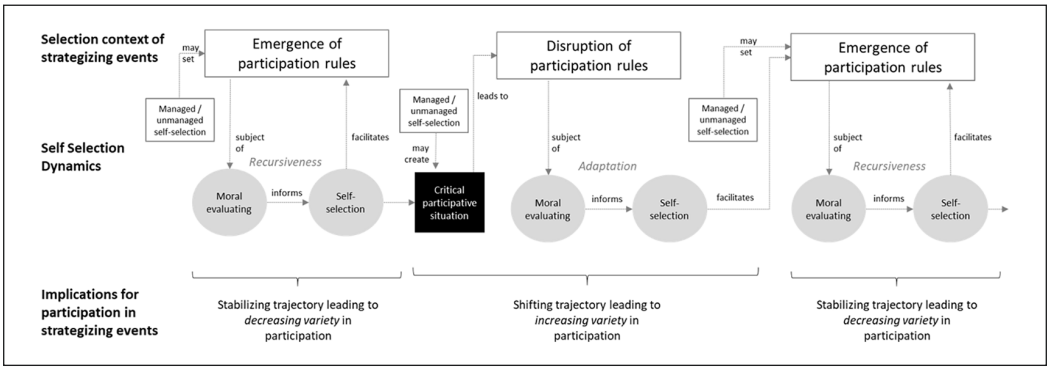

Figure 1. A process perspective of self-selection in strategy work.

A Process Model of Self-selection in Strategy Work: Stabilizing and shifting participative trajectories and their emergent consequences

Above we drew on structuration theory, as a particular practice-theoretical approach, to delineate the building blocks of a process understanding of self-selection in strategy work. In this section, we build on this theoretical foundation and elaborate how this conceptualization of self-selection helps to theorize different trajectories of self-selection. We believe that this is important, as strategy work usually does not happen in one-off events, but rather unfolds through a multiplicity of events over time with varying degrees of participation (Cohen et al., 1972; Dobusch et al., 2019). The understanding of self-selection developed above allows us to unpack why (despite self-selection) a decreasing variety of participation in strategizing events may emerge (stabilizing trajectories), yet it also offers us the means to explain under which conditions we would expect 'shifting trajectories', characterized by an increasing variety of participation over time. As we will argue, the interplay between rules in the selection contexts over time and the choices made by individuals at each point is key to the patterns, or trajectories, of strategy participation that ensue. In this respect, building on Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, we introduce the further concept of 'critical participatory situations' to describe events in which established rules of participation are disrupted, giving rise to shifting trajectories of participation.

Both stabilizing and shifting trajectories may have obvious appeal for different types of strategy work. 'Stabilizing trajectories' provide the continuity that facilitates the implementation of a particular strategic intent (Mantere, 2008; Nutt, 1989); in contrast, 'shifting trajectories' may allow firms to harness the strategic knowledge of a wider range of actors and break out of a particular strategic path (Seidl et al., 2019; Stadler et al., 2021). Yet, at the same time, these trajectories are related to negative spirals and emergent outcomes as well. Below we describe the self-selection dynamics in each of these trajectories, including the transitions between trajectories (via critical participative situations) as well as the overall consequences for strategy work in organizations. Figure 1 visualizes our process model of self-selection.

Stabilizing trajectories: Recursiveness of self-selection and participation rules

We tend to assume that organizing strategy work via self-selection attracts different actors and thus produces, by definition, participative variety. Indeed, this is an important (tacitly normative) assumption of the growing debate on

open forms of strategizing (e.g. Stadler et al., 2021). Yet importantly, counter to this understanding, a practice perspective implies that over time self-selection leads to stabilizing trajectories of participation, i.e. fairly homogeneous participation in strategy events (see Figure 1). This is due to the coupled and recursive nature of the selection context (participation rules) and individual action (self-selection) (Giddens, 1984; Jarzabkowski, 2004): As argued above, participation does not happen in a contextual void. Rather, actors are confronted with rules of participation that have been explicitly set (managed self-selection) or have been deliberately left open to interpretation (unmanaged self-selection). In both cases, self-selection of a particular set of actors into strategy events over time gives rise to the confirmation and/or emergence of (implicit or explicit) participation rules (e.g. a certain expertise or hierarchical level is required to participate in a strategy event). These rules in turn reinforce actors' self-selection decisions, thereby reproducing participation rules. Such recursiveness is the consequence of actors' retrospective evaluations of past strategizing events, seeing who was involved and what the character was of those events and thus being 'knowledgeable', i.e. being able to 'morally evaluate' whether, under the given rules, it is appropriate for them to join at this point and in line with their own set of values, beliefs and aspirations for participation (Giddens, 1984). This is important since the selection context per se does not determine behaviour. A remarkable example in this regard is the case of the premium cola collective (Luedicke et al., 2017). Following the principle of radical openness, the collective invited all of its 1650 members to participate in strategy making and to identify key strategic issues for the future. Yet, ultimately, the key organizer collective raised by far the most strategic issues and defined the strategic direction of the collective. Luedicke et al. (2017) reveal that this pattern emerged due to the lack of members' access to strategic information. They also show that this pattern was sustained and reproduced through actors' subsequent lack of participation in the collective's strategy making. Moreover, and as another example, Johnson et al. (2010) show how strategy workshops over time become a ritualized activity, in which participation rules become entrenched and condition choices for wilful participation.

Stabilizing participatory trajectories are of crucial importance in various strategic settings such as strategy implementation (Friesl et al., 2021), post-merger integration (Graebner et al., 2017) or radical organizational restructuring (Huy et al., 2014). Such contexts require firms to frame issues such that they can mobilize a stable group of actors over an extended period to enact a particular strategic intent (Gilbert, 2006). Accomplishing such mobilization via self-selection promises various benefits such as higher levels of intrinsic motivation and commitment (Hautz et al., 2017) or higher organizational identification (Pandza, 2011) among a group of like-minded individual actors.

Shifting trajectories: Disruption of participation rules and adaptation of self-selection

Above we argue that stabilizing participatory trajectories may be a common phenomenon that might actually constitute the rule rather than an exception (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Indeed, albeit in different theoretical guises, management and organization research is replete with examples of stabilizing trajectories in the form of 'dominant coalitions' (Cyert & March, 1963; Man Chang & Greve, 2019), middle manager coalitions (MacMillan & Guth, 1985) or informally organized teams that affect a strategic transformation, even over longer periods of time (e.g. Chandler, 1962). Also, while these stabilizing trajectories may prove conducive to strategy work, as argued above, they might also become problematic as they become a hindrance for 'requisite variety' (Ashby, 1956) in some instances of strategy work.

Yet, how do shifts in self-selection dynamics occur in strategy work? Building on Giddens (1984, p. 60f.), we argue that overcoming established modes of participation requires a 'critical

participative situation', i.e. a 'radical disjuncture [. . .] that threaten[s] or destroy[s] the certitudes of institutional routinization' (see Figure 1). This view is in line with other concepts in strategy research such as the 'punctuated equilibrium' (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994) or 'path dependence' (Sydow et al., 2009), suggesting that crises are required to challenge the status quo and the recursive nature of a given set of participation rules. In strategy work, such a 'criticial participative situation' may be evoked both by forces endogenous to strategic events (e.g. by shifting managed to unmanaged forms of selection or vice versa if participation proves unconducive to strategic outcomes), yet might also be exogenous (such as in cases of legal frameworks governing participation in certain events). For instance, Whittington et al. (2011) argue that external forces (cultural, societal and technological changes) require firms to become more transparent and inclusive in their strategy making. Similarly, Stadler et al. (2021) demonstrate that environmental pressure triggered a number of firms such as Ericsson or Barclays to (at least temporarily) invite a broader set of actors into their strategy process; in other words, such external pressure challenges established participation rules. Additionally, strategy practice and process research has long shown how internal actors, particularly middle managers, may themselves question participation rules of who is legitimate to participate in strategy events. This stream of research suggests that such attempts are particularly prevalent in instances of (radical) change, and with varyng degrees of success (e.g. Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Laine & Vaara, 2007).

Thus, critical participative situations may result in a disruption of the selection context, leading to the questioning and potential revision of participation rules. This does not mean that actors' self-selection decisions are no longer influenced by the rules of participation. Yet, it does imply that this context becomes less pervasive as far as the previously established rules are concerned. It is in these situations that the individual actor gains centre stage (Giddens, 1984). As the participation rules of past strategizing events no longer apply, or at least not fully, actors may more strongly engage in anticipatory moral evaluating, contemplating various possibilities of participation (Giddens, 1991; Jarzabkowski, 2004). For instance, some actors may self-select into a new open strategy event as they may see the opportunity to push their own career or agendas, while others may consider it as an opportunity to be finally heard by top managers (Westley, 1990).

This aniticipation in turn may give rise to a 'shifting trajectory' of participation, i.e. an increasing variety of participation in strategizing events. These shifting trajectories have value in a broader sense for the organization, as they may enable adaptation to changed conditions such as the societal or intraorganizational pressure towards inclusion in strategy (Whittington, 2019; Whittington et al., 2011). Yet importantly, a practice perspective implies that the described 'void' of participation rules is often just temporary (Giddens, 1984; Jarzabkowski, 2004). Over time, we would expect that the selection context is reconstituted with the emergence of a new set of participation rules, informing (yet again not strictly determining) actors' subsequent self-selection decisions. As such, it gives rise to yet another stabilizing trajectory (see Figure 1). Furthermore, firms may establish unmanaged open strategy initiatives in order to deliberately break out of a situation that has proven dysfunctional for successful strategy work ('critical participative situation') by using the wisdom of new and different actors (e.g. Plotnikova et al., 2020; Stadler et al., 2021). Yet, at the same time, the inherent tendency of self-selection towards stabilizing trajectories may create difficulties in fulfilling such promises over a longer period.

Negative emergent consequences of stabilizing and shifting trajectories

The process model outlined above argues that self-selection into strategy work unfolds in sequential phases of stabilizing and shifting

trajectories. This perspective also allows us to theorize various negative emergent consequences of self selection for strategy work, which so far have not been recognized.

Our process model of self-selection implies a convergence towards stabilizing trajectories and thus essentially a decreasing variety in participation over time. Such a driving force matters, since stabilizing trajectories are related to inertia. The striking case in point is Burgelman's (2002) classic paper on the strategy process at Intel and the issue of co-evolutionary lock-in. In this case, Intel's management vectorized its strategy towards a particular product market. Autonomous initiatives (driven by self-selection) that focused on alternative product areas were increasingly opposed and thus dwindled, reinforcing a particular selection context. Thus, the recursiveness of self-selection and the selection context may be a crucial factor for strategic inertia and the reinforcement of existing strategic paths (Sydow et al., 2009).

In line with Giddens (1984), our process model highlights that shifting trajectories emerge as a result of the disruption or destruction of established participation rules. Shifting trajectories may increase the complexity of decision making and thus impede effective strategy making (Hautz et al., 2017). As described above, this void of established participation rules may attract a variety of actors, gaining freedom to morally anticipate various opportunities of the new selection context. In the words of Giddens (1991, p. 84), this gives rise to a 'pluralism of choice' that is 'rendered visible to anyone who cares to glean the relevant information' (Giddens, 1991, p. 84). This pluralism has already been identified as a challenge in organization theory. Indeed, Cohen et al. (1972, p. 1) highlighted that in situations where a multitude of problem definitions and incoherent preferences exist, decisions may take the form of an 'organized anarchy', in which the link between problem definitions and related options becomes problematic.

Yet, the lack of participation rules may also result in a 'tyranny of structurelessness' in the words of Freeman (1972). In such instances participation rules may be appropriated by a group of actors or a 'dominant coalition' over time (Cyert & March, 1963; Mithani & O'Brien, 2021). This dominant coalition fills a void of rules by imposing their own, usually informal and non-transparent, participation rules and thus shaping in turn who is allowed or able to participate as well as in which form. Such creation of stabilizing trajectories by certain actors may then inadvertently result in the opposite of what was intended with open strategy initiatives: a narrow logic of strategizing enacted by a stable group of actors.

Relatedly, in the absence of established participation rules, self-selection decisions into strategy events are vulnerable to unintended and unconscious biases (cf. Dean, 2016). For instance, frontline workers or employees distant from a corporation's headquarters may not evaluate their engagement in an open strategy event, theoretically open to all employees, as legitimate, undermining the variance promise of such events. In other words, based on their anticipatory moral evaluating of cues provided by the selection context, only a certain group of individuals may feel addressed and/or capable to self-select themselves into the process.

Discussion and Theoretical Implications

A large body of work over the last decades has demonstrated how strategy is shaped by a diverse set of actors, some of whom are mandated to do so (typically the top management) and others who choose to do so (typically the middle management and a select group of operational employees) (Burgelman, 1983b; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Friesl et al., 2019; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). It is the latter phenomenon that forms the context for this paper. Yet, while a substantial body of work has emerged on how these actors gain voice (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), sell issues (Dutton et al., 2001) and acquire and maintain strategic agency (Mantere, 2008) in order to complement top-down strategy making, key questions remain: Why those individuals? What made

those individuals choose to engage and participate in strategy work? And, importantly, to what extent are the practices and processes deployed in strategy work contingent on the people involved? These questions have to date remained largely unanswered. This paper therefore addresses these questions and does so by proposing a process theoretic perspective of self-selection in strategy work that allows us to unpack the social dynamics of self-selection and how these dynamics create different trajectories of participation (stabilizing and shifting) over time. Self-selection is, as we have argued, not a singular rational choice. Rather, it unfolds throught the interplay of a 'selection context' (with a set of participation rules) and actors' 'moral evaluating' of this context. Our arguments have a number of important broader theoretical implications for strategy research:

First, our paper has substantial implications for research on strategy formation that aims to theorize the conditions, processes and outcomes of employee involvement. In particular, the growing debate on open strategy is built on the very premise of self-selection (Whittington et al., 2011). Research on open strategy has stressed that the variety of options generated as part of strategy development may benefit from the inclusion of a broad set of internal as well as external actors (Seidl et al., 2019; Stadler et al., 2021). Prior research on open strategy has already critically examined how the practices and processes deployed to facilitate such forms of strategy making affect participation (Dobusch et al., 2019). Unveiling the social processes underpinning self-selection allows future research to study why certain actors participate in open strategy or why they abstain from doing so. Such a research effort is of great relevance as actors' self-selection is the prerequisite for creating the 'shifting participative trajectories' which open strategy initiatives promise (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2022). What is more, this paper points to inherent problems lurking within the concept of open strategy and its specifically normative character (Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019). We tend to assume that including a broader range of actors in strategy making is per se desirable for firms. Yet, we forget to consider under which circumstances this might be the case. Our differentiation between 'unmanaged' and 'managed' self-selection contexts allows important insights into this question. Firms that open up the strategy process (perhaps with the honest intention of including all employees) must be aware of tacit structural constraints that may hinder employees with certain values, beliefs and aspirations from self-selecting into the process. We argue that while rules of participation may be deliberately set, they also emerge over time and that these tacit constraints towards particular actors may give rise to unintended 'stabilizing trajectories' that do not yield the intended variety (see Luedicke et al., 2017). Thus, in order to accomplish genuine 'inclusive openness' in strategy work, the emergence of participation rules has to be reflected on, understood and potentially addressed if participation proves dysfunctional ('critical participative situation') to trigger a shifting trajectory. Thus, exploring the often tacit dynamics of self-selection is a crucial task for future research on openness in strategy and beyond.

Second, by theorizing the conditions of self-selection this paper forms part of the wider research stream investigating voluntary participation in strategy work more generally. Indeed, participation has gained increasing attention in the last few years (e.g. Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Seidl & Werle, 2018) and has been defined as 'an activity comprising structures, practices and processes that help lower-level organizational actors (i.e., middle managers and operating employees) to take part in strategy work' (Tavella, 2020; p. 579). This definition implies that participation essentially has two sides. On the one hand, it involves the willingness and choice of a particular individual to do so, yet also the possibility of engaging (in terms of processes and structures). So far, previous research has particularly considered the latter structural aspect. For instance, Laine and Vaara (2007) show how top managers aim to limit middle-managers' participation in strategy work and leverage, as well as maintain, their

position by employing distinct strategy discourses. Similarly, Mantere and Vaara (2008) as well as Tavella (2020) show how top managers discursively construct participation options for lower-level employees. Our findings further contribute to and deepen this line of argument by showing that intentions to participate are very much intertwined with the context of particular strategizing events. While we do not take a discursive perspective in this paper, one way through which the selection context could come to bear on individual action are discourses conveying rules of participation that actors morally evaluate. Their evaluation takes place in such discursive contexts leading actors to either accept or reject the implied rules (for instance, based on individual and idiosyncratic sets of values, beliefs and aspirations) and thus act accordingly by choosing to participate or not. It is through this mechanism that such discourses (and the rules of participation that they invoke or imply) are reproduced or potentially become problematic in critical participative situations. Thus, future research on participation could evaluate how such critical situations become manifest in discourse and how actors verbalize and re-evaluate rules of participation in order to instigate, for instance, a 'shifting trajectory'.

Finally, our conceptualization of self-selection adds important theoretical nuance to the link between strategic practices and organizational outcomes, a key line of argument in practice perspectives on strategy (for instance, Whittington et al., 2006). The main thrust of this line of research has been to understand how strategy is developed or changed by investigating the practitioners involved, the practices drawn upon, as well as the situated enactment of these practices in particular circumstances (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). This perspective emphasizes that actors are enabled and constrained by contextual characteristics; yet individual actors matter as they exercise strategic agency by, for instance, shaping structures and systems of meaning or by engaging in skilful political behaviour (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau & Cloutier, 2022). Even so, prior strategy practice research has largely taken the actors present in a particular setting for granted and has focused on the organizational and strategic implications of particular practices instead (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). An important implication of this paper is that how practices are enacted in particular strategizing events is not just a matter of contextual constraints but is also influenced by the people present. Hence, when theorizing the outcomes of strategizing events we need to acknowledge the multiude of strategizing practices enacted but also the self-selection dynamics that gave rise to a particular trajectory of participation. Indeed, the presence of certain individuals might indeed have been crucial for how strategy-related events unfold (see for instance Friesl et al., 2019). This realization renders self-selection an important theoretical boundary condition for empirical studies investigating strategizing practices.

Conclusion

Strategy work has significant consequences for the future of organizations. Its raison d'être is to ensure a firm's viability by shaping its product market focus, its geographic footprint, its vertical scope and the very principles on which business is conducted. Thus, for strategy work to be accomplished 'well', it requires the careful coordination and 'coming together' of individuals with appropriate insights and skills as well as political influence (Howard-Grenville, 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising that we tend to think of strategy work as being accomplished largely via hierarchy that affords the necessary level of 'control'. This paper highlights that extant research on strategy practice and process already reveals that this hierarchical coordination of strategy work is often complemented (e.g. Burgelman, 2002), or in some cases even substituted, by individual- (or group-) level self-selection as the coordinating force (Hautz et al., 2017; Pandza, 2011).

As an increasingly larger share of strategy work actually relies on self-selection, we argue that both strategy research and strategy practice benefit from a deeper understanding of why actors become engaged in strategy work. We know that the development and implementation of strategy is ultimately down to particular actors in specific situations (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Jarzabkowski et al., 2022; Whittington, 2006). The conceptual ideas developed in this paper therefore have the potential to inform future empirical research on self-selection and the coordination that is involved in the practice of strategy work. In particular, the extent to which features of the selection context as well as actors' individual circumstances shape self-selection requires greater research attention. Due to the 'counterfactual' nature of these questions (Kornberger & Mantere, 2020), even ethnographic studies reach their limits; after all, we can only observe the participation that actually happened. Indeed, one would need to manipulate particular features of the selection context in order to make inferences about their implications for actors with particular characteristics. This could be achieved via different forms of action research or carefully crafted field experiments. Thus, this theoretical frontier for strategy process research is also a methodological one. Yet, it is also an issue of practical concern. Understanding why exactly 'this motley crew' of people gets involved is of utmost value as it is they who will shape a firm's strategic direction. Answers to these questions therefore stand to illuminate why a firm's strategy has developed in a certain way and, more broadly, allow us as well to approach one of the central problems of strategy research ('why do firms differ?') from a fresh perspective (cf. Nelson, 1991). Therefore, we hope that this paper helps to instigate further empirical research on the conditions and consequences of self-selection in strategy work.

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8. To Participate or Not to Participate: Making Sense of Incoherent Attention Structures in Corporate Innovation Contests

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Abstract. Within the attention-based-view of the firm (ABV), attention structures control employees' time, effort, and attention by allocating "value and legitimacy" to specific decisions. Prior research highlights that attention structures are often incoherent, pulling actors in conflicting directions. Incoherent attention structures are common in internal corporate innovation contests which encourage participation while requiring employees to maintain focus on daily work. These competing structural demands create equivocality about participation in such contests. Drawing on qualitative data from the first innovation contest in a low-cost location of a leading automotive supplier, this paper reveals two distinct sensemaking practices through which actors construct coherence for themselves: anchoring in identity and modulating attention regulators. By anchoring in identity, actors actively construct the individual value of a decision alternative. Through this practice, actors transcend competing structural demands. By modulating attention regulators, actors actively construct the organizational legitimacy of a decision alternative. Through this practice, actors interpret attention regulators in ways that foster structural coherence. We show that the use of these sensemaking practices depends on the nature of attention regulators (tacit versus material). We contribute to the intersections of the ABV and sensemaking, the concept of attention structures and the phenomenon of participation in innovation contests.

Keywords:
attention-based-view; attention structures; sensemaking; participation

Introduction

This paper advances the attention-based-view of the firm (ABV) by offering a novel perspective on the interplay of incoherent attention structures and employee sensemaking. A key argument of the ABV is that firm behavior depends on the channeling of actors' attention and thus activities towards organizational goals by so called attention structures (Barnett, 2008; Ocasio, 1997; Simon, 1947). Attention structures control time, effort, and attention by allocating "value and legitimacy" to issues and answers (Ocasio, 1997, p. 198). Thereby, attention structures reduce the complexity of an information-overloaded organizational environment and enable employees to act effectively (e.g., Barnett, 2008, Bauer and Friesl, 2024; Ren and Guo, 2011). In his seminal paper, however, Ocasio (1997) already notes that attention structures are not uniformly experienced throughout the firm and subsequent research has depicted them as often fragmented (Gaba and Joseph, 2013), decoupled (Joseph and Ocasio, 2012), or incoherent (Rerup, 2009), pulling individual employees in opposing directions (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023a; Ocasio et al., 2023; Vuori and Huy, 2016; Wilden et al., 2023).

Incoherent attention structures are omnipresent in corporate innovation, where actors encounter 'tensions' (Zimmermann et al., 2018), 'contradictions' (Smith and Tushman, 2005), or 'paradoxes' (Thayer et al., 2018) when deciding whether allocate time, effort, and attention to innovative or routine activities (Bledow et al., 2009). This incoherence is pronounced in internal corporate innovation contests (CICs), which are deliberately designed to disrupt organizational routines by encouraging participation while simultaneously requiring employees to maintain stability in their daily work (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2017; Nittala et al., 2022).

Thus, the incoherence of attention structures and disruption of organizational routines in innovation contests confronts actors with ambiguity and equivocality regarding their individual conduct (e.g., Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015, 2020). Put differently, actors torn in different directions (participation and routine work versus non-participation and innovation work), must construct a coherent attention structural environment, providing themselves with answers about

priorities and the use of scarce resources to navigate the equivocality involved (e.g., Weick, 1993, 1995). These dynamics shift salience from attention structures to the agency of individual employees as key organizing principle: In order to move on and act effectively, actors are required to actively create order and make sense of the situation (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Up to now, we know little about how actors make sense of incoherent attention structures in innovation contests and beyond. Understanding these dynamics promises novel theoretical insights across different domains. Most importantly, this line of inquiry sheds light on the interplay between the ABV and sensemaking; "there is very little research that examines their relationship" (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014, p. 108; Ocasio et al., 2023). Furthermore, it promises to advance our understanding of participation, one of the core antecedents of innovation contests and voluntary strategic action more broadly (e.g., Friesl et al., 2023; Malhotra et al., 2017).

Thus, based on the arguments presented above this paper asks the following research question: "*How do actors make sense of incoherent attention structures in internal corporate innovation contests, and how do these sensemaking practices shape their participation or non-participation*?"

In order to address this research question, we draw on extensive qualitative data (see, Joseph and Wilson, 2018; Rerup, 2009) collected from a unique setting; the first innovation contest in a low-cost location (Alpha) by one of the world's largest automotive supplier. Employees faced a novel and ambiguous situation (e.g., Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015), as they decided whether to allocate time, effort and attention and participate in the contest or not.

Our analysis yields various important findings. We first show the incoherence of attention structures regarding the innovation contest, enabling and constraining participation at the same time and thus pulling actors' time, effort, and attention in contradictory directions (participation versus non-participation). We reveal that actors made sense of the attention structural incoherence by applying two distinct practices of sensemaking: *Anchoring in identity* and

modulating attention regulators. By anchoring decisions in their identity to make sense of the ambiguous situation, actors actively shaped the individual value attributed to a decision alternative (cf. Ocasio, 1997, p. 198) and thereby created coherence between themselves and a particular decision alternative. Moreover, by modulating attention regulators to make sense of the situation, actors actively shaped the organizational legitimacy attributed to a decision alternative (cf. Ocasio, 1997, p. 198). They thereby constructed a decision environment of structural coherence. Moreover, by tracing the winner of the innovation contest and their subsequent progress, we show that the prevalence of these sensemaking practices is depends on the nature of particular attention regulators. While 'tacit attention regulators' (such as a firms' rules of the game) allowed modulation, 'material attention regulators' (such as financial resources) rendered 'identity anchoring' as the sole means to make sense of the incoherent structural conditions.

Based on these findings our paper makes three important contributions. First, our paper answers to various calls to develop a more dynamic and social understanding of the ABV and attention structures by integrating a sensemaking perspective (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Ocasio et al., 2018; Ocasio et al., 2023). The two sensemaking practices (anchoring in identity and modulating attention regulators) shift salience to lower-level actors' agency of in the ABV and an understanding of attention structures as social accomplishment. Second, our paper contributes to the notion of attention structures as core mechanisms of attentional control in the ABV (Ocasio et al., 2023; Ocasio, 2025). Implicitly, prior research has treated Ocasio's (1997) attention regulators as equivalent in their nature and influence (e.g., Ren and Guo, 2011; Stevens et al., 2015). Our study challenges this assumption by distinguishing between tacit and material attention regulators. We theorize that these regulators differ in the extent to which they allow for interpretive flexibility, shaping actors' ability to modulate attention regulators in their own sense. Finally, we contribute to the literature on participation in CICs, an important yet ill-understood phenomenon (Beretta and Søndergaard, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2017; Malhotra et

al., 2020). We theorize participation as a consequence of the interplay between incoherent attention structures and employees' sensemaking practices.

Theoretical Background

Theoretical foundations of attention structures

The concept of attention structures requires an understanding of its theoretical roots. Simon (1947) argued that bounded rationality in decision-making is the consequence of humans' limited attentional resources. As organizational actors are not able to attend to all stimuli and decision alternatives equally, they cannot determine an optimal decision. Limited attention is thus the bottleneck in organizing (Cyert and March, 1963; Simon, 1973). Organizations are required to establish 'principal premises' or 'attention structures' to effectively channel this crucial yet scarce resource of employees to certain behaviors and choices (March and Olsen, 1979; Simon, 1947).

William Ocasio rediscovered these ideas, placing the concept of attention structures at the very heart of the ABV. At its core, the ABV argues that attention structures regulate actors' situated attentional focus and, thus, decision-making by allocating "value and legitimacy" to issues and answers (Ocasio, 1997, p. 198). Thereby, attention structures reduce the complexity actors face in an information-overloaded world by directing actors' attention towards particular issues and answers. Attention structures consist of four interrelated attention regulators: the 'rules of the game', i.e., the formal and informal principles of action guiding attention allocation (e.g., Nigam and Ocasio, 2010); the 'players', i.e., these actors affecting others attention allocation and, thus, decision-making (e.g., Ocasio and Joseph, 2008); structural positions, i.e., the formal role and social identification providing actors with a certain attention focus in organizations (e.g., Ren and Guo, 2011); and finally resources, i.e., a firms' (in)tangible assets shaping the set of answers available (e.g., Hendriks et al., 2018). Thus, in the ABV, individual decisions and ultimately organizational moves depend on how these attention regulates distribute actors' limited time, effort, and attention.

Incoherent attention structures in organizational innovation

As indicated above, the very idea of attention structures implies that attention is coherently channeled towards selected legitimate and valuable activities (Simon, 1947, p. 100). And, indeed, most studies drawing on the ABV and its precursors have treated attention structures as 'coherent force' (see, Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023b). At the same time, numerous ABV-based research, emphasizes the often incoherent, differentiated, fragmented or decoupled nature of attention structures (e.g., Gaba and Joseph, 2013; Joseph and Ocasio, 2012), including Ocasio (1997, p. 196) who, for instance, refers to the attention regulator 'rules of the game' as often "not fully coherent and consistent". Incoherent attention structures are not only pervasive, they also matter for organizations. Rerup (2009) highlight that organizational-level "attentional incoherence" may undermine firms' ability to attend to emerging opportunities and threats. Vuori and Huy (2016) demonstrate that collective fear at Nokia undermined attentional coherence between top and middle managers, leading to innovative activities decoupled from organizational capabilities and environmental changes. Wilden et al. (2023) show that attention regulators unfold a varied effect on how top and middle managers evaluate the potential of innovation projects.

As the examples indicate, incoherent attention play a major role in firms' innovation endeavors. This is already evident in March's (1991) fundamental paper on ambidexterity, which argues that a firm's structural set-up has to balance the inherent trade-offs between exploitation of existing capabilities and exploring novel possibilities. For him, this balance is a matter of "choice of effort or attention" (March, 1991, p. 84). Indeed, a wide array of studies have emphasized organizational innovation involves tensions (e.g., Lewis et al., 2002), conflicting activities (e.g., Bledow et al., 2009) or paradoxes (e.g., Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009). Organizations must design structures that support both the stability of routines and the pursuit of innovation, while individuals are required to navigate these conflicting structural demands (Zimmermann et al., 2018).

CIC, which are increasingly adopted by firms to foster innovation beyond dedicated research and development departments, illustrate these incoherent attention structures (e.g., Dos Santos and Spann, 2011; Malhotra et al., 2020; Nittala et al., 2022). Such contests rely on employee participation, as their success depends on individuals voluntarily contributing ideas that may lead to new innovative products. However, they also inherently create competing structural demands, guiding employees' attention in different directions (cf., Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023). For instance, the established rules of the game may prioritize efficiency and product quality, while the innovation contest emphasizes creativity and risk-taking. Also, while top managers as sponsors of the initiative may promote participation, line managers might discourage it due to concerns about the ongoing daily work. As a result, employees face ambiguity about whether to allocate their time, effort, and attention to such contests, rendering participation a contested and ambiguous decision (e.g., Beretta et al., 2023; Birkinshaw et al., 2010). Despite the increasing prevalence of CICs and the centrality of participation, we still know little about how employees navigate incoherent structural demands and why they choose to engage in CICs (Beretta and Søndergaard, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2017). Previous research on participation in these internal contests has primarily focused on individual-level factors, such as intrinsic motivation (e.g., Wendelken et al., 2014) while widely neglecting their interplay with structural conditions.

Making sense of incoherent attention structures in corporate innovation contests

The arguments above suggest that employees invited to CICs encounter incoherent attention structures, channeling time, effort, and attention in contradictory directions (participation versus non-participation). In other words, incoherent attention structures in innovation contests disrupt the status quo and do not provide the 'meaning systems' that reduce environmental complexity and guide actors' focus toward specific activities (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015, 2020). Instead, the incoherence shifts salience from attention structures offering meaning and direction (Ocasio, 1997) to individuals' "construction of meaning" (Cornelissen, 2012, p. 118).

To move on and act effectively in such circumstances, actors are required to actively create a coherent view of the situation and thus to make sense of the inherent attention structural tensions and trade-offs (e.g., Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

This set of arguments implies an understanding of incoherent attention structures as a social accomplishment, becoming performative through actors' active engagement in constructing meaning. This is already evident in Ocasio (1997) who, drawing on Weick's work, emphasizes that organizational actors are "not passive recipients [...], but active creators" of the structures they face. The processes of how actors make sense of incoherent attention structures remain poorly understood in innovation and beyond; to put it in Ocasio et al's (2023, p. 111) words "implications of post-Chandlerian structures for attention and sensemaking, however, remain unclear". Generally, despite calls for integration (e.g., Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Ocasio et al., 2018), the intersections between the ABV and sensemaking remain widely untheorized (Ocasio et al., 2023). This is particularly notable given the explicit (see Ocasio, 1997, 2025) and implicit connections between both theoretical perspectives. For instance, the sensemaking literature highlights the role of sensegiving by managers in shaping employees' interpretation of the organizational reality and guiding their actions (e.g., Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007), This aligns with Ocasio's (1997) attention regulator 'players'. More broadly, attention structures can be seen as sensegiving devices provided by the organization to direct actors' focus and action.

As argued above, innovation contests, designed to disrupt organizational routines, confront actors with incoherent attention structures. They introduce ambiguity about how to behave appropriately, requiring actors to construct meaning for themselves. This renders innovation contests a particularly suitable context for exploring organizational actors' sensemaking of incoherent attention structures. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question at the intersection of the ABV and sensemaking: "*How do actors make sense of incoherent attention structures in internal corporate innovation contests, and how do these sensemaking practices shape their participation or non-participation*?"

Methodology

This study investigates the impact of incoherent attention structures on employees' (non-) participation decision in the first site-wide innovation contest in a low-cost location. Similar to other ABV-inspired studies exploring the role of attention structures as well as other sensemaking studies, the analysis of this paper draws on rich qualitative data (e.g., Bauer and Friesl, 2024; Plotnikova et al., 2024; Stensaker et al., 2008). In particular, this study is based on a case study of a German automotive supplier's subsidiary in Eastern Europe (called Alpha), launching its first site-wide innovation contest (Yin, 2009). The inherently contested context of a low-cost location, starting to engage in innovation activities seemed highly suitable to investigate the effect of incoherent attention structures and employees' sensemaking

Research Context

Alpha is an engineering center that opened in November 2013 and was founded as a low-cost location, performing engineering projects for original equipment manufacturer (OEM) assigned by the headquarter in Germany. Alpha has experienced extraordinary growth since its foundation, from less than 20 employees to more than 1000 employees today. Locations in Eastern Europe promise well-educated engineers and software developers. Accordingly, Alpha's parent company has strongly invested into Alpha over the last years, including 50 million euros for new buildings and offices for its employees.

In September 2021, Alpha's head of innovation officially announced the first Alpha-wide innovation contest with a campaign throughout the organization. Participation of employees was voluntary, and the articulation as of the first idea happened alongside their daily project work. The innovation contest followed a clear schedule (see figure 1).

Insert Figure I about here

Initially, 29 employees distributed over nine teams chose to participate in the innovation contest. On November 1st six teams were selected for a two days boot camp by a jury consisting

of Alpha's heads of department (HoD) as representatives of Alpha's top management. On November 19th, winning teams were selected for a 100-day challenge, enabling them to work on the idea mostly released from their daily project work. After a final pitch at the beginning of April 2022, Alpha's top management decided whether work on the idea should continue. The innovation contest was highly controversial from its start, leading to ambivalent attitudes and activities within Alpha's management. Thus, as we demonstrate in the findings below, employees' decision to participate in the innovation contest took place in a novel but also an ambiguous and contested environment.

Data collection

The analysis of this paper draws on two main data sources: Semi-structured interviews and rich documentary evidence. An organization design specialist of Alpha that was supporting the organization of the innovation contest enabled the extensive research access, particularly to all relevant internal documents of the innovation contest.

Semi-structured interviews. This paper draws on 51 semi-structured interviews. Four initial exploratory interviews with the key representatives of the innovation department as well as managers at Alpha were conducted in June and July 2020. These interviews focused on innovation initiatives and autonomous innovative activities at Alpha as low-cost location. The organization design specialist introduced us to the innovation contest just before its official launch at Alpha. Between November and December 2021, we conducted 36 initial interviews with a broad range of actors to explore the role of attention structures for participation in the innovation contest: six interviews with all heads of department (HoD), two interviews with key organizers (head of innovation and the responsible innovation manager), 13 interviews with non-participants and 15 interviews with participants. Importantly, interviews were conducted with at least two members of each participating team. The interviews with participants and non-participants began with general questions about the role, department, or tenure at Alpha as well as their daily work ("What does your day job at Alpha look like?"). Furthermore, we

investigated the effect of top-down attention regulators (Ocasio, 1997) regarding the innovation contest with tailored questions. For instance, we asked all participants about the purpose of the location as well as the innovation climate at Alpha ('rules of the game'). In particular, our questions aimed at investigating how actors made sense of the incoherent environment and their decision with initially broad questions (e.g., "What were your reasons of (not) participating in the innovation contest?") and specific follow-up questions. To trace the development of the innovation contest, we conducted eight additional interviews with two representatives of each winning team during (February, 2022) and after the 100-day challenge (May, 2022). In January, 2023 three additional interviews were conducted (with two finalists, one non-participant) to reflect on the first innovation contest at Alpha. Table I gives an overview about the interviewed participants and non-participants.

Insert Table I about here

Documentary evidence. We draw on a wide range of internal and public documents comprising many hundreds of pages of text and slides that enabled 'material' insights into Alpha's attention structures. We collected most of this documentary data during and after conducting the interviews in November and December 2021 to deepen our insights into attention structures at Alpha. For instance, we had access to official company presentations, organizational charts, relevant internal presentations and the official flyer of the innovation contest, results of feedback surveys of participants and non-participants, and the internal innovation blog of Alpha. We enriched the internal documents with publicly available data such as Alpha's English media coverage, its website, social media presence, public interviews from Alpha's CEO, or job advertisements (see Table II for an overview).

Insert Table II about here

Data Analysis

This paper followed an abductive approach to data analysis (Mantere and Ketokivi, 2013). Our data analysis was first guided by Ocasio's (1997) concept of attention structures and regulators as well as relevant sensemaking literature (e.g., Rouleau, 2005) to unpack (non-)participation in innovation contests. The observation of strongly incoherent (organizational-level) attention structures prompted us to investigate how individuals made sense of such contradictions and ambivalences inductively. Overall, our approach to data analysis consisted of four interrelated steps:

Step 1. In the first step of data analysis, we used Ocasio's (1997) four attention regulators (rules of the game, players, structural position, and resources) to openly code our data and investigate whether these top-down regulators enabled or constrained participation in the innovation contest. We thereby developed a large number of first-order, descriptive themes (e.g., Alpha prevents innovation as low-cost location, Alpha pursues innovation through different activities, capacity is overbooked, capacity is freed up for innovation, etc.) by triangulating interviews and internal as well publicly available documentary data (e.g., official job advertisements or job descriptions). This initial analysis revealed a clear pattern: Attention structural incoherence regarding the innovation contest was omnipresent. Subsequently, we systematically classified the different codes and developed abstract and more general (second-order) codes to capture the essence of the first-order descriptive themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) along the four incoherent attention regulators (e.g., rules of the game: Pursuit of innovation versus extended workbench, structural position: Room for innovative ideas versus regimented daily job). Table III summarizes this step, providing extensive evidence for the incoherence of attention structures with regard to (non-)participation in the CIC.

Step 2. In the second step, our objective was to unpack how individuals made sense of the incoherent attention regulators that as our interviews clearly showed gave rise to ambiguity about how to behave appropriately. To do so, we openly coded all (non-)participants' interviews

aiming to distil how individuals interpreted and thereby responded to the contradictions inherent in the attention regulators. Interviews have been widely used in sensemaking studies as they allow to explore the accounts actors generated about an ambiguous situation (e.g., Maitlis, 2005; Stensaker et al., 2008). We developed a large number of first-order, descriptive codes about these accounts on their participation decision in the innovation contest. Such codes were for instance "participation as waste of time due to ongoing customer projects critical for Alpha's success", "participation enables more efficient work on daily projects", "participation violates Alpha's purpose within the corporation", "participation as continuation of formative childhood experiences" or "participation as incompatible with personal identity". Subsequently, in several iterations and by consulting the literature on attention regulators (Ocasio, 1997), we aggregated these descriptive codes into abstract (second-order) themes ('Anchoring in Identity' and 'Modulating attention regulators') (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). 'Anchoring in Identity' refers to making sense of the environment in the absence of coherent structural guidance, by drawing on one's identity. 'Modulating attention regulators' refers to diminishing or magnifying the effect of particular attention regulators to construct a sense of structural coherence. In line with previous literature on sensemaking (Rouleau, 2005) and given our focus on the individual actor, we labeled these emerging second-order themes as 'sensemaking practices'.

Step 3. In the next step, we aimed to reveal how these broader patterns across participants and non-participants relate to the incoherent of attention structures. Initially, comparing these emerging second-order themes across all actors, we realized differences between participants and non-participants. While participants could constantly draw upon their identity to make sense of the environment, several non-participants, describing themselves for instance as 'innovators' could not. This insight as well as the interest in incoherent attention structures prompted us to have a closer into our data as well as the literature. Subsequently, we again analyzed the data by drawing on Ocasio's 1997 (p. 195ff.) conceptualization of how attention structures shape attention allocation and prioritize certain decisions over others by assigning

value and legitimacy. We found that 'anchoring in identity' forms a category of individual-oriented sensemaking practices that is aimed at constructing individual value of a particular decision. Instead, 'modulating attention regulators' form a category of organizational-oriented sensemaking practices aimed at constructing organizational legitimacy of a particular decision. Table IV summarizes steps 3 and 4 and provides extensive additional evidence for the sensemaking practices.

Step 4. Finally, we wanted to better understand how the interplay between incoherent attention structures and the identified sensemaking practices in an exploratory manner. Therefore, we analyzed the initial and subsequent interviews with the members of the winner team based on the coding schema of step 2 and 3. This allowed further interesting insights into the concept of attention structures. Coding and analyzing the later interviews, we found that the material impact of particular regulators (resources and players) became evident in the further course of the events, limiting actors ability to modulate them and thereby create structural coherence. Based on this analysis, we differentiated between tacit and material attention regulators, enabling distinct sensemaking practices (e.g., anchoring in identity remains as sole response to material attention regulators).

Setting the stage: Incoherent attention structures pull actors in different directions

The innovation contest was a novel event at Alpha that disrupted organizational routines at the location. Below, we show how the incoherence in Alpha's attention structures simultaneously enabled and constrained participation in the contest (see Table III for additional evidence).

Insert Table III about here

Rules of the game: Pursuit of innovation versus extended workbench

The rules of the game refer to the informal and formal principles of action that guide and restrict actors in realizing a firm's objectives. Alpha's top-down principles of actions were

highly incoherent, incorporating the fundamental contradiction between the pursuit of innovation and its mandate as a low-cost location acting as an "*extended workbench for the headquarter in Germany*" (HoD 1, Interview 1).

Innovation was postulated as a core value at Alpha. The slogan of Alpha was "*our innovation your future*" and official documents regularly celebrate current innovations and activities fostering future innovation:

> "OUR VISION: WE PUSH OUTSTANDING, CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE IDEAS" (internal department presentation, p. 8).

Indeed, managers agreed that innovation is crucial for Alpha's progress and that employees' efforts should (in principle) be channeled in this direction. There were important strategic reasons for fostering innovation. They allowed Alpha to gain "*visibility*" and "*responsibility*" (e.g., HoD 2) by *impress*[ing] *the* [headquarter in Germany] *with some innovation work"* (HoD 1, Interview 1).

At the same time, this focus on innovation conflicted with Alpha's "*set up as a low cost organization*" traditionally oriented towards working on "*smaller* [operative] *tasks and mature products*" while "*new technology areas or new product development are always happening in Germany*" (HoD 2). The innovation contest made the tension between both 'principles of action' salient within Alpha's top management as the following quote illustrates:

> I have an ambivalent relationship to this [the innovation contest]. [...]. We, the HoDs, have discussed this intensively [...] and it is still not clear to me. In principle, from an organizational point of view, we are an engineering service provider. We get projects from business units in Germany, project A, project B, we have to execute, that's it! [...] our job is not to develop a washing machine 2.0 outside the automotive context! No! Because of that I have an ambivalent perception about the innovation contest. Is this really good for Alpha? How much energy can we invest into it without violating our mandate? (HoD 4)

Players: Formal empowering versus informal undermining

The so-called players in the ABV are these actors or groups of actors influencing others' time, effort and attention allocation and, thus decision-making. Managers constituted the key players for employees at Alpha. And, indeed, they agreed on having a crucial role in advertising voluntary participation in such contests:

> So, people have to be inspired. And it also, it has to be communicated. So, they say, "wow, this is something cool". (HoD 1, Interview 1)

Nevertheless, managers' role regarding the innovation contest was ambivalent. In the official top-down communication, participation was praised as an opportunity to "*be a game changer"* (official flyer innovation contest) "*empowering* [Alpha] *members to work on new business models*" (official presentation innovation contest, p. 3). Information was spread across Alpha by a "*call for ideas*" email to all employees, information meetings, and the distribution of flyers in the building (promotion plan). Yet, in contrast to that, the heads of department and were skeptical and some "*absolutely not happy with* [the innovation contest]" (e.g., HoD 4). They informally undermined the participation of their employees by, for instance, not actively communicating and promoting the innovation contest to their department:

> Within the leadership circle [HoDs of Alpha] we decided to leave it be. So, we are not in favor of it and not against it. If an employee is interested, he can participate […], but we do not make any advertising for it. (HoD 1, Interview 2)

Structural Positions: Plenty of room for innovative ideas versus regimented daily job

Structural positions refer to the formal roles and social identifications, continuously channeling actors' attention towards the accomplishment of their tasks. However, as the contradictions in the rules of the game suggest, the structural positions at Alpha did not provide employees with clearly defined expectations regarding work on innovations. The tension between the promise of "*plenty of room for innovative ideas*" (official job advertisements) and the regimented daily project work was omnipresent.

Alpha was strongly advertising innovation opportunities for current and new employees. For instance, Alpha promoted these opportunities in an internal blog called "*Innovation@*[Alpha]" with the slogan: "*Bring your innovative ideas to life*!". Moreover, in job advertisements, standard sentences such as "*So, are you ready to shape the future of the mobility* [at Alpha]*?"* indicated a focus on innovations in structural positions at Alpha. Yet, top managers highlighted that these statements very often did not reflect in the daily job in their departments. The automotive projects, coming from the headquarter in Germany, typically required "*a lot of*

repetitive, monotone work", primarily focused on "*deliver*[ing] *faster and in a better quality. This is always the target here*." (HoD 6).

Resources: Freeing up capacity versus lack of capacity

Time was the key resource at Alpha. Alpha's business model as engineering center was to execute technical projects and bill employees' time for these projects. Therefore, the availability and official legitimation of time for participation in the innovation contest was a crucial 'attention director' for employees. This attention regulator, however, was incoherent regarding the innovation contest, in turn, pulling actors in opposing directions. Time (and budgets) for the innovation contest were officially approved and funded by the top management and innovation department. Managers in principle agreed that *"freeing capacity"* (Head of Innovation, Interview 1 & 2) was essential for the success of such innovation initiatives. As shown in figure I, employees should be temporarily relieved of their daily responsibilities for a two days boot camp, preparing them for a final pitch day for the 100-day journey. Subsequently, after the pitch day, up to two teams should be (and were) accepted for the 100-day-challenge with the promise to work 100 days with "*80 % of your work capacity freed* [...] *to push forward your idea*" (official flyer). While the boot camp and the 100-day challenge were created to free up and legitimate time spent in the initiative and encourage participation, it led to tensions between the head of departments and the innovation team. Indeed, most heads of department were (highly) critical about the concept of the 100-day-challenge pointing out that "*you should not take it* [the 80%] *as a hard threshold* [...] *we have other things to do!*" (HoD 2). Asked whether he could compensate for the time if one of his employees was accepted to the 100-day-journey, a head of department answered directly:

> Pff, absolutely not! [...] I have 30 or 35 employees too few, based on the plan. And to lose one in this situation... (HoD 4)

Actors make sense of incoherent attention structures through distinct sensemaking practices

Very few employees of our sample (P 8 and P 13) encountered a coherent attention structural environment regarding the first innovation contest at Alpha. For these actors, participation in the innovation contest was a straightforward and unambiguous decision, desired by their manager ("*He wanted me to join*", P 8) and a direct extension of their daily job and thus unproblematic from a resource perspective ("*it's pretty much what I normally do in* [my] *new projects*", P 13). These two actors were part of a small, newly created unit focused on "*new technologies*" around "*virtual reality and augmented reality*" (P 13). However, most employees at Alpha were confronted with incoherent attention structures, pulling individual employees in contradictory directions. In the very notion of the ABV (Ocasio, p. 198f.) Alpha's attention structures did not provide a clear and coherent valuation and legitimization of the answers available, enabling and constraining participation at the same time. Alpha's top managers were aware that the launch of the innovation created a novel situation at Alpha, "*challeng*[ing] *the status quo*" (HoD 5) and "*wak*[ing] *employees up from their daily routines*" (HoD 3, HoD 1). Consequently, to participate or not was no straightforward decision, requiring employees to navigate inherent trade-offs:

> It's difficult to have a balance between the regular day-to-day work, and also be involved in this kind of projects, like the [innovation contest]. Because the deeper you go, the more you need time. And at some moment, you have to sacrifice something. (P16)

"*Struggles*" (NP 6), "*mixed feelings*" (NP 6), and attempts "*to find balance*" (P 8) were highly evident in the interviews with the employees, describing the innovation contest as "*unknown territory*" (P 1, Interview 1). Indeed, they often reflected lengthy on the ambiguous situation they were suddenly confronted with:

> [Recently], I see a lot of activities [such as the innovation contest] being done extra to the work that needs to be done. And that's a good thing. It has positive aspects. Also, I think there's a trade-off. So, we need innovation. We need resources allocated for innovation. But we need to keep in mind that existing projects need to go on. They need to function. There needs to be a balance! And I think this balance is not fully achieved yet [at Alpha]. (P 12)

How did employees deal with this situation? Below, we show that participants and non-participants engaged in two sensemaking practices that allowed them to create a coherent picture of the conflicting structural conditions they encountered; anchoring in identity (individual-oriented sensemaking) and modulating attention regulators (organizational-oriented sensemaking). Table IV provides additional evidence for these sensemaking practices.

Insert Table IV about here

Individual-oriented sensemaking: Anchoring in identity

As described above, the invitation to the first innovation contest created a novel and ambiguous situation, disrupting established routines at Alpha. In order to navigate these "*new waters* [...] *that also create uncertainty*" (P 12), employees drew on their identity. More specifically, they constructed their decision as a matter of identity and thereby created coherence between themselves and a particular decision alternative. This sensemaking practice referred to as 'anchoring in identity' aims at actively attributing individual value to a specific decision.

Participants. By interpreting participation as anchored in their identity, participants constructed participation as personally more valuable option compared to non-participation. For instance, independent of high time pressure and fully booked capacity, they stated that participation would bring them personal value as they would "*need these challenges* [...] *to function best*" (P 1, Interview 1). In a similar vein, they interpreted the situation as an opportunity to finally live out their identity and passion:

> The idea is we'd like to make a platform for local administrations, like city councils, that has a digital recording of old traffic activity in the city. [...] Yeah, so I'm really as a personal interest, I'm really into like city planning, urbanism, things like that. So, I'm, I'm really interested, it is kind of like a nerdy hobby. (P 4, Interview 1)

Remarkably and relatedly, several participants even made sense of the situation by tracing the *"driving factor*" of their engagement in the innovation contests back to their "*childhood*"

(e.g., P 1, P 2, P 6). Thereby, actors made sense of their participation choice as a logical extension of their of their personal history and individual system of valuation:

> It [participation in the innovation contest] goes back into my childhood, because I was always very curious. I always liked to build all kinds of constructions with my friends, obviously playing around, but I enjoyed it a lot [...] this is the reason behind my participation! (P 6)

Non-participants. Conversely, several non-participants, embedded in similar structural conditions, constructed their non-participation choice as compatible with their identity and thereby as more valuable option than participating in the innovation contest. Non-participants faced a distinct challenge. They generally appreciated the innovation contest as "*brilliant, really, really good*" (NP 10) or "*an interesting initiative*" (NP 1). Yet, at the same time, they did not join the initiative, leading to "*inner conflicts*" (NP 3). In order to create coherence for themselves, a number of (but not all) non-participants grounded their decision in their identity, in the words of these actors "[their] *own personality*, [their] *own psychology*" (NP 10). This is nicely illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

> I don't get so enthusiastic about such things. [...] I don't know, include this new feature [into a product] and so on. And also, if *I don't see the value for me* [...], it doesn't motivate me. [...]. I'm not a really optimistic person, I'm kind of a realist and kind of pessimistic. (NP 1)

In the interviews, questions regarding the innovation contest could even result in long reflections of actors' personal values, guiding them in leading a good life and how these values were interrelated with the decision to not participate in the innovation contest:

> I'm driven by 'necessities is the mother of all inventions'. This is how I work [...] that's why I didn't join this campaign. If somebody asked me "hey, can you invent something", I will just tell him as I am, because if I have nothing to fix, I have no idea how to invent something or to innovate something. So pretty much everything I need to fix or need to improve is based on necessity. This is how I work in my entire life. I don't think I can change something [...] I have a car, I don't like cars, even if I am working in the steering department. I like simple cars, because I enjoy driving them. So I don't see any need to improve cars if it's working, it's a simple engine, doesn't have a lot of computers. [...]. I'm more a practical guy. This is the main reason why I didn't join this campaign. (NP 5)

Organizational-oriented sensemaking: Modulating attention regulators

Besides 'anchoring in identity', employees also employed the sensemaking practice of 'modulating attention regulators' to create order of the situation. Through this practice, employees interpreted attention regulators in a way that fostered structural coherence, in other

words resolving the structural incoherence they were facing. Modulating attention regulators aims at actively constructing organizational legitimacy of a specific decision alternative.

Non-participants: Magnifying attention regulators. As indicated above, making sense of the ambiguous environment was challenging for non-participants who still viewed the innovation contest as a generally "*great thing*" (NP 3). While some non-participants could mitigate this ambivalence by constructing participation as incompatible with their identity, this approach was not universal as others identified themselves as having an "*innovation mindset*" (e.g., NP 6, NP 13). For these actors, making sense of the situation was particularly challenging. Alongside identity anchoring (where feasible), non-participants modulated attention regulators to create coherence between their decision to abstain and the structural environment. Specifically, non-participants did so by foregrounding certain attention regulators as paramount and thus legitimate from an organizational perspective, overshadowing contradictory attention regulators.

For instance, many non-participants magnified the limitation of 'resources' as paramount for their decision-making, emphasizing that given the time constraints at Alpha, non-participation was the only legitimate option. For instance, they interpreted their daily job as "*more important* [than the innovation contest] [...] *because* [Alpha] *has so many projects and not so many people that are joining this team and we will be more and more busy*" (NP 6). In line with that, NP 2 argued that employees like him should "*behave maturely*, [that is] *to know what the priorities are sometimes* [the daily job if resources are scarce]", understanding his non-participation choice as acting on this principle:

> I have, as you heard, plenty of stuff to do in my *normal job* [being an active team-lead and active developer at the same time for multiple software projects]. I was like "okay, I'm not really interested, because I don't really have time for it". (NP 2)

Relatedly, they magnified that in their 'structural position' at Alpha working on customer projects was essential; "*the project is the boss, my first boss!*" (NP 2). Consequently, they made sense of the innovation contest as "*not a topic for the day-to-day job*" (NP 7) or just an

unimportant "*side project, because this is what is, this is the goal of it right, to have a side project*" (NP 1), rendering non-participation as the legitimate option.

In a similar vein, to make sense of the decision environment, some non-participants foregrounded that the innovation contest conflicted with Alpha's established 'rules of the game' as a location dedicated to executing projects from headquarters (i.e., 'Alpha as a low-cost location'). From this perspective, they critically questioned the alignment between the innovation contest and Alpha's strategic focus, wondering "*if it* [participation in the innovation contest] *is not just a waste of time* [for Alpha]*"* (e.g., NP 13). They further interpreted the innovation contest in its current form as misaligned with Alpha's strategic orientation toward low-cost project work and exploitation, a focus maintained since its foundation:

> The [innovation contest] has the set up for a startup. So, we want to do innovation as a 'start up approach'. [...] to build up something new. to reinvent the wheel [...] it's very hard to do exploration innovation [at Alpha] [...] you need a certain level of expertise, you have to have a certain level of understanding about the problems, an understanding about the markets. People who are working everyday with these topics, they know the problems. And we have [unexperienced colleagues in this regard], what they can do [...] is just innovation in the exploitation field (NP 13)

Participants: Counteracting attention regulators. Participants were in a different position compared to non-participants as they could consistently draw upon their identity to make sense of the situation. Yet, even though participants may have constructed alignment between their identity and their decision, attention regulators pulling them towards non-participation still remained present. Thus, in addition to 'identity anchoring', participants modulated attention regulators to counteract these attention regulators. Thereby, they were able to create coherence between their decision and the structural environment.

In most cases, this sensemaking practice was aimed at the resource constraints at Alpha. Indeed, most participants faced significant time pressure and overloaded schedules, inclining them towards non-participation. In order to mitigate the effects of this attention regulator, participants interpreted participation in the innovation contest as a strategic use of time, highlighting the benefits for efficiency and effectiveness in their daily project work and thus legitimate at Alpha:

> I think it [participation in the innovation contest] is anyway a *benefit for the organization*. You learn and [...] take something to the normal project and it helps in your agility so not only for [your] speed but also for the technical know-how [...] you are involved maybe five times faster in some topics. [...]. You will use the skills [acquired] in the regular job. (P1, Interview 1)

Relatedly, in their structural position participants were typically deeply embedded in a streamlined daily job of implementing requirements for automotive projects, which distanced them from thinking outside the box and engaging in innovative activities. In order to counteract this 'structural force', participants interpreted the project work at Alpha and participation in the innovation contest as complementary and synergetic, enabling them to *"connect the dots"* (e.g., P 14) with crucial benefits for the organization:

> Long term their [management's] projects will profit from that [...], also because of the mindset I get from it. So, for example, focusing more on what are the [customer] needs and its technical solutions. [...] I will certainly use stuff I learnt [in my structural position]. So I will try to apply that directly in the project itself. (P 10)

Moreover, as shown above managers were skeptical about their employees' participation. In order to counteract the effect of this attention regulator, participants interpreted the role of their managers as negligible for the legitimacy of their decision within Alpha:

> I didn't really ask for support, because in the announcement presentation it was said that they [managers] know about this. Then I didn't ask about anything. I just blocked my calendar and said that I will be away [...] management just wants their projects to be done, so they don't really care. (P 10)

Finally, as described above many actors experienced Alpha as a low-cost location with "*innovation be*[ing] *the last one on the list of priorities*" (P 6), directing employees towards working off predefined projects rather than engaging in the innovation contest. Employees counteracted these 'rules of the game' by interpreting the innovation contest as an opportunity to establish new "*development paths*" and "*reach that* [next] *level of system responsibility*" (P 15) at the location, constructing participation as beneficial for Alpha in the long run and thus legitimate.

Aftermath: The varied nature of attention regulators shapes ongoing sensemaking practices

As demonstrated above, participants made sense of the contradictory environment of the innovation contest by employing two distinct practices with different focal points; anchoring in

identity and modulating attention regulators. Below, we illustrate how the persistent and varied nature of attention regulators—material versus tacit—shaped the ongoing use of these practices for actors from teams 2 and 5 who were accepted for the 100-day challenge (see Table I).

Anchoring in identity as response to material attention regulators

Initially, participants had re-interpreted and thereby counteracted the attention regulators, pulling them towards non-participation and thus directing their time, effort, and attention towards their daily project responsibilities. Although the sensemaking practice of 'modulating attention regulators' provided temporary relief from these structural forces, the material impact of attention regulators—specifically, 'resources' and 'players'—became undeniable during the 100-day challenge. As a response, participants increasingly drew on their identity to make sense of the situation, enabling them to justify and sustain their commitment to their participation. Retrospectively, P1 acknowledged that he misinterpreted the structural constraints involved: "*I think in the excitement from back then, I think it* [the real world impact of structural constraints] *was kind of impossible to see for me*" (P4, Interview 4).

Indeed, as soon as the 100-day challenge started the selected participants faced 'resources' challenges as the typically tightly budgeted and understaffed projects work continued, requiring their involvement. It became clear that members of the selected teams could only work "*one day two days per week, no more, all of us also have our regular projects that we must take care of*" (P1, Interview 2) or "*one day per week*" (P2, Interview 2) on their idea, demanding many hours of overtime of the actors involved. Participant 1 explained how drawing on his identity allowed him to make sense of this situation and continue with the 100-day challenge:

> We focused on this and the standard projects that we [were] involved because this was just something next to the full time job. We were not dedicated to this startup idea. We just worked with pleasure to prepare something but we actually all have our regular projects where we have to work. [...]. I think when you [work] on an innovation that you are really passionate about, then you're inclined to like, to enjoy the innovation part more [than your daily project work]. (P1, Interview 4)

The situation became particularly precarious for team 5. During the 100-day challenge the managers of two team members (besides P4 and P3) intervened and they "*needed to go back to*

serious project work" (P4, Interview 3), leading to P4 being the only technical person remaining: "*all was on his shoulder* [...]*, he was overloaded with all the stuff*" (P2, Interview 2). His line management required him to continue with the daily project work. He described this experience as an "*overwhelming*" situation that showed him his limits, expecting "*16 hours* [work] *a day*". Such structural strain could have driven him to detach from the project. Yet, while he "*definitely doubted myself* [...] [and] [did] *not want to do this anymore a number of times*" (P4, Interview 3), he continued with it, making sense of the challenging situation by drawing on his identity:

> I personally have a need for achievement on a personal level. I need to feel that I'm doing something and I'm hitting some goals in order to feel satisfied with the work that I'm doing. [...]. I think it's very much on a psychological formational basis, like, how I see the world, or how I see, how I get meaning from my experience, and in life, in general. (P4, Interview 4)

Modulating attention regulators as response to tacit attention regulators

As described above, attention structures opposing participation in innovation remained powerful forces during the 100-day challenge. While for instance the attention regulator 'resources' became concrete and unfolded real world impact, Alpha's 'rules of the game' as a *"low-cost location"* (P4, Interview 3) were a subtle force. P2 reflected on the ingrained initial responses to innovation ideas, the "*mindset*" (P1, Interview 2) of the location, as follows:

> I see this negative response that there always may be, we always have the tendency to give this as a first feedback that no this isn't possible and this is not the way we do things in [Alpha] and so on (P2, Interview 2).

Relatedly, P4 described the 'rules of the game' at Alpha by drawing on a Romanian saying, *"Don't give up the small bird that's in your hand for the big bird that's on the fence"*. Yet, the rules of the game remained implicit, without direct impact on the innovation work. Due to this implicit nature, actors were still able to modulate and mitigate them, enabling motivation to further work on their ideas in the 100-day-challenge. Participants did so by continuing to emphasize the potential of innovation and their work on innovation to transform Alpha to "*develop in this agile way of working* [required for innovations]" (P 2, Interview 2) and become

"*as valuable as any other location* [developing new products] *that's been around for 20, 30, 40 years*" (P 4, Interview 2):

> And now, here in Romania, we are not developing really projects, but we are working on the other locations project, and why not to develop something here? That [the innovation contest] could be a beginning for us! (P3, Interview 2).

Conceptual Interpretation: Theorizing the interplay of incoherent attention structures and sensemaking in corporate innovation contests

This paper serves a dual purpose. It enhances our empirical understanding of participation in CICs and advances the existing theory of the attention-based-view of the firm, more specifically the role of incoherent attention structures. We develop two core conceptual arguments: (1) we unpack how actors make sense of such incoherent attention structures in the context of a CIC by actively constructing the value and legitimacy of the decisions available. (2) we add important nuance to the concept of attention structures by arguing that attention regulators differ in nature (material versus tacit) and thus in effect on individual actors, participating in innovation and other contested contexts. In figure 2, we provide a model of participation in CIC, incorporating these two arguments.

Insert Figure 2 about here
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(1) In his seminal paper, Ocasio (1997) already highlights that attention structures are often incoherent (see also, Gaba and Joseph, 2013; Joseph and Ocasio, 2012). Incoherent attention structures' can be defined as the simultaneous presence of attention regulators channeling actors' time, effort, and attention toward opposing decision alternatives. Such incoherence is particularly prevalent in organizational innovation activities and even more so in CICs. Such incoherent attention structures have significant implications for individual actors in organizations, giving rise to complex decision environments and creating ambiguity about how to behave appropriately; in other words, they require actors to make sense of the situation and create coherence for themselves. Our findings reveal that actors address this challenge by

drawing on two distinct practices of sensemaking, each with a different focal point (individual or organizational) and serving a different purpose (value or legitimacy).

Individual-oriented sensemaking: Anchoring in identity. This sensemaking practice refers to making sense of an ambiguous situation as a matter of identity. By focusing on the individual value of decisions, actors are able to transcend structural constraints (illustrated in figure 2, where the arrow representing identity anchoring directly shapes decision-making). This points to a key principle: In the absence of coherent attention structural guidance, actors anchor their decision-making in their own sense of self by drawing on factors such as their personality, personal history or individual preferences. In doing so, they actively construct the subjective value of decision alternatives, channeling time, effort, and attention toward the personally most meaningful options (cf., Ocasio, 1997, p. 198). This is especially relevant in innovation, where intrinsic motivation often drives behavior. For instance, in our case, several participants interpreted their decision to participate as rooted in their passion for technology developed during childhood, transforming the participation choice into an act of self-realization beyond professional requirements.

Organizational-oriented sensemaking: Modulating attention regulators. This practice refers to reinterpreting or modulating attention structures to create perceived coherence in ambiguous situations (illustrated in figure 2 where the arrow representing modulating attention regulators indirectly shapes decision-making). This is crucial because, even when a decision aligns with an actor's identity, structural constraints persist and guide actors in a particular direction. By modulating attention regulators, actors construct organizational legitimacy for their decisions, directing time, effort, and attention toward the (subjectively) most legitimate choice (cf., Ocasio, 1997, p. 198). For instance, participants interpreted participation as helpful to save time in ongoing or future projects and thereby legitimate (from an organizational perspective), mitigating the structural pressure of resource constraints. Conversely, non-participants foregrounded time and manpower constraints in daily projects as key challenge and thus

interpreted their non-participation choice as legitimate option under these circumstances. Thus, both participants and non-participants modulated attention regulators to create coherence of the situation, but they did so in a different manner. Participants diminished the effect of particular regulators (such as the lack of time), while non-participants magnified the effect of particular attention regulators, constructing their decision to abstain as inevitable. This distinction highlights two forms of modulation: counteracting regulators to create room for action, or amplifying regulators to justify inaction. The approach of 'magnifying attention regulators' is particularly intriguing. Non-participants partly described themselves as 'innovators', rendering their inaction particularly contested. Magnifying certain attention regulators serves as an attempt to construct one's agency as limited and thus to overcome the inner tensions from the decision made. Conversely, 'counteracting attention regulators' serves as an attempt to reclaim agency by challenging existing structural constraints.

(2) Our analysis shows that actors could modulate each of the attention regulators, depending on their individual situation to initially make sense of a novel and ambiguous situation. For instance, participants that worked for managers opposed to such initiatives could interpret their role as unimportant in this organizational initiative. While this reinterpretation may counteract the immediate impact of these constraints, it does not eliminate their long-term influence on how actors allocate time, effort, and attention. In other words, the attention regulators remain present and powerful. Yet, their effect and how actors deal with them varies, depending on the very nature of the regulators. Our findings highlight a critical distinction between two types of attention regulators (material and tacit), each influencing how actors navigate incoherent attention structures differently.

Tacit attention regulators. This type of attention regulators (e.g., certain cultural norms) is implicit and intangible, fundamentally differing in its effect compared to material attention regulators we describe below. Due to their implicit nature, actors are still able to reinterpret and adjust them in order to create alignment between the structural environment and decisions

made. In our case, participants continued to modulate the existing rules of the game of a 'low-cost location', by emphasizing the potential of their innovation work for the further development of the location. This reinterpretation enabled them to subvert existing 'rules of the game' and construct a sense of coherence between their work and the structural context.

Material attention regulators. This type of attention regulators (e.g., resource availability or time constraints) is tangible, concrete and directly impactful in guiding time, effort, and attention, rendering reinterpretation or modulation inherently restricted. Our findings illustrate an important point: When such constraints leave little room for modulating them, actors turn to their identity as a source of coherence. In the innovation contest, actors' identity enabled them to make sense of and continue with their engagement against materializing structural constraints. Our case also suggests, that attention regulators materialize over time (i.e., shift from tacit to material attention regulators), requiring different responses over time. This can lead to situations, most people know. One might choose to join a new project (such as an innovation contest or an exciting paper collaboration), downplaying the demands of other time-consuming commitments. However, over time, those deferred obligations (such as the daily project work in our case or teaching commitments and R&Rs in academia) may resurface and unfold concrete impact, rendering reinterpretation increasingly difficult. In these situations, one's identity and passion becomes key to make sense and justify continued engagement in the new project.

Theoretical Contributions

This paper responds to various recent calls to go beyond traditional "structural" understandings of the ABV (Barnett, 2008, p. 611) and contribute to a more dynamic and social perspective of the ABV (Nicolini and Korica, 2021; Ocasio et al., 2018; Ocasio et al., 2023; Splitter et al., 2024). In order to do so, this paper focuses on the key concept of the ABV (Ocasio, 1997) in the inherently contested context of an innovation contest in a low-cost location: attention structures. More specifically, this paper builds bridges between a sensemaking perspective and

the ABV by theorizing how employees create order of incoherent attention structures. Furthermore, this paper addresses calls to deepen our understanding of (non-)participation in CICs (e.g., Beretta and Søndergaard, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2017). In detail, this paper makes three important contributions, offering novel theoretical perspectives to the intersections of the ABV and sensemaking, the concept of attention structures and the phenomenon of participation in CICs.

First, our paper advances the understanding of the ABV by integrating a sensemaking perspective. While sensemaking has been integral to the ABV and the concept of attention structures (Ocasio, 1997, 2024), the interplay between both theoretical perspectives has received limited scholarly attention (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Ocasio et al., 2018; Ocasio et al., 2023). We identify two sensemaking practices (anchoring in identity and modulating attention regulators) through which actors actively create meaning of incoherent attention structures, shaping how they allocate time, effort, and attention to a particular decision. These sensemaking practices have a different focal point (individual or organizational), fulfill a different purpose (value or legitimacy) and differ in their relationship to attention structures.

'Anchoring in identity' enables actors to actively construct individual value of a particular decision alternative, independently from the effects of attention structures. This has wider theoretical implications. Prior ABV-based research has commended the virtues of structural coherence, enabling a consistent and sustained attentional focus on a limited set of issues and answers (e.g., Ocasio et al., 2023; Ocasio and Joseph, 2018). Such coherency, for instance, allows organizations to effectively identify potential threats for organizations (Rerup, 2009) or to avoid and overcome crises (Kudesia and Lang, 2024). Our findings add critical nuance to this stream of literature. Incoherent attention structures are an 'identity opportunity', enabling employees to interpret the value of decision alternatives through the lens of their identity; in other words where attention structural coherence fades, personal coherence may be constructed. The emergence of such coherence may come with significant benefits for organizations. For

instance, in our case, several participants extensively allocated time, effort, and attention to their idea alongside their daily job responsibilities as they felt deeply attached to this kind of work.

'Modulating attention regulators' enables actors to resolve structural incoherence by interpreting specific attention regulators in ways that foster structural coherence. Through this sensemaking practice, actors construct organizational legitimacy for their decisions, ensuring that their chosen focus resonates with broader organizational norms, goals, or expectations. Our study reveals two distinct forms of 'modulating attention regulators' that either constrain (magnifying attention regulators) or expand (counteracting attention regulators) actors' agency. Thus, by drawing on this sensemaking practice actors shape the meaning of divergent attention regulators and thereby socially accomplish attention structures. This implies a role shift of individual actors in the ABV from receivers (e.g., Barnett, 2008; Ren and Guo, 2011) to active interpreters of attention structures. In this regard, our study offers a considerably more radical perspective than a recent paper by Plotnikova et al. (2024). Our study highlights that actors' agency reflects not only in the 'physical' adaptions of attention structures over time (for instance by adding new communication channels), yet particularly in how actors make sense and thereby socially construct attention structures (for instance by magnifying the effect of particular attention regulators in communication channels). Taking this role shift seriously calls for ABV-based research to move beyond a top-down perspective and to explore the distributed nature of attentional agency. Rooted in Simon's (1947, p. 2) understanding that "the major is likely to have a greater influence upon the outcome of a battle than any single machine gunner", ABV-based research has almost exclusively focused on top managerial actors. For instance, scholars have highlighted that they are "the most critical players in attention regulation" (Ocasio, 1997, p. 197) and foregrounded their ability to "subcontract attention" of lower levels (Nicolini and Korica, 2021, p. 24). While top managers may indeed design attention structures (Ocasio and Joseph, 2008) and the attentional direction of organizations in most cases (Ocasio,

2011), employees are 'knowledgeable actors', interpreting attention regulators in their sense and thereby give rise to positive as well as negative firm-level outcomes.

Second, our paper adds theoretical nuance to the concept of attention structures. Just recently, Ocasio et al. (2023, p. 2) argued, "there is much research and theoretical developments that remain to be done to better understand attentional structures". While prior research has implicitly treated Ocasio's (1997) attention regulators as equivalent in their nature and influence (e.g., Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023b; Stevens et al., 2015), our paper challenges this assumption by showing that attention regulators significantly differ in their characteristics and, consequently, their effects. We distinguish between tacit and material attention regulators. Tacit attention regulators are implicit and intangible in guiding actors time, effort and attention towards particular activities. This intangible nature leaves room for interpretive flexibility, enabling employees to exercise agency and modulate these regulators in ways that align with their priorities and understandings. This interpretive flexibility presents a challenge to the 'attentional control' of organizations (Joseph et al., 2024; Ocasio, 2025). As employees are able to interpret attention regulators in their sense, organizational efforts to maintain a unified and sustained attentional focus across the organization are at risk of being disrupted. Love (2024, p. 150) argues that such fragmentation creates "attentional failures" within and of organizations. Conversely, material attention regulators are tangible and explicit in guiding time, effort, and attention to particular activities. This tangible nature implies limited interpretive flexibility as it imposes clear and direct boundaries on actors' behaviors and sensemaking. In other words, material attention regulators exert a more authoritative and constraining form of attentional control of organizations. Through material attention regulators, organizations can enforce a coherent and sustained focus on activities deemed relevant (in our case the ongoing customer projects), yet they may also undermine creative or autonomous behavior and thus ultimately firms' adaptation to the environment (cf., Joseph and Wilson, 2018). Material attention regulators, however, will not necessarily stop such behavior as actors may draw on their identity

to make sense of and navigate these constraints. Thus, even when material regulators provide limited interpretive flexibility, actors' identity enables a sense of coherency even when the allocation of time, effort and attention diverges from these tangible structures.

Finally, this paper advances the theoretical understanding of participation in CICs by unpacking the interplay between structure and agency. While widely adopted by organizations (e.g., Dos Santos and Spann, 2011; Stieger et al., 2012), such internal initiatives have received limited scholarly attention (e.g., Nittala et al., 2022). In particular, participation, despite being critical to their success, has remained under explored (e.g., Beretta and Søndergaard, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2017). Existing research on participation has primarily focused on individual-level factors such as intrinsic motivation (Wendelken et al., 2014) or the different 'roles' individuals adopt in the process (Beretta and Søndergaard, 2021). This body of work also highlights structural tensions as central to participation, such as the competing demands for time and attention of the daily work and the initiative (Malhotra et al., 2020). However, it stops short of theorizing how individual-level factors and the (attention) structural demands interact in shaping participation choices (see Friesl et al., 2023). Our findings show that when coherent structural guidance is absent, individual identity becomes critical. Identity enables actors to make sense of competing demands and justify their (non-) engagement in CICs. However, such 'anchoring in identity' alone may often be insufficient to make sense of the enduring influence of attention structural constraints. This becomes particularly evident for non-participants that may have described themselves as 'innovators'. These actors magnified the attention regulators pulling them towards non-participation and thus constructed their agency as constrained to create coherency for themselves. Conversely, by what we refer to as 'counteracting attention regulators', participants diminished the effect of opposing attention regulators to expand their agency and justify their participation. Thus, (non-) participation decisions are not solely the result of individual agency or structural factors in isolation. Instead, our paper suggests that these decisions emerge as actors work to align their identity and competing structural demands.

Conclusion

Our paper shows that actors make sense of the incoherent attention present by drawing on two distinct sensemaking practices that allow them to construct value and legitimacy of decision alternatives available (participation versus non-participation in an innovation contest). This paper builds connections between the ABV and sensemaking. While the ABV emphasizes structural determinants of attention, sensemaking foregrounds actors' agency. Integrating these perspectives opens new avenues for understanding the dynamics of organizational attention and particularly the role of individual actors in the ABV. For instance, in their recent paper highlight the importance to consider "personal aspects" in the ABV (Nicolini and Korica, 2021, p. 23). We extend this argument by specifying when and how personal aspects are likely to come into play. We reveal that personal aspects (akin actors' identity) become crucial in situations of incoherent attention structures, in other words when structural conditions do not provide sufficient cues that coherently direct attention.

It is important to note that, like related studies (e.g., Bauer & Friesl, 2024; Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Vuori & Huy, 2016), our work focuses on the concept of attention structures rather than directly measuring attention allocation. This limitation of our study offers avenues for future research. Experimental studies (see, Laureiro-Martinez et al., 2023), yet also observational studies (see, Splitter et al., 2024) promise insights into the specifics of attentional processing and its implications for decision-making under incoherent attention structures.

Incoherent attention structures play a major role in various organizational phenomena, involving disruptions of the status quo. Our findings suggest that incoherent attention structures can be beneficial for firms by enabling actors to modulate attention in alignment with their identity. However, they may also pose risks in contexts requiring collective and coherent shifts in organizational attention (e.g., during transformational change). These insights extend beyond our study's context. Conducting 'attention structure audits' (cf., Kahneman et al., 2021) could help organizations identify whether incoherencies allow for interpretive flexibility and thus

invite unconventional activities or require reconciliation to provide unified attentional direction, depending on the firms' goals.

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Tables

Table I. Background of interviewed participants and non-participants.

Actor	Functional Role	Team	Department	Tenure	Interview(s)
Participant 1	Mechanical Engineer	1*	Hardware Engineering (HoD 2)	7 years	Nov. 2021 Feb. 2022 May 2022 Jan. 2023
Participant 2	Team Lead Hardware Integration	1*	Hardware Engineering (HoD 2)	5 years	Nov. 2021 Feb. 2022 May 2022
Participant 3	Financial Controller	5*	Central Function Controlling	5 years	Feb. 2022 May 2022
Participant 4	Computer Vision Engineer	5*	System Engineering (HoD 5)	3 years	Nov. 2021 Feb. 2022 May 2022 Jan. 2023
Participant 5	Team Lead Software Development	2	Software Engineering (I) (HoD 1)	2 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 6	Team Lead Software Development	2	Software Engineering (I) (HoD 1)	4 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 7	Electrical Engineer	6	Electric Engineering (HoD 4)	6 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 8	Software Engineer	4	Powertrain Software (I) (HoD 3)	1 year	Nov. 2021
Participant 9	Team Lead Software Testing	6	Software Engineering (II) (HoD 1)	8 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 10	Software Engineer	6	Powertrain Software (II) (HoD 3)	7 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 11	Software Engineer	3	Electric Engineering (HoD 4)	5 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 12	Software Engineer	5	System Engineering (HoD 5)	9 Years	Nov. 2021
Participant 13	Software Engineer	4	Powertrain Software (I) (HoD 3)	2 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 14	System engineer	2	Software Engineering (I) (HoD 1)	5 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 15	System engineer	2	Software Engineering (I) (HoD 1)	2 years	Nov. 2021
Participant 16	Software Engineer	3	Software Engineering (II) (HoD 1)	2 years	Nov. 2021

*These teams were selected for the 100-day challenge.

Table I. Continued.

Actor	Functional Role	Team	Department	Tenure	Interview(s)
Non-Participant 1	Software Engineer	-	Powertrain Software (I) (HoD 3)	5 years	Dec. 2021
Non-Participant 2	Software Engineer	-	Software Engineering (II) (HoD 1)	4 years	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 3	Electrical Engineer	-	System Engineering (HoD 5)	2 years	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 4	Software Engineer	-	Software Engineering (II) (HoD 1)	3 years	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 5	Mechanical Engineer	-	Electric Engineering (HoD 4)	6 years	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 6	Software Engineer	-	Software Engineering (II) (HoD 1)	4 years	Nov. 2021 Jan. 2023
Non-Participant 7	Software Engineer	-	Powertrain Software (II) (HoD 3)	1 year	Nov. 2021
Non-participant 8	Team Lead Software Development	-	Powertrain Software (I) (HoD 3)	5 years	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 9	Group Lead Software Development	-	Software Engineering (III) (HoD 1)	1 year	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 10	Software Engineer	-	Software Engineering (II) (HoD 1)	1 year	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 11	Application engineer	-	Software Engineering (I) (HoD 1)	3 years	Nov. 2021
Non-Participant 12	Project Manager	-	Software Engineering (II) (HoD 1)	4 years	Dec. 2021
Non-Participant 13	Team Lead Simulation	-	Quality Validation Engineering (HoD 6)	6 years	Dec. 2021
					∑ 39 Interviews

Table II. Overview of archival data (selection).

Type of documents	Volume
Internal documents	
Official company presentations (from 2014 and 2020)	46 slides
Internal Strategy Statement	1 page
Organization Chart	1 page
Innovation contest internal presentation	17 slides
Innovation contest internal 100-day-challenge presentation	7 slides
Innovation contest official flyer (early and final version)	2 pages
Innovation contest application form	1 page
Internal promotion plan	2 slides
Onboarding and bootcamp presentations	31 slides
Timetables and agenda of all events related to innovation contest	3 pages
Overview selection process bootcamp & 100-day challenge	2 pages
Non-participant feedback survey innovation contest	22 survey completions; four questions, e.g.: "What prevented you from joining the program?"
Participant feedback survey innovation contest	5 survey completions, 12 questions, e.g., :"Why did you participate in the program?"
Lessons learned innovation contest (based on participants' feedback)	8 pages
Feedback forms (for jury)	3 pages
Internal Article Winner Team (after 100-day challenge)	2 pages
Blog Innovation@Alpha	30 pages
Internal department (from HoD 1) survey of employees	103 survey participants (of 230 members of department), three questions on work conditions and aspirations (e.g., open question; "Where do you currently see problems in the work processes?"; Five-point Likert scale; "Would you like to take more responsibility?")
Internal presentations of departments (department presentations, presentation of department-wide hackathon, feedback presentation of department-wide hackathon, official article department innovation, etc.)	> 130 slides / pages
Public documents	
Job advertisements of Alpha (from 2021 and 2022)	> 30 job publications
Social Media (end of 2020 until 2022)	> 150 pages of posts (accounting for different subsidiaries in Romania, focus on Alpha)
International media coverage on Alpha (from 2021 until 2022)	21 articles, including three interviews with Alpha's CEO

Table III. Supporting evidence for incoherent attention structures (selection).

Attention regulators directing time, effort, and attention in contradictory directions	
Rules of the game enabling participation	Rules of the game constraining participation
Pursuit of innovation Together we drive our motto: LET US BUILD THE FUTURE BASED ON YOUR IDEAS!" (internal flyer, p. 1) "[Alpha] develop[s] technologies for the future in the areas of connected, electrified and autonomous driving" (internal company presentation II, p. 15). Autonomous driving is one strategic development direction [...] here [at Alpha]. The ultimate goal is to have a safe, accident-free and comfortable future mobility, where the driver is transformed into a passenger and the car drives autonomously without human supervision (Public Interview, CEO of Alpha)	*Extended workbench* It is not our task [at Alpha] to invent something new here. This is completely out of scope. And I am critical [with the innovation contest]. There are other organizations at the [Alpha Corporation] which are responsible for that. [...]. There is business from the headquarter, where we have to fulfill the assigned projects! And, we will not be successful for sure. And then I see the risk, that we will not make friends in Germany, if we say, ok the projects we should execute, the projects that bring business, we cannot do them unfortunately. But we have enough freedom to make a bit ‚Jugend forscht' [German school contest for young scientists][(HoD 4). Actually, our organization has got no clue how to do innovation. (HoD 1, Interview 1) I see that there is a big gap, there is innovation happening in Germany, new ideas are coming from there, not from Romania (HoD 2)
Players enabling participation	Players constraining participation
Formal empowering So, initially we [managers] need to encourage this, we need to do some efforts from the management side, too, for the people, and later it becomes a culture for the organization. (HoD 2) So, from my perspective, [the innovation contest], is a mandatory activity for [Alpha]. [...]. We developed competencies, but we did not develop our own [Alpha] identity. This activity can really strengthen the [Alpha] identity. And this is what I'm always looking for. And this is what I always support (HoD 6).	*Informal undermining* They [managers] have a problem with this! [...] I understand that it's a difficult problem, because you have the projects, you have deadlines, you have to deliver (Innovation Manager, Interview 2). I was really not asking anything on top from my employees [the innovation contest]. I was asking them to do their job [...]. It was open, if somebody would like to participate that, I was not stopping anybody, but I knew that they were already overloaded (HoD 6).

Table III. Continued.

Attention regulators directing time, effort, and attention in contradictory directions	
Structural positions enabling participation	Structural positions constraining participation
Room for innovative ideas You are not afraid to think outside the box and try to find creative approaches to challenges (Job Advertisement, Software Simulation Engineer, Software developer, etc.) The new offices [Alpha inaugurated in 2020] include cutting-edge technologies, inspiring staff to get more creative and innovative at work. Activity Based Work is about flexibility of the work environment, making it suitable for both extraverts and introverts in the office to bring up great ideas. (public case study, p. 2)	*Regimented daily job* See, there are companies that are working on very high-end technologies. These companies they look for such people. And our company is of course a product-oriented company. We highly encourage innovation and so on, but innovation is not the primary criteria when we are recruiting [for structural positions]. (HoD 2) They [employees] are expected to contribute to the projects on most, let's say 99.5% of their time. (Group Leader)
Resources enabling participation	Resources constraining participation
Freeing capacity The teams entering the 100 Days Journey receive 10.000 EUR funds per team, mentorship by local high management, coaching and 80 % of their work capacity freed to be able to demonstrate their commitment and drive to push forward their ideas." (Internal blog post during 100-day challenge, March, 2022) I have to say honestly, that would never work that way [if a team with some of his employees was accepted for the 100-day challenge]. But then we should, if the idea is good, create a plan. And then, of course, we do not have 80% 100 days, but perhaps 40% in 200 days, something like that perhaps [at maximum] [further reflecting on capacity difficulties at Alpha]. (HoD 3)	*Lack of capacity* To do this [the innovation contest] right now [in times of limited resources], is a really, really dangerous situation [for Alpha]. [...] one [of my] teamleader[s] has quitted now because he was tired of all this here and out of this group, they are 46 employees, I got three other voluntary terminations. That means with him four, that is almost 10% in one month! (HoD 1, Interview 2). We have some conflicts of interest with that in our organization, because [the innovation contest] is in principle an initiative to foster new ideas also outside the daily project work [...] we do not have enough people to do the projects we have! That means we do not need new projects and products if we are not able to handle the projects we have. (HoD 4)

Table IV. Supporting evidence for sensemaking practices.

Sensemaking practices constructing value and legitimacy of decision alternatives
Anchoring in identity (aimed at *individual value*)
Participants This [participation in innovation contest] goes back in time. I grew up with my father who was an electrician, and he was repairing a lot of stuff around me. Then, I got into motorcycles and cars and stuff like that, and I was trying to improve and work with that. So, it's a passion that comes from a very early life stage. I could say maybe, when I started school, I also started some extracurricular activities, like model boats, building RC [radio-controlled] cars and planes and stuff like that. (P 2, Interview 1)
It is curiosity and passion for engineering that lets me do all of this! (P 6)
I have a lab[ratory] at home, and I really like doing things related to robotics in general and this covers mainly the prototyping of their of mechanics, electronics, a lot of stuff. I'm really passionate about all these [activities] [...]. And as I said, I like robotics, so I [always] really wanted to create some remote control robot to help my grandparents actually, that was the initial idea. [...]. I always, even at night, dream about doing this nice robot. So for example, this is what I've been [also] dreaming about these days [when the innovation contest was announced]. (P 10)
Non-Participants I'm more the kind of guy who likes to do my own thing. So involving a lot of people or involving a company in some of my ideas, it is not my cup of tea so to speak. (NP 10)
This is how I am. So I don't have to lie or make excuses. It [the innovation contest] simply does not suit me. (NP 5).
You know, you are working eight hours [on projects] and software developers [like me] are not really in the good mindset to write some other extra stuff [for the innovation contest]. It's possible definitely, there might be people who like to do this also on the weekend. (NP 2).
Modulating attention regulators (aimed at *organizational legitimacy*)
Non-Participants: Magnifying attention regulators *Resources:* For me actually, I *think* I cannot do it [participate in the innovation contest] because I'm just too much involved into operational work, actively growing the team and a lot of for example different cross-functional tasks and things like that. (NP 9)
Structural Position: New projects and the most important functions for the clients, so everything must be working properly at the end of the project [...] doing these tasks and innovation on top of that [the important project work] [...] that's too much! (NP 6).
Players: I believe at this point [with my manager] it would be very difficult, I just started a new role as product owner [...] and yes I would not be able to combine both [project job and innovation contest]. (NP 3)
Rules of the Game: It [participation in the innovation contest] comes with disadvantages [for Alpha]. Please have a look at the new generation, they all want to be part of changing the world, the universe and everything, if they are involved in such programs or in products they perhaps don't want to go back anymore to *normal projects*. This is a huge risk, so if we have there like 25 percent of the people that maybe will not want to switch back when it is closed. (NP 9)

Participants: Counteracting attention regulators

Resources: It is something that is not [exhausting], it's something that gives you energy! It's something that you are not used to, something special you can profit from, [it] puts your mind in a different mode to be more creative and be *more productive* [in the projects]. (P 15).

Structural positions: And you are [able] to use it [learnings from the innovation contest] in your other projects [...] because you learned some good stuff there. So definitely it's good for [Alpha]. (P 1)

Players: We didn't have to consult with them [the managers]. I mean it wasn't mandatory or something like that. I mean it wasn't a requirement. (P 16)

I just let him know [per email] that I'm participating. But I didn't ask. (P 7).

Rules of the game: I believe in order to become competitive here [Alpha], you need to [...] find a bunch of people that have ideas and give them time, like take them from the project work, develop their ideas. (P5)

Figures

Figure 1. Overview and timetable of Alpha's innovation contest.

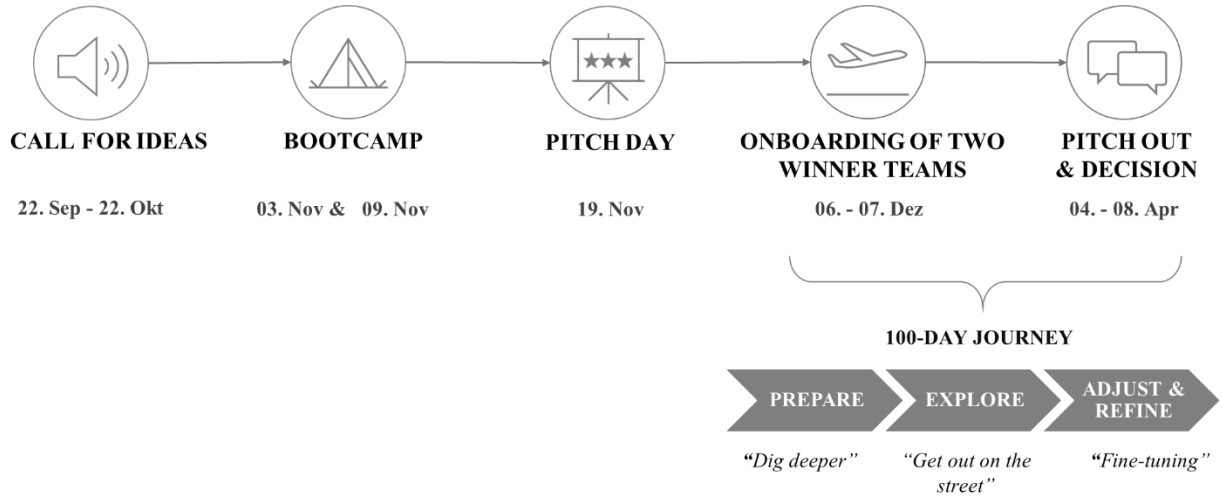
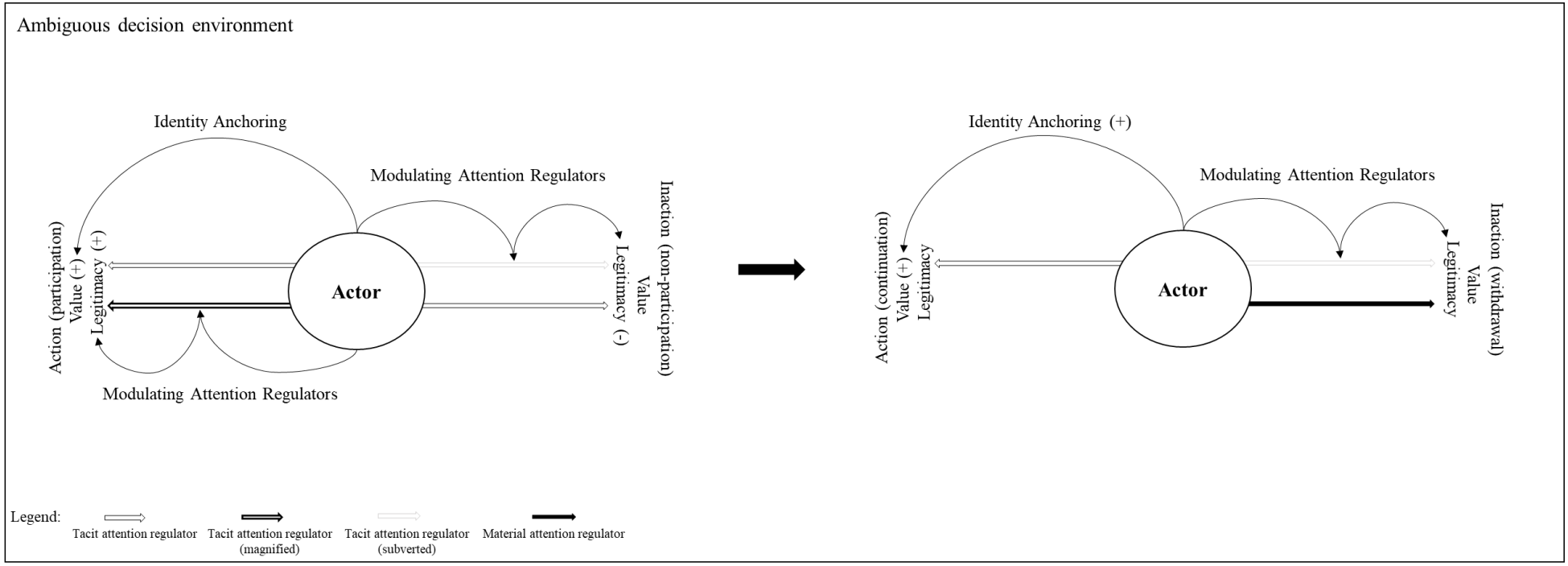


Figure 2. Making sense of incoherent attention structures in CICs and beyond.



9. Who sits at the table? Social media exposure biases managers' situated attention and strategic preferences.

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Abstract. Social media use has a profound impact on strategic actions at the firm-level. Understanding these effects requires an understanding of how and when social media affects individual managers and how this impact scales up to observable outcomes. In this paper, we build on the Attention-Based-View to conceptualize social media use as a situational characteristic of attention allocation. We conducted a preregistered experiment in which managers at different hierarchical levels (N = 200) acted as CEO of a fictitious firm. They were exposed to LinkedIn posts to test if social media content influences the salience of specific strategic answers and, thereby, strategic preferences. We manipulated the posts' content in terms of covered strategic choices (organic vs inorganic), hierarchical position of the post´s author (CEO vs Junior Engineer) and post's social resonance (high vs low number of likes and comments). The experiment shows that social media exposure biases managers' strategic preferences. Of their total budget of 100 Mio US$, participants invested on average 7.5 Mio US$ more into those strategic answers that were dominantly featured in their LinkedIn feed. This effect remained stable when controlling for several individual factors but strongly increased to 18.5 Mio US$ for senior-level managers. Furthermore, a particularly strong bias emerged for posts from authors on lower-levels of organizational hierarchy that received exceptionally many likes and comments. These observations show that social media effects vary considerably in strength across a firm's hierarchy and highlight the critical role of peripheral factors such as immediate trends in the social network.

Keywords:
attention-based-view of the firm, social media, context, situated attention, experimental research

Introduction

The Attention-Based-View (ABV) highlights that decision-makers' situated attention allocation shapes firms' behavior and outcomes (Ocasio, 1997). The ABV strongly emphasizes that the features of particular situations have a crucial impact on which issues and answers decision-makers attend to and act upon (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023). An omnipresent situational characteristic of recent times is social media (e.g., McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Social media are designed to attract the attention of its users across both private and professional situations, influencing their preferences and behavior in manifold ways (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021; van Bavel et al., 2021).

Over the last decade, the use of social media as a source of information has become increasingly common among managers (Heavey et al., 2020; Ocasio et al., 2023; van Knippenberg et al., 2015). So far, strategy scholars have focused on the effects of managers' social media use on firm-level outcomes. Prior research has particularly taken a 'volitional view' by investigating social media as a form of strategic communication. For instance, recent work has explored how top managers communicate in social media (e.g., Grafström & Falkman, 2017; Heavey et al., 2020) and, thereby, attract public interest (Men et al., 2018), create trust and satisfaction with their firm (Tsai & Men, 2017), cope with competing demands of stakeholders (Castelló et al., 2016), or even increase M&A announcement returns (Wang et al., 2021a). Yet, the 'recipient view', i.e. the effects of social media consumption on managerial preferences and strategic conduct, that ultimately gives rise to organizational level outcomes, remains ill-understood.

We build on the ABV to theorize social media use as a situational characteristic of attention allocation (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023; Ocasio, 1997, p. 194f.). Social media significantly differ from traditional media by enabling immediate access to real-time information with low attentional effort and across manifold situations (e.g., Heavey et al. 2020, McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Wang et al., 2021b). Whether it is on the train to a meeting, between two virtual

meetings or while waiting for the elevator, social media constantly attract managers' attention, confronting them with potentially relevant strategic information (Andreassen et al., 2014; Heavey et al., 2020). Despite its ubiquity in daily work and multiple calls to intensify corresponding research (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023; Heavey et al., 2020; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Ocasio et al., 2023; van Knippenberg et al., 2015), we only have a limited understanding of how social media affects managers themselves. Against this background, a critical question is: *How does social media exposure influence managers' preferences for strategic answers?*

We explored this question by developing a novel experimental setup that invited *N*=200 managers to act as the CEO of a fictitious company. Within this role, they were asked to make strategic decisions regarding the future orientation of their firm while being exposed to social media information via LinkedIn posts. The presented social media feed either dominantly featured organic (internal) or inorganic (external) strategic answers, representing the two main contrary categories of a firm's growth strategy (Lockett et al. 2011; Penrose 1959). Additionally, we examined how the prototypical structure of LinkedIn posts influences the potential impact of the feeds' content on strategic preferences (cf., Joseph & Gaba, 2020). Therefore, we manipulated the two key structural characteristics of LinkedIn posts; the hierarchical level of a post's author (CEO versus employee) and the post's social resonance (high versus low number of likes and comments). This setup mirrors the status of LinkedIn as the most popular social media platform among top managers (Heavey et al., 2020), while the experimental design comes with the compelling benefit of providing insights into causal relationships (e.g., Bolinger et al., 2022; Di Stefano & Gutierrez, 2019), which requires investigating strategic behavior in a controlled environment (e.g., Agarwal et al., 2010; Reinhardt et al., 2024). To further maximize internal as well as external validity of our findings, the sample exclusively consisted of managers (Aguinis et al., 2022; Bolinger et al., 2022).

We observed that the exposure to social media significantly influenced participants' strategic preferences. Participants invested on average 7.5 Mio US$ more into those strategic answers

(out of a total budget of 100 Mio US$) that were dominantly featured in their LinkedIn feed. This effect remained stable when controlling for individual factors such as experience with strategy work and LinkedIn use. However, it strongly increased to 18.5 Mio US$ for senior-level managers, rendering these biases particularly meaningful for firm-level outcomes. Surprisingly, the hierarchical level of the posts' author did not influence participants' strategic preferences. Yet, social media posts from authors with a low hierarchical level, yet with high amounts of likes and comments, had a particularly strong effect on managers' investment preferences for strategic answers. This uncommon combination may make these posts particularly salient and thus attract managers' attention (Ocasio, 1997).

Our results have three important theoretical implications. First, our findings add theoretical nuance to the ABV, by demonstrating how social media as distinct organizational context form part of the situated attention fabric of an organization (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Ocasio, 1997), while lying outside its boundaries and control. Our results showcase that the small, subtle and taken for granted material features of this distinct organizational context (such as a social media post seen before a board meeting) direct attention towards particular issues or answers in strategy-making and thereby influence strategic conduct. Second, our paper complements extant strategy research that mainly took a 'volitional view' on social media for strategy-making (e.g., Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017; Heavey et al., 2020; Wang et al. 2021a) by spotlighting the recipient of strategic information on social media. Our study points to inherent risks of managers' social media use. The use of social media can lead to biases in preferences for strategic answers with potentially severe implications on the firm-level. Finally, our paper also contributes to the growing debate on participation and stakeholder involvement in strategy making. As we show, public social media is a powerful communication channel through which actors, regardless of their hierarchical level, can influence managers' preferences. This renders today's strategy-making less elitist and exclusive (cf. Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington, 2019).

Theoretical foundations and hypotheses

Social media as a pervasive and distinct situational characteristic of today's strategizing

A pervasive material feature of our contemporary world are social media, designed to capture humans' limited attentional resources and, thereby, impact humans and their behavior in manifold ways (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021; Stanko & Beckman, 2015; Wu, 2017). Over the last decades, scholars have proposed varying definitions of social media (Aichner et al., 2021). Drawing on the most prominent publications in this domain, we formally define social media as a digital web 2.0 application that enables its user to 1) create a (semi-)public profile on a particular platform, 2) connect to with a wide array of other users, and 3) share and consume information on this platform (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Information posted on social media such as LinkedIn, Instagram, or Facebook convey different kinds of both explicit as well as implicit data (e.g., Matthews et al. 2022; Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018) that enable its users to draw inferences (Leonardi, 2014). For instance, a post's content, the number of Likes as well as implicit data such as the photo of a post's author may be used by actors to evaluate the validity of the information shared (e.g., Borah & Xiao, 2018; Meinert & Krämer, 2022; van der Heide et al., 2012).

Strategic decision-makers within firms spend an increasing amount of time on social media due to its distinct characteristics and for different purposes (Andreassen et al., 2014; Heavey et al., 2020). Social media distinguishes itself from traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, or analysts' reports through its interactive, immediate, and hedonic nature, shaping how managers share and consume information (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021; Wang et al., 2021b). In contrast to traditional media, social media enables managers to interact with audiences through immediate real-time updates (e.g., Etter et al., 2019; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015) and thereby volitionally make a positive impression on others with low effort (e.g., Bao et al., 2023; Castelló et al., 2016; Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017; Tsai & Men, 2017). Extant research has demonstrated that such activities on social media positively influence

stakeholders' perception of a firm's corporate social responsibility (Wang and Huang, 2018), a firm's reputation (Etter et al. 2019; Grover et al., 2019), or stakeholders' trust (Grant et al., 2018). Furthermore, research has highlighted that managers use social media to maintain control over the public discourse in situations of crises by, for instance, selectively disclosing information that portrays the organization in a favorable light (e.g., Heavey et al., 2020). In particular, the interactive and immediate nature of social media allows managers to share their "own news or delive[r] information on a crisis before others are able to" (Fowler, 2017, p. 720).

This 'volitional' view of social media of course rests on the premise that others attend to social media content for the purpose of seeking information or in other words are 'recipients' of social media content. And indeed, a number of studies highlights that managers increasingly use social media to access strategically relevant information (e.g., Nicolini & Korica, 2021; van Knippenberg et al., 2015) by, for instance, tapping into the wisdom of otherwise 'unheard' groups such as employees or communities (Baptista et al., 2017; Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington, 2019). However, despite the pervasive character of social media and its increasing importance in the daily managerial work, research on the 'recipient view' in this domain has remained highly limited (e.g., Ocasio et al., 2023). To use Heavey et al's (2020, p. 1516) words an "important aspect of social media neglected [...] to date is the impact of social media engagement on strategic leaders' attentional processes". Accordingly, below we build upon the attention-based-view of the firm (ABV, Ocasio, 1997) to investigate how the consumption of social media content might influence strategic-decision-makers themselves.

An ABV perspective on the recipient view of social media in strategic decision-making

Building on the seminal work of the Carnegie school (Cyert and March, 1963; March and Simon, 1958; Simon, 1947), the ABV assumes that decision-makers' limited attention is the key, yet limited resource in organizations. The ABV argues that organizational-level behavior ultimately depends on how decision-makers allocate their attention to issues and answers available in particular situations and that these situations are regulated by so called

organizational attention structures (Ocasio, 1997). While ABV-based research has predominantly focused on the structural conditions of attention allocation (e.g., Barnett, 2008; Fu et al., 2020; Ocasio, 2011; Umashankar et al., 2022), Ocasio (1997, p. 204) has initially put the situatedness of attention front and center. A key characteristic of any situation is its materiality, guiding actors' attention towards particular issues and answers and thus shaping decision-making (e.g., Dameron et al., 2015; Kay et al., 2004; Ocasio, 1997; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Accordingly, from a situated attention perspective social media are an important material characteristic of strategic situations (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023); i.e. situations in which managers attend to organizational issues and answers (Ocasio, 1997, p. 190f.).

As shortly outlined above, social media exhibit a distinct nature, distinguishing it from traditional media. It is this distinct nature that may play a key role in how social media affect decision-makers' attention in strategic situations. Social media are an inherently hedonic information system (Van der Heijden, 2004) as they constantly attract actors' attention towards its content, that only requires limited attentional effort to consume (e.g., Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). Information shared on social media is imminently and immediately available for managers across different situations, be it between two strategy meetings, after an exhausting call, or at home at the dining table; in other words "anywhere and anytime" (Boczkowski et al., 2018; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). In terms of strategy-making, social media provides decision-makers 'effortless' access to strategic answers that other firms or decision-makers chose (Heavey et al., 2020), triggering bottom-up (stimulus-driven) attentional processing (Ocasio, 2011; Shepherd et al., 2017). For instance, social media posts may draw managers' attention to a competitor's announcement of an acquisition, the investment into a new technology, or the launch of a diversity campaign. While such bottom-up processing of information demands less attentional resources than top-down (goal-driven) processing (Kahneman, 1973), particularly in the context of social media, it may still strongly reflect in managers' preferences (Shepherd et al., 2017). This is because in strategic situations, certain

strategic answers come ‘on top of the head’; in other words they become more salient and more available than others, not presented in social media (Ocasio, 1997; Shepherd et al., 2017; Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). Based on this reasoning, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: *Exposure to social media posts influences managers’ preferences for strategic answers.*

Posts on widely used social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, or Instagram are structured in a similar way, providing access to particular kinds of immediately visible information beyond their pure content (e.g., Matthews et al., 2022). It is this prototypical structure that may shape the impact of social media on managers’ attentional processing and thus their preferences for particular strategic answers (cf., Joseph & Gaba, 2020; Simon, 1947). While the structural characteristics across the social media platforms mentioned above have strong parallels, we focus on the platform LinkedIn in the following section. LinkedIn has by far been the most popular social media platform among managers in recent years (e.g., Heavey et al. 2020).

Posts on LinkedIn enable access to information about its author, most notably about her/his job title and thus on the author’s hierarchical position within an organization. This information may matter for how social media content is processed by managers. Research in applied psychology has long demonstrated that individuals are more attentive to activities of actors in higher hierarchical positions; they consider their viewpoints as more trustworthy and are more likely to adopt them (Bickman, 1974; Fiske, 1993; Milgram, 1963). Relatedly, Ocasio (1997, p. 197) notes that “[t]he most critical players in attention regulation [of other actors] are typically the CEO and top management”. This may particularly hold true in a strategy context. Strategy is traditionally understood as the domain of the top management, particularly the CEO, and, thus, an individual’s legitimacy in the strategy process and its wider discourse is closely related to her/his hierarchical rank in a firm (e.g., Hambrick, 1981, 1989; Ocasio and Joseph, 2008). Thus, managers may draw upon the hierarchical position of a post’s author to make

inferences about a post's legitimacy and relevance in strategic situations. From this perspective, posts from authors in higher hierarchical positions should be more salient, i.e., attract more managerial attention and, thus, unfold a stronger effect on managers than posts from authors in lower hierarchical positions (Ocasio, 1997, p. 198f.). Thus, with reference to hypothesis 1, we propose:

> **Hypothesis 2a:** *Social media posts from authors with a higher hierarchical rank have a stronger influence on managers' preferences for strategic answers than posts of authors from lower hierarchical ranks.*

Besides information about the author, the structure of LinkedIn posts also conveys information regarding its 'social resonance', i.e. the relevance to a particular audience or even the public, in form of likes and comments. Generally, strategy decision-makers are required to sustain attention to public debates in order to identify emerging technological trends (Gerstner et al., 2013) or to detect potential risks for the firm (Rerup, 2009) and for the industry as a whole (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001). Today, social media play an important role for managers in assessing the environment (e.g., Heavey et al. 2020). At the same time, social media use entails the risk of encountering vast amounts of irrelevant, misleading or even fabricated information, competing for users' attention; in the words of van Knippenberg and colleagues (2015) "information [on social media] scales faster than attention". Previous research on social media shows that in order to overcome this issue, actors draw upon the number of likes and comments as a proxy or key heuristic (e.g., Borah & Xiao, 2018; Meinert & Krämer, 2022; Walther et al., 2018). By the same token, managers may draw upon the number of likes and comments of a post to make inferences about its validity and relevance in strategic situations. From this perspective, posts with a high number of likes and comments should be more salient, i.e. attract more managerial attention and, thus, unfold a stronger effect on decision-makers' strategic preferences than posts with low number of likes and comments (Ocasio, 1997, p. 198f.). Thus, with reference to hypothesis 1, we propose:

Hypothesis 2b: *Social media posts with high social resonance (high number of likes and comments) have a stronger influence on managers' preferences for strategic answers than posts with low social resonance (low number of likes and comments).*

Yet, the question still remains why top managers' strategic decision-making should actually be impacted by exposure to social media? The arguments above imply that social media may influence situated decisions in an informational bottom-up sense by increasing the availability and salience of certain strategic answers over others (Kahneman, 1973; Ocasio, 1997; Shepherd et al., 2017). But social media may also affect situated attention and decision-making in an indirect way. Social media are arenas of impression management and self-presentation (Sun et al., 2021) as the content provided (almost) exclusively reflects positive outcomes (Heavey et al., 2020; Soroka et al., 2018). Extensive research has demonstrated that the exposure to idealized content on social media leads to dissatisfaction of its users, for instance with regard to their own body, triggering activities to create alignment with the ideal presented on social media (e.g., Ryding et al., 2020; Vandenbosch, 2022). Similarly, the focus on success in social media may evoke managers' dissatisfaction with their firms' performance and thus direct attention to strategic answers positively portrayed on social media – options that, if adopted, promise the resolution of a performance gap (e.g., Cyert and March, 1963; Greve, 2008). Based on this reasoning, we propose:

Hypothesis 3a: *Exposure to social media decreases satisfaction with the status quo of a firm's performance.*
Hypothesis 3b: *The influence of social media on preferences for strategic answers depends on whether dissatisfaction with a firm's performance is triggered by social media exposure.*[1]

Methods

Transparency and openness

We describe our sampling plan, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. All data, analysis codes, and research materials are available in the Open Science

[1] Please note that this hypothesis was preregistered as additional exploratory analysis and will thus be investigated accordingly.

Framework (OSF): https://osf.io/juhzg/?view_only=e709b200572149749e561513eb34e01f. Data were analyzed using R, version 4.1.1 (R Core Team, 2021) and the packages *dplyr* version 2.1.1 (Wickham et al., 2023), *tidyverse* version 1.3.1 (Wickham et al., 2019), *ez* version 4.4.0 (Lawrence, 2016), *schoRsc*h version 1.9.1 (Pfister & Janczyk, 2016), and *MBESS* version 4.9.0 (Kelley, 2017). Our study's design, hypotheses and its analysis were preregistered at OSF: https://osf.io/4kepg?view_only=a7d5adad747846299c56e53153b91d4c.

Experimental design

Our experimental protocol simulates the use of social media embedded in a decision-making situation while allowing to manipulate the content of social media posts. Participants were *N*=200 managers at varying hierarchical positions who were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 x 2 x 2 experimental design with one within-subject factor and two between-subject factors (see Table 1).

Insert Table I here

As between-subject factors, we manipulated the hierarchical position of the authors of the respective feed (i.e., "high" = CEO, "low" = Junior engineer) and the social resonance of the social media content (i.e., "high" = 10,000-15,000 likes and 200-250 comments, "low" = 10-15 likes and 2-5 comments; exact numbers were determined randomly within the given ranges for each specific post). Furthermore, we manipulated within-subject which out of two strategic approaches was presented in a specific post (organic growth strategy or inorganic growth strategy (see Lockett et al., 2011). Participants received social media content on both strategic approaches. However, one strategy was covered by the majority of social media posts (60%), while the second strategy was only covered by one post within the feed (10%). To make demand characteristics (Orne, 1962) and experimenter effects (Rosenthal, 1976) less likely and, thus, increase external validity, we also presented social media content which was unrelated to both strategic approaches (30% of all posts). The strategic approach dominantly featured was

balanced over participants and all posts were presented in random order. Thus, the third experimental factor can be described as the dominance of each post´s content within the feed ("high" = 6/10 posts; "low" = 1/10 posts)".

Developing social media posts

We developed a set of posts in an iterative process (Roth et al., 2020; Wade et al., 2020). Initially, we reviewed several hundred posts of over 20 CEOs on LinkedIn and analyzed them in terms of covered topics, structure and writing style. We particularly focused on how these CEOs presented strategic answers (e.g., acquisitions or internal investments) in their posts. Based on this assessment, we created ten fictitious LinkedIn posts, each consisting of a text section and an image. Three of these posts had identical content across participants. For the remaining seven posts we created two versions of the text section, depending on the experimental condition (see Table 1 for the experimental design). We designed these two versions to be highly similar (e.g., same wording; same picture; comparable length), only differing in the crucial aspect we aimed to manipulate (an organic vs. an inorganic growth strategy). We conducted several preliminary studies, to ensure that the dominant strategic orientation was clearly evident for each post and to further validate that our posts looked like authentic LinkedIn posts. Therefore, we asked strategy experts (researchers within this field who hold a PhD) for feedback on the covered strategic orientation and further collected feedback from a student sample on the general authenticity of our stimuli. After multiple phases of testing, evaluations of both samples were highly positive („it looks like real LinkedIn posts"; „looks and reads exactly like my LinkedIn feed"; "feels like if I am on LinkedIn myself"). In Appendix A we provide sample posts for each condition. All stimuli (as well as further materials) are available on the OSF registry as described above.

Dependent variables

The main dependent variables were ratings for strategic answers and corresponding budget allocations. These measures were collected directly after participants had read through their

LinkedIn feed. Participants rated four strategic actions for their fictitious company on a five-point scale, going from "very unlikely to adapt this strategy" to "very likely to adapt this strategy". Two of these strategic actions belonged to each superordinate strategic answer (i.e., "invest in your employees" and "invest in your factories" for an organic growth strategy; "acquire another company" and "invest in a joint venture" for an inorganic growth strategy). These actions were displayed in random order. We asked participants to rate specific actions instead of strategic approaches to increase external validity and prevent demand effects (similar to Chng et al., 2012). To further increase external validity, we not only measured explicit attitudes regarding different corporate strategies, but also concrete action intentions (Ajzen et al., 2018). To do so, participants received a fictitious budget of 100m USD that they could allocate to the different strategic actions (similar to Chng et al., 2012). Participants could freely decide how they split this sum between all four actions and how much of the total sum they wanted to spend. We further randomized whether ratings or budgets were collected first. Moreover, we measured satisfaction with the status quo of participants' fictitious firm via ratings on a visual analog scale going from "Very unsatisfied" to "Very satisfied" (responses were scaled from 0 to 100). To capture the influence of social media exposure on this variable, we measured satisfaction before and after the fictitious LinkedIn feed was presented. The second satisfaction rating was collected directly after participants had red through the posts (before rating the strategic actions and allocating the budgets).

Procedure

After reading the informed consent statement and agreeing to all experimental terms, we collected additional information for each participant to describe our sample: gender, age, nationality, industry, managerial level, experience with strategy work, and LinkedIn use. Next, participants were briefed that they would act as the CEO of the fictitious automotive company "CAR" within the experiment. They received background information on this firm and on the strategic issues it has to tackle (see Appendix B). Participants were informed that they would

lead a digital board meeting in a few minutes to determine CAR's future strategic options. To bridge the waiting time, they should read through their LinkedIn feed in order to assess current trends in the automotive industry. To create familiarity with the authors of the social media content, participants also received short descriptions of each person (see Appendix C). After this introduction phase, participants indicated their satisfaction with their firm's status quo, based on the provided information (see dependent variables). Then, each participant received a customized LinkedIn feed consisting of 10 posts and we measured but not limited the time participants required for reading through it. Finally, we collected all dependent variables (see dependent variables), debriefed all participants, and thanked them for their participation. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines set by the American Psychological Association. According to the ethical guidelines of the German Society for Psychology (DGPs) and regulations of the local ethics committee, ethics approval is not required for research that provides signed informed consent from study participants, collects data anonymously, and has no
foreseeable negative impact on participants.

Social Desirability and common method bias, manipulation and manipulation check

To address potential influences of social desirability, the informed consent statement explicitly stressed that responses would be anonymous and confidential. In addition, we ensured participants that there were no right or wrong answers to any question. To control for common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2000), we captured managers' preference for strategic answers with multiple methods, using different scales and questions. We further varied the range of the anchors. For example, strategic actions were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, and possible budgets for strategic actions ranged from 0 to 100.

At the end of the experiment, we asked participants which strategy the firms in their LinkedIn feed mainly used to adapt to the changing environment. They indicated their response on a visual slider, going from "Organic growth strategy" to "Inorganic growth strategy" (ratings

were scaled from 0 to 100). This question served as a manipulation check and was further used, to exclude participants from the analyses who did not pay sufficient attention to the social media feed.

Sample

We collected data of 200 managers by deliberately contacting LinkedIn users in managerial roles as well as persons from the professional network of the authors (as indicated by job titles such as Head of, Vice President, Director, Managing Director, CEO etc.). Due to the selectivity of this target group, data collection took from May to October 2022. As preregistered, 62 participants (31%) had to be excluded as they did not pass the manipulation check (see above), i.e., indicated a rating below 50 when an inorganic growth strategy was dominantly presented or indicated a rating above 50 when an organic growth strategy was dominantly presented. Results for the whole sample (without data exclusions) are presented in the supplement. Our final sample consists of 138 managers (103 males, 35 females; age: M = 40.9 years, SD = 11.6 years). To ensure high external validity of our findings, we focused on recruiting experienced managers in high managerial positions. This is evident by an average time of experience with strategy work of 10.5 years within our sample. Furthermore, 70% of our participants (n = 96) indicated a middle or high managerial position. To further maximize external validity, we recruited a diverse sample from various industries and service lines (e.g., consulting: n = 22, financial services: n = 10; health care: n = 14; information technology: n = 23). Participants indicated 22 different nationalities and 87% (n = 120) of all participants were active LinkedIn users.

Data analyses

Manipulation check: Higher ratings for the manipulation check for participants who received social media content dominantly proposing an inorganic compared to an organic growth strategy.

We calculated a two-tailed t-test for independent samples, comparing ratings for the manipulation check between participants who received social media content dominantly

proposing an inorganic compared to an organic growth strategy. Please note that this analysis includes all participants, irrespective of their response to the manipulation check.

To test H1, H2a, and H2b, we calculated two separate 2x2x2 analyses of variance (ANOVAs) of average ratings and average budget allocation to one strategic answer. Dominance of posts' content (high vs. low) was used as a within-subject factor, while social resonance (high vs low) and hierarchical position of the posts' authors (high vs low) were used as between-subject factors. Significant three-way interactions were followed by two separate ANOVAs for posts by authors of high and low hierarchical position and significant two-way interactions were further investigated by two-tailed *t*-tests.

To test H3a, we conducted a two-tailed paired-samples *t*-test, comparing satisfaction ratings before and after social media exposure. To test H3b, we compared average budget allocations for dominantly compared to non-dominantly presented strategies between participants who reported reduced satisfaction after social media exposure and participants who reported equal or even higher satisfaction after social media exposure with a *t*-test. Finally, we calculated the correlation of changes in satisfaction (after social media exposure – before social media exposure) and the effect of contented dominance on allocated budgets (dominantly presented strategy – non-dominantly presented strategy).

Additionally, we investigated whether the effect of social media exposure on strategic preferences is affected by individual characteristics. Therefore, we calculated a multiple linear regression of allocated budgets, using individual and demographical characteristics (gender, age, managerial level, experience with strategy work, LinkedIn use) as additional predictors next to content dominance. Furthermore, we calculated two *t*-tests comparing allocated budget differences of dominantly and non-dominantly presented strategic answers between high and medium as well as high and low managerial level.

Results

Manipulation Check

Participants who received a majority of posts covering an inorganic compared to an organic growth strategy indicated significantly higher ratings for the manipulation check (inorganic group: $M = 75.42$, $SD = 22.03$; organic group: $M = 54.66$, $SD = 27.13$), $t(198) = 5.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.84$. As higher ratings represent an inorganic strategic answer it can be assumed that the manipulation has been successful.

Preferences for strategic answers

Ratings. Table 2 shows average ratings for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position of the author and social attractiveness of the post.

Insert Table 2 here

There were no main effects, Fs < 1, but the results revealed a two-way interaction of hierarchical position and content dominance, $F(1,134) = 5.90$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. As shown in Figure 1, ratings for posts by authors of low hierarchical position, were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategic answer, $t(64) = 2.40$, $p = .019$, $d = 0.30$ (95% CI [0.05, 0.54]). In contrast, such an effect was not present for posts by authors of a high hierarchical position, $t(72) = 1.05$, $p = .296$, $d = 0.12$ (95% CI [-0.11, 0.35]).

Insert Figure 1 here

There was neither an interaction of the authors' hierarchical position and social resonance, $F < 1$, nor of content dominance and social resonance, $F(1,134) = 2.33$, $p = .129$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Crucially, there was a three-way interaction of all factors, $F(1,134) = 10.14$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Figure 2 shows that posts by authors of low hierarchical position yielded higher ratings for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategy, $F(1,63) = 6.73$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 =$

.07, but ratings were not affected by social resonance of the posts, $F(1,63) = 1.44$, $p = .234$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

Insert Figure 2 here

For authors of low hierarchical position, content dominance and social resonance interacted significantly, $F(1,63) = 12.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. Posts with high social resonance led to higher ratings for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented content, $t(35) = 4.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$ (95% CI [0.32, 1.04]), while such an effect was not present for posts with low social resonance, $|t| < 1$. Meanwhile, for posts by authors of high hierarchical position neither a main effect nor the interaction effect was significant, Fs ≤ 1.11, ps $\geq .296$, $\eta_p^2 \leq .01$. Overall, these results neither support Hypothesis 1 nor Hypothesis 2a or 2b.

Budget allocation. Table 3 shows average budget allocation for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position of the author and social attractiveness.

Insert Table 3 here

Budgets allocated to strategic actions were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategic answers (dominant: $M = 52.03$, $SD = 24.09$; non-dominant: $M = 44.40$, $SD = 23.07$), $F(1,134) = 4.27$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Allocated budgets were not affected by hierarchical position of the posts' authors, $F < 1$, or social resonance of the posts, $F(1,134) = 1.47$, $p = .228$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$. There was neither an interaction of the authors' hierarchical position and social resonance, nor of content dominance and social resonance, or of hierarchical position and content dominance, Fs ≤ 2.36, $p \geq .127$, $\eta_p^2 \leq .02$. However, all three factors interacted significantly, $F(1,134) = 4.20$, $p = .042$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$.

For posts by authors of low hierarchical position, allocated budgets were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategy, $F(1,63) = 6.72$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, but budgets were not affected by social resonance of the posts, $F < 1$. Content

dominance and social resonance interacted significantly, $F(1,63) = 4.16$, $p = .046$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. For posts with high social resonance, allocated budgets were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented content, $t(35) = 3.01$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.50$ (95% CI [0.15, 0.85]), while such an effect was not present for posts with low social resonance, $t < 1$. Meanwhile, for posts by authors of high hierarchical position, all main effects and the interaction effect missed significance, Fs ≤ 3.32, ps $\geq .073$, η_p^2s$\leq .01$. Overall, these results provide support for Hypothesis 1 but do not support Hypothesis 2a and 2b.

Satisfaction with the status quo of one´s firm. Satisfaction ratings were significantly lower after compared to before the social media content was presented (before: $M = 59.45$, $SD = 24.15$; after: $M = 49.90$, $SD = 21.11$), $t(137) = 4.74$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.40$ (95% CI [0.23, 0.58]). This outcome provides support for Hypothesis 3a.

Exploratory analysis

Table 4 shows results of the multiple linear regression. Most importantly, no individual or demographic factor predicted allocated budgets (βs ≤ 2.88, ps $\geq .086$) but content dominance was still a significant predictor after including all other variables in the model, $\beta = 7.63$, $p = .008$).

Insert Table 4 here

Budget differences were descriptively higher for participants indicating a high managerial level ($M = 18.51$, $SD = 48.81$) compared to a middle ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 41.02$); $t(94) = 1.85$, $p = .067$, $d = 0.38$); or low managerial level ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 40.51$); $t(87) = 1.66$, $p = .101$, $d = 0.35$. For participants who reported lower satisfaction ratings after the social media exposure, we found descriptively, however statistically not significantly, higher budget differences between dominantly and non-dominantly presented strategic answers compared to participants who did not reported reduced satisfaction ratings (reduced satisfaction: $M = 11.61$, $SD = 44.57$; equal or higher satisfaction: $M = 0.41$, $SD = 42.67$), $t(136) = 1.43$, $p = .154$, $d = 0.24$. Moreover, there

was no correlation of differences in satisfaction (after social media exposure – before social media exposure) and allocated budgets (dominantly presented strategy – non-dominantly presented strategy), $r = -.06$, $t < 1$. Overall, these results provide no support for Hypothesis 3b.

Replication study

To test whether similar results can be found for a non-managerial sample, we replicated this experiment with a sample of prolific workers and students. Sample size, used stimuli, experimental procedure, and all data analyses were similar to the main experiment (see OSF registry for raw data and analyses). Details on the sample and in-depth statistics are provided as supplement in the supplementary file. In line with our first study, satisfaction was reduced after compared to before social media exposure, $p < .001$. Moreover, strategic answers that were presented dominantly in the social media feed were rated higher and received higher budget allocations than strategic answers which were not dominantly featured, ps $< .001$. Each of these effects was descriptively stronger for the non-managerial compared to the managerial sample, however this difference only approached significance regarding ratings for strategic answers (see supplement).

Discussion

Social media are an omnipresent material feature of our time that profoundly influences our personal and working life as well as global politics (e.g., van Bavel et al., 2021). Yet, despite manifold calls (Heavey et al., 2020; Ocasio et al., 2018; Ocasio et al., 2023; van Knippenberg et al., 2015), strategy research was reluctant to provide insights into how social media influences (strategic) decision-makers themselves. Accordingly, in their influential paper, McFarland & Ployhard (2015, p. 1653) note that "social media is a relatively unexamined type of context that may affect the cognition, affect, and behavior of individuals within organizations" – a statement that still holds true today.

This study addresses this striking knowledge gap by exploring the relationship between exposure to social media and preferences for strategic answers. In order to do so, we draw on

an experiment in which we provided managers with fictitious LinkedIn posts. These posts were manipulated in terms of dominantly covered strategic orientation (organic vs inorganic), hierarchical position of the post´s author (CEO vs Junior Engineer) and social resonance of the post (high vs low number of likes and comments). After exposure to the social media feed, participants should rate different strategic answers for a fictitious company and allocate a financial budget to these varying options.

Two results of this study are particularly revealing. First, exposure to a particular strategic answer on social media significantly affects the amount of financial resources allocated to this strategic answer. Descriptively, participants invested about 7.5 Mio. US$ more (of a fictional budget of 100 Mio. US$) into a strategic answer dominantly presented in the social media feed. Thus, our results suggest that social media use affects the decision-makers' preference for strategic answers. Second, we observed managers to be particularly sensitive to posts from authors with a low hierarchical level but with a high amount of likes and comments. From an ABV perspective (Ocasio, 1997), these posts are especially salient and thus have a particularly strong effect on strategic preferences.

We could replicate our main finding of increased budget allocation due to corresponding social media exposure for a non-managerial sample. In this second experiment, participants even invested 12.7 Mio. US$ (out of 100 Mio. US$) more into the dominantly presented strategic answer. Furthermore, for this sample we also found a significant effect of social media exposure on ratings.

Several further results are worth noting. In both experiments, exposure to social media significantly reduced satisfaction with one's (fictitious) firm. This decrease of satisfaction, however, did not directly affect the relationship between participants' preferences for strategic answers and their (dominant) presentation in social media. Yet, descriptively, those participants who reported lower satisfaction after compared to before the social media exposure, invested on average even over 11 Mio. US$ more into strategic answers dominantly presented in social

media. Moreover, while not statistically significant (presumably due to the reduced sample size), the descriptive results indicate that top managers' strategic preferences are more strongly influenced by presented strategic information on LinkedIn. Top managers invested 18.5 Mio. US$ more into strategic answers dominantly presented.

This finding is particularly relevant because top managers were shown to spend more time on social media than lower-level actors (Andreassen et al., 2014). Increased exposure and exceptionally high susceptibility to social media information therefore prepare the ground for a critical impact of these biases on the firm level. Social media exposure may have a particular strong influence on top managers' strategic preferences due to several reasons: Actors in higher hierarchical positions tend to process information rather superficially as they are typically confronted with attentional overload (Fiske, 1993). Moreover, top managers face strong ambiguity in their role as they have to meet strategic decisions based on a yet uncertain future (e.g., Cyert & March, 1963; Geletkanycz & Hambrick, 1997), requiring them to constantly engage in environmental scanning (Hambrick, 1981). Social media platforms like LinkedIn can support strategic decision-makers in this essential task by providing strategically relevant information (e.g., trends in the industry and activities of competitors) (e.g., Heavey et al. 2020, van Knippenberg et al. 2015).

Our results have wider implications for different streams of management and psychology research. First, our paper adds important theoretical nuance to the ABV. In their recent paper, Ocasio et al. (2023) even highlighted that without exploring the "role of media – including the mass and the social media [...] – our understanding of ABV remains incomplete." The key argument of the ABV is that managers' decision-making depends on which issues and answers they attend to in particular situations and that these situations are regulated by attention structures (Ocasio, 1997). Based on Simon's (1947) and March and Olsen's (1979) seminal work, ABV-based research has focused on the role of attention structures within a firm such as particular organizational players (e.g., Fu et al., 2020; Umashankar et al., 2022), the prevailing

rules of the game (e.g., Crilly & Sloan, 2012; Stevens et al., 2015), or the organizational architecture (e.g., Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Joseph and Wilson, 2018). The results of our study showcase the significance of considering attention structures outside a firm's boundaries and control. In this regard, social media platforms such as LinkedIn are particularly powerful, differ starkly from traditional media (Wang et al., 2021b) and thus provide a unique organizational context affecting organizational actors (McFarland and Ployhard, 2015). Real-time information on social media is easily and immediately accessible and processing this information only requires limited attentional resources (e.g., Heavey et al., 2020). Accordingly, managers, typically facing attentional overload (e.g., Ocasio, 1997; Simon, 1973), habitually use social media in manifold professional as well as private situations (Andreassen et al., 2014). We show that even short exposure to social media posts may come with severe yet potentially unintended consequences, making certain issues and answers salient and, thus, affecting managers' strategic preferences. Thereby, this study spotlights the power of the situation (Brielmaier and Friesl, 2023; McFarland and Ployhard, 2015; Ross and Nisbett, 1991), indicating that it may be the subtle material features of organizational life (such as a social media post seen before a board meeting) that direct attention towards a particular issue or answer in strategy-making. This has wider implications. Social media as an omnipresent and subtle material feature, directing attention in different directions and thereby influencing strategic preferences, may erode managers' sustained attentional focus on particular issues and answers that is key to craft great strategies (Ocasio & Joseph, 2018) or to detect organizational threats (Rerup, 2009).

Second, our study adds theoretical nuance to strategy research on social media that has mostly taken a 'volitional view'. Recent research in this area shows that firms with top managers active on social media (in this study Twitter) are more likely to engage in M&A (Wang et al., 2021a). Our study reveals a potential mechanism thereof: The exposure to announced mergers and acquisitions on social media (e.g., Heavey et al., 2020; Mazboudi & Khalil, 2017) increases the availability and salience of certain strategic answers, profoundly

influencing managers' strategic preferences for these answers. This may be the case as such announcements on social media (in comparison to traditional newspapers) typically solely focus on positive aspects (Soroka et al., 2018), leading to dissatisfaction with one's firm, as we demonstrate. This dissatisfaction does not seem to affect the influence of social media content on strategic preferences, yet, may still trigger managers to envisage new strategic activities in the first place in order to resolve this dissatisfaction (Cyert & March, 1963; Greve, 2008). Overall, in contrast to previous strategy research that has emphasized the benefits of social media for managers (e.g., Bao et al., 2023; Grover et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021a), our study points to inherent risks of managers' social media use. The use of social media may lead to biases in managers' preferences for strategic answers. Importantly, our study demonstrates these biases were particularly pronounced for top managers, preparing the ground for their critical impact on the firm-level. A rather provocative implication of our finding is that managers who are highly active on social media may rather imitate other firms than choose strategic answers against a prevailing trend. This matters, as for instance research on M&A highlights that acquisition performance is higher for early movers and lowest at the peak of an acquisition wave (Andonova et al., 2013; McNamara et al., 2008).

Finally, our paper has implications for the growing research stream on participation, stakeholder involvement and openness in strategy-making. Previous research in this area has emphasized that top managers' activity on social media enables higher degrees of inclusion and transparency (Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011). Social media affords top managers to share strategic information more widely and to engage in strategic discussions with various actors across an organization (Baptista et al., 2017; Leonardi, 2014). These studies focus on enterprise social media, i.e. social media platforms only accessible to organizational members (Leonardi et al., 2013). Our study goes significantly beyond these findings. It demonstrates that actors outside an organization and, in contrast to our hypothesis, independently of their hierarchical level can effectively influence managers' preferences. Moreover and importantly,

we show that posts of lower-level actors with a high number of likes have a particularly strong influence in this regard. Activity on social media may thus constitute a valid means for employees (without strategic roles in an organization) to successfully direct top managers' attention to certain issues and answers considered important by them (such as firms' transition towards sustainability or diversity issues). These results render today's strategy-making more open and less exclusive than before the era of social media had begun (cf., Baptista et al. 2017; Hautz et. al. 2017; Whittington, 2019).

Conclusion

Social media platforms like LinkedIn are omnipresent, permeating organizations and thereby constituting an integral part of the context that shapes managerial attention and preferences (Ocasio et al., 2023; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Our experimental design mirrors a common scenario in organizations where managers scroll through their social media feed, filling the time before their next meeting or distract themselves from their work duties (e.g., Andreassen et al., 2014). Thereby, our paper differs from prior research focusing on, for instance, recruiters' deliberate use of information on social media for hiring decisions (e.g., Zhang et al., 2020). Our paper showcases that even short exposure to social media posts can have a severe effect on strategic preferences. Thus, the findings presented in this paper are clear: social media occupy a seat at the table of strategic decision-makers. These findings have theoretical implications for future research on the effects of social media, yet they also have practical managerial implications. Indeed, the effect of social media on situated attention and strategic preferences promises new insights into the dynamics but also performance implications of strategic decisions. One of those domains are, for instance, bandwagon effects in mergers and acquisitions.

Despite its novelty and importance for research and practice, this paper is also subject to several limitations. A key limitation of this study is the relatively high exclusion rate of participants due to the failed manipulation check. A reason for this may be our endeavor to

make the experiment realistic and avoid experimenter effects. We decided to present a mixture of organic and inorganic strategic answers in all conditions and thus did not implement the strongest manipulation possible but rather a setting that resembles everyday exposure to social media. As described above, social media is hedonic in nature and thus may often be used by managers to distract themselves and relief pressure rather than to actively seek for strategic information. Accordingly, the results of the manipulation check indicate that the influence of social media on managers' strategic preferences seems to depend on a certain threshold of attention allocated to its content, rendering an important boundary condition to our findings (see the results for the whole sample without exclusions in the supplementary file). This boundary condition is worthy of closer investigation. Which conditions inhibit or even amplify the influence of social media on managers' attention? How do our findings change if only a single post or a significantly larger number of posts is presented, making attentional focus to the content of specific posts more or less likely? Relatedly, how does the effect of exposure to social media content change over time? It is likely that the repeated exposure to social media content amplifies the effect we found as certain mental categories are constantly activated (Wyer Jr & Srull, 2014).

Moreover, to keep our study as realistic as possible, we manipulated the social media content in terms of proposed strategic answer (organic vs inorganic). As our sample exclusively consisted of managers, it can be assumed that our participants had pre-experimental preferences regarding this subject. Thus, we expect stronger effects of social media exposure for topics with no pre-preferences such as for acquisition decisions of previously unknown companies or novel technological innovations. This assumption receives further support from our replication study with a non-managerial sample, for which we found descriptively larger effects for each measure (ratings and budgets). Social media matter, it is about time that strategy research fully appreciates the effects of social media on managers and their attention and seeks to understands how this effect scales up to observable strategic outcomes.

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Appendix A

The following figures (Figure 1a - 8a) present eight versions of a social media post in order to illustrate the different experimental conditions (organic or inorganic strategy, author high or low in a firm's hierarchy, high or low social resonance). We further randomized for each post whether the author of the post had a rather male ("Max H.") or rather female ("Anna L.") name and whether the company of the post`s author was called "Alpha Automotive" or "Beta Automotive".

Figure 1a

Social media post authored by a CEO, with high social resonance and about an inorganic strategy

Figure 2a

Social media post authored by a CEO, with low social resonance and about an inorganic strategy

Figure 3a

Social media post authored by a junior engineer, with high social resonance and about an inorganic strategy

Figure 4a

Social media post authored by a junior engineer, with low social resonance and about an inorganic strategy

Figure 5a

Social media post authored by a CEO, with high social resonance and about an organic strategy

Figure 6a

Social media post authored by a CEO, with low social resonance and about an organic strategy

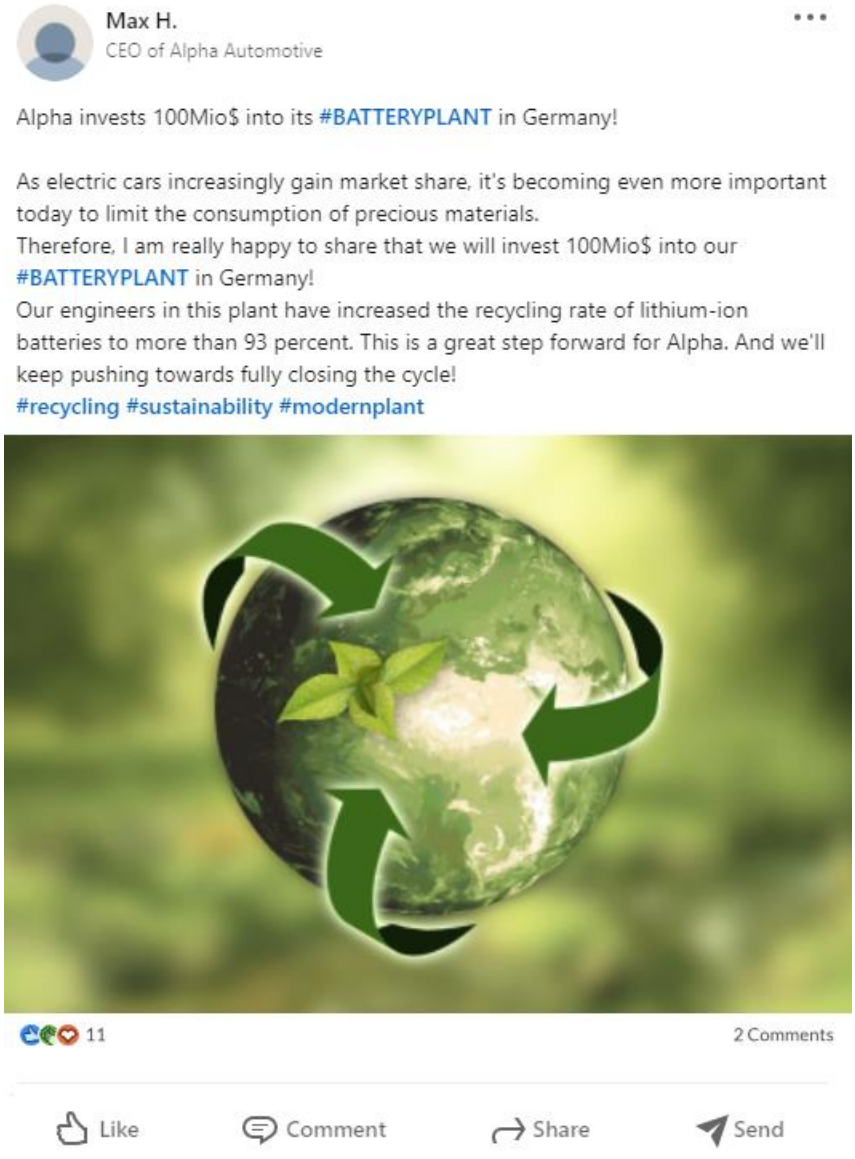


Figure 7a

Social media post authored by a junior engineer, with high social resonance and about an organic strategy

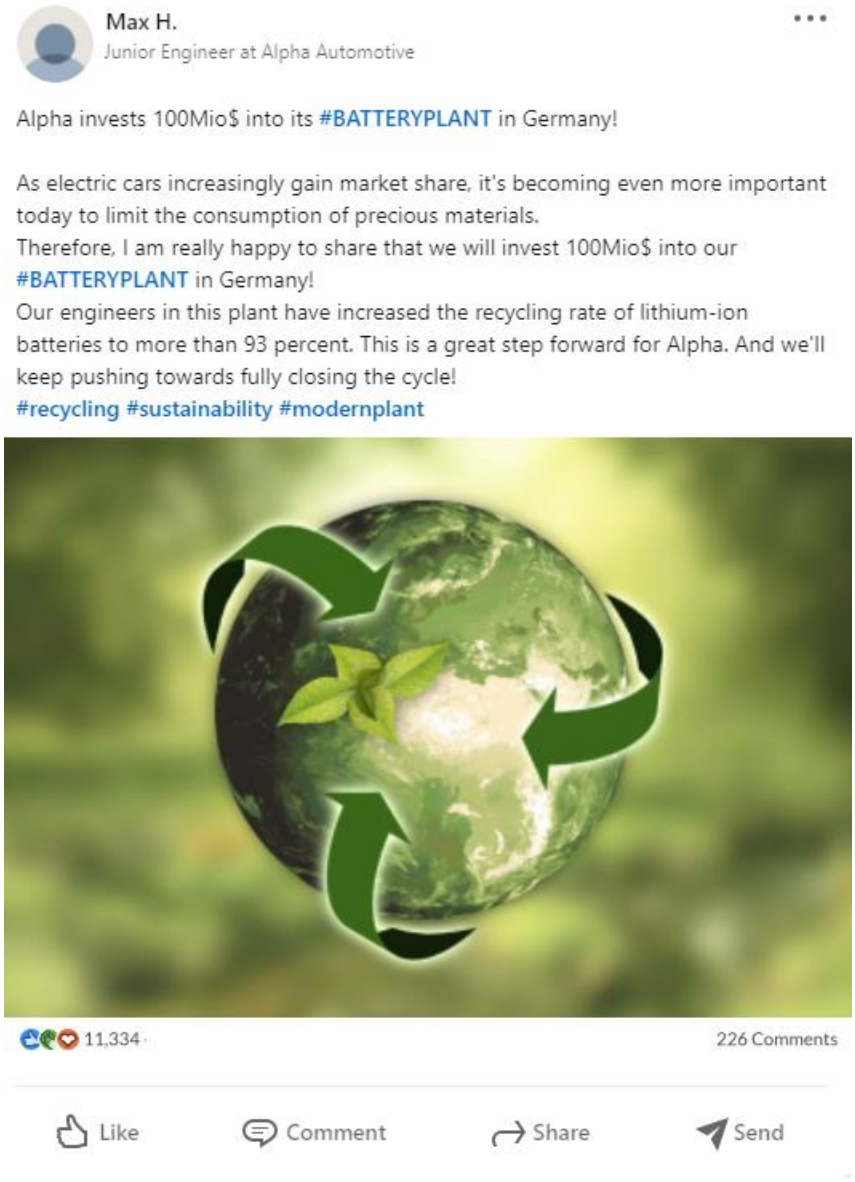
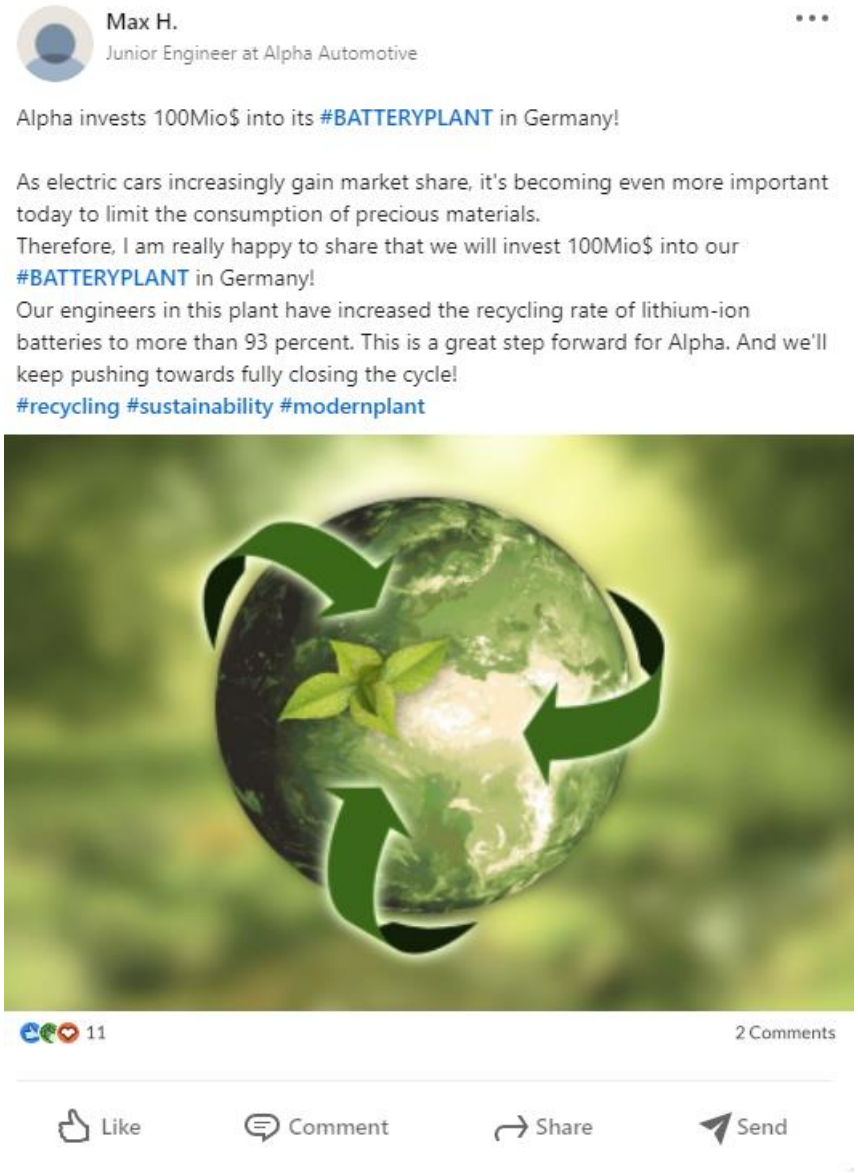


Figure 8a

Social media post authored by a junior engineer, with low social resonance and about an organic strategy



Appendix B

Figure 1b

Description of participant´s role and background information on their fictious company

Imagine you are the CEO of the publicly-traded company CAR. CAR has an over 100-year long history and you have been the CEO of this company for about two years. In your role, you are responsible for CAR's strategic orientation. CAR is a leading automotive supplier with locations all over the world that has been growing continuously since World War II. CAR is often described as "traditional" and as a "backbone of the German economy". Over the course of it's 100-year history, CAR always managed to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

The logo of your company.

Appendix C

Figure 1c

Exemplary descriptions of the authors of the social media posts

Your feed includes posts from the following persons of your network, including competitors of CAR:

Max H.: CEO of Alpha Automotive
You personally know Max from an event of the German Association of the Automotive Industry about 4 years ago. You regularly read his posts with interest.

Anna L.: CEO of Beta Automotive
You met Anna three years ago at an automotive fair and stayed in contact since then. You regularly read her posts with interest.

Thomas T.: Professor of Applied Economics / University of Cologne
You do not know Thomas personally. But you regularly read his posts with interest.

Tables

Table 1

Experimental factors

Factor	*Factor Type*	*Selection/Manipulation*
Hierarchical Position of Posts' Authors	Between Between	High Low
Social Attractiveness of Posts	Between Between	High Low
Content Dominance	Within Within	High Low

Table 2

Average ratings (standard deviations in brackets) for each combination of content dominance (high vs low), hierarchical position (high vs low) and social attractiveness (high vs low)

Content Dominance	High Hierarchical Position		Low Hierarchical Position	
	High Social Attractiveness	Low Social Attractiveness	High Social Attractiveness	Low Social Attractiveness
High	3.56 (0.80)	3.74 (0.66)	4.21 (0.72)	3.78 (0.77)
Low	3.91 (1.06)	3.76 (0.89)	3.28 (0.92)	3.98 (0.75)

Table 3

Average budget allocations (in Mio. US$; standard deviations in brackets) for each combination of content dominance (high vs low), hierarchical position (high vs low) and social attractiveness (high vs low)

Content Dominance	High Hierarchical Position		Low Hierarchical Position	
	High Social Attractiveness	Low Social Attractiveness	High Social Attractiveness	Low Social Attractiveness
High	45.03 (24.68)	52.72 (22.14)	60.31 (26.14)	49.03 (21.11)
Low	47.50 (24.29)	46.79 (21.87)	36.53 (24.17)	47.31 (20.52)

Table 4

Results from linear regression of allocated budgets

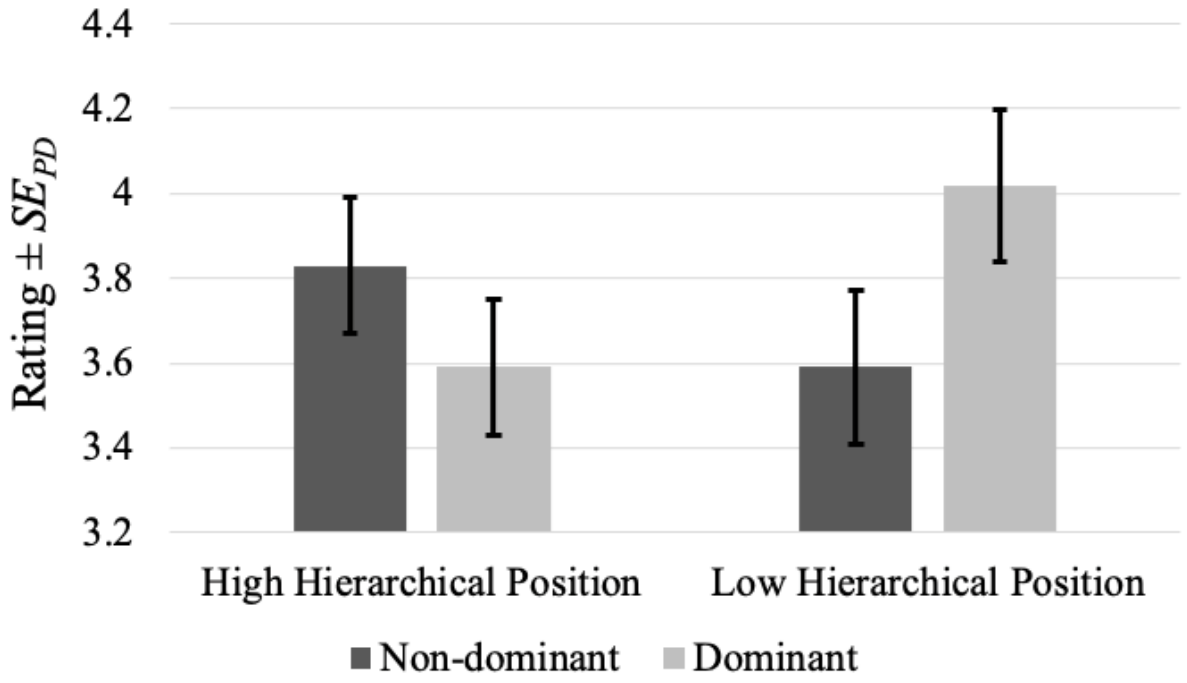
Variable	β
Managerial level (low)	-1.82 (.684)
Managerial level (middle)	-2.40 (.534)
Experience with strategy work	0.38 (.191)
Age	-0.35 (.086)
Gender	-0.73 (.841)
LinkedIn use	-2.88 (.506)
Content dominance	7.63 (.008)
Constant	58.54 (6.81<.001)
N	138

Note. p-Values in parentheses are based on non-clustered *SE*s.

Figures

Figure 1

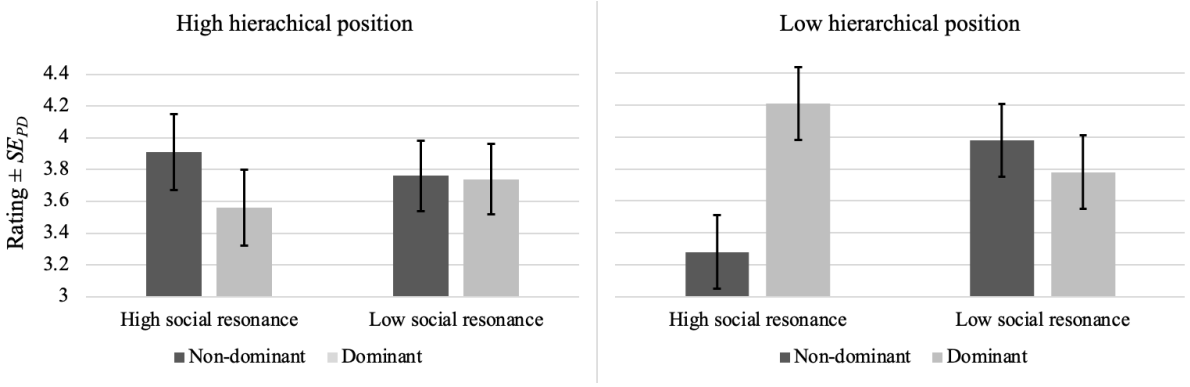
Average ratings for each combination of content dominance and hierarchical position



Note. Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister & Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each level of hierarchical position (high and low).

Figure 2

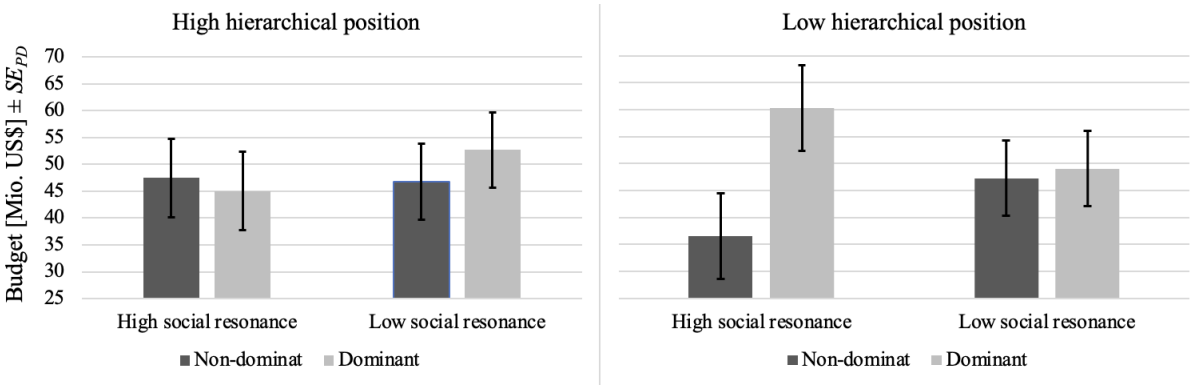
Average ratings for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position and social resonance



Note. Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister & Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each level of social resonance (high and low).

Figure 3

Average budget allocations for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position and social resonance



Note. Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister & Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each level of social resonance (high and low).

Supplement

Results for Experiment 1 without data exclusions

Satisfaction with the status quo of one´s firm

Social media exposure significantly reduced satisfaction ratings, $t(199) = 5.39$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.38$.

Preferences for strategic answers

Ratings. There were no significant main effects on ratings, Fs ≤ 3.72, ps ≥ .055, η_p^2s ≤ .01. Content dominance and hierarchical position interacted significantly, $F(1,196) = 7.86$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, but there was no interaction of content dominance and social resonance or of social resonance and hierarchical position, Fs ≤ 1.77, ps ≥ .184, η_p^2s ≤ 0.1. There was a three-way interaction of all factors, $F(1,196) = 7.62$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$.

Budgets. There were no significant main effects or two-way interactions for allocated budgets, Fs ≤ 2.39, ps ≥ .124, η_p^2s ≤ .01. There was a three-way interaction of all factors, $F(1,196) = 4.35$, $p = .038$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

Experiment 2: Non-managerial sample

Participants

Again, we collected data from 200 participants. To achieve a diverse sample of individuals with no managerial experience, we collected data from German students (n = 46) and international prolific workers (n = 154). Note that we prefiltered all participants in terms of any prior experience with strategy work or management. We applied the same manipulation check as for the main study, leading to a final sample size of 131 participants (61 males, 69 females, 1 non-binary; age: M = 26.8 years, SD = 7.5 years). The final sample consisted of 102 prolific workers and 29 students (business major: 22, psychology major: 6, other major: 1). Within the sample 53% (n = 70) of all participants were active LinkedIn users and they indicated 21 different nationalities.

Results

Manipulation check

Participants who received a majority of posts covering an inorganic compared to an organic growth strategy indicated significantly higher ratings for the manipulation check (inorganic

group: $M = 57.33$, $SD = 33.60$; organic group: $M = 37.59$, $SD = 28.80$), $t(198) = 4.46$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.63$. As higher ratings represent a more inorganic strategic orientation it can be assumed that the manipulation has been successful.

Satisfaction with the status quo of one´s firm

Social media exposure significantly reduced satisfaction ratings (before: $M = 72.99$, $SD = 25.46$; after: $M = 58.75$, $SD = 24.49$), $t(130) = 6.25$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.55$.

Preferences for strategic answers

Ratings. Table S1 shows average ratings for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position of the author and social attractiveness of the post. Ratings for strategic actions were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategic approach, $F(1,127) = 16.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. In contrast, the hierarchical position of the posts' authors and social resonance of the posts did not affect ratings, Fs < 1. We did not observe any significant two-way or three-way interaction, Fs < 1.

Budgets. Table S2 shows average budget allocations for each combination of content dominance, hierarchical position of the author and social attractiveness of the post. Significantly higher budgets were allocated to strategic actions belonging to the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategic orientation, $F(1,127) = 13.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. There was no effect of hierarchical position of the posts' authors or social attraction of the posts on allocated budgets, Fs ≤ 1.11, ps ≤ .293, η_p^2s ≤ .01. There were no significant interaction effects, Fs < 1.

Cross experiment comparison

We compared effects of social media exposure on satisfaction ratings, strategic action ratings and budget allocations between both experiments (managerial vs non-managerial sample). Therefore, we calculated an ANOVA of satisfaction ratings, using experiment (1 = managerial sample, 2 = non-managerial sample) as a between-subjects factor and timing (pre vs post social media exposure) as a within-subjects factor. Furthermore, we calculated separate ANOVAs of strategic action ratings and budget allocations, using experiment (1 = managerial sample, 2 = non-managerial sample) as a between-subjects factor and content dominance (dominant vs non-dominant) as a within-subjects factor.

In line with our main findings, social media exposure significantly reduced satisfaction ratings, $F(1,267) = 60.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Furthermore, satisfaction ratings were significantly lower

for the managerial compared to the non-managerial sample (managerial: $M = 54.67$, $SD = 23.14$; non-managerial: $M = 65.87$, $SD = 25.93$), $F(1,267) = 20.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. However, there was no interaction of experiment and timing (see Fig. S1), $F(1,267) = 2.39$, $p = .123$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

Strategic action ratings were significantly higher for the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented content, $F(1,267) = 11.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Ratings for strategic actions did not differ between both studies, $F < 1$, but both factors interacted significantly (see Fig. S2), $F(1,267) = 5.06$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. That is, ratings for dominantly compared to non-dominantly presented strategic actions were significantly higher for the non-managerial sample, $t(130) = 4.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.36$, while such an effect could not be found for the managerial sample, $t < 1$. In line with our main findings, significantly higher budgets were allocated to strategic actions belonging to the dominantly compared to the non-dominantly presented strategic orientation, $F(1,267) = 15.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Allocated budgets did not differ significantly between both studies, $F(1,267) = 2.00$, $p = .158$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, and there was no interaction of both factors (see Fig. S3), $F < 1$.

Tables (Supplement)

Table S1.

Average ratings (standard deviations in brackets) for each combination of content dominance (high vs low), hierarchical position (high vs low) and social resonance (high vs low).

Content Dominance	High Hierarchical Position		Low Hierarchical Position	
	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance
High	3.97	4.08	4.02	4.07
	(0.53)	(0.79)	(0.87)	(0.84)
Low	3.61	3.60	3.39	3.53
	(0.81)	(0.92)	(1.01)	(0.73)

Table S2

Average budget allocations (in Mio. US$; standard deviations in brackets) for each combination of content dominance (high vs low), hierarchical position (high vs low) and social resonance (high vs low).

Content Dominance	High Hierarchical Position		Low Hierarchical Position	
	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance	High Social Resonance	Low Social Resonance
High	53.40	53.92	51.52	52.48
	(21.07)	(22.79)	(26.18)	(23.49)
Low	40.63	41.89	41.00	36.59
	(19.30)	(23.86)	(24.63)	(20.50)

Figures (Supplement)

Figure S1.

Satisfaction ratings, broken down by timing (Pre vs post social media exposure) and experiment (managerial vs non-managerial sample). Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister & Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each experiment.

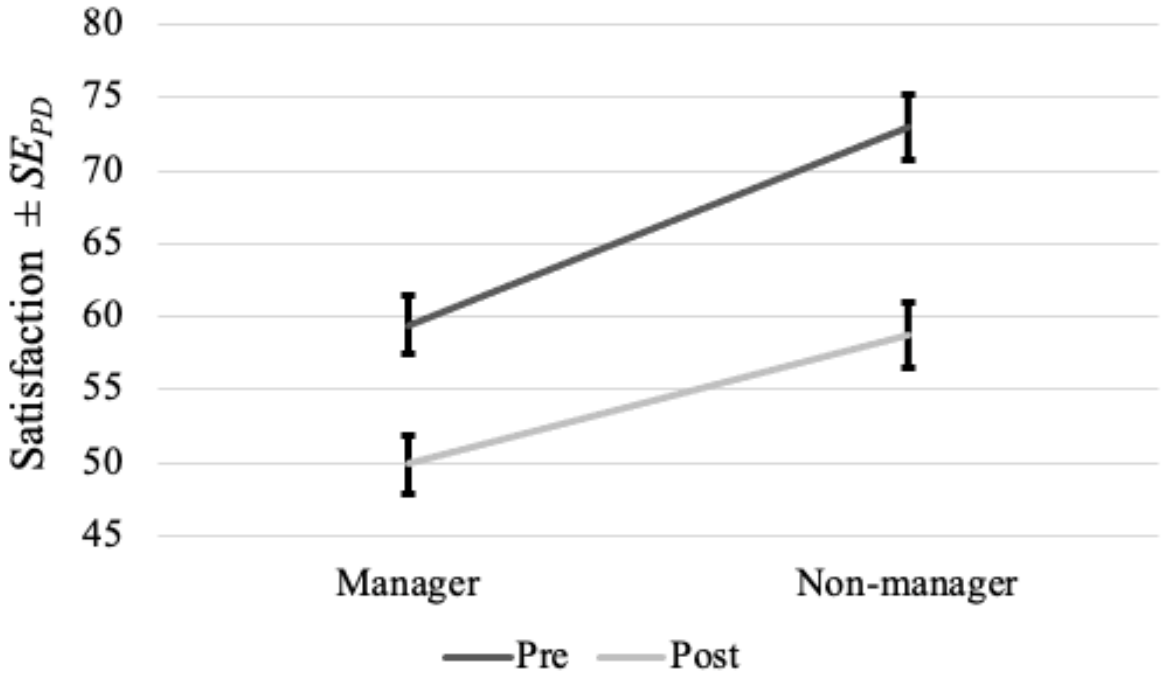


Figure S2

Ratings for strategic actions, broken down by content dominance (dominant vs non-dominant) and experiment (managerial vs non-managerial sample). Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister & Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each experiment.

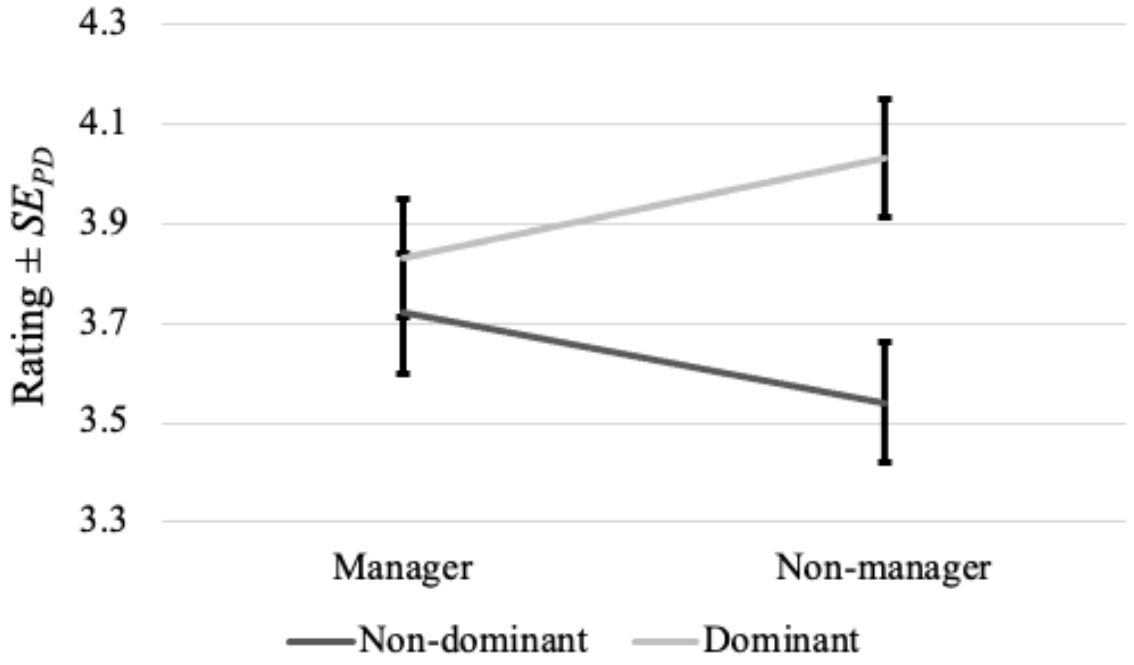
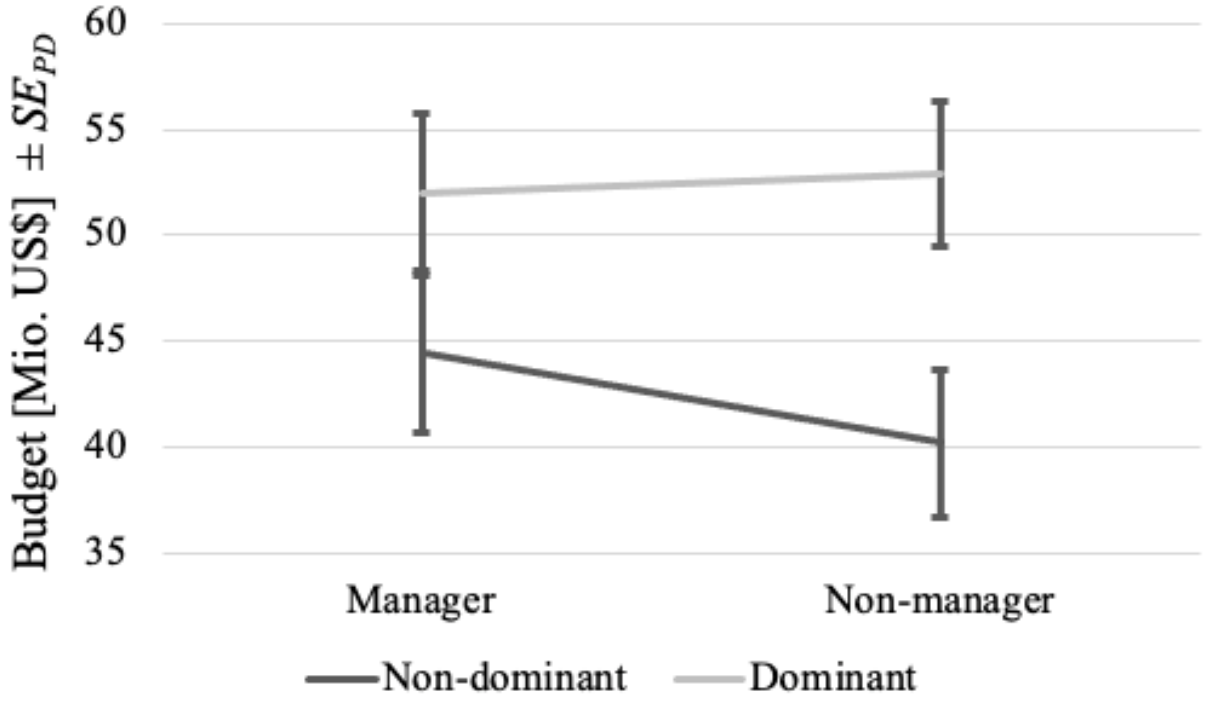


Figure S3.

Allocated budgets, broken down by content dominance (dominant vs non-dominant) and experiment (managerial vs non-managerial sample). Error bars indicate standard errors of the paired differences (Pfister & Janczyk, 2013), calculated separately for each experiment.



10. Discussion of thesis papers

This dissertation sheds new light on participation in organizations. Previous research has long considered participation as a fundamental phenomenon for organizations and their inner processes (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1947). Participation has been linked to enabling innovations (e.g., Nittala et al., 2022) and based on this driving strategic renewal (e.g., Burgelman, 1983b), potentially fostering superior strategy formulation (e.g., Splitter et al., 2024), or building strategic commitment and consensus (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992b). Yet, while prior research appears to converge on the positive effects of participation, our understanding of the processes through which individuals accomplish participation has remained limited, particularly within the context of strategy (e.g., Friesl et al., 2023; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Tavella, 2021).

Specifically, this thesis explores the dynamics and effects of voluntary participation across organizational levels by drawing on practice-theoretical perspectives as well as the attention-based view of the firm. Voluntary participation is an increasingly salient and relevant phenomenon in light of the growing emphasis on 'openness' in management research in general (e.g., Chesbrough et al., 2018; Splitter, Dobusch, et al., 2023) and strategy research in particular (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011). Open approaches such as Open Innovation and Open Strategy promise significant benefits, including superior innovative or strategic outcomes by harnessing the wisdom of the crowd (e.g., Ortner et al., 2024; Seidl et al., 2019). The realization of these benefits, however, depends upon the voluntary participation of individuals within that crowd (e.g., Friesl et al., 2023).

This thesis offers several important contributions to our theoretical understanding of participation in organizations (Paper II, III, IV, V), as well as the attention-based view of the firm (Paper I, IV, V) and strategy-as-practice (Paper I, Paper III, Paper IV). Table III summarizes the specific contributions made in each of the five papers.

Table III. Summary of theoretical contributions of the five thesis papers.

Paper	Theoretical contributions
Paper I: The attention-based view: Review and conceptual extension towards situated attention	• Providing a nuanced theoretical framework about the ABV, summarizing its core developments. • Renewing the focus on situated attention in the ABV which has been considered as its key contribution (Ocasio, 1997, 2025). Theorizing situated attention from a practice-based perspective by outlining four essential situational characteristics that affect how attention is situated in a particular context (materiality, social dynamics, temporality, and framing of strategic setting). This has wider theoretical implications for the ABV: o Shifts salience to individual actors in ABV-based research that has mainly focused on organizational-level outcomes (e.g., Dutt & Joseph, 2019; Fu et al., 2020). o Connects ABV research to socio-materiality research by spelling out the interrelated impact of situational characteristics on situated attention allocation. o Highlights the benefits and challenges of a practice-based perspective (see also Nicolini & Korica, 2021; Nicolini & Mengis, 2023). Thereby, emphasizes the impotance of different theoretical perspectives with different onto-epistemological foundations to advance research on situated attention.
Paper II: Pulled in all directions: Open strategy participation as an attention contest	• Spotlights and theorizes 'non-participation' in Open Strategy and strategy practice and process research as fundamental phenomenon. • Offers a conceptual model theorizing (non-)participation as the outcome of attention contests • Provides conceptual clarity regarding 'participation' and 'inclusion' (e.g., Mack & Szulanski, 2017; Whittington et al., 2011) ; while inclusion constitutes a moral offer and intent, participation is the actual uptake of this offer
Paper III: Taking individual choices seriously: A process perspective of self-selection in strategy work	• Theorizes self-selection in Open Strategy and strategy work more broadly as the interplay of structure and agency (cf. Giddens, 1984). Prior research has primarily focused on structural conditions shaping participation choices (Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Tavella, 2020), overlooking the role of actors' agency in these choices. • Challenges the idea inherent in Open Strategy research (e.g., Hautz et al., 2017; Seidl et al., 2019) that inviting diverse actors leads to diverse strategic ideas. The paper theorizes that self-selection stabilizes over time (i.e., only a particular type actors participates), limiting the diversity of actors participating and thus the diversity of ideas brought into the strategy process. • Prior research has mainly focused on the 'practice-praxis nexus, i.e., the performance and strategic implications of particular practices. This view has taken the actors engaging in strategy practices for ganted (e.g., Balogun et al., 2015; Rouleau, 2005). Our paper spotlights the 'practitioner-practice nexus' as fundamental to strategy practice and process research. How particular practices are enacted crucially depends on which actors have self-selected into the process.

Paper	Theoretical contributions

Paper IV: To Participate or Not to Participate: Making Sense of Incoherent Attention Structures in Corporate Innovation Contests	• Offers a theoretical model about (non-)participation decisions in internal innovation contests as a consequence of the interplay of structures ('attention regulators') and agency ('sensemaking practices')
	• Contributes to recent social and dynamic perspectives on the ABV (e.g., Nicolini and Korica, 2021; Ocasio et al., 2023; Ocasio et al. 2018)
	  o Contributes to the intersection of the ABV and sensemaking perspectives by identifying and theorizing two sensemaking practices (anchoring in identity and modulating attention regulators) through which actors create meaning of incoherent attention structures. While sensemaking has been critical to Ocasio's (1997) seminal paper, the relationship between both traditions has received limited empirical and theoretical attention (e.g., Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Ocasio et al., 2023)
	  o Provides new avenues to understand attention structures, the fundamental concept in attention-based perspectives (Ocasio, 1997, Simon, 1947) by distinguishing between 'material' and 'tacit' attention regulators and their effects.
	• Contributes to our understanding of participation in internal innovation contests that are widespread, yet have remained under researched (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2017; Nittala et al., 2022). In particular the paper theorizes the role of (internal) structural incoherencies for participation choices.

Paper V: Who sits at the table? Social media exposure biases managers' situated attention and strategic preferences	• Contributes to the ABV by showing the impact of social media consumption on situated attention and strategic decision-making. Prior ABV research has widely ignored the role of social media (e.g., Ocasio et al., 2023). The findings highlight social media as a critical attention structures outside a firm's boundaries and control. • Adds theoretical nuance to our understanding of social media in strategy research. Prior research has predominantly highlighted the positive effects of top managers' volitional engagement in social media (e.g., Heavey et al., 2020). The results of this paper imply that there is another side of the coin. Social media engagement can significantly bias top managers strategic preferences, preparing the ground for their critical impact on the firm-level. • Contributes to the growing literature on strategic openness and participation in strategy-making (e.g., Whittington et al., 2011; Whittington et al., 2016). The findings of this paper imply that participation in strategic conversations of actors beyond a firm's boundaries and independently of their hierarchical rank can affect top managers strategic preferences.

10.1 Broader theoretical implications for participation research

While Table III details the fine-grained theoretical contributions of each individual paper, it is important to highlight the broader theoretical implications when considering the papers and their interplay more holistically. Three broader and interrelated implications stand out: First, voluntary participation in strategy cannot be taken for granted and is distinct from inclusion. Second, voluntary participation in strategy and beyond emerges through the interplay of structure and agency. And third, even if actors voluntarily participate this does not imply diversity and based on that superior strategic outcomes. Below, I outline these broader theoretical contributions as well as avenues for future research.

10.1.1 Distinction between inclusion and participation strategy research

The first broader contribution of this thesis lies in reconceptualizing participation in strategy as a fundamental, yet contested phenomenon that must be separated from inclusion. Previous strategy research has highlighted the importance and merits of voluntary participation for strategic outcomes (e.g., Burgelman, 1983b; Mintzberg, 1978, 1994), yet the underlying mechanisms that give rise to it have largely remained untheorized. Strategy work has often been understood as a privilege, reserved for an exclusive and elitist group entrusted with shaping an organization's future (e.g., Knights & Morgan, 1991; Whittington, 2019). Participation of lower-level actors in strategy work has been framed as partaking in this privilege. Actors are "included" (Whittington et al., 2011, p. 535) or given "the chance to be included" (Hautz et al., 2017, p. 305) in this privilege. Put provocatively, this perspective has limited the agency of lower-level actors as conditional on the benevolence of those in power rather than as a self-determined choice. In this view, participation is reduced to the act of inclusion, and thus not an important phenomenon on its own; as Mantere and Vaara (2008, p. 342) put it a "nonissue". This is also evident in Whittington's and colleagues (2011, p. 532) seminal paper that define inclusion as the "the range of people involved in making strategy", implicitly assuming that participation as the actual, active involvement naturally follows as a consequence of inclusion.

The reality, however, is starkly different. Most actors who are formally included in strategy, such as those invited to contribute their ideas in an open strategy community, abstain from choosing to actively engage (e.g., Bjelland & Wood, 2008; Plotnikova et al., 2021; Stieger et al., 2012). For instance, in the open strategy initiative by Wikimedia only 9299 of its many millions of users registered to join the initiative. Of these registered actors only 3096 actually participated, with the top eleven contributors accounting for 40% of all contributions (Laura Dobusch et al., 2019). An even more extreme example is the case of the Premium Cola Collective. Following the principle of radical openness, the collective invited all of its 1650 members to participate in strategy-making and to identify key strategic issues for the future. However, ultimately, 1636 members did not contribute to strategy at all, leaving the central organizer to raise 71% of the strategic issues identified (Luedicke et al., 2017). Participation, therefore, is far from being a "nonissue" in strategy work; rather, it represents a fundamental challenge—and one of critical importance. Participation is not only a necessary condition for realizing the benefits Open Strategy promises, but it has also long been recognized as essential for achieving strategic commitment and consensus (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992a, 1992b; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004).

Paper II and III of this thesis spotlight and explicitly theorize participation in strategy work acknowledging it as a key phenomenon on its own, distinct from inclusion. These papers understand inclusion as an 'moral offer' and participation as actors' actual uptake of this offer. Drawing on the ABV, Paper II theorizes the tensions and challenges involved in strategy participation. For instance, it highlights that the opportunity to participate in strategy may confront actors with process ambiguity and require identity shifts and status transitions. Strategy work lacks clearly defined expectations, rendering it an elusive domain (e.g., Whittington, 2019) where understanding how to behave appropriately becomes a significant barrier for those invited to participate. At the same time, 'strategy comes with a halo': it is frequently viewed as an elitist role, reserved for those accountable for shaping the firm's future

(e.g., Knights & Morgan, 1991; Whittington et al., 2011). And, relatedly, strategy participation requires actors to assume a role that involves dealing with 'bigger questions' beyond their typical short-term operational tasks, demanding a fundamental shift of perspectives. Participation choices thus are shaped by a variety of social dynamics, including power and politics, status, or organizational norms.

Understanding and acknowledging participation as a complex social phenomenon, far from being universal, opens up numerous avenues for future research across different theoretical perspectives (e.g., role theory, identity theory, or sensemaking perspectives). How do actors enact role transitions into the strategy domain? How do they create security for themselves this elusive and contested environment? Which role does identity play in participation decisions (Mantere & Whittington, 2021)? How do actors make sense of the complex dynamics involved in strategy settings and how does this affect actors' decisions to participate or not (see paper IV of this thesis for an analysis in an internal innovation contest)? How does the organizational climate, a firm's particular notion of strategy, or 'psychological safety' (e.g., Edmondson, 1999) affect participation decisions? These questions are essential for understanding the broader contextual conditions that enable or hinder engagement in strategy work. And of course, it also raises fundamental design questions of open forms of strategy work. How can organizations design processes that lower barriers to participation while ensuring meaningful contributions?

10.1.2 Conceptualization of participation as interplay of structure and agency

The second broader contribution lies in the conceptualization of participation in strategy and beyond as the interplay of structure and agency. Recognizing that voluntary participation in organizational settings cannot be considered as taken for granted and acknowledge it as a contested phenomenon, the following question becomes key: How can participation be theorized and thus be explained?

Previous strategy and innovation research has highlighted different key explanatory mechanisms of participation. Research in strategy practice and process, though engaging with

voluntary participation to a limited extent (e.g., Laine & Vaara, 2015; Tavella, 2021), has primarily focused on the role of structural conditions. For instance, in their seminal paper, Knights and Morgan (1991) illuminate how strategy discourse, rooted in traditions of warfare and masculinist perspectives, legitimizes the exclusion of actors beyond top management. This discourse rationalizes power concentration at the top, reinforcing the elitist character of strategy work (see also Whittington, 2019). Similarly, Mantere and Vaara (2008) identified specific strategy discourses that either facilitate or hinder the participation of lower-level actors. Adopting a more micro-level perspective, Tavella and colleagues (2021) examined management meetings and identified two discursive practices through which top managers construct participation: By either delegating responsibility or by withdrawing it and justifying these decisions. Thus, this stream of research collectively stresses that structural conditions, created and enacted by top managers, constrain or enable lower-level actors' participation in strategy work. However, it could be put much more critically: This research stream reflects a structural bias that neglects the agency of lower-level actors and thereby reinforces the understanding of strategy as a domain entirely dominated by top management, retaining full control over who can participate in the strategy process and who cannot. While structural conditions shaped by top management are highly influential, prior research suggests that actors possess the capacity to overcome these constraints and voluntarily engage in strategic initiatives despite them (see, Bower, 1970; Burgelman, 1983b; Friesl et al., 2019).

Research on internal innovation contests has adopted a more diverse perspective on participation, emphasizing both individual and structural factors. For instance, at the individual level, studies have highlighted the role of intrinsic motivation in driving participation (e.g., Wendelken et al., 2014). At the same time, scholars have drawn attention to structural challenges, such as the competing demands of balancing innovation efforts with daily work responsibilities (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2020; Zuchowski et al., 2016). However, the relationship

between structural- and individual-level factors in shaping (non-)participation choices remains largely unexplored in this research stream.

This thesis introduces a novel perspective on participation within the literature on strategy and innovation, conceptualizing it as the outcome of the interplay between structure and agency. It argues that participation cannot be fully explained without understanding how structural conditions and individual agency interact to shape actors' choices. Drawing on practice-theoretical perspectives (Giddens, 1984; Thévenot, 2001), Paper III argues that actors' values, beliefs, and aspirations play a critical role in how they interpret structural conditions which in turn shapes participation decisions in strategy work. Thus, structural conditions alone do not determine participation; rather, their influence unfolds as actors actively respond to them through their individual perspectives. In the context of an internal innovation contest, Paper IV provides an empirical example of this understanding of participation. It reveals that participants' identity as innovators enabled them to overcome and reconstruct structural conditions pulling them toward non-participation. Actors' agency thus was central for reconciling the incoherent structural conditions they faced. Interestingly, the paper also finds that non-participants, although they might also identify as innovators, reinforced the impact of structural conditions that constrained participation in the innovation contest. They thereby constructed their agency as limited, enabling them to rationalize their decision to abstain from participation.

Understanding participation as the outcome of the interplay between structure and agency opens up a range of promising opportunities for future research. Paper IV provides nuanced insights into this interplay in the context of an innovation contest. There, participants' agency—the ability to act otherwise and participate despite structural constraints (Giddens, 1984)—is closely linked to their identity as innovators. As the paper shows, this identity is often rooted in formative childhood experiences, such as working in a parent's workshop or early experimenting with new technologies. It is this identity, that enables participants to make sense

of various challenges, such as working extra hours beyond their daily job responsibilities or resisting pressures from managers to prioritize operational tasks over innovative efforts. However, in the context of strategy work, we know little about the drivers of such agentic behavior. Strategy, being an ill-defined role, provides a broad spectrum of possibilities for how it can be enacted and connected to one's identity. For instance, the promise of power and influence strategy implies (e.g., Knight & Jarzabkowski, 2023; Knights & Morgan, 1991) may motivate some actors to choose to engage in strategy against structural constraints. Alternatively, the aspiration to shape the firm's future for the greater good could serve as a key driver of agentic behavior. This raises important questions about the underlying traits and motivations that fuel agency in different strategic contexts. For example, do traits such as narcissism or machiavellianism explain certain actors' determination and persistence in overcoming constraints to participate? Or, conversely, do characteristics such as humility and altruism or a strong sense of humanity drive participation in strategy work? The way agency manifests in participation decisions is likely to be context-dependent, influenced by organizational culture and situational factors. Thus, comparative case studies could provide insights into the different conditions mobilizing different forms of agency reflecting the various ways actors are able to act within structural constraints (cf. Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

10.1.3 Challenging assumption of linkage between inclusion and diversity

The third broader contribution of this thesis builds upon the first and second contributions, arguing that openness and resulting voluntary participation do not necessarily translate into superior strategic or innovative outcomes. Prior research on open forms of strategy has often emphasized the benefits of broad inclusion. It suggests that involving a wide variety of actors enables firms to gain an "information advantage" in their strategies (Seidl et al., 2019, p. 16), "improve the quality of strategic decisions" (Splitter, Jarzabkowski, & Seidl, 2023, p. 1888), or produce "creative, higher-quality strategies" (Stjerne et al., 2024, p. 821). A similar premise underpins research on open forms of innovation which posits that inviting a wide array of

contributors fosters the development of novel and creative products (e.g., Chesbrough, 2006; West & Bogers, 2014). More recent critical voices, however, have highlighted limitations and challenges associated with this approach to innovation by, for instance, stressing the difficulties in transferring innovative ideas into the core organization or making them commercially viable (e.g., Dahlander & Gann, 2010; Dos Santos & Spann, 2011; Ruiz & Beretta, 2021). Such critiques suggest that realizing the benefits of openness is not as straightforward as often assumed.

The ascribed positive effects of openness are typically rooted in the so-called 'variance hypothesis' (Dahlander, 2016), suggesting that inviting a diverse set of actors leads to a broader range of ideas and, ultimately, superior outcomes. This perspective reflects an implicit assumption in the literature that diversity, or variance, is automatically achieved in open forms of strategy and innovation. More specifically, it has been taken for granted that openness to a wide array of actors results in the participation of individuals with diverse perspectives and ideas, with positive implications. This implicit assumption is challenged in this thesis.

Paper III theorizes the distinction between 'managed' and 'unmanaged' openness in participatory processes. In managed openness, invitations to participation are explicitly linked to specific criteria, such as particular roles, locations, or expertise. In contrast, unmanaged openness sets no deliberate boundaries, allowing participation to the crowd without restrictions. Many prominent examples in the literature, such as Wikimedia's strategy initiative (Laura Dobusch et al., 2019), IBM's Innovation Jam (Bjelland & Wood, 2008), or Ericsson's strategy community (Plotnikova et al., 2021), exemplify unmanaged openness. These initiatives are often celebrated for their potential to enable diverse and creative ideas. Paper III argues that this is can be a fallacy. While unmanaged openness appears inclusive by design, it is often shaped by tacit structural constraints that give rise to particular patterns of participation, undermining the promise of variance. For example, innovation communities may inadvertently discourage participation from individuals without technical roles, even if they might bring

critical customer insights. Similarly, such communities, demanding engagement in addition to daily job duties may, for instance, systematically exclude those with caregiving responsibilities. It is important to highlight that such tacit structural constraints do fully determine choices; there is still room for agency, but certain options become less likely to be pursued. Paper IV provides further interesting insights into these dynamics, presenting an unmanaged innovation context theoretically open to all employees. The paper shows that a relatively small number of very passionate and motivated engineers chose to participate in the contest. The variance of actors participating was thus limited but this was not necessarily a disadvantage for the organization (see Felin et al., 2017).

Acknowledging that inviting the crowd in strategy and innovation settings does not necessarily lead to diversity in participation and ideas, opens up a number of questions for future research. First and foremost, it raises inquiries about the design of initiatives like open strategy communities or innovation contests. What are the key hidden barriers that may hinder a particular set of actors from participating? How can organizations design such initiatives to harness the diversity of the crowd effectively? It is important to highlight, however, that while participation of diverse actors with diverse ideas may be beneficial for firms, it may not be in their best interest that a great number of employees participates. Prior research has stressed that broad participation poses challenges such as the effortful selection of ideas (e.g., Cui et al., 2024) and increased costs of internal initiatives as attention, time, and effort are diverted from core daily tasks (e.g., Malhotra et al., 2017). So, how should open initiatives be designed that the diversity of actors is ensured without significantly increasing their cost and complexity (Nittala et al., 2022)? An interesting approach to address this trade-off has been featured in recent Open Strategy papers where firms decided to include a limited number of actors, representing different roles and departments (Langenmayr et al., 2024; Splitter et al., 2024). This design approach, however, is prone to biases in the selection of actors (cf. Seidl & Werle, 2018). Consequently, harnessing diversity may be precluded ex ante in such formats.

Importantly, questions about harnessing diversity extend beyond mere participation to whether diverse ideas are actually utilized. Even if diverse ideas are submitted, the issue remains of whether these ideas resonate with strategic decision-makers. For instance, analyzing crowdsourcing initiatives of 922 organizations, Piezunka and Dahlander (2015) show that decision-makers preferred familiar over distant ideas from external contributors. This effect was reinforced if decision-makers were exposed to a large number of ideas. Consequently, harnessing diversity may be impeded both in the initial design of initiatives and in the selection process that follows. The selection process of ideas promises further insights into the potential limits of harnessing diversity, particularly in open strategy contexts, where our understanding about such processes has remained limited (e.g., Hautz et al., 2019). Questions for future research include: What role do familiarity biases play in strategy contexts? How is the selection process shaped by broader organizational norms or power and politics? How does the personality of strategic decision-makers affect the selection of strategic ideas? Selection processes also matter for future participation, as they affect whether actors will engage in future initiatives and thus may influence the realization of diversity over time (see Piezunka & Dahlander, 2019).

10.2 Practical implications

Besides its theoretical contributions, this thesis also has important implications for practice. Three core practical takeaways can be distilled from the five papers of this thesis: First, enabling participation in open strategy and innovation initiatives requires firms' awareness of structural constraints and proactive efforts to address them. Second, enabling participation is not sufficient on its own; it requires ongoing support and careful management to mitigate risks and sustain engagement. Third, while social media offers opportunities to gain strategic insights from participants beyond a firm's boundaries, it may also lead to biases in strategic preferences with negative firm-level implications.

Firms increasingly invite their employees to contribute ideas to strategy and innovation processes. These efforts typically aim to collect novel and diverse perspectives which may ultimately result in innovative strategic approaches or products. Firms that invite the crowd, however, often face disappointments. They may have invested significant amount of money into digital tools to enable a smooth process, may have hired a consultancy to design an innovation contest or started an advertisement campaign, promoting such initiatives within the organization. But then the number of participants remains highly limited. Including actors does not automatically result in their participation. This can lead to the mistaken conclusion that employees are not interested in the organization's future and may even prompt firms to abandon such initiatives altogether. The papers of this thesis reveal that non-participation is often rooted in tacit structural constraints. For example, a culture overly focused on exploitation may leave little room for exploration or fail to convey a sense of honest intent behind such initiatives. Employees may also feel unable to contribute something substantial, for instance perceiving strategy as a domain reserved for top management. Overall, there may be a wide number of tacit barriers. To identify such hidden constraints that drive employees to abstain, firms could conduct what this thesis terms 'attention structural audits' (cf., Kahneman et al., 2021). Such proactive exploration of structural constraints, including a firm's rules of the game or resource disparities, allows organizations to mitigate these issues before launching such initiatives. Furthermore, and relatedly, firms should be aware that opening up the strategy or innovation process to all employees, for instance by launching a strategy community, does not automatically imply diversity of participants. Rather, it is likely that a particular set of actors self-selects into the process. Thus, the diversity of actors involved and the diversity of ideas raised may be limited and such biases may stabilize over time. As a consequence, initiatives theoretically open to all must be carefully managed and adapted to harness the wisdom of the many and not of particular group of actors. To address this issue, firms should explicitly design these initiatives to engage actors who have historically chosen not to participate. For example,

firms could tailor invitations to employees in specific roles, departments, or geographic locations that were underrepresented in previous initiatives.

However, as this thesis further implies, enabling conditions that foster diverse participation is only one step to foster involvement. Ongoing organizational support is essential throughout the process. As Paper IV shows, actors who submit their ideas despite structural constraints often feel deeply attached to them and are willing to invest significant personal effort, such as working extra hours or even dedicating weekends to refine their contributions. While this may seem beneficial for organizations, it also carries significant risks. Over time, actors' passion can lead to exhaustion and psychological detachment from their work (cf. Bredehorst et al., 2024). Furthermore, and closely related to this, how firms manage and support participants sends an important signal for future participation. Overburdening participants with work, leaving them unsupported, or failing to validate their contributions adequately can create tacit structural constraints that hinder participation in future initiatives.

Finally, this thesis also provides insights into the opportunities and risks of social media as a means of participation. Paper V highlights how exposure to social media posts, particularly those with high a number of likes from actors in lower hierarchical levels, can significantly influence top managers' strategic preferences. This implies that participation in strategic conversations on social media offers an important avenue for employees but also external actors to exert strategic influence. For top managers, however, this presents risks. The key task of strategy is often considered to ensure differentiation from competitors. Interpreted more widely, our findings suggest that consuming strategic information on social media may prompt top managers to align their preferences with prevailing trends rather than develop distinctive strategic approaches. These results emphasize the need for top managers to reflect critically on their engagement with social media. They should carefully consider how their strategic preferences may be shaped by the typically positively framed and trend-driven information presented on social media platforms.

11. Conclusion

This doctoral thesis examines voluntary participation in organizational settings, predominantly drawing on the ABV and practice-based theories. It makes several theoretical contributions to the study of participation while also advancing the ABV. For instance, it offers new avenues to conceptualize attention structures, a core concept of the ABV (Ocasio, 1997) and its precursors (March & Olsen, 1979; Simon, 1947). The thesis adopts critical perspective on participation in open forms of strategizing and innovating, challenging several core assumptions that underpin this stream of literature. It advocates for a conceptual distinction between inclusion and participation. While inclusion refers to the moral act of inviting individuals to take part in a process, participation entails their actual engagement. This distinction matters also beyond organizational and strategy research, for instance in inclusive urban planning (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011) or in the education system. We often assume that inclusion is sufficient to ensure participation, yet overlook tacit constraints (e.g., perceived lack of competencies, time constraints, limited access to resources etc.). As a result—and this is another key claim of this thesis—inclusion does not necessarily translate into a diversity of actors participating, challenging another core assumption in the literature on open organizational approaches (e.g., Splitter, Dobusch, et al., 2023; Whittington et al., 2011).

While this thesis offers critical perspectives on the study of participation, it should not be mistaken as a rejection of open forms of organizing. Having engaged with this topic over the past years and continuing to collect data across various settings, I strongly believe in enabling participation as a fundamental mechanism to create commitment to the organization and enable employees' experience of meaningfulness in their work. These advantages were already raised by Barnard (1938), Simon (1947), and Argyris (1964), yet have become increasingly important in times of 'quiet quitting' (Bolino et al., 2024). And here, I fully agree with the literatures on open strategy and innovation: The knowledge of employees represents a highly valuable resource that organizations should seek to use. However, and this shall be the core message of

this thesis, it is not enough to simply open up processes. Openness requires work. For participation to become meaningful, organizations must actively address the many tacit constraints present within their structures, cultures, and processes.

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