

**PROSPECTIVE**

# Communication and attention dynamics: An attention-based view of strategic change

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**Research Summary:** The attention-based view (ABV) has highlighted the role of organizational attention in strategic decision making and adaptation. The tendency to view communication channels as “pipes and prisms” for information processing has, however, limited its ability to address strategic change. We propose a broader role for communication as a process by which actors can attend to and engage with organizational and environmental issues and initiatives and argue that such a view can significantly advance understanding of strategic change. On this basis, we offer suggestions for future research on communication practices, vocabularies, rhetorical tactics, and talk and text in shaping organizational attention in strategic change. We also maintain that this enhanced view of the ABV can help advance research on dynamic capabilities, strategy processes, strategy-as-practice, and behavioral strategy.

**Managerial Summary:** To further enhance our capabilities to manage strategic change and renewal processes in organizations, we need a better understanding of how to manage organizational attention. In this article, we highlight the importance of understanding the role of communication and discuss the use of different communication practices, vocabularies, rhetorical tactics, and talk and text as possible levers that can be used to dynamically shape organizational attention. We call for further research to advance the understanding of how these levers can be used to influence the ways in which different sets of strategic issues, initiatives, and action alternatives are handled. We believe that such an enhanced view of organizational attention can enable the development of new, improved strategy practices to manage strategic change and renewal processes.

**KEYWORDS**

attention-based view, communication, discourse,  
language, strategic change

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, the attention-based view (ABV) of the firm (Ocasio, 1997) was proposed to explain firms' strategic decision making and adaptation—key topics in strategy research. Building on and reinterpreting Andrews's (1971) classic definition, the ABV defines a firm's strategy as the pattern of organizational attention, the distinct focus of time and effort by the firm on a set of issues—problems, opportunities, and threats—and on a particular set of action alternatives—skills, routines, programs, projects, and procedures (Ocasio, 1997, p. 188). According to the ABV, organizational attention generates a firm's strategic agenda, the issues and action alternatives that guide the allocation and deployment of resources in organizations (Ocasio & Joseph, 2005).

The original ABV formulation (Ocasio, 1997) has influenced a broad range of strategy areas, including research on strategic planning (Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004), top management teams (Cho & Hambrick, 2006), corporate governance (Tuggle, Schnatterly, & Johnson, 2010; Tuggle, Sirmon, Reutzel, & Bierman, 2010), multinational management (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008), and technology strategy (Eggers & Kaplan, 2009). In this body of ABV research, scholars have focused on the structural determinants of attention, situated decision making and strategic moves.

Subsequent theoretical development and empirical studies (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Ocasio & Joseph, 2005) have extended the original theory and further explained the structure and role of communication channels as a means to distribute organizational attention and to formulate and implement the firm's strategy. However, most research on the ABV remains primarily structural; the attention structures—the firm's rules, players, positions, and resources—and the structures of communication channels respond to environmental stimuli to generate strategic change and adaptation (Barnett, 2008; Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Vuori & Huy, 2015). This more structural approach to attention allocation and strategic change is particularly useful in explaining how responses to changes in institutional logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), government regulations (Cho & Hambrick, 2006), and technological innovations (Li, Maggitti, Smith, Tesluk, & Katila, 2013) external to the firm are mediated and moderated by existing structures and patterns of organizational attention. The traditional ABV is, however, not very well equipped to explain less-incremental forms of change and adaptation (cf. Cyert & March, 1963; Greve, 2003) in dynamic environments. In these environments, key aspects of strategic change, such as strategy renewal and transformation, radical and architectural innovations, and environmental disruptions, require the reconsideration of strategic agendas and a reconstitution of the firm's attention structures, which are less readily explained by existing approaches to the ABV.

To better account for forming and implementing less-incremental forms of strategic change and renewal, a more dynamic approach to attention allocation is needed. In this article, we seek to accomplish this goal by highlighting the need to expand the role and centrality of communication in generating changes to the firm's strategic agenda and attention structures. Prior research has shown how communication, through the exercise of voice (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008) and issue selling (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001), generates changes to existing patterns of organizational attention. However, the more general role of

communication in developing new strategic agendas that result in strategic change and renewal remains underdeveloped.

Thus, we propose that in order to further develop the attention-based view of strategic change, it is necessary to go beyond the existing information-processing perspective on attention allocation and develop the role of communication in attention dynamics. Communication already plays a role in the ABV, but primarily in terms of communication channels as the “pipes and prisms” through which information flows. In this article, we propose instead that future developments in the ABV more explicitly consider the content and practices of communication, defined in terms of “social interaction that builds on speech, gestures, texts, discourses, and other means” (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, & Vaara, 2015). Communication through social interactions, both within and between communication channels, allows for organizational participants to jointly attend to and co-orient themselves with changes in strategic issues, initiatives, and activities throughout the organization, which constitute a strategic change—whether planned or emergent.

For this purpose, we outline four suggestions for future research on how (a) communication practices, (b) vocabularies, (c) rhetorical tactics, and (d) talk and text shape organizational attention and generate strategic change. We argue that by focusing on these underexplored areas, the ABV can complement other previous research on strategic change, including dynamic capabilities (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015), strategy process dynamics (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006), strategy-as-practice (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), and behavioral strategy (Powell, Lovallo, & Fox, 2011).

## 2 | FROM INFORMATION PROCESSING TO COMMUNICATION IN THE ABV

Given its origins in the Carnegie School tradition (Cyert & March, 1963; March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1947), the ABV is often regarded as an information processing perspective in which attention is the critical limit on the information-processing capacity of the organization. When the ABV was first proposed, the objective was to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of the structuring of attention in line with Simon’s (1947) pioneering work on structure and cognition and to “link individual information processing and behavior to organizational structure” (Ocasio, 1997, p. 188). This information-processing view is reflected in applications of the ABV in strategy research, including the work on performance feedback effects (Chen & Miller, 2007; Iyer & Miller, 2008; Washburn & Bromiley, 2012), firm forecasting ability (Durand, 2003), and how the proximity of a deadline changes attention focus (Lehman, Hahn, Ramanujam, & Alge, 2011).

While the ABV highlights well the central importance of information-processing capacity and the structural distribution of attention, the role of communication in shaping the dynamics of organizational attention has received less research attention, as discussed above. Theory and research on the ABV have tended to regard the communication channels as pipes and prisms for information processing instead of arenas for sensemaking and competition over ideas and viewpoints (cf. Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). However, attention in the ABV is defined as the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing on time and effort on the repertoire of issues and action alternatives facing the organization (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189). Moreover, although organizational attention is often measured in terms of communication through official texts, primarily letters to shareholders (Cho & Hambrick, 2006; Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Nadkarni & Barr, 2008), minutes of boards of directors (Tuggle et al., 2010; Tuggle et al., 2010), and, less commonly, through observations of informal communications and meetings (Yu, Engleman, & Van de Ven, 2005), acts of communication have

most often been seen as measures of relative attention allocation instead of acts that themselves also influence the dynamics of organizational attention.

In the original formulation of the ABV, Ocasio (1997) provided a platform on which to study the role of communication in the ABV by outlining the spatial, temporal, and procedural dimensions of communication channels that guide attention. In his more recent work, he has expanded on this idea by discussing the central role of communication channels in “attentional engagement,” which is defined as the process of intentional, sustained allocation of cognitive resources to guide problem solving, planning, sensemaking, and decision making (Ocasio, 2011).

Ocasio (2011) notes that attentional engagement is central to the ABV perspective on attention and is relative to views on attention drawn from research on managerial cognition, which defines attention more narrowly in terms of selective attention and noticing, rather than Ocasio’s more expansive definition. While attentional engagement is shaped by communication, the research on attention has tended to overlook the role of the social interactions underlying communication in shaping the situated attention and attentional engagement that occur within and between communication channels. We propose that attention in the ABV should be studied not only as an individual-level cognitive phenomenon but also as a social one in which the attention and co-orientation of organizational actors is shaped by communication.

Thus, to develop a more dynamic attention-based view on strategic change, we suggest researchers go beyond the traditional information-processing view and highlight the role of communication in attentional engagement. The traditional view can be described as following the “conduit metaphor” (Reddy, 1979) view in which communication is a process of sending and receiving information, and language and communicative practices have a limited effect on the message, its meaning, and its reception. Instead, we suggest drawing on more contemporary approaches that highlight the role of communication in shaping the ways in which organizational actors think and act (Cornelissen et al., 2015; Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). Accordingly, communication is a process by which speakers interact with other speakers and recipients to jointly attend to and engage with an understanding of organizational and environmental phenomena (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Weick, 1995). This process is situated within and between channels and distributed throughout the organization (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012).

### **3 | EXPANDING THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE ATTENTION-BASED VIEW: AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

To elaborate on the role of communication content and practices on strategic change, we identify four future research areas that have the potential to enhance our understanding of how attentional dynamics shape a firm’s strategic agenda. These include (a) an analysis of the nature of communicative practices used in communication channels, which can enable or constrain changes in attentional engagement, (b) an analysis of strategic vocabularies to develop insights into how the language use shapes attention, (c) an analysis of rhetorical tactics to better comprehend the role of political dynamics in shaping the strategic agenda of a firm, and (d) an analysis of different forms of talk and text to understand how changes in strategic agendas are articulated and shared throughout the organization.

These four areas are not intended to provide an exhaustive account or theory addressing how communication shapes attentional dynamics and strategic change. Instead, they identify potential building blocks for future research. In the following, we draw insights from key areas of

communication and discourse studies and apply them to explain how the ABV can help strategy researchers explain strategic change.

### 3.1 | Proposal #1: Communicative practices in communication channels

In order to understand better the role of communication in shaping a firm's strategic agenda, there is a need to examine the nature and characteristics of communication channels. One way to approach this issue is to focus on the communicative or discursive practices that enable or constrain communication in specific channels (e.g., Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Paroutis & Heracleous, 2013; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Communicative practices are not the content of communication but the means through which communication happens. Thus, they are the ways in which communication technologies and tools are used, rules about participation rights, conventions about language use, and norms about appropriate forms of interaction that steer organizational communication and attentional engagement within and between channels.

Past research has shown how communicative practices enable or constrain communication and thus emerging strategic agendas. This is especially the case for strategy meetings and workshops (e.g., Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, & Schwarz, 2006; Seidl & Guérard, 2015) that are formalized communication channels with a major impact on attention (Ocasio & Joseph, 2008; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). For example, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) have studied strategy meetings and analyzed how various meeting practices—e.g., turn-taking, scheduling, issue bracketing, and voting—can influence strategic discussions. Similarly, Johnson, Prashantham, Floyd, and Bourque (2010) have elaborated on the ritualistic aspects of strategy workshops and how managers performed “quasi-priestly” roles as others followed suit. Kwon, Clarke, and Wodak (2014) have highlighted the discursive practices that teams use to develop shared views around strategic issues in meetings: re/defining, equalizing, simplifying, legitimating, and reconciling. Kaplan (2011) has in turn focused on the characteristic features of PowerPoint as a means of communication. Other studies have examined the effects of discursive practices on people's ability to participate in strategy processes and shape the strategic agenda. For example, Mantere and Vaara (2008) identified six practices impeding or enabling participation: mystification, disciplining, technologization, self-actualization, dialogization, and concretization.

These studies notwithstanding, we still have a rather limited understanding of communicative practices in various communication channels and particularly the extent to which they reinforce existing patterns of organizational attention or facilitate the formulation and implementation of strategic change. Future studies should consider both communicative practices within the firm's channels and similar activities outside its boundaries. Thus, it would be important to examine the practices of orchestrated strategy making, as in “open strategy” (Whittington, Hautz, & Seidl, 2017), as well as how discussions in the media may shape the attention of managers. Furthermore, the communication tools and technologies used in increasingly distributed organizations, such as global teams, need to be further analyzed in greater detail. In addition, we have a limited understanding of how social media and communication technologies are used to shape strategic agendas. However, it would be valuable to examine, for example, how diverse communicative practices help to spread new strategic issues and initiatives through social media relative to those used in more traditional communication. Overall, while the existing research has already established the importance of communicative practices in developing strategic agendas, more research is required to explain how diverse communicative practices both generate and transform attentional engagement in new and different forms of communication channels and how they enable or constrain strategic change.

### 3.2 | Proposal #2: Strategic vocabularies as microfoundations of attention formation

While understanding of the practices of specific communication channels is crucial, it is also important to examine the role of language as a basis of communication in order to develop the ABV approach to change. A critical assumption is that language is a social product that guides individual and group cognition and more specifically, attention. The relationship between language and cognition has long been the subject of debate and research by psychologists, linguists, and anthropologists. While a strong version of what is popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that language determines thought, has been more or less disproven (e.g., Berlin & Kay, 1969), a Neo-Whorfian approach has become increasingly prevalent. It states that language directly shapes both how we think (Boroditsky, 2011) and what we are likely to think (Gentner & Goldin-Meadow, 2003).

The issue is not whether we could have the same thoughts absent specific language knowledge, but the likelihood that we would do so without language. For example, we could think about strategy in business without having the word “strategy” available to us, but we are more likely to pay attention to strategy and have greater consensus about what strategy means with a common language about strategy. Language thereby serves as a lens for cognition, a tool kit, and a category maker (Gentner & Goldin-Meadow, 2003). This is not a trivial matter, as specific forms of language or discourse tend to steer attention toward particular issues and initiatives. One way to approach this issue is to focus on the strategic vocabularies that managers use or do not use in a firm. Following Loewenstein et al. (2012), we define vocabularies as systems of words and the meaning of these words, used by groups, organizations, and institutional fields in communication, thought, and action.

Vocabularies are central to determining which issues and initiatives are likely to be attended to within and between communication channels. For example, the vocabularies of NASA have been examined by Vaughan (1996) and Ocasio (2005) to explain how managers and engineers’ attention and inattention to safety and risks shaped the fatal Challenger and Columbia accidents. Importantly, research has begun to study how vocabularies shape the strategic agenda of the firm. For example, Jones and Livne-Tarandach (2008) explored the vocabularies of architects and how they affected their marketing strategies.

Attention shifts may be triggered and legitimated through new and changing vocabularies (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Innovations in vocabularies are similar to crystallizations of ideas that serve as focal points of attention. Through new conceptualizations, managers may be able to coin a strategic idea that fundamentally shifts distributed patterns of organizational attention. For example, Ocasio and Joseph (2008) examined how changes in vocabularies used for strategic planning at General Electric shifted the strategic agenda throughout the corporation. More generally, we argue that new words and categories play a crucial role in attention dynamics.

To develop new ideas and challenge conventional ways of strategic thinking and acting, there is a need to tolerate, nurture, and even promote new words, concepts, and categories as an essential part of strategic change. The key argument is that vocabularies have a fundamental impact on how managers make sense of their environment, organization, and strategy. Language enables attention to be focused on important issues and initiatives, as managers may miss opportunities and threats that they cannot comprehend with existing vocabularies. Thus, not only does cognition impact the vocabularies we use (we think before we talk), but vocabularies also affect attention and cognition (we use language to guide how we think).

While research on vocabularies and changes in strategic agendas is still in its infancy, some studies provide guideposts for future research. For example, the study of Gawer and Phillips (2013) on the evolution of Intel’s strategic agenda to becoming a platform leader provides evidence of how



changes in vocabularies created changes in the firm's strategic agenda. Faced with a changing institutional setting, Intel created a new language emphasizing the company as an "industry enabler" and a "catalyst for innovation," facilitating a strategic agenda that favored platform strategies. New words and categories used both within the firm and with Intel's suppliers were critical in shifting the company's organizational identity and relationships while also transforming its organizational strategies. Future research should also examine not only how vocabularies may facilitate strategic agenda change but also how they may hinder attention to new strategic agendas either within specific communication channels or throughout the organization.

### 3.3 | Proposal #3: Rhetorical tactics as determinants of attentional engagement

Another key issue is how managers use communication to influence others. This is an important topic because although the attention-based view sees the power of organizational players as an important part of the firm's attention structures, it implicitly treats power as fixed and has not specified how political dynamics are related to attentional engagement or to changes in the firm's attention structures. Extending the work of Kaplan (2008), Mantere and Vaara (2008), and Paroutis and Heracleous (2013), among others, an analysis of the different types of rhetorical strategies or tactics used by different actors in an organization to guide the attention focus of the organization can be useful for understanding this link. In general, the question is how to exercise not only power but also influence through rhetorical tactics and how they affect the patterns of organizational attention that enable or constrain strategic change.

While there are a wide variety of rhetorical strategies that can be used to influence attentional engagement, research on strategic issue selling has been particularly enlightening in this respect (e.g., Dutton et al., 1997; Dutton & Ashford, 1993). In this work, it is essential to note the key role of middle managers in regulating communication and "buying" and "selling" issues and ideas (Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). The political dynamics between middle and senior management is likewise important (c.f., Vuori & Huy, 2015). Another perspective is the framing of issues or initiatives (Kaplan, 2008; Werner & Cornelissen, 2014). For instance, Kaplan (2008) has studied "framing contests," that is, the ways in which actors provide alternative ways of understanding and focusing attention on strategic issues.

Beyond issues of selling and framing, further research on rhetorical strategies would be useful to allow us to understand the political underpinnings of attention dynamics. Not only do strategic agendas shape the attention of individual managers in the ongoing process of organizational communication (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012), but managers also often have their own interests in shaping agendas and focusing attention on specific issues and initiatives.

### 3.4 | Proposal #4: Forms of talk and text to study how strategic agendas are articulated and shared

From the perspective of the ABV, talk and text play an important role in the structural distribution of attention and form the strategic agenda of the organization (Cooren, Vaara, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2014; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). To better understand these forms of communication, it is important to examine both specific instances of talk (as in strategy meetings) and texts (as strategic documents). For instance, recent work on the communicative construction of organizations (CCO) is useful for elaborating on the specific role of talk and texts in these processes (Cooren et al., 2014; Robichaud, Giroux, & Taylor, 2004; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). In this view, attention focuses on a common object, such as a strategy text or a conversation. Thus, even if managers have different

interest and goals, alignment may be created precisely by texts or ideas that are jointly attended to. Robichaud et al. (2004) propose that strategies tend to develop through “metaconversations.” In this view, multiple and disparate conversations are distributed in various meeting or communication channels and are linked together by common communicative elements, such as an understanding of what strategies should be embraced (see also, Fenton & Langley, 2011). Strategic texts, especially strategic plans, may then become significant parts of communication in their own right.

Rather than only focusing on individual texts, our perspective emphasizes that talk and text constitute a continuous, though differentiated, stream of communication that evolves dynamically over time and across the organization. Prior patterns of talk and text have both enabled and constrained management in directing organizational attention to key issues and initiatives. Importantly, specific communicative practices, changing vocabularies, and/or rhetorical tactics allow for new forms of talk and text to emerge, which is critical for nonincremental strategic change and renewal. Changing patterns of talk and text generate changes in the firm’s organizational attention to the extent that these patterns are reproduced, translated, and transformed throughout the firm’s various communication channels generating new attention rules. This temporal and spatial fluctuation and coevolution of talk and text is thus a key part of the attention structures of an organization (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Nasrallah, Levitt, & Glynn, 2003; Ocasio & Joseph, 2006; Ocasio & Joseph, 2008), resulting in changes in strategic agendas throughout the organization (Jacobides, 2007; Macintosh & Maclean, 1999; Ocasio & Joseph, 2005).

Future research examining the coevolution of talk and text from a dynamic ABV perspective may also examine not only the commonalities across talk and text but also their differences. As attention is distributed throughout the organization, multiple meta-conversations typically coexist, which may inhibit strategic change and adaption (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Future research would be needed to examine whether, when, and how attention to contradictions within and across meta-conversations may generate or impede strategic change.

#### 4 | A NOVEL PERSPECTIVE ON STRATEGIC CHANGE

We propose that foregrounding the centrality of communication in the ABV can significantly advance our understanding of strategic change and renewal. This is because attention to new strategic issues and initiatives is generated, reconstructed, and implemented in organizations in and through communication. As outlined above, this opens up new questions and areas of inquiry that strategy scholars could—and in our view, should—pursue to enhance our knowledge of attention dynamics and strategic change. Focusing on how communication affects attention dynamics can, in and of itself, provide an important missing piece of the puzzle to conversations about strategic change. However, it can also complement other existing approaches, such as research on dynamic capabilities, strategy process research, strategy practice research, and behavioral strategy research.

First, an enhanced focus on communication in the ABV can help deepen our understanding of how communicative practices, vocabularies, rhetorical tactics, and forms of talk and text shape a firm’s dynamic capabilities (c.f. Teece, 2007). Prior research on dynamic capabilities has incorporated attention into the sensing and seizing capabilities (Barreto, 2010; Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Helfat & Peteraf, 2015; Salvato, 2009), but its role is not yet fully developed. An enhanced focus on communication can help deepen our understanding of the different patterns of strategic change and renewal that heterogeneity in the distribution of perception and attention across individuals in organizations (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015) can introduce. Incorporating social interactions, communication, and attentional engagement more explicitly may provide a more expansive understanding of the role



of attention not only in sensing and seizing but also in reconfiguring opportunities for strategic change. This is particularly critical when strategic change is less incremental. Future research could further examine how different types of patterns of communication and attention translate into dynamic capabilities that generate effective strategic change, renewal, and adaptation (Laamanen & Wallin, 2009).

Second, strategy process research (Floyd, Cornelissen, Wright, & Delios, 2011; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006) can build on an attention-based view of strategic change and renewal by analyzing the communications practices through which organizational attention can constrain or enable attention to new strategic issues and initiatives. Key questions here include, for example, how different strategic themes emerge and compete for the attention of the decision makers, how they evolve over time from one management team meeting to another in different parts of the organization, and how they eventually become articulated in the strategic agenda that is then formally communicated to the organization. A more dynamic view of attention would also enable researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how the attention to a firm's goals cascades in the organization, directing the attention of middle and front-line managers to the strategic agenda of the firm, thus influencing strategic change and renewal.

Third, strategy-as-practice research (SAP) has caused a recent surge of interest in the social and organizational practices that enable and constrain strategy-making (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2015; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Communication dynamics within the ABV can help elucidate how strategy practices shape attentional engagement and focus, and can also be connected with recent work on strategy tools (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015). For example, vocabularies used for labeling the key strategic themes and concepts and the way strategy presentations are crafted with PowerPoint can be highly influential in changing the patterns of organizational attention.

Fourth, research on behavioral strategy has recently become increasingly interested in the different behavioral dynamics and biases associated with strategic decision making (Gavetti, 2012; Powell et al., 2011). A communicative perspective on the ABV allows an examination of how attentional biases can play out in group settings and communication channels (e.g., board of directors, top management teams (TMT), task forces). Such analysis could help us to better understand how different kinds of communication practices can affect the different aspiration levels and reference points that management attends to (Blettner, He, Hu, & Bettis, 2015), the temporal foci of the TMT (Nadkarni & Chen, 2014), and through that either bias or de-bias organizational attention and strategic agenda (Monteiro, 2015).

The communicative perspective on the ABV resonates well with other streams of research, such as sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In recent years, sensemaking scholars have also concentrated on the constitutive role of language in sensemaking and called for more empirical work on its discursive and narrative aspects (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sonenshein, 2010). Furthermore, a part of this research has focused on sensegiving, that is, attempts to rhetorically or discursively influence others (Monin et al., 2013; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Despite these advances, sensemaking and sensegiving research has predominantly dealt with individual cognition and the enactment of social reality through cognition (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), usually without an explicit focus on the social processes that the ABV highlights. Indeed, the criticism that sensemaking research has recently received relates to the methodological individualism inherent in the cognitive tradition of this approach (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). What is specific with the ABV is that it can, more so than other related approaches, focus on the strategic agenda of an organization. We argue that taking communication seriously, as a social process beyond individual cognition, can help to explain how this agenda is being formed or changed. This is especially the case

when examining the dynamics of attentional engagement at the group or organizational level, which necessarily involves communication and language.

When pursuing these questions, future strategy research using the ABV may also need to use and develop new methods of analysis. Thus far, the cognitive foundations of the ABV have been studied with a relatively limited range of methods, although there have also been quite promising recent developments (e.g., Laureiro-Martinez, 2014; Laureiro-Martinez, Brusoni, Canessa, & Zollo, 2015). Future research could strive even further to develop new methods to elucidate the communicative dynamics in strategic change. As for quantitative methods, advances in textual network analysis and topic modeling have a great deal of potential in terms of being able to elucidate the key role of vocabularies in strategic change. These methods may also be useful in studying the role of rhetoric in attentional engagement. Qualitative methods, such as discourse or conversation analysis, can serve to dig deeper into communication practices in meetings and communication in other arenas. Video-ethnography (Gylfe, Franck, Lebaron, & Mantere, 2016) and other forms of ethnographic analysis (Paroutis, Franco, & Papadopoulos, 2015; Vesa & Vaara, 2014) could also broaden our understanding of various communicative processes and practices and their dynamics in a novel manner.

In conclusion, we propose that by going beyond the existing ABV focus on information processing and adopting a more expanded role for communication, future theory and research will better explain how strategic agendas change throughout the firm as different sets of issues, initiatives, and action alternatives are attended to. Strategic change is a collective process, and the dynamics of attention allocation at the organizational level are achieved through communication and social interactions. Increased research on the content and practices of communication will therefore provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of attention behind the formation and implementation of new firm strategies.

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