

TOP MANAGEMENT TEAM CONSTELLATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING

ABSTRACT

Two major themes in the upper echelon decision making literature are the efficacy of the CEO and the composition of the top management team (TMT). Little research has examined their intersection. This study addresses the call to reveal the social processes within TMTs, by focusing on CEO-TMT member interaction in decision making. Drawing on video ethnographic data of two TMTs, we explore the patterns of interactions between CEOs and TMT members in their strategic decision making meetings. Through an analysis of 20 issue discussions, we identify five “constellations”, a team level construct capturing the core relational dynamics that are created through mutual CEO-TMT member influence during a team’s discussion of a strategic issue. We explain how these constellations unfold and their implications for the processes and outcomes of TMT strategic decision making. We then elaborate how our findings contribute to the TMT and upper echelon literatures, as well as our understanding of team politics.

Keywords

Top management teams, strategic decision making, influencing behavior, team constellations, upper echelons, video ethnography

INTRODUCTION

While strategy is influenced by many different parties in an organization (Bower, 1970; Burgelman, 1983, 1994; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003), top management teams (TMTs) are still widely considered the “primary shapers” (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009, p. 8) of an organization’s strategic direction and its outcomes (Chandler, 1962; Child, 1972; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Westphal & Stern, 2007). As Hambrick (2015, p. 1) notes, “The term top management team (TMT) has been adopted by organization and strategy theorists to refer to the relatively small group of most influential executives at the apex of an organization – usually the general manager and his or her direct reports” (See also Boeker, 1997; Carpenter, Geletkanycz, & Sanders, 2004; Tushman & Rosenkopf, 1996). How they work together is central to the study of organizational strategy. Drawing on a definition of teams as “small groups of interdependent individuals who share responsibility for outcomes” (Hollenbeck, Beersma, & Schouten, 2012, p. 82), we anticipate that, when members disagree, it is sometimes the team leader, sometimes a subgroup of the team, and sometimes the collective as a whole who makes a decision (Hollenbeck et al., 2012, p. 94; Manz & Sims, 1987).

Most research on the impact of those in an organization’s upper echelons on strategic decision making has taken one of two approaches. One body of work has focused on the CEO as the lone decision maker, and identifies important CEO attributes, such as their education, tenure, attention, experience, and values, that influence decision making (e.g., Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011; Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Lewis, Walls, & Dowell, 2014; Nutt, 1993). This influential work does not, however, attend to the team context in which the CEO is operating. The second body of research treats all members of the TMT, including the CEO, as a single entity, with the implicit

assumption that they share equal responsibility in decision making (e.g., Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Schweiger, Sandberg, & Rechner, 1989) – despite recognizing that “some executives have much more say than others” (Hambrick, 2007; p.336). There is thus a limited understanding of what occurs between the CEO and other TMT members in strategic decision making processes, and how this shapes decision outcomes.

To address this issue, and answering the call from upper echelon researchers to open up the “black box” of TMTs (Carpenter et al., 2004; Georgakakis et al., in press; Hambrick, 2007), we join a nascent stream of TMT interaction research by exploring the interactions between CEOs and other TMT members in strategic decision making. We extend this work, however, by moving beyond a unidirectional focus on how CEOs influence other TMT members (e.g., Kisfalvi & Pitcher, 2003; Peterson, Smith, Martorana & Owens, 2003), and recent studies of CEO-TMT member interaction outside of decision making (e.g., Liu, Fisher, & Chen, 2018; Ma & Seidl, 2018; Zhang, Li, Ullrich, & Dick, 2015), to examine how CEOs interact with other TMT members when making strategic decisions, and how these interactions influence strategic decision making. In order to explore these interactions, we use video ethnography, an intensive research method involving observation and video-recordings (Christianson, 2018; Gylfe, Franck, LeBaron, & Mantere, 2016; Jarrett & Liu, 2018; Streeck & Mehus, 2005), to examine, in detail, the moment by moment exchanges between CEOs and their TMT members in two organizations.

Our study makes three main contributions to the TMT literature. First, we open up the black-box of TMT interactions by revealing the embodied, multimodal influencing behaviors which TMTs use in their meetings, and identifying five team constellations, each associated with a different decision outcome. Our research thus extends the current TMT literature by providing insight into the embodied social processes that operate between individual and team-level

characteristics and certain decision outcomes. Second, we highlight the differences between CEO and team members' influencing behaviors in TMT decision making and explain the implications of these differences for decision making processes and outcomes. We show that while CEOs influence from a position of formal authority, TMT members can increase their influence through a wide range of behaviors and by building temporary coalitions that can provide a powerful counterbalance to the CEO, or at least lead the CEO to justify a position. Our study thus moves beyond an understanding of the TMT as a single entity (Carpenter et al., 2004; Hambrick, 2007; Nielsen, 2010; Pitcher & Smith, 2001), to show how strategic decision making is shaped by the different influencing behaviors of those in the TMT. Our third contribution sheds new light on the political aspects of TMT decision making. While previous research has found that top teams develop stable coalitions that affect how decisions are made (e.g., Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988), our study indicates a more dynamic and fluid view of coalition building and explores how these coalitions develop and their impact on decision outcomes.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

CEOs & TMTs in Strategic Decision Making Research

Upper echelon research, and strategic leadership research following from it, has generally taken one of two approaches to understanding the impact of senior executives on organizational decision making (Arendt, Priem, & Ndofor, 2005). First, the "CEO studies" regard the CEO as the firm's principal decision maker and show the impact of CEO attributes, such as age, education and personality, on decision making (e.g., Barker & Mueller, 2002; Daft, Sormunen, & Parks, 1988; Gerstner, Konig, Enders & Hambrick, 2013; Henderson & Nutt, 1980). These important studies do not, however, consider the influence of the TMT in the strategic decision process. The second approach, the "top team studies", treat the TMT members, including the

CEO, as equivalent contributors when predicting decision making processes and outcomes. Analyzing the team as a unit, this research assumes that responsibility for decision making is shared by its members (e.g., Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Using members' demographics and functional/educational backgrounds to characterize the team, some of these studies have shown how the team's demographic or functional diversity may lead it to make higher quality decisions (Boone & Hendriks, 2009), engage in strategic change (Wiersema & Bantel, 1992), and be more innovative in their strategy (Bantel & Jackson, 1989). However, other research has found that more diverse TMTs make slower decisions and have problems reaching consensus and initiating strategic change (Greening & Johnson, 1997; Hambrick & D'Aveni, 1992; Knight et al., 1999; O'Reilly, Snyder, & Boothe, 1993). Such mixed findings – thought to be the result of treating all TMT members as having equal influence in decision making, and typically using proxies for team behavior in meetings – have led to an interest in studying CEO-TMT member interactions directly, in real time (Carpenter, Geletkanycz, & Sanders, 2004; Kisfalvi & Pitcher, 2003; Roberto, 2003).

TMT Interactions in Strategizing Research

Recent research on TMTs has found that CEOs affect TMT interactions through, for example, the expression of certain personality characteristics or emotions (e.g., Kisfalvi & Pitcher, 2003; Peterson, Smith, Martorana & Owens, 2003). Other research has shown that team dynamics influence the processes and outcomes of strategic decision making, strategy formation and strategic change (e.g., Kisfalvi, Sergi & Langley, 2016; Liu & Maitlis, 2014). Some of this work has shown how the emotional dynamics of a TMT influence how strategic issues are proposed, discussed, and evaluated (e.g., Liu & Maitlis, 2014), and how a lack of interaction between TMT members can result in a strategy implementation failure because of their different

understandings of the strategic plan (Sminia, 2005). Largely missing from this research, however, is an exploration of how CEOs and TMT members interact with and respond to each other (Jarzabkowski & Searle, 2004; Liu, Fisher & Chen, 2018). Recent exceptions include Ma and Seidl's (2018) study, which finds that new CEOs establish a group of close collaborators that may initially differ from, but gradually converges with, their TMT over time, creating tensions along the way. Further, Zhang and colleagues' study of CEO transformational leadership showed the importance for TMT effectiveness and firm performance of individual consideration and intellectual stimulation that focused evenly on each TMT member (Zhang, Li, Ullrich, & Dick, 2015). When the CEO treated members differently from one another, this negatively affected TMT dynamics, and ultimately team effectiveness and firm performance. These interesting studies highlight the importance of CEO and TMT interactions, but do not consider their impact in the critical context of TMT strategic decision making.

Influence in TMT Decision Making Interactions

Acknowledging TMTs as hierarchical bodies in which the CEO and TMT members likely have different degrees of influence highlights the importance of research that has explored the political nature of TMT strategic decision making (Cyert & March, 1963; Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Elbanna, 2006). This work has shown the presence of formal and informal power (Greve & Mitsuhashi, 2007), and a variety of influencing behaviors used by members, including coalition formation, withholding information, and the use of expert consultants to gain advantage over others (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). Influence can also be rhetorical, as Samra-Fredericks' (2003, 2004) studies of top executives show. Her in depth, observational research of a TMT reveals how some top executives draw on rational argument and intense negative emotions to influence other TMT members' preferences for proposed strategic actions.

In another study of how senior executives use language to influence, Shi and colleagues (Shi, Zhang, & Hoskisson, 2019) found that Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) ingratiated themselves with their CEOs through unconscious verbal mimicry, or “language style matching”. However, this research also showed that when CFOs’ and CEOs’ language style was highly matched, the CFOs were less likely to challenge their CEOs, leading firms to undertake more mergers and acquisitions, and to realize lower announcement returns.

Other research has explored different ways in which individual managers – often middle managers – influence those around them (e.g., Kipnis & Schmidt, 1982; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Yukl, Falbe & Young, 1993; Yukl & Tracey, 1992) or garner the attention of top managers through issue-selling (e.g., Dutton, Ashford, O’Neill & Lawrence, 2001; Dutton, Fahey, & Narayanan, 1997). Although this research does not focus on TMTs, it demonstrates the broad array of ways in which executives influence decisions through their interactions with others in organizations. Guided by the literature on TMT interaction and decision making and sensitized to the importance of influencing behaviors in these interactions, the present study addresses the following research questions:

How do CEOs and TMT members influence each other in TMT decision making meetings? How do these interactions shape the processes and outcomes of strategic decision making?

METHOD

Context & Data Collection

Data were collected from two TMTs (TMT A & TMT B) by two authors independently, some of which has been previously discussed in Liu & Maitlis (2014)¹ and Jarrett & Liu (2018)².

¹ None of the variables nor excerpts of data in the Liu & Maitlis (2014) paper is used in this paper.

² We previously used 263 words from a transcript of one TMT meeting to illustrate a point in a method paper (Jarrett & Liu, 2018). We do not use this data in this paper.

As researchers who study similar phenomena in a novel way, we began to discuss how we each approached our data and shared our observations. In these conversations, we shared reflections about the teams' meetings, for instance, the kinds of strategic issues discussed, the behaviors of the two CEOs, and the similarities and differences when they interacted with their TMT members. During these exchanges, we began to see that we both had interesting emergent findings about TMT-leader influencing behaviors in strategic decision making meetings, and considered how we might learn more by combining our data sets. This process is similar to that described by Bechky and Okhuysen (2011), who combined two independently collected data sets from separate field studies to develop a comparative analysis of a phenomenon of interest. As Vesa and Vaara (2014, pp. 292-293) explain, such comparative ethnographies, which can emerge serendipitously by combining empirical material already conducted, permit greater generalizability than is possible with traditional, single case ethnographies.

To explore the theme of TMT influence and interaction in strategic decision meetings, we thus drew on data from two teams that were comparable on key dimensions such as size and gender composition, and in organizations that were going through a strategic change process during the time of our study. Although it would have been interesting to study a greater number of teams, our unit of analysis in this paper is the interaction episode, rather than the team. An interaction episode is a team's discussion of a strategic issue in a meeting, from beginning to end. For this study, we analyzed 20 interaction episodes, focusing on the influencing behaviors of the CEO and each other member of the team. These influencing behaviors were often dyadic, but also at times enacted between three or more members. Because gaining access to video record a series of TMT meetings is extremely difficult, and collecting and analyzing such data is very labor-intensive, we chose a design that enabled a detailed, rich, processual analysis of TMT

interactions, rather than a large-scale comparative case study that could have addressed other research questions.

TMT A is the top team of a medium-sized computer game company (CGC) based in Canada with about 400 employees, a number which fluctuated with game production cycles. CGC was founded by its then CEO, Henry, in 1996³, as a video game studio, developing games for big publishers such as Microsoft. This company was under an acquisition negotiation during the time of our study (2010). Mid 2008, Henry decided to hire an Executive Producer, Isaac, who worked as a de facto CEO to oversee the operations of the organization. This team, excluding Isaac, had worked together from 2006 and had met regularly in TMT meetings at the time of the study. In total, there were eight members in the team, which also included two Directors responsible for technology and art resources for the whole company.

TMT B is the top team of an international business services company (IBSC), operating across Europe, North America, Asia Pacific and Africa with about 28,000 employees. This company's initial product discovery was made by a university professor and the organization was founded as a small office in 1915. It then grew its scope internationally. During 2008, the year of study, the company underwent several key strategic changes in organizational structure, product portfolio and leadership. Bart, the new CEO was hired during 2006. The eight-member team had regular meetings throughout the observation period. TMT B is a much larger data set which was gathered over two years, in multiple stages. For this paper, we only analyzed the data from stage 1 of the TMT B study (3 months). This ensured a comparable period and number of meetings to the TMT A data set, which was studied over three months.

³ For the purposes of anonymity, exact dates and names in this study have been disguised. Their sequence and relative time spans are accurately represented. Since our purpose is to understand the dynamics among team members, the specific dates are less important for our analysis.

Tables 1 and 2 show the position and tenure of each team member in these two teams. In this paper, we use video recorded meetings, as well as interview transcripts from interviews conducted with each of the team members after the meetings were recorded. These interviews lasted 1-1.5 hours and focused on members' understandings of the CEO's role, the relationships between team members, and the dynamics in the meetings in general. During the interview, each member of the TMT was shown some video clips of themselves during critical incidents in the meetings and asked to share their interpretation of what was happening. These video clips were selected because they captured important, often heightened, moments of the team's discussion of strategic issues, and we believed that individuals' reflections on these moments would provide valuable additional information that could inform our analysis of the meeting dynamics, as other researchers have found (Dempsey, 2010). Critical incidents were short (1-3 minute) periods that included, for example, times when strong opinions about an issue were expressed, disagreements were voiced and negotiated, or intense emotions were displayed. The data gathered in these interviews, both on the critical incidents and more generally through team members' descriptions of their role in the team and their relationship with both the CEO and other TMT members, were significant additions to the meeting data.

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here

This study uses video ethnography, which involves the microscopic analysis of recorded pieces of naturally occurring human activities and interactions (Christianson, 2018; Gylfe, Franck, LeBaron, & Mantere, 2016; Streeck & Mehus, 2005). Following the tradition of this method, we call this “naturally occurring” because these activities occur as a matter of course in organizations, rather than as a result of an experiment members were asked to do for our

research. However, unlike traditional ethnographic research, which relies on the researchers' observations and field notes, video ethnographers capture naturally occurring activities in a material form that enables repeated subsequent examination.

Aware of a potential "observer effect" (Bryman, 2004), and in order to minimize our impact on the processes we were studying, our video cameras were located as unobtrusively as possible in the corners of the meeting rooms. Researchers find that any observer effect usually diminishes during the observation period, as they build trust with the team and as the participants get used to the researchers' presence (Adler & Adler, 1994). Further, our observations of team members' displays of intense emotions, use of humor, and conflicts, were consistent with other research suggesting the team members were no more performing for us than for each other, as is common in much of organizational life (e.g., Kisfalvi & Pitcher, 2003; Metiu & Rothbard, 2013). Although video ethnographic research with top management teams is a relatively new method, it is part of a long tradition of ethnographic research in which the insights gained are considered to outweigh the observer effect (Gylfe et al., 2016; LeBaron, Jarzabkowski, Pratt & Fetzer, 2018).

Data Analysis

Following Jarrett & Liu (2018), we use a specific approach to video ethnography. First we "zoomed in" to closely scrutinize the rich micro interactions between the team leader and the team members, and then we "zoomed out" to capture unfolding processes and global, repetitive patterns of interactions, as well as their context. We coined the term "constellations" for these patterns. Finally, we examined the data we had gathered by "zooming with" the participants, that is, analyzing TMT members' interpretations of critical incidents from the video-recorded interactions. "Zooming in and zooming out" are similar to "detailing, sequencing, and patterning" (Gylfe et al., 2016) and consistent with Langley's (1999) "grounded theory strategy"

for process data analysis, staying very close to the original data and allowing patterns to emerge bottom-up through systematic coding. We describe our data analysis procedure below, but although we present a linear data analysis process for the sake of clarity, it was much more of an iterative process going back and forth between different stages.

Zooming in: Identifying the strategic issues and influencing behaviors in the meetings.

In keeping with previous literature, we defined an issue as strategic if it was likely to have a significant impact on the organization's present or future strategies, structure, process, or business model (Ansoff, 1980; Dutton et al., 1983; Grant, 1991; Mintzberg, 1985). Decisions on these strategic issues are "important, in terms of the actions taken, the resources committed, or the precedents set." (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Theoret, 1976, p. 246). We went through both data sets identifying all the strategic issues being discussed in these meetings. In TMT A, ten strategic issues were discussed in meetings over a three month period, falling into four categories: products (2 issues), processes (2 issues), resources (3 issues), and structure (3 issues). TMT B was a larger data set, gathered over two years, in multiple stages. We identified 12 issues in the first three months of meetings in stage 1; these fell into the same four categories as TMT A: products (2 issues), processes (4 issues), resources (3 issues), and structure (3 issues). In order to match the amount and type of data across the two teams, however, we then excluded the two issues from the process category which were of less strategic impact and involved much smaller capital investment, resulting in 10 issues distributed in the same proportion across the four categories as the TMT A issues.

Insert Table 3 & Table 4 about here

We next zoomed in, examining the team's discussion of each strategic issue. This was an

iterative process involving watching the video-recorded meetings many times, analyzing the transcripts, and using the literature to sensitize us to ways of coding the interactions. Following other research on real time group interaction, we decided to code the influencing behaviors displayed by the participants via verbal, vocal, hand gestural and body postural channels (see Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Liu & Maitlis, 2014).

To do this, the first two authors (acting as Coder A and Coder B respectively) first reviewed existing coding schemes for influencing behaviors (e.g., Kipnis, Schmidt, & Willkinson, 1980; Lawler & Youngs, 1975; Lechner & Floyd 2012; Maner & Case, 2016; Stevenson, Pearce, & Porter 1985; Yukl & Falbe 1990) with a research associate. Most of these provided only broader categories of influencing behaviors (e.g., legitimizing, pressure tactics, coalition building), and were oriented towards influencing behaviors in a dyadic situation, rather than between multiple parties. However, we also drew on other ways of conceptualizing influence (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Samra-Fredericks, 2003), using these to expand the existing coding schemes to include cues from gestures, postures, and gaze channels. Finally, we inductively developed new codes from our data. The first author (Coder A) went through the TMT A data set and the second author (Coder B) went through the TMT B data set using the expanded list of codes, identifying new influencing behaviors that were not included in the expanded list. These new influencing behaviors included, for example, seeking undue credit, declaring ownership, bridging, and derailment. Coders A and B and the research associate discussed and defined these new codes and added them to the expanded list of codes. Through this process, we developed a coding table which included 32 kinds of influencing behaviors (see Table 5). The two authors and research associate became well-acquainted with the two data sets during this process since providing examples for the codes in the expanded coding scheme and

defining the new codes required them to discuss chunks of data from both data sets.

Insert Table 5 about here

Coding the data took place in three rounds, and we refined the coding scheme as we proceeded (c. f. Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019). In the first round, the Coder A and Coder B used the coding scheme to code the data of TMT A and TMT B respectively. We coded the influencing behaviors at the utterance level. This meant assigning an influencing behavior code each time a participant finished their turn in the conversation. There were instances when one person used several influencing behaviors in one turn; there were also utterances that did not involve influencing behaviors. In the second round, the research associate (Coder C) coded the data from both TMTs. After she had coded the first two issues of each data set, she shared her coding with the author who had done the first round of coding for that TMT, and they compared their coding. They found very high agreement across most of the codes and traced the disagreements to ambiguities in the definitions of seven of the 32 codes, which were being used differently by different coders. These included, for example, one person coding a behavior as “upward appeal” when another coded it as “referring to other people”, and one coding a behavior as “assertiveness” while another coding it as “reiterating”. The two coders then discussed and resolved the discrepancies by refining the code definition and reached preliminary agreement on all the initially discrepant codes. This process was repeated, with Coder C comparing her codes with the pre-existing ones after coding every two issues, until she had completed the coding, and full agreement was reached on all the codes across both data sets. In the third round of coding, coder B examined the codes on which Coders A and C initially disagreed when they coded TMT A data, and Coder A examined the codes on which Coders B and C initially disagreed when they

coded TMT B data. Any final disagreements were discussed among the three coders until all agreed with the code assigned.

Each piece of coding was thus the result of multiple perspectives, following the recommended approach for inductive coding (c.f. Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010; D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990; Kreiner, Hollenshe, & Sheep, 2006). We reached 100% agreement on all the codes through this coding process, but since this was through ongoing discussion and negotiation rather than produced through independent coders, applying traditional interrater reliability tests, such as concordance or kappa statistic, would not have been meaningful (c.f. Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2009; Petriglieri et al., 2019).

Zooming out: Identifying patterns in CEO-team member interaction.

We then zoomed out, in two ways. First, we looked at each TMT's discussion of each issue. We paid attention to how the conversations got started, the particular roles the CEO and members each took, and the tone of the conversation between them. Second, we made comparisons across the teams' discussions of the 20 strategic issues, seeking to identify the kinds of influencing behaviors between the CEOs and team members on which we could meaningfully compare the 20 discussions and identify salient "within-group similarities and across-group differences" (Eisenhardt, 1989; p. 540).

At the start of each interaction episode we were able to code the initial positions that CEO and TMT members held towards the issue under discussion. In most of the 20 issues that we analyzed, the CEO and TMT members' initial positions were clearly stated, or easily inferred. In some cases a position was expressed in a less straightforward way, for instance, the MD West of TMT B said, "I hold my breath when you say (name of the candidate for an executive role)". Our understanding of this TMT member, based on the context of the issue

discussion, and his following argument that the candidate selected by the CEO was not a good choice, provided us with the information to code it as initial “disagreement”. We then coded the CEO and TMT members’ initial influencing behaviors, and their unfolding influencing behaviors as interaction proceeded. Across the 20 interaction episodes, we identified five different kinds of CEO-TMT interaction patterns, which we term “constellations”. We define constellation as a team level construct capturing the core relational dynamics that are created through mutual CEO-TMT member influence during a team’s discussion of a strategic issue. We use “constellation” instead of a general term such as “pattern” or “configuration” to reflect the importance of team members’ positions in relation to one another, and to highlight the implications of these different relative positions for the discussion of strategic issues.

Zooming further out: Connecting TMT constellations and TMT decision making processes and outcomes

With our research questions in mind, we paid particular attention to a key aspect of the strategic decision making process, that is, the extent to which team members participated and were jointly involved in the decision process. We coded “participative decision making” by closely analyzing the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of each team member, coding the processes as more participative to the extent that every team member got a chance and enough air time to share their views, and less participative when team members were shut down or ignored in the discussion.

We then explored how each constellation related to the decision making process, and to the kind of decision outcome: whether a decision was made or postponed and, when a decision was made, whether it was a consensus decision that had the support of all TMT members, or a minority decision, which had only partial support. We regard a strategic decision as “a choice

with important consequences and resource demands for the organization (Mintzberg et al. 1976; Hickson et al. 1986)” (Nutt, 1998, p.198), and considered that a decision had been “made” when the team summarized that actions would be taken in a particular time frame for a particular issue under discussion.

Table 6, the data display table, shows our detailed descriptions of the five constellations, each illustrated by an issue discussion from one team to supplement those examples given in the text below. The table also shows the strategic decision making processes and outcomes associated with each constellation.

Insert Table 6 about here

“Zooming with”: Deepening our interpretation of the influencing behavior dynamics

In this stage, we drew on the data collected in the interviews and in our “zooming with” sessions, complementing the data collected in “zooming in” and “zooming out”, to interpret the patterns of influencing behavior dynamics and their implications for the team’s strategic decision making processes and outcomes. For instance, in one episode, a team member’s posture and facial expression suggested she was unhappy with a comment from the CEO, and we were curious why she withdrew from the discussion, rather than arguing her case. In the subsequent interviews with her and her team members, we learned that she was “fuming” but had “learned to be calm” in such situations because of the vulnerability of her position. She explained that she thought she had not got support from her team members. By enabling us to hear participants’ thoughts and feelings that were not observable in the meetings, zooming with helped us gain a more nuanced understanding of the influence dynamics in the meetings.

Explaining the relationship between TMT constellations and TMT decision making processes

and outcomes

As we sought to explain the relationships between the five constellations and their outcomes, we first saw that an important factor was whether the CEO and TMT members had the same (congruous constellation, five episodes) or different (the other four constellations, 15 episodes) initial starting positions. Then looking more closely at the four constellations unfolding after a difference in initial positions, we found they could be organized on two dimensions: the CEO's level of engagement and the presence or absence of coalition formation among the TMT members. We used this finding to theorize important mechanisms through which TMT constellations influence strategic decision making processes and outcomes. We also investigated the influence of issue type on the constellation triggered, but did not find any relationship.

FINDINGS

This study examined how CEOs and TMT members influenced each other in TMT meetings and how these interactions shaped the processes and outcomes of strategic decision making. Our main findings were five constellations, each capturing the core relational dynamics that were created through mutual CEO-TMT member influence. These constellations developed out of the initial positions held by CEO and other TMT members, and their initial and unfolding influencing behaviors in the discussion of an issue. Each constellation shaped the decision making process and its outcome, in terms of whether the team made a decision, and the level of agreement with the decision, if made. This process is illustrated in Figure 1. The relationships between the five constellations and their respective decision processes and outcomes are summarized in Table 7. In this section, we describe the five constellations that were identified across 20 interaction episodes in TMT meetings. They are named the Congruous, Undermining,

Spectating, Cooperative, and Adversarial constellations and are illustrated below with excerpts from the two TMTs' meetings.

Insert Figure 1 about here and Table 7 about here

TMT Constellations in TMT Strategic Decision Making Meetings

Congruous constellation

A congruous constellation was characterized by shared understandings of the issue and best ways forward. This kind of constellation developed when the CEO and TMT members saw eye to eye from the beginning, which was evident when the CEO made a proposal and all team members immediately agreed with it. The ensuing discussion involved rational argument, and considerable information seeking and information sharing, with one party drawing on their experience and knowledge to help the other party better understand the issue at hand. It seemed that the CEO was “preaching to the converted” and all the team members joined in with the discussion, which had a warm emotional tone. This resulted in a strategic decision making process that involved a high level of participative decision making so that the team as a whole understood the issue better. As a result, there was agreement among all present and a consensus decision that had the commitment of every team member.

We illustrate the congruous constellation with TMT A's discussion of “global project” with quotations taken from the video data and individuals' influencing behaviors noted in italics in [/] brackets below; other important information such as nonverbal behaviors (e.g., hand gestures, body postures, interruptions) is presented in () brackets. In this episode, the CEO proposed moving to a “global project” model in which all producer teams would share resources, a significant change from the current business model in which each team was responsible for its own costs and profits. This proposed plan was beneficial to all the teams and all the team

members agreed upon it at the beginning.

CEO: ... It's globalization of processes, art, programmers, things like that. We'll discuss it here, and fine-tune it one more time, and then present it to the Operations Committee. It's very important. *[rational argument, making a proposal] (looking around the table at each team member to engage all of them)*

The team members then discussed how Kelly should design a "master sheet" that captured all the resources that could be "globalized", what it should include, and when and how to send it to which employees. The team members, drawing on their experiences with the company, told the CEO that this kind of information, sent too early, might demoralize some employees since some might not want to be moved from one team to another. The CEO then sought a "possible resolution" from the team members. All team members contributed to the discussion and proposed that the document should cover only a three-month timeline (Sam), shared with the employees that would be affected (Roy), and approved by the TMT (Sam), before being sent out to everybody. Then, drawing on her knowledge of the complexity of the situation, Judy commented:

Judy: But even if only everyone in this group gets it, we all have to have had the conversation with our group before we send out the thing in its entirety, right? We can't just say, "OK my group is fine, just send it out." Because then other people's stuff might be ... (CEO: nodding, indicating he agrees). So, you actually have to do checks and balances with each other before it goes out. *[rational argument, drawing on own experience] (she pauses & looks at and includes the CEO and then all the other team members)*

Bryan further commented on the confidentiality concerns:

Bryan: We should send it to our team leaders. They have to treat it with confidence, confidentially, and they have to understand that it's speculative and have the maturity to deal with all that stuff. We get it first, and then send it out to them, give them the opportunity to give feedback and everything else. It's in our court from there on *[rational argument] (in a firm tone, looking around the table)*

The CEO's final proposal was agreed upon by all the team members.

CEO: OK. I'd like to amend that the proposal that yes, that's how this process works. I'd like to propose an amendment. Everything you said but only one document

gets sent to all. Only the one that's three months, that's more final, only that one can go. *[rational argument, bridging through summarizing comments] (he looks around making sure that there is no disagreement or nobody is going to add anything to this final proposal)*

In this discussion, both the CEO's and the members' body postures were relaxed, open and engaging: they looked at the speaking team members, nodding to show that they agreed with their comments. The atmosphere in the room was one in which both the CEO and the members were trying to engage each other through the discussion, and this created a positive, warm emotional tone. The CEO and members built on each other's comments and the final proposal was better than the initial proposal. As a result, a consensus decision was made that secured all team members' commitment.

This constellation was identified in TMT A's discussions of four issues and TMT B's discussions of one issue. These issues are identified in Tables 3 & 4, with the notation "Cg". In Table 6 we include TMT B's discussion of "review accident" issue to further illustrate this constellation.

Undermining constellation

The second constellation, undermining, describes a relational dynamic that began with the CEO and one team member in opposing positions and was characterized by the undermining of that team member by the CEO. The CEO challenged and then undermined the member either by demeaning them, or implying some lack in them. This individual then sought support from other team members but failed to engage strong support, and gradually withdrew from the discussion. The prevailing emotional tone was negative, although sometimes the team members used humor to deflect the CEO's comment. There was limited information sharing among the team members. This constellation was associated with a lack of participative decision making, and a decision – the CEO's proposal – that was imposed without the support of other TMT

members. We call this a minority decision.

We illustrate the “undermining” constellation with TMT B’s discussion of the issue of “relocation project”. The main incentive of the initiative was to save costs, which meant disrupting the current workflow and relocating people to different offices. The meeting was supposed to be led by Daniel, the Chief Information Officer (CIO), who had undertaken a series of investigations, gathered cost options and developed some initial scenarios. The CEO had also done his homework, however, and he disagreed with Daniel.

The episode began with Daniel confirming the scope and intention of the next part of the meeting, which was to plan for the relocation of offices, understand the potential loss of employees, business continuity and costs. He confirmed, “This is a planning meeting (not an IT meeting)”. But the CEO responded:

CEO: The challenge here is to look at ways we could manage our corporate functions more economically... It’s just about how to do this more efficiently. The very crude approach that I am putting in this note which is, at this stage, very much for discussion. *[Rational argument, sharing information, drawing on own expertise] (Presents in calm and authoritative manner, arms folded throughout while also looking around to team). (Daniel looking at and flipping quite loudly through his pile of notes. The CEO talks for another 4 minutes and concludes with a question): “Is it (his own proposal) worth the trip? On the basis of the numbers we currently have, I think the answer is yes.” [drawing on his Finance expertise, rational argument, sharing information] (Remains calm and in control)*

Daniel: I’ve got different numbers...*[a counter challenge](He looks at his pile of notes, nervously tapping his pen and shaking his head. Orients directly to another team member, appeals for his support)*

Both his appeal and his point about the numbers were ignored by the whole group. Rather than inviting Daniel to share his data, the CEO talked over him. Daniel turned and glared at the CEO, fiddling with his pen, visibly upset by the turn of events.

CEO: What I did was this. I wrote a thought piece, ... completely from the top of my head – knowing that Daniel was doing parallel work. I got my head around the bigger picture, which is this paper. We’ll then come back to the details, which really only became clearer last night *[Uses rational argument, drawing on own experience and*

financial expertise. There is also a demotion of Daniel by not including him in the discussion] (CEO displays instances of dominance and effectively ostracizes Daniel with clear and directive hand gestures, addressing the other members of the team.)

The CEO continued talking about the options for several minutes without interruption. During this time Daniel looked tense, either looking down at his papers, or out of the window, twirling his pen. His bodily orientation was away from the CEO.

CEO: So, is there a general comprehension around the table about the proposition? *[drawing on own expertise, inclusion] (Looking around the team seeking validation, hand gesturing wrapping up discussion)*

The rest of the team members conveyed that they understood. *(team members nod)*

CEO: Good that's secured... Well done me. *[seeking credit] (The response is met with laughter all around the team, except Daniel who remains silent and stares away from the team).*

Throughout the discussion the CEO displayed strong, dominating influencing behaviors that undermined Daniel's efforts. Daniel ultimately withdrew from the discussion. Most of the team members appeared indifferent and unengaged, despite Daniel's attempt to get help from them. The exchange had a dismissive, negative emotional tone. This constellation was associated with an absence of participative decision making, with most team members contributing little to the discussion. The decision that was made was the CEO's proposal and was the preferred outcome of some of the team members. We call this kind of decision a minority decision.

TMT A's discussion of one issue and TMT B's discussions of three issues unfolded with the same "undermining" dynamic. These issues are identified in Tables 3 & 4, with the notation "U". In Table 6, we include a brief summary of TMT B's discussion of the "central and regional costs" issue to further illustrate this constellation.

Spectating constellation

The third constellation, spectating, was characterized by a discussion in which the CEO played a minor role. It began with the CEO not taking a position and two team members taking

opposing positions at the beginning of an issue discussion. During the exchange, the CEO adopted a bystander position, observing the team members using a variety of influencing behaviors in a discussion that had a competitive tone. There was considerable information sharing but not always full exploration of alternative solutions. At the end of their exchanges, the team members still held opposing opinions. In the absence of agreement or evidence of a clear “winner”, the CEO proposed postponing the decision making to a later meeting, despite the issue calling for a quicker decision. This constellation was not associated with a participative decision making process, and although the team members argued for a resolution, the decision was postponed.

We use TMT B’s discussion of the “marketing team structure” to illustrate this constellation. In the discussion, the CEO let his two Managing Directors debate a controversial proposal. Each Director argued against the other’s proposal, drawing on their own expertise. The discussion began with the Head of Marketing (HoMktg), Yoeung Mai, identifying several shortcomings in the local marketing capability. She made a logical and carefully presented case and after considering various formats and options, proposed there should be a direct reporting line of country-level marketing personnel from their country manager to the HoMktg herself.

Yoeung Mai: So what we propose to do is to have the bigger countries reporting to (the centre) directly...So there is not, in any sense, any dramatic changes. Any questions at this point? *[Rational argument, drawing on functional expertise and own knowledge, depolarizing]*

Quinton (MD East): Well, I fundamentally disagree with changing the reporting from a straight line into the country General Managers into the centre. I think ... it’s really important for a country General Manager to be able to work with the sales and the marketing function together in the country... *[direct challenge].(Twirls his spectacles around in right hand to start, looks at the presented structure chart, then directly at Yoeung Mai. Moves from large open hand gestures to folding arms once he has made his point.)*

Quinton continued to explain that, in his “personal opinion”, the reporting line in the centre was “commercially weak” and that he thought that that person taking over would be “a recipe for disaster”. The two continued to trade counter-arguments, with Yoeung Mai arguing for centralization of the marketing function and Quinton arguing for autonomy. The final comment was by Quinton.

Quinton: I wouldn't underestimate the disengagement of the General Managers if you take away the marketing function from them in terms of their ownership of the P&L. I think it's a much bigger step than taking away finance, HR, and IT. I think you are really feeling as a General Manager locally you have been disempowered if you take the marketing away. *[magnifies the risk] (maintains direct eye contact, speaks slowly and deliberately but pace increases when reaches the end, supported by more gesticulation of the arms and hands.)*

It seemed that the two team members could not persuade each other despite this lengthy debate. The CEO appeared restless and then intervened. He quickly summarized the discussion and directed the two Directors to do further analysis and come back with a better proposal for discussion in the next meeting.

Throughout the discussion, the two debating team members used rational arguments, drawing on their own knowledge and expertise, and direct challenges to influence each other. The discussion had an intense, competitive emotional tone, but there was also a lot of information sharing between the team members. The CEO took a bystander position, observing the debate, and postponed the decision for a later meeting. This constellation was thus associated with a strategic decision making process that was not very participative, and did not result in a decision.

This constellation was evident in the discussion of two issues in TMT A, and three issues in TMT B. These issues are identified in Tables 3 & 4, with the notation “S”. In Table 6 we provide a brief summary of TMT A’s discussion of “Hiring interns” issue to further illustrate this constellation.

Cooperative constellation

The fourth constellation, which we term “cooperative”, was characterized by the resolution of differences between the CEO and other team members through constructive discussion. This constellation developed from initial positions in which the CEO was in disagreement with the rest of the team, who were united in their position. During the discussion the team members worked together, drawing upon their knowledge and expertise to engage and persuade the CEO. This engendered considerable information sharing between the team members. Team members’ body postures and hand gestures were open and engaging, and the use of inclusive humor made the challenge less threatening to the leader. This constellation had a calm, positive emotional tone and was associated with a decision making process in which there was a high level of participative, joint decision making. The discussion resulted in a final decision based on the team members’ proposal, with which all agreed – a consensus decision.

We illustrate the cooperative constellation with TMT B’s discussion of “database management”. The CEO, Bart, was initially not in favor of the idea, but the following excerpt shows how the other team members joined together to persuade him of the proposal’s merits.

CEO: All right, the group balanced score card, I want to –... (*interrupted by MD East, Quinton*)

Quinton: Kevin (CFO) and I had a conversation, Bart, ... we had got a couple of investments in DataBase where they are actually coming to impact on the bottom line if we don’t do them in the timeframe that we have been working to. [*rational argument, drawing on own expertise; legitimizing by reference to the CFO*](*Pauses, spins glasses in his right hand, jabs them into the air to make his final point*).

CEO: You wrote a business case for DataBase? [*direct challenge*](*CEO responds immediately; sits up, turns directly to MD East and stares at him with a quizzical look on his face*)

Quinton: Absolutely. [*Assertive response, draws on knowledge acquired from doing business case and legitimizing by referring to CFO*](*Emphasizes his response with gestures and head nodding*)

CEO: My goodness. *(body directly towards MD East and looks at him with some surprise)*

Quinton: So, and therefore we do want very, very keenly to, we will get the business cases up, but we need to get DataBase deployments running from our perspective. *[Coalition building](Kevin, CFO, smiles as Quinton continues).*

Quinton explained what was going on in the different geographic areas to support his case. After he had established the urgency of the issue, other team members built on each other's comments, nodding to each other, answering the CEO's questions regarding cost and technology, and explaining to him how this decision connected to other aspects of change in the organization. For example, the CFO strengthened the case by making a link between this initiative and the company's overall investments, and other team members then joined in.

Kevin: So the paper for the (investment committee meeting) ..., looks at the whole investment and what it might look like, but with some specific business cases around the (regions). *(Looking alternately at MD East and MD West)*. This is what the benefit would look like. And the plan would be to sign off the individual aspects, the customer profitability aspects, et cetera. But also have a framework for when we will call off investments as they come upon a case by case basis...(and have), a picture of what the whole spend will look like, so that the thing we need to commit as a group to (the data management system) across the group and what the total spend is like.. *[rational argument, drawing on own knowledge, coalition building, bridging]* *(Speaks confidently, gesturing expansively about the big idea with his hands, as well as inclusively between MD East and the CEO and other team members)*

Yoeung Mai: And the work (team member) is doing and the data architecture would fit *[Inclusion of others, piggyback on discussion and bridging]* *(Open gestures, looks at CIO, and CFO)*

Daniel: It's kind of complementary to it. *[Piggybacks on discussion, forms coalition with HoMktg]* *(relaxed, orientates towards HoMktg, energetic)*

Yoeung Mai: Yeah, because we need to extend that, the reporting, there is going to be a group solution. *[Bridging]* *(looks around and draws an arc with forefinger towards the group)*

Quinton: I would echo that very strongly. In terms of the category definitions, for example hierarchies and all of those (things), we need to really get nailed down,... Daniel (CIO) and I think that could be brought to whatever meeting you want to bring in to actually get them signed off, because I think it will then make reporting across all categories consistent as we are going forward. *[drawing on own knowledge, the inclusion]*

of others] (*Sits back, gestures to CIO and HoMktg*)

Discussion continued for several turns with the team members exploring options and reality testing and the CEO asking questions for clarification and a recognition that it affected the whole business. He leaned forward and actively listened. The tone of the meeting became very calm and thoughtful. After some time, MD East proffered:

Quinton: I think we are in agreement. [*Inclusion, seeking support and coalition*]
(*Emphasis with nodding of head, smiling, hands together*)

Kevin: We are in agreement.

Throughout this process, team members drew on their experience to build on each other's comments, and were inclusive in acknowledging each other's views. The discussion continued refining the details of the initiative with the team increasing its level of convergence. There was a lot of information sharing and a calm, positive emotional tone throughout the discussion. This constellation was associated with a strategic decision making process where there was a high level of participative decision making. The final set of exchanges established a growing convergence on the proposal and the team reached a decision that was agreed upon by all the team members, a consensus decision.

This constellation was identified in TMT A's discussions of two issues and TMT B's discussions of one issue. These issues are identified in Tables 3 & 4, with the notation "Cp". In Table 6 we provide a brief summary of TMT A's discussion of "software purchase" issue to further illustrate this constellation.

Adversarial constellation

The fifth constellation, adversarial, represents a "fight" mode. In this constellation, the CEO and one team member's initial positions were in opposition. During the discussion, each party argued strongly from their own perspective, seeking support from other team members

through rational argument and information sharing. Throughout, there was much pulling and pushing between the CEO and the team members. In one episode, the CEO and his ally eventually got their way over the other group, after much discussion. In other episodes, the team member coalition managed either to postpone the decision to later meetings or get their way, despite disagreement from the CEO and his ally. In this constellation, despite the contesting tone of the discussion, there was considerable information sharing and a moderate level of participative decision making. However, the team did not reach consensus in any of the episodes associated with the adversarial constellation, and the decision was either postponed or supported by a minority.

In TMT A, the CEO, supported by the Producer, Roy, proposed that Bryan make his game the first online game as the company's initial bid for an "online presence", a critical strategic move. Bryan strongly disagreed with the CEO's proposal and was supported by Tony. During the discussion, the CEO used lengthy rational arguments to support his proposal but was challenged by Bryan and Tony who drew on their own expertise and experiences to argue against it. The CEO then used "upward appeal" (appealing to the founder, who was not in the meeting) to support his argument, and later offered a compromise proposal. None of this, however, persuaded Bryan and Tony.

In the following piece of transcript, we illustrate the dynamics of this discussion. It begins with the CEO recounting a previous conversation with the founder, who had agreed to put up a large sum of money to support the production of an online game.

CEO: I can approach (the founder) and ask, "You're talking about \$6 million here and I can ... Didn't you even one time say if it's \$15 million, I can get it? Did you really say that much?" They [the Operations Committee] seem to be saying ... You'd put together a plan that makes sense, I don't think they're that concerned about the 15 million. I don't think they've ever seen a plan that they're happy with, to spend tons of money on, until recently [*sharing information; uses upward appeal; seeking undue*

credit]. (He becomes animated when he repeats what he said to the founder, looking at Bryan directly, looking around the table to engage other team members)

...

CEO: [I would] go to the founder and see if what they say is true, that they would spend \$1 million, \$2 million on just strategic, online component. I'll propose this game... *[upward appeal] (he looks at Bryan, tries to engage him)*

But both the CEO's upward appeals and rational arguments were quickly challenged by Bryan and his ally.

Bryan: *(after explaining his previous experiences of not getting any extra budget)* They don't want to spend another penny *[drawing on previous experience] (he stares at the CEO and starts to become visibly annoyed).*

Tony: Does [one of our strong competitors] have online? *(CEO: No)*. Does it stop it from doing what it's doing? *(CEO: No)*. Is it going to stop it from hitting 15 million? *(CEO: No)*. *[drawing on own knowledge & experience, direct challenge, coalition building with Bryan] (He frowns, stares at CEO, and seems annoyed)*

Bryan further challenged the CEO:

Bryan: It'll probably make a big difference on the Xbox sales, on the PC sales, I agree with that, but it won't make a difference on the PS2 sales *[drawing on own knowledge] (he speaks very fast, looks directly into the CEO's eyes).*

Towards the end of the discussion, Bryan and his ally, Tony, tried to stop the CEO's lengthy argument by using diminishing language:

CEO: But this is a money thing, not a technology thing? *[seeking information, showing lack of knowledge] (he looks at Bryan)*

Tony: It's a distraction thing! *[humiliating comments to disagree]*

Although they were not fully persuaded and did not really agree with the decision, the CEO and his ally, Roy, succumbed to the vehement arguments of the two forceful team members, with a tone of contestation prevailing through the discussion. In the end, although the CEO was not keen, the team made a decision that had been proposed by the opposing team member but in a modified form: to make the game online in the future, rather than now. This was

a moderately participative decision process, resulting in a minority decision.

TMT A's discussion of one issue and TMT B's discussions of two issues followed the "adversarial" constellation pattern. These issues are identified in Tables 3 & 4, with the notation "A". In Table 6, we include a brief summary with excerpts of TMT B's discussion of the "controversial model" issue to further illustrate this constellation.

Summary

Looking across these five constellations, we see that the two with a more collaborative relational dynamic and positive emotional tone – the congruous and cooperative constellations – led to participative decision processes and consensus decisions, while the three with more oppositional relational dynamics and negative emotional tones – the undermining, spectating, and adversarial constellations – led to less participative decision making processes and either no decision being made, or a decision that was not consensual. We unpack these findings further in the next section.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we set out to address two research questions:

How do CEOs and TMT members influence each other in TMT decision making meetings? How do these interactions shape the processes and outcomes of strategic decision making?

To answer them, we closely examined the influencing behaviors occurring during strategic issue discussions in the meetings of two TMTs, and explored their implications for team decision making. We identified five different constellations, each reflecting the core relational dynamic created between CEO and TMT members during the discussion of a strategic issue, and showed that each constellation was associated with specific decision processes and outcomes.

This section is presented in three parts. First, we focus on the constellation that emerged when CEO and team members held the same position at the start of the discussion, linking this set of dynamics to Hambrick's (1994) work on behavioral integration in TMTs. Second, with a view to better understanding the dynamics and effects of influence when parties in a TMT disagree, we focus on the four constellations (undermining, spectating, cooperative and adversarial), in which the CEO and team members held different initial positions. We identify two key dimensions that distinguish between them, and use these to explain the different outcomes of each constellation. Third, we highlight the significance of understanding TMT decision making as an embodied, social and emotional process. Throughout, we connect our findings to the extant literatures on CEO and TMT decision making, showing how we extend this research.

When Initial Positions Concur: Behavioral Integration in TMTs

When the CEO and TMT members agreed with each other on the initial proposal for a strategic issue, the stage was set for the congruous constellation, in which everyone displayed collaborative behaviors, working together to produce a consensus decision. This constellation can be likened to Hambrick's (1994) "behaviorally integrated" team type, with high information sharing and joint decision making. In such cases, when no conflict of interest exists between a CEO and its members, often because they perceive a proposal as collectively beneficial, they engage in a "productive social exchange" (c.f. Lawler et al., 2008). This involves mutually facilitating influencing behaviors that are expressed with open gestures and positive emotional tones that constructively engage the other party. While this dynamic was most evident in the congruous constellation, we also saw it evolve in the cooperative constellation. The cooperative constellation started from a point of difference between CEO and team members, but moved

towards behavioral integration through the ensuing interaction, as team members drew on their expertise and built on each other's contributions to persuade the CEO. They also at times used humor, which enabled a collaborative dynamic that was not threatening. This kind of interaction, and the positive emotion with which it is imbued, engages and builds solidarity among team members (Carmeli, Dutton & Hardin, 2015; Collins, 1981; 1993), creating a highly participative decision process and consensus outcomes.

While our study finds constellations consistent with Hambrick's model, it raises questions about the assumption that the level of TMT behavioral integration is influenced by team composition and various contextual factors (e.g., Hambrick, 1994; 1995). On this basis, we would expect that a given team, with no changes in its composition or context, would have a relatively stable level of behavioral integration. However, this is not what we observed in our study. Instead, we found that our two different teams, sometimes even in one meeting, could be behaviorally integrated (e.g., the congruous and cooperative constellations) when they discussed one issue, and behaviorally fragmented (e.g., the adversarial and undermining constellations) when they discussed another. This suggests that examining TMT behavioral dynamics as processual patterns producing temporary "states" rather than as relatively stable "traits" grounded in demographic differences provides us with a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of the interactions between TMT leaders and members. Further, throughout our processual data, we identified constant shifts. Whether a team is "integrated" or "fragmented" depends on who is in the room, the issues being discussed, the tactics they use, and the emotional tone generated. We are not arguing that teams do not have dominant orientations towards a level of behavioral integration, but that these are more dynamic and complex than previously acknowledged.

The Dynamics of Influence When Initial Positions Differ: The Role of CEO Engagement and Team Member Coalitions in Strategic Decision Making

Turning now to the four constellations prompted by differences in initial positions, we present a matrix (see Figure 2) that categorizes these constellations according to two dimensions: the CEO's level of engagement, and whether or not the team members form a coalition.

Insert Figure 2 about here

With regard to the CEO's engagement, we found in our data that how actively involved the CEO became in a discussion varied. In the constellations on the left side of the matrix, the CEO plays a more passive role. For example, in the spectating constellation he (or she, if abstracting to other cases) allows team members with opposing views to talk about the issue at some length without intervening. They have an intense, competitive exchange while the CEO quietly observes. Only at the end, when there is no resolution, does the CEO propose postponing the decision to a later meeting. In the cooperative constellation, the CEO begins by expressing a position counter to that of the rest of the team but then goes with them as they discuss the issue, becoming part of a calm and positive participative decision process and eventually allowing him or herself to be persuaded to the team members' point of view. This accommodating stance is quite different from that displayed in the two constellations on the right side of the matrix (undermining and adversarial), where the CEO actively asserts him or herself in the discussion, either by undermining or arguing fiercely with a disagreeing team member. We see that CEO passivity leads to a consensus decision or its postponement, while CEO assertiveness can result in the decision for which the CEO has fought. The outcome of the adversarial constellation, however, is uncertain, and less directly predicted by the CEO's level of engagement.

By highlighting the importance of the CEO's level of engagement in issue discussions, we contribute to literature that has shown the critical role played by a CEO in TMT strategic decision making. We build on research in the upper echelon literature that has demonstrated the impact of CEO attributes such as their experience, personality, and values on company strategy (e.g., Gerstner, Konig, Enders & Hambrick, 2013; Nadkarni & Hermann, 2010), by showing that the impact CEOs have on decision making is significantly shaped by how actively they engage in TMT discussions, and the constellation that forms around a given issue. A more passive stance, even when this permits the airing of differences and sharing of information among team members, is unlikely to result in the CEO's preferred decision outcome. Although we did not find that issue type predicted constellation type in our study, it may be that CEOs are more likely to adopt a passive stance on issues that they feel are less important, or about which they have less knowledge. More generally, our finding about the role of CEO engagement has implications for our understanding of how various CEO characteristics influence strategy, highlighting the CEO's active engagement in TMT meeting discussions as a key mediating mechanism through which personal attributes such as the CEO's values, personality and knowledge might have their impact. This occurs through the formation of a particular constellation and its ensuing decision process. While other research has identified organizational culture as an important process through which CEO demographics shape firm outcomes (e.g., Berson, Oreg & Dvir, 2008; O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman & Doerr, 2014), the present study reveals a potential mediator more proximally connected to the CEO.

The second dimension in Figure 2 is concerned with the presence or absence of a coalition among team members. In the two constellations in the bottom row of the matrix (spectating and undermining), each party argues their own point of view, and no other team

member steps in to support or argue for them. In each case the team member is unsuccessful in building a coalition and also in getting their proposal accepted. In contrast, in the two constellations on the top row of the matrix, the process and outcomes of discussion are significantly shaped by the formation of a coalition among team members. In the case of the cooperative constellation, a coalition of all team members leads a calm, participative process that enables them to get their proposal accepted after initial opposition from the CEO. In the adversarial constellation, the formation of a coalition between two team members or more may ensure a process in which their views are heard and enable a decision to be made in their favor, but this outcome is also affected by other factors, such as the CEO's parallel development of a coalition with another team member.

Our findings add to research on organizational politics that has evidenced the importance of coalitions in strategic decision making (Child, Elbanna & Rodrigues, 2010; Narayanan & Fahey, 1982). The political perspective on organizations casts executives as competing to ensure their interests are met, and forming coalitions in order to influence important decisions (Cyert & March, 1963; Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Pettigrew, 1973). Coalition formation is defined as seeking potential allies to engage in joint actions to achieve one's own goals (Lawler & Youngs, 1975). In our study, while the CEO had formal authority in the TMT meetings, other team members increased their influence by building coalitions and drawing on other sources of political capital to increase their participation and influence (Ocasio, Pozner & Milner, 2020). This provided a strong counterbalance to the CEO's authority and enabled team members to gain acceptance for proposals that would have been less likely to get buy-in had they been promoted by just one individual. Indeed, when a team member stood alone against the CEO in the absence of a peer alliance, they not only failed to influence the CEO but ended up withdrawing from the

entire discussion. Building on research on social rejection (Blackhart, Nelson, Knowles, & Baumeister, 2009) and ostracism at work (Robinson, O'Reilly & Wang, 2013), we consider that this withdrawal behavior may have been due in part to feeling a lack of connection to others, after failed efforts to gain support from the other team members. However, while coalitions are practically and emotionally important for team members, having a coalition is not sufficient to determine the decision outcome. For example, when the CEO is actively engaged in discussion, as seen in the adversarial constellation, they may also draw on allies. When one coalition negotiates with another, this prompts a “bargaining” mode (Lawler et al., 2008) with a contesting emotional tone, in which individuals seek mutual interests, offer and exchange concessions, and negotiate the terms of agreement. The outcome of such an exchange is uncertain.

Our study extends research in the TMT strategic decision making literature that has identified coalition building as an important political behavior with significant consequences (e.g., Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Narayanan & Fahey, 1982). Our findings, that new coalitions are built around new issues, and depend very much on the individuals in the room rather than on more stable factors (e.g., demographic factors, such as age, and office location), demand a more fluid conceptualization of coalition building than the literature has tended to portray. Our study thus adds to the organizational politics literature through its close investigation of coalition formation in top teams: although others have explored the nature of coalition building at the organizational level (e.g., Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Stevenson et al., 1985) much less is known about the conditions under which coalitions develop within top teams (Zhang & Greve, 2019).

TMT Politics as Embodied, Emotional and Multimodal Interactions

The present study extends the literature on TMT politics by showing how CEOs' and TMT members' interactions may have origins in their histories and thoughts but take an embodied and multimodal form, expressed in their talk and embodied in their gazes, gestures, facial expressions and body movements (LeBaron et al., 2018; Streek, Goodwin, & LeBaron, 2011). In congruous and cooperative constellations, for example, TMT members and CEOs are spatially oriented toward each other and their body postures are more open and relaxed. Coalition formation (or the failure to build a coalition) is also established through gaze, gestures, and body movements, as well, of course, as verbally. For instance, in the undermining constellation, when the CEO diminished a team member, this individual looked at other team members for support. However, these members either looked away or played with their pens which left the help-seeking team member without support. Feeling alone, and perhaps rejected, this individual withdrew (sitting back, looking down) from the discussion, with their opinion going unheard. In contrast, in coalition building in the cooperative constellation, the team members' embodied interactions involved leaning in towards one another, supportive gestures, and non-verbal mimicry as they built on each other's ideas.

Displayed emotion is also important in TMT embodied interaction. Previous research has highlighted the role of emotion in TMT strategic decision making politics (e.g., Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; 2004), but our study reveals how the same influencing behavior, expressed with a different emotional valence, can have a very different effect on how another party responds. For instance, the influencing behavior of "drawing on own knowledge and experience" was used in an engaging way to increase the CEO's understanding in TMT A's congruous constellation, but with dominance and displays of negative emotion in the adversarial constellation, where it was used to challenge and destabilize him. Moreover, the emotional

valence with which behaviors are imbued accumulate through interaction to create a constellation with a particular emotional tone. Each of the constellations found in this study had a distinctive emotional quality, that emerged out of the team exchanges, and contributed to the decision process and its outcome. Our study thus adds to the emerging body of work on embodiment in organizations by highlighting the embodied, emotional nature of strategic decision making in TMTs, showing how our understanding of this process is significantly deepened by the use of research methods that enable a multimodal exploration of team interaction.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have opened the “black box” of TMTs and shown the range of *in situ* micro-dynamics that TMT members evince. What we observe from coding these rarely captured moment-by-moment interactions is that while CEOs significantly shape team constellations and the resulting strategic decision making processes and outcomes, so too do the behaviors of the rest of the team. Indeed, we find that team members can significantly influence the CEO, especially when they join together to do so. Capturing patterns of influence among the CEO and TMT members, we have identified five constellations that emerged in two different teams and discussed their impact on strategic decision making processes and outcomes.

Our study of course has limitations. First, the micro-level of analysis involved in video ethnography has limited the number of teams that we could include in this study. That the same team constellations were found in two different teams suggests they may also be found in other teams, but we do not see this set of constellations as exhaustive. Indeed, engaging in a thought experiment (Antonakis et al., 2019; Gerring & McDermott, 2007; Kornberger & Mantere, 2020) and counterfactual thinking (Kray et al., 2010) leads us to wonder how this study’s findings might have differed had we researched different TMTs, firms, industries or organizations in

different countries. For example, in TMTs with more female members than in the teams in our study, we might have observed more Cooperative constellations and fewer Adversarial constellations in TMT decision making, since research suggests that female TMT members tend to be more collaborative than their male counterparts (Dezso & Ross, 2012) and that female representation in TMTs triggers “enhanced exchange, discussion, and integration of different sources of information and distinct perspectives” (Jeong & Harrison, 2017, p. 1224). Further, in highly regulated industries, such as the pharmaceutical industry, many strategic decisions are constrained by policy guidelines and government regulations. As a result, there might be less discretion within the TMT, and more externally influenced, rule-based procedural decision making (e.g., Stonebraker, 2002). Analysis of team meetings in this context might reveal additional influencing behaviors such as “referring to authority/ law/ regulation”, and additional constellations that arise from greater deference to technical experts within a TMT seeking to avoid risk. Lastly, culture affects how leaders influence (Fu & Yukl, 2000; Kennedy, Fu & Yukl, 2003), with leaders in a high-power distance culture (such as China) tending towards more assertive influence behaviors than those in low-power distance culture (such as the US) (Schermerhorn & Bond, 1991). Doing research with TMTs in a higher power distance culture could, we believe, reveal a more autocratic constellation in which decision making is dictated by the CEO with minimal participation from the other TMT members.

While these different TMT compositions and contexts would certainly be interesting to study, we do not believe they would alter the core findings of the present research: that certain influence behaviors combine to create certain team constellations around different decision issues, and that these constellations shape aspects of the decision process and outcome. Research with such different TMTs might, as we suggest, reveal additional patterns of influence and

therefore additional team constellations that shape decision processes and outcomes in new ways. We therefore see this as an important direction for future research, believing that the identification of other constellations, including how they develop and their impact on decision making, will make a valuable contribution to our understanding of TMTs and strategic decision making in organizations. In the absence of observable counterfactuals, however, our findings remain to be replicated and confirmed in other settings.

A second limitation is our focus on CEO and TMT members' interactions in their meetings. While we recognize that TMT members also engage in important interactions outside of meetings, we follow others who have noted the significance of meetings as an arena for decision making, often the only time when all team members gather to discuss strategic issues (Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003; Palli, Vaara, & Sorsa, 2009; Samra-Fredericks, 2010). Furthermore, because such meetings are typically held in private, our study provides a rare opportunity to look inside TMT meeting rooms and examine decision processes as they unfold there. However, we believe that future research could valuably expand its focus to include not only full TMT meetings, but also the bilateral, informal meetings that occur between the members and between members and the CEO, using more traditional ethnographic approaches. In addition, with the rise in virtual meeting technology, and increasingly dispersed executive teams, we see an opportunity for studies that explore interaction in virtual team meetings and the impact of such TMT meetings on strategic decision making processes.

A third limitation is that the present study has not examined how other factors, such as team members' backgrounds, personalities and histories may shape their interactions. However, the focus of our study was to explain how CEOs and TMT members influence each other in

TMT decision making meetings, and how these interactions shape the processes and outcomes of strategic decision making. This was thus not a study of the antecedents of those influence behaviors, such as background or personality, which have already been well examined. For instance, Cable & Judge (2003) found that managers scoring high on extraversion were more likely to use inspirational appeal and ingratiation, and those scoring high on openness were less likely to use coalitions. Similarly, research has found that managers tend to use different kinds of influence behaviors when they attempt to influence their subordinates, peers, and bosses (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). Many factors may have affected how individuals influenced each other, for example, the level of a TMT member's knowledge⁴ on a specific issue likely increasing their confidence and credibility in influencing the CEO and fellow members. Our systematic analysis, however, focuses downstream from these factors, on patterns of influence, and how they shape strategic decision making processes and outcomes. As such, it can make a unique contribution to research on TMT composition, as we explain next.

Despite its limitations, our study makes valuable contributions to the TMT strategic decision making literature, to upper echelon theory, and to the literature on organizational politics. First, this work contributes to TMT studies which use team members' demographic data and functional and educational backgrounds to predict decision making outcomes (e.g., Boone, Lokshin, Guenter & Belderbos, 2015; Finkelstein et al., 2009; García-Granero et al., 2018; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992) by showing how these characteristics, and perhaps other as yet unstudied influences, are embodied and enacted when the team engages in issue discussions. Our study demonstrates that decision making processes and outcomes are influenced by the team constellation, or relational dynamic, that emerges in the course of a discussion among a specific

⁴ We would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for helping us identify this important factor.

set of individuals, utilizing certain influencing behaviors, around a particular issue. Further, across constellations, we show how CEO engagement in an issue discussion may be an important behavioral mechanism mediating the effect of personal characteristics such as personality or knowledge on TMT decision making.

Second, our findings highlight the danger of treating the CEO and TMT members as a single entity and the implicit assumption that they share equal responsibilities in decision making (e.g., Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Schweiger, Sandberg, & Rechner, 1989). Our research shows that studying TMT discussions as they unfold in real time, supported by member interviews focused on critical incidents occurring in the meetings, can highlight the different kinds of influencing behaviors used between those in a TMT and their differential and cumulative impact on decision making. This study may therefore begin to explain some of the inconsistent findings in previous research on TMT composition, as well as responding to calls to examine how CEOs and TMT members interact with each other in general (e.g., Liu, Fisher & Chen, 2018).

Third, we contribute to the literature on organizational politics (Drory & Romm, 1988; 1990; Lepisto & Pratt, 2012; Mintzberg, 1985; Pettigrew, 1973) by showing that influencing behaviors are a common element of TMTs' daily interactions and revealing how, often through building temporary coalitions, members shape the processes and outcomes of strategic decision making. Further, we show that influencing behaviors and coalition building are embodied multimodal interactions expressed through individuals' talk, gaze, gestures, facial expressions and body movements. Our study thus highlights the value for organizational politics research of team level studies that capture the complexity of these political processes.

Finally, this study also makes a methodological contribution. We proceed from Hambrick's claim that the "black box research has not been done because it is exceedingly difficult" (2007, p.337) and respond to the repeated calls for more intensive qualitative research methods to directly and carefully observe the TMT decision making process (Arendt et al., 2005; Roberto, 2003; Simsek, Heavey, & Fox, 2018). We have used video ethnography (Christianson, 2019; Gylfe et al., 2016; Jarrett & Liu, 2018) to reveal moment-by-moment interactions between TMT leaders and members and to capture and scrutinize, repeatedly, individuals' influencing behaviors in their meetings. Moreover, to our knowledge, this is the first video ethnographic study that connects and explores the dynamics of two TMTs. By identifying interaction patterns common across two different teams, we have added new insights to the growing body of research emerging from video ethnographic TMT research (e.g., Jarrett & Liu, 2018; Liu & Maitlis, 2014).

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APPENDICES

Table 1 TMT A Information

Name	Current position	Tenure/ current position (years)
Isaac	Executive Producer De facto CEO	1.5
Bryan	Producer	7
Judy	Producer	7
Roy	Producer	2.5
Sam	Producer	4
Tony	Producer	2
Kelly	Director- Art	7
Quinn	Director- Tech	2.5

Table 2 TMT B Information

Name	Current position	Tenure/ current position (years)
Bart	CEO	5
Barry	MD West	5
Quinton	MD East	4
Yoeung Mai	MD Asia/ Head of Marketing	.5
Kevin	CFO	2.5
Daniel	CIO	1.5
Nigel	HRD	4.5
Ralph	Company secretary	14

Table 3 Strategic Issues Discussed in TMT A's meetings

Topics	Strategic Issues Discussed (total 10)		
Products	Online strategy [A]	Competitor's products [Cg]	
Processes	Publishing TMT meeting minutes [Cp]	HR process [S]	
Resources	Hiring interns [S]	Bonus plan [Cg]	Software purchase [Cp]
Structure	Making Kelly's role permanent [U]	Global project [Cg]	Project future [Cg]

A: Adversarial; Cg: Congruous; Cp: Cooperative; S: Spectating; U: Undermining

Table 4 Selected Strategic Issues Discussed in TMT B's Meetings

Topics	Strategic Issues Discussed (Total 10)		
Products	Marketing manual [S]	New Valour vs Beta Zeus (Data platforms) [A]	
Processes	Database management [Cp]	Review accident [Cg]	
Resources	Relocation project [U]	Central and regional costs [U]	Cost of Executive Development Programs [S]
Structure	Controversial model [A]	Marketing team structure [S]	Hiring head of Digital [U]

A: Adversarial; Cg: Congruous; Cp: Cooperative; S: Spectating; U: Undermining

Table 5 TMT A & TMT B Influencing Behaviors Codes Master Sheet

Category	Code	Definition	Example in our data
Rational argument	Rational argument	Persuasion using logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade a target.	TMT B: Team members use rational argument attracting support for the project on Database management. (in a neutral, firm tone, speaks confidently)
	Share information freely with team members	Team leader or team members share information with other team members.	Self-explanatory
Consultation	Freedom to innovate and explore options	The dominant party allows others/ subordinates in room to explore and have an open (as opposed to controlled) discussion	TMT B: in the “database management” discussion the CEO allows the discussion to unfold.
	Inclusion: Engaging others in the conversation.	A hand gesture, body posture or verbal behavior to make others involved in the discussion.	TMT A: Bryan: “Are you in this with us”? (looking at the CEO and then looking around the table).
Inspirational appeal	Inspirational appeal	One team member makes a request or proposal that arouses another member’s enthusiasm by appealing to target values, ideals, and aspirations, or by increasing target self-confidence.	TMT A: Roy: “Saying online so that you can have more money to make <i>your</i> game better” (looking directly at Bryan, body tilts forward).
Coalition	Coalition building	Team members bond together to argue for or against on a specific issue.	TMT A: Tony supports Bryan’s argument of not making his game online (Tony frowns & stares at the CEO, seems to be annoyed)
	Piggybacking	Jumping/riding off the back of one discussion in order to move to another related issue.	TMT B: HoMktg rides on the discussion and credibility of the CFO (her gestures are open, looks at the CFO and CIO).
	Seeking support	Seeking for support from other team members by asking or looking at the latter.	Self explanatory.
Legitimizing	Drawing on own knowledge, experience, and expertise	Team members draw on their knowledge of the products/markets/competitors, their expertise in their functional areas, and their experience with the company/ industry to support an argument.	TMT B: MD East: “I think there are – there is – it's really important for a country managing director to be able to work the sales and the marketing function together in the country and to agree to the plan that's appropriate for the country with the local marketing resource” (speaks in a firm tone)
	Upward appeal	A team member refers to a higher authority to support own argument	TMT A: CEO: “The founder needs this to be done before the end of next month”.

Category	Code	Definition	Example in our data
	Seeking (undue) credit	Seeking (undue) credit to enhance own status thus to persuade other team members	TMT A: CEO: “I take this up with the founder...; I made him agree to do ...” (looks at the team members, energetic hand gestures)
	Referring to other people/sources of influence	Not necessarily authority, but also other organizational members	TMT A: Roy: “A very senior technician in my team said so....”
Pressure/coercive tactics	Demotion & Ostracism	To explicitly undermine the authority and contribution of another, and in some cases to exclude the other from discussion and decision making.	TMT B: Speaking over and for someone; failure to acknowledge or allow the other person’s contribution; Does not seek to bring the “excluded” person back into the group.
	Vigilance and control	Closely monitor group members to maintain rank and reduce threat from others.	Interruptions, direct eye contact, staring the other person down, directive hand gestures.
	Assertiveness	Verbal acts in a confident and direct manner.	TMT B: Simple one-word answer that’s delivered without doubt. MD East: “Absolutely”. (neutral, very firm tone, looks directly at the other team member).
	Issuing directives	Making a decision or an impolite request which cannot be challenged and does not require the consent of others.	TMT A: Sam: “I want this done by tomorrow”. (stares at the other team member, very firm tone)
	Humiliating comments	Demeaning or derogatory statements that aim to stigmatize or reduce the other’s rank.	TMT A: Bryan: “you are stupid if you think...”, swearing. (he seems to be angry, stares at the other team member).
	Direct challenge	Directly challenging a position.	TMT B: MD East: “I fundamentally disagree”. (Twirls his spectacles around in right hand to start, looks at the presented structure chart, then directly at the Head of marketing, moves from large open hand gestures to folding arms once made his point.)
	Declaring ownership	Self explanatory.	TMT A: Bryan: “This is my game so you don’t touch it”. (looks directly at the other team member, in a firm tone)
	Hoarding/ withholding information from the group	Keeping secrets or holding information. Refusal to have an open discussion and to share ideas.	TMT B: Bart: “I certainly don’t want to burden you all with all those thoughts about that”.

Category	Code	Definition	Example in our data
	Pointing out Knowledge/expertise/ experience gap	Pointing out that team leader or team members do not have the requisite knowledge/ expertise/ experience to contribute to the discussion or to properly explore or contest an idea.	TMT B: Leader or member increases the knowledge gap or points out others' knowledge gap "you don't have as much knowledge as I have."
	Hijack	Unexpected undermining of a discussion in order to take control of it. There is an element of surprise in it.	TMT B: MD East: "... Can I, like, just put my hand up on another one (issue), which is on DataBase (a proprietorial software). <i>[Interjects and gently hijacks the meeting's formal agenda]. (Hesitantly raises his hand over his head and points at the papers in front of him).</i>
	Reiterating	Repeating own argument again and again so that to emphasize own opinion.	TMT A: Bryan reiterates his proposal of postponing doing online many times. (in a very firm tone, loud and increasing volume)
	Delaying a decision	Team member or leader attempts to delay a decision.	TMT B: The Marketing team states that the evidence is inconclusive and needs more time to assess, thus delaying an action point.
	Magnifying risk	Team member exaggerates the risk of a position or proposal.	Self-explanatory
	Narrowing down conversation	Closing or narrowing down the conversation and excluding options or open discussion	Self-explanatory
Other	Humor, Sarcasm, Irony	Using humor and/or sarcasm or irony as an indirect way to challenge a high status individual or to deflect from tense situation	TMT B: MD West: "It felt good for the first five minutes (group laughter) ...then in the absence of a reply... started working on the CV".
	Bridging	Linking and seeking common ground between parties. Or to provide an impartial view on two controversial arguments (this needs to draw on own experience, knowledge and expertise)	TMT A: Bryan's recognition in the discussion that there are pros and cons with the "intern" and the "using internal staff" options, therefore, there is no perfect solution for the problem. (he looks at the debating parties in turn)
	Compromising	Revising one's position to shorten the distance between one's proposal and that of the counterpart's. Instead of insisting for own idea, giving up some elements thus makes it easier to accept for another party. Take another person's position into account, so not giving up. Compromising for Win-Win.	In TMT A: The CEO's arguments start with "doing online now", change to "using online as an excuse to ask for more budget" to "you don't have to do it now but to it with the next version".
	Depolarization	Discursive acts indicating "my opinion is not too different from yours". To ease the tension between two parties. (different from compromising because not giving up anything).	TMT B: HoMktg: "We definitely think it's not just about the Marketing agenda, recognizing there is a lot of local competition and local operational and tactical marketing needs. It's not what's stopping us, it's more the aim is

Category	Code	Definition	Example in our data
			to get balance right and then have the transparency of managing it together with country and regional teams.”
	Derailment:	Turn the focus of the discussion to another topic, turning the tables on the discussion – taking the discussion down a path different from the one that was intended	Intentional change of topic: TMT B: Controversial model discussion is a prime example, where MD West takes over an agenda item to raise his concerns over an already agreed proposal for a centralized structure.
	Keeping on track	Call to redirect the off-track conversation back to its focus	TMT A: Bryan & Tony call the team to get away from the discussion on “music” and get back to “online”.

Table 6 Data Display Table for Selected Issues

The “Congruous” Constellation: TMT B’s Discussion of the “Review Accident”

Initial positions	Main influence behaviors used	Data excerpts illustrating the constellation	Decision making process	Decision making outcome
Initial agreement between CEO and TMT members.	<p>CEO main influencing behaviors: seeking information/ draws on own experiences</p> <p>Members’ main influencing behaviors: drawing on own knowledge/ experience, rational argument</p> <p>A lot of information sharing between CEO and TMT members.</p>	<p>Setting: The TMT is reviewing lessons from a fatal accident in the workplace and are now considering options to improve safety in the warehouse and surrounding areas e.g. delivery of goods, pedestrian areas etc. There is agreement that they need: “Safe workplace, safe vehicles and safe people”. They decide to examine safe vehicles to begin, especially technology. They are presented with an update from Derek, from the company’s Health & Safety Team.</p> <p>Derek (H&S specialist): Begins with a summary of findings from the accident and pooled insights across the company of current practices. <i>[Sharing information]</i></p> <p>CEO: “Well, let me start off, I think the candy reversing alarm should be essential. I really can’t see a reason not to do that”. <i>[Draws on own knowledge/experience]</i></p> <p>Derek: “Yeah, with the sensors”.<i>[Piggyback on previous comment]</i></p> <p>But they recognize that the site is used by 3rd parties that might not have these features.</p> <p>Another member adds: “reversing radar for example, it has a limited range”. <i>[indirect challenge]</i></p> <p>Quinton takes the discussion: “In the environmental services ...we had CCTV, we had the alarms and we had a system that if there was any – touched anything of the back immediately break the alarm. And that was all available”. <i>[Draws on own experience and freely shares information]</i></p> <p>CEO (turning to Derek): “What is your recommendation”? <i>(Derek defers to the group)</i></p> <p>The discussion continues with team members building on each other’s ideas, providing information on best practices and drawing from their own experience and knowledge from other companies. They also identify things that might have prevented the accident as well as new risk areas. The team agrees to introduce new measures and a proposal of options and costs for the next meeting.</p>	High level of participative decision making.	Consensus decision

The “Undermining” Constellation: TMT B’s Discussion of “Central and Regional Costs”

Initial positions	Main influence behaviors used	Data excerpts illustrating the constellation	Decision making process	Decision making Outcomes
The CEO and one team member are in oppositional positions before the beginning of the discussion.	<p>CEO main influencing behaviors: hijacks agenda, direct challenges, humiliating comments, and magnifying risk.</p> <p>Members’ main influencing behaviors: rational argument, seeking support, indirect challenge.</p> <p>Minimal information sharing between the CEO and the team member</p>	<p>Setting: The company’s profits were falling. Thus, this episode captures a meeting where the TMT is focused on cost reduction across the company. The planned agenda does not include a discussion of IT’s costs and recharging. However, the CEO hijacks the meeting and unexpectedly puts the CIO (Daniel) on the spot to explain the IT costs. The issue has more significance as members of the TMT report that IT is hopeless and generally, they do not see it as good value for money.</p> <p>CEO: What’s our IT session? There’s quite a lot of coverage in that. /hijacking the agenda, indirect challenge/</p> <p>Daniel: Data quality... information security and the product world. (mumbles response, hesitant)</p> <p>CEO: 14 million [long pause], .../direct challenge, CEO put the spotlight on CIO/</p> <p>Quinton: You just walked yourself into a conversation... /Uses humor to ease the tension/</p> <p>CEO: 14 million then is part of the 65 (of total costs to bring down) and I guess we’ve got probably some even classification issues and about and why how we handle IT between overheads and operations... /drawing on own finance expertise, direct challenge and assertiveness/</p> <p>Daniel: Do you want me to have a quick run at... /defers to CEO/</p> <p>CEO: And we really struggled in these numbers. /direct challenge, blame of IT/</p> <p>Daniel then provides data and rational argument that the situation is not as bad as the CEO interpreted and seeks support from the CFO (Kevin). However, Kevin only provided rather plain confirmation of Daniel’s numbers. Daniel’s further short explanation was challenged by the CEO with Kevin’s weak support:</p> <p>CEO: But then just to be clear, that to me was a cross charge particularly, is that right? So that number as it would have said you used 13[million] and.../direct challenge/</p> <p>Kevin: It varies -- it was not cross charged, this was held... /providing clarification/</p> <p>Daniel: As a central contingency that he held in then it moved into IT. /rational argument/</p> <p>Throughout the discussion the CEO orientates his position to Kevin but is in fact talking Daniel. This is rather humiliating for Daniel who plays with his pen and cools himself by flapping the side of his jacket. The CEO concludes with a final challenge as he remains dismissive about Daniel’s responses.</p> <p>CEO: So in terms of classification, hmm...I guess my challenge then, Kevin, would be to get a classification we understand that what we’re going to treat as overhead in IT, and what we treat as operational expense and we have already established to do a root and branch hmm [long pause]... recap of our IT costs but there is a difficulty around getting consistency across the whole piece”.</p>	Lack of participative decision making.	Minority decision: Decision made by issuing a directive on how the process will run going forward.

The “Spectating” Constellation: TMT A’s Discussion of “Hiring Interns”

Initial positions	Main influence behaviors used	Data excerpts illustrating the constellation	Decision making process	Decision making Outcomes
<p>CEO does not have a clear position at the beginning.</p> <p>Two team members are in oppositional positions for a proposal at the beginning of the discussion</p>	<p>CEO main influencing behaviors: Seeking for information, delay decision making</p> <p>Members main influencing behaviors: rational argument, assertiveness, drawing on own knowledge and experience.</p> <p>A lot of information sharing between the TMT members, but minimal information sharing between the CEO and the team members</p>	<p>Setting: It is common practice in this company that producers hire interns to fill their staffing needs. The interns are flexible and they are paid a fraction of a normal staff’s salary. This is good for each producer team’s profitability but is harmful for the company since temporarily idle employees are still on payroll. This dilemma is caused by the company’s “team centric” model. Sam’s team is in urgent need of staff who have certain skill sets so he insists he will hire interns. Roy argues strongly against Sam’s proposal because it is detrimental to the company’s and other teams’ profitability. The CEO does not have sufficient knowledge about the skills sets needed nor does he have enough experience with the company to judge whether Sam’s proposal is reasonable, so that he tries to postpone the decision making multiple times despite the two team members’ strong arguments. The following excerpt illustrates one round of the discussion.</p> <p>Sam: That’s a classic problem of what’s good for the team budget versus what’s good for the company. This is classic in very crystal black and white. From our team perspective, we don’t want internal people. We need them for three months, there are specific low-grade tasks, the dollars we have to pay for them only allow us to hire interns. We need the number of bodies to do the work and it just doesn’t work for us from a team perspective to take on full-time people that are within the company. From a company perspective, obviously it saves money to take people who are already hires and not hire even new interns... From the game perspective, it’s best to have experienced, full time people but I don’t have the budget. <i>[rational argument, drawing on own experience & knowledge] (he is agitated)</i></p> <p>Roy strongly disagrees with Sam’s proposal to hire interns because it’s a bigger, company-wide question.</p> <p>Roy: I care about it because I’m going to be paying for one quarter of those five people that are not employed right now, not the five that are on your team, even though I’m paying their overhead, because you’re not paying their overhead, you’re only paying fifteen hundred bucks a month (for the interns). So I’m paying a quarter of their overhead, and I’m paying for a quarter of five people who are out of work. Bryan’s saying, “I’ll pick them up” and he’s eats into his margin... what is our commitment to the people that we have in the building? <i>[rational argument, direct challenge](high volume, firm tone)</i></p> <p>CEO: ... I don’t see any reason why we can’t resolve this by taking it to Ops (operations committee meeting where the Founder would participate). We’ll all have these opinions, we’ll all say these things, and if [the founder] will have some other opinion. And we’ll resolve it. <i>[rational argument, delaying decision making]</i>.</p>	<p>Lack of participative decision making</p>	<p>No decision: decision postponed.</p>

The “Cooperative” Constellation: TMT A’s Discussion of “Software Purchase”

Initial positions	Main influence behaviors used	Data excerpts illustrating the constellation	Decision making process	Decision making Outcomes
The CEO vs. all the team members in oppositional positions for a proposal at the beginning of the issue discussion.	<p>Leader main influencing behaviors: upward appeal, depolarizing, rational argument</p> <p>Members’ main influencing behaviors: coalition building, rational argument, drawing on own knowledge/experiences</p> <p>A lot of information sharing between the CEO and TMT members.</p>	<p>Setting: The team discusses Sam’s team’s request to purchase new software for game production.</p> <p>Sam: “So you’ve put the brakes on buying three [software A] for my team”. <i>[Seeking for information]</i></p> <p>CEO: “I did not put the brakes on nor did I put out the green light. I said wait”. <i>[depolarizing]</i></p> <p>Bryan, supporting Sam’s request, then comments that he felt, due to the ongoing acquisition deal, the company was not focusing on developing good games and many major decisions for his games were also delayed.</p> <p>Bryan: “These guys are not focused. [Game A or Game B], good luck to us getting those green lights in the next couple of weeks. (CEO: Right). It’s impossible to get their attention”. <i>[coalition building, rational argument]</i></p> <p>Sam: “You can’t hire anybody for your project and I can’t order in some software. That’s what they are saying?” <i>[coalition building]</i></p> <p>CEO: “Well wait, I thought you said that even if you ordered it there is a little delay or something anyway.” <i>[depolarizing]</i></p> <p>Sam: “You’ve got to get your name on the list.” <i>[rational argument]</i></p> <p>...</p> <p>CEO: “OK, can we wait until tomorrow? This is a (founder) decision because he talks to (the acquiring firm). If it was me, I’d go ahead”. <i>[upward appeal, depolarizing]</i></p> <p>Sam: “But we’ve been having these conversations for at least a month now”. <i>[rational argument]</i></p> <p>Then Tony chimed in to support Sam’s argument,</p> <p>Tony: “We are going to do (a special kind of game production) at some point. Correct? Then we need (software A)... Well it’s not 10 thousand dollars”. <i>[coalition building, rational argument]</i></p> <p>CEO: “Alright... I agree”.</p> <p>Bryan further supported Sam’s argument that this adds value to the firm even it is getting acquired.</p> <p>Bryan: “If we own those, does that get added to the value of our asses of our company?” <i>[rational argument, coalition building]</i></p> <p>CEO: “Okay go ahead”. <i>[agreement reached]</i></p>	High level of participative decision making.	Consensus decision

The “Adversarial” Constellation: TMT B’s discussion of “Controversial Model”

Initial positions	Main influence behaviors used	Data excerpts illustrating the constellation	Decision making process	Decision making Outcomes
CEO and one focal team member are in oppositional positions for a proposal at the beginning of the discussion	<p>CEO and ally: control and vigilance, demotion, sarcasm/humor, ostracizing.</p> <p>Focal team member and ally: indirect challenges and sarcasm/humor</p> <p>A lot of information sharing</p>	<p>Setting: The TMT is having a strategic meeting on financials when the MD West uses the opportunity to raise the controversial matter of the organization’s structure to move from a more centralized model. The matter was discussed in earlier meetings and the agreement was to be more centralized to save costs. Although the MD raises the point to propose cost savings, it is a matter on which he and the CEO completely disagree.</p> <p>MD West (Barry) raises the subject as an opportunity for “radical thinking” and recognizes it’s “controversial” in opening up the discussion. <i>[Rational argument]</i></p> <p>But the CEO immediately interrupts and responds: “I think I ought to think about that”, looking at the MD straight in the eyes. He mumbles “Don’t want to burden you...” <i>[direct challenge – suggests MD does not have all the required knowledge]</i></p> <p>Barry: “But we all have thoughts. I’m sure you’d like to hear them?” <i>[indirect challenge]</i> The group begins to chuckle. The CEO looks away. Barry continues: “Or you may not want to hear them”. <i>[coalition building]</i> <i>(Barry looks down sheepishly. There is then an outburst of group laughter).</i></p> <p>The interaction continues and the CEO says: “But I have seen a lot about your (thoughts)... You write to me at great length about your thoughts”. <i>[Demeaning comment mixed sarcasm/ humor to challenge]</i> <i>(Group laughs).</i></p> <p>Barry: “I sent you a 20-page plan... I haven’t had a reply...” CEO responds: “Was I meant to reply to it?” <i>[Uses sarcasm to challenge]</i> <i>(The group continues to laugh at this exchange.)</i> “I thought you were just unburdening.” <i>[Uses sarcastic comment to challenge]</i> <i>(By now the whole group is engaged in this humorous drama.)</i></p> <p>Barry: “It felt good for the first time ... but now I’m working on my CV”. <i>[Uses humor to indirectly challenge]</i></p> <p>This exchange of using humor as a devise to challenge and counter-challenge as they are both pushing their agenda, with the CEO distracting the MD by humor and teasing. The exchange is calmed by the CEO explaining rationally the reason for the agreed centralized model. But he does not use his role authority he brings into the conversation the CFO, MD East and the company secretary (who is the longest standing member) to justify his case. MD West also gains support from another member: “I think you are absolutely right Barry”. But the CEO continues to garner support from his allies who oppose the “much more radical option” and take the CEO’s side. MD West was defeated.</p>	Moderately participative decision making.	Minority decision: Decision supported by some TMT members and reluctantly accepted by others

Table 7 Summary of Initial Positions, Constellations, Decision Making Processes and Decision Outcomes

Initial Positions CEO vs. TMT Member(s)	Constellation	Decision Making Process: Level of participation	Decision Outcome:	
			Decision Made?	Level of Agreement
Agreement between CEO and TMT members	Congruous	High level of participative decision making	Yes	High: Consensus decision
CEO and one focal team member in oppositional position	Undermining	Lack of participative decision making	Yes	Low: Minority decision
CEO- no clear position Two team members in oppositional position	Spectating	Lack of participative decision making	No: Decision postponed	N/A
CEO vs. all TMT members in oppositional positions	Cooperative	High level of participative decision making	Yes	High: Consensus decision
CEO and one focal team member in oppositional positions	Adversarial	Moderately participative decision making	Uncertain	Uncertain

Figure 1. The Development and Impact of a TMT Constellation

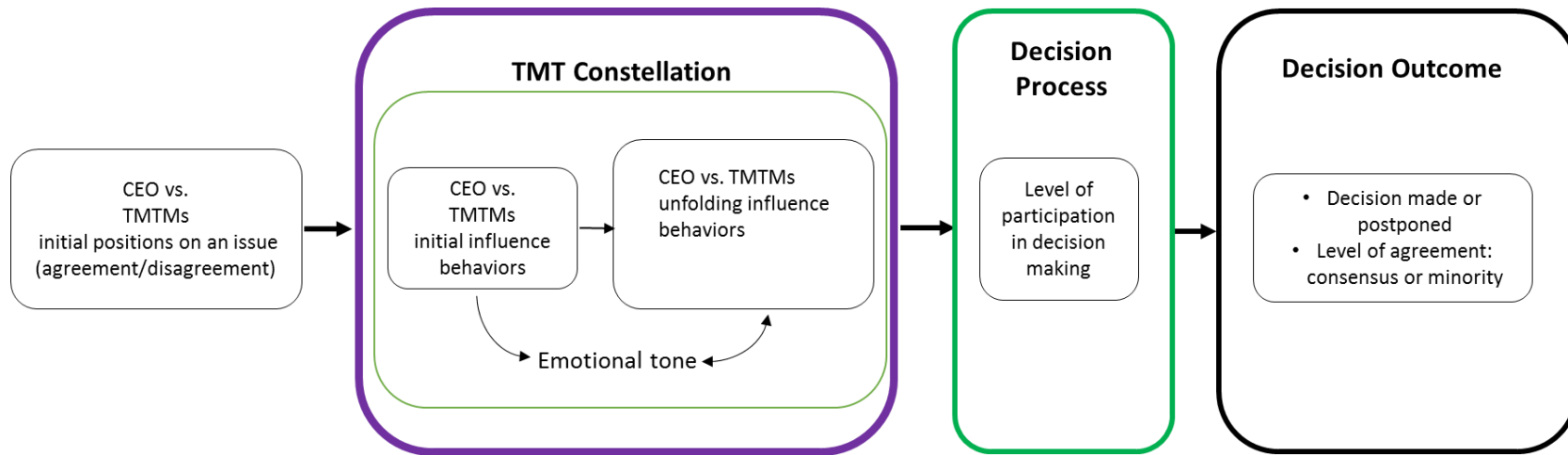


Figure 2. Key Mechanisms in Constellations Emerging from Different Initial Positions

TMT Member Coalition Building Present	Cooperative Emotional tone: Calm & Positive Decision Process: Participative Decision Type: Consensus	Adversarial Emotional tone: Contesting Decision Process: Moderately participative Decision Type: Uncertain
	Spectating Emotional Tone: Competitive Decision Process: Non-participative Decision Type: No decision	Undermining Emotional tone: Mostly negative Decision Process: Non-participative Decision Type: Minority (CEO's) decision
CEO Passive		CEO Active