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

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## Abstract

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

## INTRODUCTION

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

Since Ocasio's (1997) seminal article, the ABV has left an enormous imprint on organization and management

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

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

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

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

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

(materially mediated) social accomplishment (Nicolini & Korica, 2021; Ocasio et al., 2017). With this review, we hope to move ABV-based research forward and revive the idea of situated attention.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE ABV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

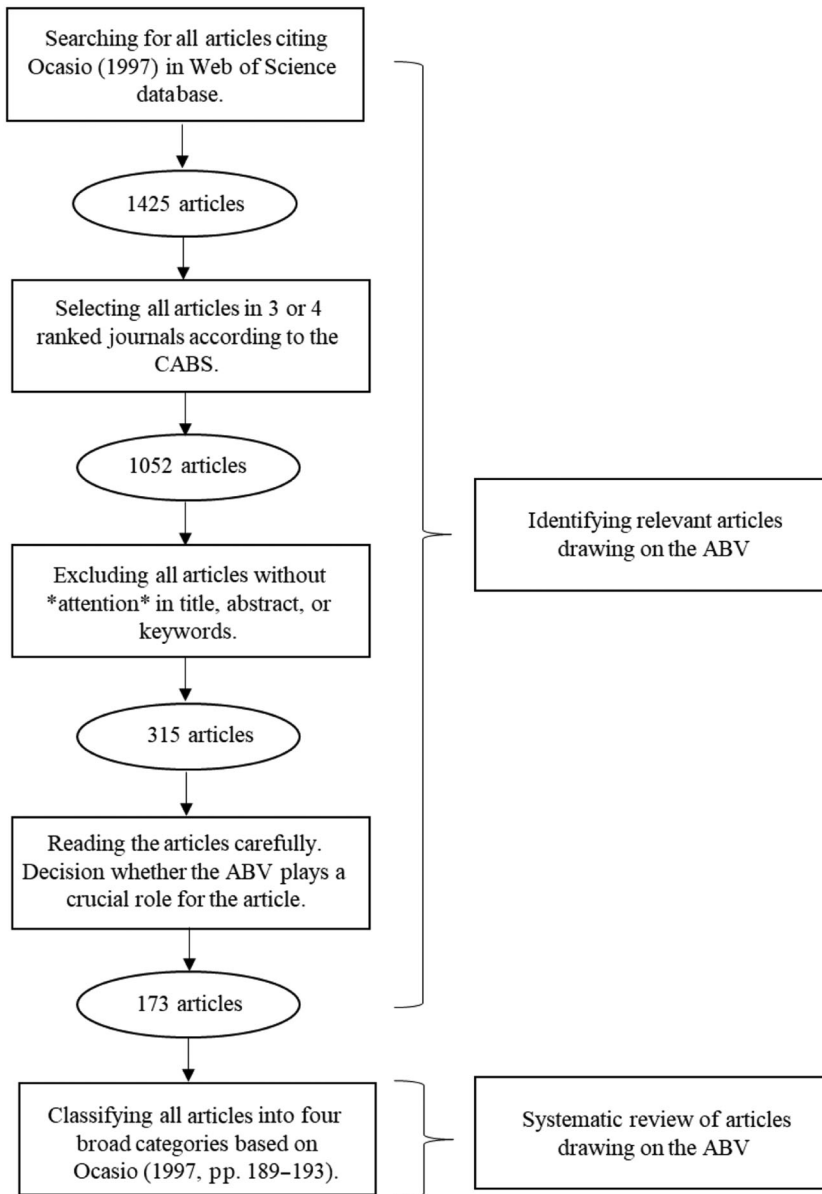
Moreover, scholars have extended the ABV beyond its original scope. While the ABV explains attentional focus with structural and situational aspects (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189ff.), scholars have drawn on individual-level factors to approach attentional focus (see Taylor & Fiske, 1978). For instance, scholars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

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

## METHODOLOGY

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

FIGURE 1 Review process



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

this allowed us to highlight research areas that are particularly advanced and those that constitute a gap for further research.

## REVIEW OF ABV-BASED STUDIES

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



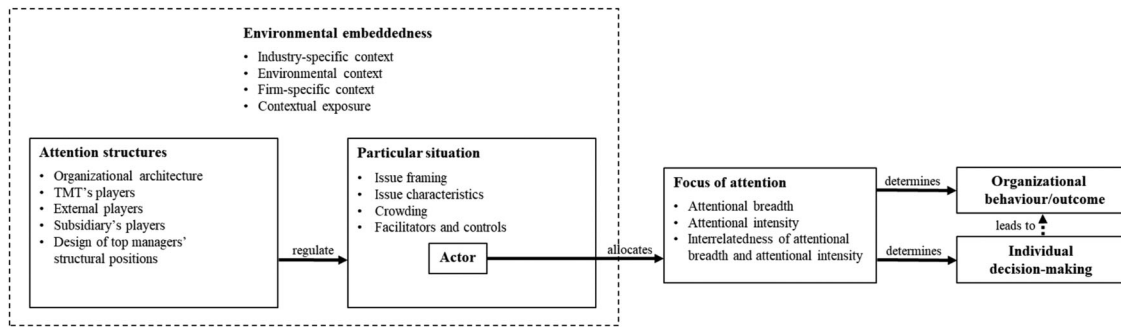


FIGURE 2 Consolidated model of the ABV and ABV-based research

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

### Focus of attention (I)

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

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

### Attentional intensity

Attentional intensity describes the amount of attention focused on a selected issue (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kahneman, 1973). In an early study, Yadav et al. (2007) show that the intensity of CEOs’ attention allocation to objects outside the firm (external focus) and events in the future (future focus) explain differences between firms’ innova-

tion outcomes. Similarly, for a sample of Chinese firms, Chen et al. (2015) demonstrate that the amount of top management’s attention to innovation is related to a firm’s innovative outcomes. Overall, innovative outcomes seem to depend on a certain minimum attention of decision-makers (e.g. Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Yadav et al., 2007) and seem to be sensitive to the diversion of attention to unrelated issues (Mithani, 2017; Srivastava et al., 2021).

### Attentional breadth

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

### Interrelatedness of attentional intensity and attentional breadth

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

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

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

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

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

(Continues)



TABLE 1 (Continued)

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

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

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

To sum up, this research demonstrates the importance of attention allocation for organizational and strategic outcomes. As attention is scarce, in Simon's (1973, p. 270) words, 'the chief bottleneck in organizational activity', small differences in how decision-makers allocate

attention to issues and answers might have a dramatic effect on firm behaviour and outcomes (Dessein & Santos, 2021). This highlights the significance of explaining how attention (with a certain intensity) to (diverse) issues and answers emerges—the core point the ABV makes.

## Attention structures (II)

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

## Organizational architecture

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

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

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

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

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

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

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

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

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



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

## TMT players

In recent years, multiple studies have explored how different players in the TMT influence organizational attention and behaviour differently (Ocasio, 1997, p. 197). Cho and Hambrick (2006) show that, following a substantial regulation change in the industry, airlines increased their attention on entrepreneurial issues (see IIb, industry-specific context), especially after personal changes on the level of the TMT. For instance, shorter tenures of players in the TMT, more output-oriented functional experiences and an increase of demographic diversity were related to an airline's increased entrepreneurial attention. Similarly, a recent study by Fu et al. (2020) suggests that the appearance of a new player in the TMT influences its attentional processing and thus a firm's performance. Drawing on a sample of S&P 500 firms, the authors show that the presence of a chief sustainability officer is positively associated with corporate social performance. More precisely, firms with a chief sustainability officer are more intensely engaged in reducing socially irresponsible activities than in increasing socially responsible activities. This points to

a negativity bias in how limited attention is allocated by the top management (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Similarly, Umashankar et al. (2021) find that marketing players on the boards of directors direct a firm's attention to customer-related issues. Specifically, marketing players mitigate the negative effect of mergers and acquisitions on customer satisfaction, which emerges as top managers' attention is diverted away from customers to financial figures. Lee (2021) draws on a similar argument. He argues that firms would profit from HR players on boards or TMTs as they would influence decision-makers' attention to otherwise not considered but relevant HR-related issues and answers. The underlying idea of these studies is that diverse players in the TMT help to increase a firm's attentional breadth to otherwise unattended issues and answers, and thus extend the firm's behavioural repertoire (see also Bjornali et al., 2016; Brandes et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2020; Galbreath, 2018).

## External players

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

## Subsidiary players and headquarters' attention

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

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

### Design of top managers' structural positions

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

### Environmental embeddedness (III)

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

### Environmental context

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

### Industry-specific context

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

### Firm-specific context

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

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

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

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

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

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

## Contextual exposure

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

## Particular situation (IV)

Finally, we focus on studies considering the characteristics of a particular situation to explain attention allocation. Indeed, prior research in social psychology implies that characteristics of a particular situation are more powerful

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

## Issue framing

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

## Issue characteristics

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



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

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

(Continues)



TABLE 4 (Continued)

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

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

## Crowding

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

## (Situational) facilitators and controls

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

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

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Materiality

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

TABLE 5 Illustrative questions for future research exploring situated attention

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

and social actions (e.g. Orlikowski, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Prior research has shown that the 'materiality' underpinning a particular context is crucial to understanding situated attention allocation. In famous studies, Hutchins (1995a, 1995b) demonstrates how technical devices (and their respective characteristics) guide individuals' attention and cognition in the complex tasks of navigating ships and aeroplanes. The author highlights that different jobs on board require attention to different aspects of these devices. Kaplan (2011) shows how the materiality of (digital) PowerPoint slides allowed different actors to discuss, recombine and align strategic ideas in particular situations. From an ABV perspective, these Pow-

erPoint slides served as attention integration devices (cf. Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Mazmanian et al. (2013) examine the implications of the usage of mobile email devices for professionals. The authors report that the technical device fundamentally changed how actors attended to issues and answers. On the one hand, the professionals were able to attend to emails more flexibly regarding time and location; on the other hand, the technical device increasingly soaked up attentional resources. Professionals internalized requirements to sustain attention on the technical device with its digital channels and to be constantly accessible across various situations. In a series of experiments, Kay et al. (2004) provide specific insights into how

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

## Social dynamics

The social dynamics underpinning the situational context are also an important avenue for further research on situated attention allocation (cf. Ocasio et al., 2017). In order to highlight the relevance of social dynamics for attention formation in particular situations, we point to famous studies grounded in a practice perspective and social psychology. For instance, in the context of strategy-making, Kaplan (2008) demonstrates that actors’ negotiation and alignment of cognitive frames was situated in social interactions. These framing practices allowed establishing a collective attentional direction (Ocasio, 2011) which led to collective strategic action. Similarly, Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) show how social interactions and their manifestation in material artefacts continuously and recursively directed and restricted actors’ situated attention to certain aspects of the environment, enabling a unified strategic planning process. Thus, attention to issues and answers in strategy-making seems to be continuously negotiated among actors. As a recent study of Nicolini and Korica (2021) indicates, power may play a crucial role in such processes. The authors show that actors in higher hierarchical positions are able to determine or ‘sub-contract’ situated attention of other, lower-level actors and thereby set a firm’s (attentional) direction. More broadly, social psychology has a long tradition of examining how situations’ social dynamics influence an individual’s attentional processing and behaviour (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). For

instance, the classic experiments of Sherif (1937) and Asch (1961) imply that even humans’ basic situated attending to the environment is socially mediated. A prominent example in this regard is the widely known phenomenon of groupthink (for reviews, see Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Esser, 1998). Groupthink describes how people situated in a group setting tend to agree on (even clearly irrational) decisions without proving valid alternatives appropriately due to their desire for conformity and harmony (Janis, 1972). Groupthink is related to selective information-processing biases. Thus, issues and answers fitting the group’s overarching ideas are preferably attended to, while other issues and answers are ignored (e.g. Janis & Mann, 1977). This gives rise to several questions for future ABV research. For instance, how do high-power actors impact the attention of others in strategy meetings? Or related to the organization-level findings of Cho and Hambrick (2006) or Fu et al. (2020), how does social diversity influence attending and thus decision-making in board meetings?

## Temporality

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



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

### Framing of the strategic setting

Finally, the framing of a firm's strategic setting may influence how attention is allocated in particular situations. Our understanding of the strategic setting includes the firm's generic broader context, such as the industry velocity or environmental uncertainty, as well as a firm's specific conditions, such as its prior performance or competition. Our review shows that prior ABV-based research has highlighted relationships between this strategic setting, organizational attention, and firm-level outcomes (e.g. Hendriks et al., 2018; McCann & Bahl, 2017; McCann & Shinkle, 2017). As firm-level outcomes are contingent on how decision-makers focus their attention in particular situations, the strategic setting should ultimately unfold its effect there. However, how the strategic setting influences situated attention allocation depends on the meaning attributed to this strategic setting in a particular situation; in other words, how this strategic setting is invoked. Prior research has emphasized the importance of this (situational) framing on (situated) attention allocation and decision-making (e.g. Bazerman, 1984; Daniel & Tversky, 1984; Ocasio, 1995). For instance, in the context of strategic transformation, Gilbert (2006) demonstrates that the framing of environmental change as either threat or opportunity resulted in different attention allocation to this change. Framed as an opportunity, key aspects of the change were not attended to, while framed as a threat, the change captured managerial attention leading to (rigid) actionism (see Whyte, 1986). It is important to

highlight that the framing of a strategic setting is related to the power dynamics we described above. Not just the subject and the direction of the framing is crucial, but also who does the framing. Framing of the strategic setting by high-power actors may have a different effect on situated attention allocation than framing by low-power actors (George et al., 2006). This gives rise to multiple questions for future research in order to understand situated attention allocation: for instance, how does (the enactment of) performance below aspirations impact attending in a strategy meeting? Or how does the (enactment of the) industry-specific context influence how actors attend to issues and answers in such meetings?

### Implications for future research on situated attention

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

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

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



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

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

## CONCLUSION

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

a conceptual extension of the ABV is warranted in order to fully understand the situational dynamics that govern attention allocation in organizations.

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