

# 13th EIASM WORKSHOP ON TOP MANAGEMENT TEAMS AND BUSINESS STRATEGY RESEARCH

## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND ATTENTION IN A POST-CHANDLERIAN WORLD

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### CALL FOR PAPERS

“The scarce resource is not information; it is processing capacity to attend to information. Attention is the chief bottleneck in organizational activity, and the bottleneck becomes narrower and narrower as we move to the tops of organizations...” Herbert Simon (1973, p. 270)

2024 marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hambrick and Mason’s (1984) groundbreaking work on upper echelons theory (UET). It is also nearly 30 years since Ocasio (1997) introduced the attention-based view of the firm (ABV). The symbiotic relationship between these two streams of research has not only enriched each area of inquiry independently but also facilitated rich cross-fertilization. Indeed, pioneered by Cho and Hambrick (2006), a burgeoning body of research has emerged that examines the dynamic interplay between top executives’ experiences, preferences, and dispositions, and attention structures within and around organizations.

The synergistic linkages between UET and the ABV are rooted in the fact that they share many theoretical and ontological foundations. Most importantly, they both adopt a behavioral perspective—a belief in the central role of managerial interpretations in shaping an organization’s “strategic agenda, the issues and action alternatives that guide the allocation and deployment of resources in organizational behaviour” (Ocasio et al., 2018: 156). Overall, the daily work of top executives and its effects are almost impossible to theorize without considering the mechanisms conceptualized by the ABV. Likewise, the dynamics of organizational attention are inconceivable without considering top executives, their activities, job demands, and characteristics (Ocasio et al., 2018). To date, research on strategic leadership and organizational attention has illuminated abundant and far-reaching

implications of these mechanisms for key organizational outcomes, such as innovation, corporate political activity, social responsibility, and stakeholders' social evaluations of organizations (e.g., Eklund & Mannor, 2021; Gerstner et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2003; Kurzhals et al., 2020; Neely et al., 2020; Post et al., 2022; Sajko et al., 2021; Schädler et al., 2022; Wowak et al., 2022).

While research at the nexus of UET and the ABV has generated a steady stream of insights, organizations and the world around them have fundamentally changed and will continue to change, potentially challenging focal premises and boundary conditions of this body of research. In particular, as Ocasio and colleagues (2023) have noted, organizations and their leaders operate in an increasingly post-Chandlerian world. The old world was defined by Alfred Chandler's (1962) traditional big businesses: diversified, vertically integrated corporations governed by multidivisional corporate hierarchies and operating in relatively slow-moving markets. Clearly, Chandlerian organizations will endure; yet, organizations' environments have transitioned into an era marked by nimble, entrepreneurial high-tech enterprises thriving in dynamic, interdependent, and interconnected platforms and ecosystems. This post-Chandlerian world is a world of blurring boundaries, multi-territorial structures, and the increasing use of algorithmic/machine-based decision making (Adner, 2017; Adner et al., 2019; Altman & Tripsas, 2015; Ansari et al., 2016; De Reuver et al., 2018; Furr et al., 2022; Garud et al., 2022; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Jacobides et al., 2018; Khanagha et al., 2022; Krakowski et al., 2023; Lehmann et al., 2022; Rietveld et al., 2019).

These tectonic shifts may hold profound ramifications for top executives' roles and influence on firms and organizational attention. Altman and colleagues, for example, highlight that in platform-based ecosystems "critical value-creation efforts are done by individuals and organizations not directly employed by the firm, yet, the locus of control over this value-creation activity is within organizational boundaries" (2022: 78–79). Relatedly, Ocasio et al. note that "attention structures have become less hierarchical and decomposable, with communication flows more often cascading upwards rather than just downwards, greater integration of communication between organizational subunits, and greater dynamism in the formal and informal channels of attention through which strategies are generated, implemented, and reconstituted" (2023: 108). The roles of top executives, especially the CEO, are also undergoing profound transformation (Shylina et al., forthcoming): "In the post-Chandlerian corporate world, the role of the CEO has become the role of an attention-shaper, an opinion shaper, and 'tribal' leader. The CEO shapes the direction of the company by shaping the dynamic flow and focus of the attention through the corporation. She or he can reinforce some of the themes emerging from within the organization or select some key themes from the external environment for the organization to emphasize" (Ocasio et al., 2023: p. 109). Notably, the world at large is undergoing multiple metamorphoses—technologically, politically, economically, socially, and ecologically—all of which may fundamentally affect firms, strategic leadership, and society (e.g., Buyl et al., 2022; Colquitt & George, 2011; Fehre et al., 2023; Quigley & Hambrick, 2015; Whittington et al., 2017; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). The dynamics of strategic leadership and attention today bear little resemblance to those in 1997, let alone 1984.

In this spirit, we will seize the occasion of the 2024 workshop to call on scholars of the UET and the ABV to join researchers at the vanguard of platform and ecosystems research to collectively explore "Strategic Leadership and Attention in a Post-Chandlerian World." We seek to investigate how strategic leadership and organizational attention function a post-Chandlerian world—including aspects of governance, agency, discretion, communication, leadership, and so forth (Shylina et al., forthcoming). Our underlying assumption is that for top executives, work and job demands may require novel approaches, skills, cognitive orientations, and knowledge structures to navigate the idiosyncratic paradoxes of coopetition, openness, and ecosystem governance that define the emergent (cyber)spaces of platforms, ecosystems, and algorithms (Altman & Tripsas, 2015; Bourdeau, 2010; Kammerlander et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2019).

In articulating this call, we pursue both theoretical and managerial objectives. Equally critical to our motivation in convening this workshop is an essentially philosophical rationale: our theorizing and empirical investigations in strategy often proceed as though historical changes in technology, competition, or the broader socio-political environment do not warrant adjustments to our established conceptual frameworks. Both strategic leadership research and ABV are not immune to this tendency. For the ABV, cognitive limits on attention are biological constraints that transcend history, culture, and technology; however, the ways in which humans transcend these constraints through technology and organization are contingent upon historical context (Ocasio et al., 2023).

Therefore, by recognizing the historically contingent nature of strategy, in terms of both theoretical development and its influence on practice (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Ocasio & Joseph, 2008; Whittington, 2019), we believe that UET and the ABV can valuably inform solutions to the grand challenges of today's world. In the case of the ABV, for example, the multidivisional and vertically integrated structure of the hierarchical organization epitomizes a paradigmatic template of organizational structure, which served as the foundation for research on TMTs and organizational attention. The erosion of this structure, however, necessitates a critical, deeper understanding of the dynamic and continual movement in attention and the ensuing ramifications for strategic leadership within organizations. The impact of our scholarly communities' research—its meaning for businesses, organizations, and society at large—hinges on our capacity to grapple with critical questions such as:

- How, why, and under which circumstances do new forms of organizing—and in particular post-Chandlerian attention structures and processes—affect the roles, functions, and job demands of top executives, and strategic leadership more generally?
- Which executive personalities, dispositions, experiences, and values affect strategic leadership and its outcomes in today's organizations—and through what distinct mechanisms?
- How do post-Chandlerian organizations affect institutions—norms, values, and taken for granted assumptions—around strategic leadership?
- How can research at the interface of UET, the ABV, and platforms and ecosystems provide an “ecosystem of thought” to generate valuable new theory and insight?
- What are our responsibilities in this context, and how can we ensure that our findings are heard and that they help strategic leaders in today's world make better long-term decisions in light of grand environmental, political, and societal challenges?
- How can TMT members address challenges of coherent attention and sensemaking when actors, particularly middle managers, are to a large degree situated in different social realities in and around post-Chandlerian organizations?
- What strategies can TMT members devise (e.g., in the form of CEOs' voluntary corporate disclosures) to counter possible external negative attention associated with evaluations that result from the sheer novelty and, in turn, cognitive illegitimacy of many of today's business models?
- How can organizations employ media, especially social media, to spin attention within their new networked environments and how can the media in turn force organizational attention on selective issues not necessarily of their own choosing?
- What are the theoretical and empirical scaffoldings to study distributed attention and sensemaking bubbles in post-Chandlerian structures where groups of actors with varying motivational biases either deliberately or unintentionally attend to and/or actively produce invalid information that then becomes public and shared?
- How can TMT members tackle complex challenges in organizations with increasingly porous boundaries and an expanding role of external actors, for instance, by drawing upon distributed knowledge from external sources of innovation and ideas?

- What methods do novel forms of communication, enabled through new technologies, genres, and innovative modes of communication, employ to promote or resist strategic change?
- In post-Chandlerian forms, where culture increasingly supplants hierarchy as a mechanism for attentional coherence and control, how can culture function as a toolkit for developing, communicating, or obstructing strategic initiatives?

We invite researchers to submit papers that address any of the topics suggested above. Moreover, in the open-minded tradition of our workshop, we call for research on *any questions related to TMTs and individual top executives*. We particularly encourage submissions of paper proposals that fall into one of the following domains:

1. Literature reviews and state-of-the-art papers that encourage debate about the role of strategic leaders and discuss theoretical and empirical challenges for future TMT research;
2. Conceptual papers that combine different and novel theoretical perspectives to explain the antecedents, nature, and/or consequences of the composition of the TMT in various forms of organization;
3. Empirical papers focusing on an array of TMT-related research topics: e.g., TMT structure and dynamics; the boundaries of the TMT; interactions and power relations within TMTs and/or between the TMT and other influential actors, such as the board, middle managers, or (external) network ties; executive succession and turnover; executive performance and compensation, etc.



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