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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Exploring managerial intentionality

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To enable a better understanding of individual and, as a logical extension, organizational behavior, we set forth a theoretical framework of managerial intentionality. At its core are the concepts of desire and belief, which together form intentions. We argue that it is these intentions that may substantially affect strategic choices and, by that, organizational change. Exploring managerial intentionality, we acknowledge a central building block of cognitive science, which contrary to representations and computations has, by and large, been neglected in the management and organization literatures. We use the framework to explore the intrapersonal and interpersonal role of managerial intentionality as well as its effectiveness in an organizational context. We also clarify the differences to related concepts and discuss implications for future research. In doing so, we contribute to the overall objective of increasing our understanding of managerial action and organizational behavior.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the study of top executives has increasingly become a cornerstone within the field of organizational studies and strategic management. Researchers have thereby focused on human factors that play an important role in shaping organizational outcomes. Among other concepts, managerial intentionality is generating increased interest in organizational studies. In general, managerial intentionality is used to describe the influence of decision makers in managing organizational development and, simultaneously, is contrasted to theoretical reasoning on organizational change to be primarily determined by environmental factors (McKelvey, 1997; Werder, 1999). Although a great deal of interest in managerial intentionality has been expressed by scholars, its study in organizations has remained problematic for at least two reasons. First, managerial intentionality has been roughly defined and simply taken as a given, which leads to a lack of clarity on what the nature of managerial intentionality actually is. Second, we also lack understanding of how managerial intentionality is effective in organizational settings.

One key assumption that underlies managerial intentionality is that organizations are, at least to a certain extent, the reflection of its top managers (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). They are assumed to shape an organization's development by making strategic choices that imply, for example, significant investment or divestment decisions (Child, 1972). Another assumption refers to the mind of top managers as the main driver of strategic choices and, thus, organizational change. In this regard, idiosyncrasies of organizational development are also seen as the result of differences in their top managers' minds. In particular, most attention is paid to cognitive topics such as knowledge structures, cognitive maps, heuristics and biases, or attention (Marcel, Barr, & Duhaime, 2011; Nadkarni & Barr, 2008). But concentrating on different cognitive capabilities, virtually to the exclusion of any consideration of their underlying intentions and rather taking them as givens, respectively, has left us with an incomplete picture. For instance, the basic 'cognitive' argument is that the knowledge that top managers possess and the cognitive processes in use build the groundwork for organizational actions. Yet, knowledge in and of itself can hardly be a sufficient condition for organizational action. The same applies to cognitive processes. Moreover, one is left without an explanation for differences in actions of decision makers who share very similar cognitive capabilities. As Pastin (1985, p. 300) stated: "Two managers may share views of how things stand. One may decide the situation is hopeless, while the other launches a plan for market dominance. The difference is in the intentions."

Based on this notion, we propose a model of managerial intentionality that integrates both the motivational dimension as well as the knowledge- or belief-related dimension. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In the following, we elaborate the model of managerial intentionality that encompasses at its core the three constructs: desire, belief, and intention. This allows us to distinguish

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between managerial intentionality and related conceptions that also deal with the striving nature of agents. Next, we focus on the functions of managerial intentionality and how it operates both on the individual as well as on the organizational level.

2 | MANAGERIAL INTENTIONALITY

Managerial intentionality is an ancient concept that is deeply rooted in philosophical and psychological discussions about the human mind and its purposeful nature. Yet, its relevance for organizational studies has only been explicitly acknowledged by a few researchers. For instance, McKelvey argues that "organizational phenomena result from both individual human intentionality and natural causes independent of individuals' intended behavior" (McKelvey, 1997, p. 352). Furthermore, Lewin and Volberda begin their *Prolegomena on Coevolution* with "Does intentionality matter? How does it matter?" (1999, p. 519). They argue that these questions have occupied center stage in research on organizational adaptation and selection and in the practitioner-oriented literature since the dawn of modern theorizing and research on management and organization. Hutzschenreuter, Pedersen, and Volberda go a step further in proposing that managerial intentionality "may not only be the most differentiating, but also the most neglected factor that influences internationalization and, logically, multinationality" (Hutzschenreuter, Pedersen, & Volberda, 2007, p. 1,058). In this paper, we propose managerial intentionality as the interplay of central cognitive components, focusing on the personal level of top managers. Managerial intentionality is seen as the main driver of conscious and reasonable managerial behavior and decision making, which, in turn, can lead to organizational change. Thereby, we advocate a more voluntaristic perspective that top managers are able to shape the development of their organizations by their intentions, decisions, and actions. Contrary to the theory of path dependence that regards organizational development as a path predetermined by history (Lewin & Volberda, 1999), managerial intentionality puts forward the possibility of path breaking or even path creating managerial behavior.

Our contention that managerial intentionality is central to explaining organizational action raises the question of how intentions are formed. Our model is intended to provide an answer to this basic question. Figure 1 shows the building blocks of managerial intentionality. In the following subsections, we develop the concept of managerial intentionality which we define as *central cognitive characteristic of an executive's mind that is based on contextual desire–belief complexes leading to respective intentions and that constitutes the precursor of strategic choices in the context of organizational change.*

2.1 | Context

The formation of intentions and strategic choices does not take place in empty space but is context specific. Indeed, the relevance of context has been stressed in the management literature (e.g., Bamberger, 2008; Dierdorff, Rubin, & Morgeson, 2009; Johns, 2006). Mowday and Sutton define context as "stimuli and phenomena that surround and thus exist in the environment external to the individual, most often at a different level of analysis" (Mowday & Sutton, 1993, p. 198). From a managerial perspective, this level of analysis might be the organization or an industry. Taking the context specificity of managerial intentionality into account is necessary in that the meaning of a certain intention and the derived strategic choice can only be explained against the backdrop of a given context. With that said, the meaning of a certain strategic choice of an organization might differ dependent on the context. To describe the constituents of context, we follow Johns (2006) who proposes a concept distinguishing between two levels of context, the omnibus and the discrete. The omnibus approach refers to fundamental aspects such as location, time, and occupation, that is, where, when, and who. One should therefore first define the spatial, temporal, and personal circumstances in which intentions are formed and strategic choices take effect. For

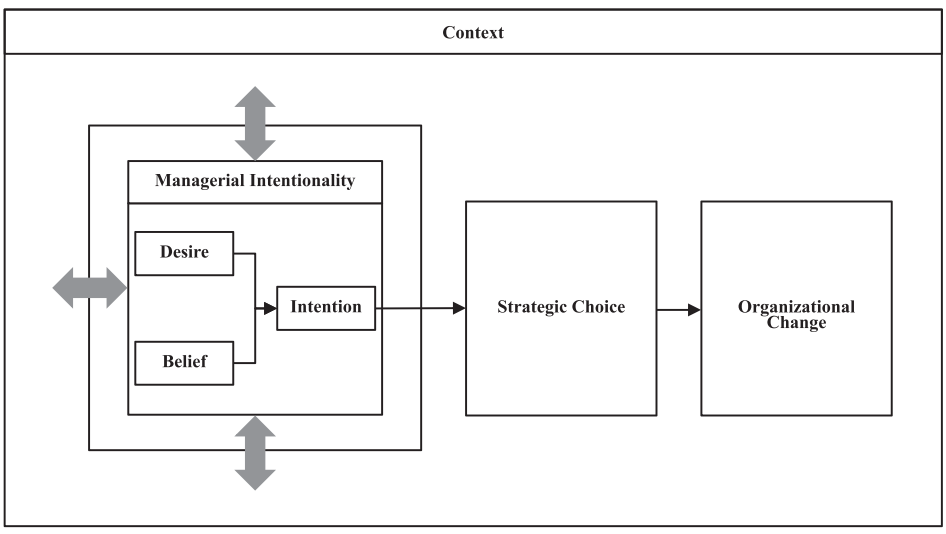

FIGURE 1 A model of managerial intentionality

instance, are intentions formed by top managers that are located in developed countries or in emerging economies (spatial), do intentions unfold at the time of industrialization in the second part of the 18th century or during World War II at the first part of the 20th century (temporal), and are intentions of a founder chief executive officer (CEO) or an agent CEO at the foreground (personal)? While the omnibus context provides rather general and rough information, the discrete context is more fine-grained. It includes detailed aspects of the task, the extent of social influence, and the physical environment. Task characteristics include uncertainty, autonomy, and available resources; the social dimension encompasses interpersonal features such as social density, structure, or influence; while elements of the material environment are captured by the discrete physical context. Hereby, particular importance is attached to the social context as top managers are embedded in social networks (Nohria, 1992). Within these networks, top managers face certain norms that provide information on whether certain actions are socially acceptable or not. Top managers occupying more outward-directed functions—that is, marketing or product management—in rather innovative organizations might form intentions that are more disruptive in terms of organizational change, while their counterparts in rather stable organizations might primarily seek incremental organizational adaptions (Foxall & Payne, 1989).

2.2 | Desire

Some researchers have argued that favorable attitudes can lead to intentions if the expected consequences of actions are seen as valuable (East, 1993; Elliott, Armitage, & Baughan, 2003). However, Bagozzi (1992) has argued that favorable attitudes might be insufficient to stimulate intentions without desires. "In contrast, the existence of a desire, in the presence of a belief that one can act, is a sufficient motivator to activate an intention and does not require a positive evaluation. A person can want or desire to do something even though it is unappealing, unpleasant, or in some other way evaluated negatively […] Likewise, one can want or desire not to do something even though it is evaluated positively." In other words, managers may take actions that they find unpleasant, and they may not take action even when they consider something as appealing (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Desires can range from rather vague to concrete objectives. Instead of objective, we use the more general term desire (a) to account for the partially affective character of desires (Bagozzi, Dholakia, & Basuroy, 2003) and (b) to indicate that an initial wooly representation of a future state of affairs can develop into a concrete objective during an evaluation process.

In the context of organizational change, desires play a central role in that they express the future state of the focal organization in many different facets, be it with regard to the general strategic positioning or more specific aspects such as diversification, internationalization, or alliance formation. Yet, while the construct of desire is related to the 'why' question of intention formation, beliefs are necessary to answer the 'how' question in evaluating the feasibility of a given desire.

2.3 | Belief

The notion of belief has long been the subject of philosophical discussions. Belief is generally defined as a confidence that something is true (Griffiths, 1967), and knowledge is a subset of beliefs that is seen as being "true […] with a reason" (Harré & Lamb, 1983, p. 328). By relying on the broader construct belief, we acknowledge that decision makers can act on beliefs that are not justified or true, thus, that don't form knowledge by definition (Markózy, 1997). Belief is considered by many researchers to be another important element in the formation of intentions (Bratman, 1987; Malle, Moses, & Baldwin, 2001). While desire is about desirability, belief is about feasibility and so the means by which something is done. Knowledge is used to assess whether the desire or objective can be achieved. To evaluate the feasibility of a certain intention and the related strategic choice, actors rely on descriptive knowledge, the "knowing of", as well as procedural knowledge, "knowing how" (Holsapple, 2003).

The belief on whether a strategic choice is feasible and, thus, the associated desire is achievable is strongly influenced by the decision maker's domain schemas, that is, the "knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among those attributes" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 98). A number of researchers have underlined that the domain schemas of experts are larger and have a greater number of interrelationships than those of novices (Kimball & Holyoak, 2000; Rousseau, 2001). As Dane (2010, p. 581) helpfully elaborates, "domain experts possess complex schemas—schemas containing not only a relatively large number of attributes but also a relatively large number of relations between the attributes within each schema, as well as between the schemas themselves." Hence, while a highly experienced top manager may see a given intention as feasible, a less experienced one may not.

2.4 | Intention

The notion of intention is a desire–belief entity, indicating a specific means–ends structure. While a desire or an objective will be oriented toward a certain end or specific outcome, intentions also take into account "facilitating and inhibiting factors" (Prestwich, Perugini, & Hurling, 2008, p. 50). Thus, an intention is a "representation of both the *objective* […] one is striving for and the *action plan* one intends to use to reach that objective" (Tubbs & Ekeberg, 1991, p. 181). Intentions can range from "very abstract representations (e.g., being successful in life), to more specific representations (e.g., finishing the project by Friday), to (ultimately) basic motor behaviors" (Tubbs & Ekeberg, 1991, p. 184).

In order to genuinely understand a certain intention, the underlying desire (end) and belief (means) must be understood. Moreover, one intention and action can constitute the means for another. For instance, a manager's intention to increase productivity might be

behind that manager's intention to increase profits. We focus on more abstract and sophisticated intentions that are formed by organizational decision makers in the course of their work and which lead to certain strategic choices that have an impact on the whole organization. Their intentions are abstract because the strategic choices or issues they deal with are themselves usually broad, unstructured, diffuse, and ill-defined (Ansoff, 1980).

One reason for the diffusivity may be rooted in the temporal arrangement of intentions as they can exhibit different time dimensions. Mele (2009) distinguishes between proximal and distal intentions. Proximal intentions can be realized immediately, for example, a factory worker who spots a defect quickly forms an intention to stop the assembly line and acts on it immediately. Distal intentions are realized in the more distant future, for example, the marketing director of an information technology company intends to launch an advertising campaign in 6 weeks' time. Implementing distal intentions is more difficult, as in the interim external and internal factors may interfere. For example, there might be a change in the general business environment, or a key supplier may go bankrupt.

2.5 | Strategic choice and organizational change

Desire and belief can form an intention that can precede a certain strategic choice. Hence, strategic choice in the present context is the result of a conscious and reasonable intentional process. In this regard we use the term strategic choice in a broad way. For instance, strategic choices can refer to changes of corporate strategy with regard to internationalization, diversification, or the configuration of corporate activities. In the model of managerial intentionality, intentions and the related strategic choices may lead to an entire course of highly sophisticated and complex organizational action, such as in an internationalization or a diversification strategy. The more abstract the intention and the strategic choice, the more likely that the course of action will not be fully specified ex ante. For instance, a CEO has the desire to enter the Brazilian market as part of a larger internationalization strategy, and the belief that the company has the necessary resources available to do so. That CEO might form the intention to acquire a Brazilian company. The realization of that intention then leads to the implementation of an action plan, which is partial at the beginning and which will be filled "with specifications of means, preliminary steps, and more specific courses of action" (Bratman, 1987, p. 29) in the course of its implementation. As our example shows, the intended strategic choice to enter the Brazilian market is a step toward the higher intention of internationalizing. In other words, often what managers do cannot be appreciated in isolation. Thus, like the analysis of intentions, the analysis of specific strategic choices is meaningless other than as part of a means–ends structure.

To sharpen the understanding of managerial intentionality, we now compare it to related concepts. They, like the managerial intentionality view, basically assume that individuals act in an intentional way. Table 1 gives a summary of the discussion about similarities and differences with regard to managerial intentionality and related concepts.

TABLE 1 MI and related concepts

Related concepts	Similarity to MI	Distinction from MI
Need theory	▪ Explanation of purposeful behavior	▪ Focus on the inner-motivational processes of the focal actor, while MI is directed toward changes on the organizational level ▪ Predefined need categories, while MI deals with the actual context-specific intention ▪ Consideration of both volitive and appetitive desires, while MI is solely focused on volitive desires
Expectancy theory	▪ Explanation of purposeful behavior ▪ Important role of beliefs with regard to means and ends	▪ Focus on the micro level and the individual decision-making process where the final outcome is the choice or rejection of an individual act, while the outcome of MI affects organizational change ▪ Belief on instrumentality refers to the ability of the individual, while in the context of MI, beliefs can also include knowledge of organizational variables ▪ Assumption that means and ends as well as their relation can be quantified and, thus, calculated, while the focus of MI is on strategic choices that are often ill-defined, unstructured, and diffuse to be numeralized
Goal- setting theory	▪ Explanation of purposeful behavior ▪ Various functions of goals, for example, directing attention or enabling persistence	▪ Focus on goals as desired outcomes in terms of level of performance, while in the context of MI, the focus is on intentions as desired outcomes in terms of certain state of affairs achieved by a certain course of action (desire–belief entity) ▪ Interest in goal characteristics for effective performance, while MI refers to the context-specific content of intentions

Abbreviation: MI, managerial intentionality.

2.6 | Managerial intentionality and need theory

Some researchers have argued that underlying needs explain purposeful behavior (Alderfer, 1972; Herzberg, 1976; Maslow, 1954). In these theories, scholars distinguish between different types of needs and need categories. For instance, Maslow (1954) establishes a hierarchical system of needs whereby he distinguishes between lower level needs such as thirst and safety (i.e., security, stability, and so on) and upper level ones such as esteem and self-actualization. Another categorization is made by Alderfer (1972) who postulates three need categories: existence, relatedness, and growth. Finally, Herzberg (1976) proposes motivators and hygiene factors as two different need categories that have an impact on motivation. Although we will not deny that needs are effective in everyday's activities and helpful to explain purposeful behavior, the approach of managerial intentionality differs fundamentally from the aforementioned need theories. First, needs as used here refer to inner states of motivation and satisfaction. Even if needs may imply other ′outer′ actors—such as in Maslow's (1954) belongingness and love needs—the fulfillment of these needs is ultimately directed at the focal actor. By contrast, the focus of managerial intentionality is not on the actor but on changes that lie outside and concern entities on the organizational level. This becomes clear when we bear in mind the logic of managerial intentionality: Desires and beliefs together form intentions that precede strategic choices leading to organizational change. Second, the aforementioned need theories are positive theories in that they define categories of need in advance and use them to analyse a focal phenomenon. Contrary to that, managerial intentionality is not predetermined by a certain type of desire. It instead deals with the actual intention that can be expressed in terms of temporal and spatial coordinates and that is bound to a specific context. Third, managerial intentionality refers to volitive desires based on rationality and exhibiting a certain complex and highly sophisticated nature, while need theories also include appetitive desires that refer to physiological aspects.

2.7 | Managerial intentionality and expectancy theory

Similar to managerial intentionality, expectancy theory explicitly take into account the relationship between means and ends. Beliefs play an important role in that they found both the expectancy of an actor's efforts to result in a desired performance and the instrumentality, that is, the reward of a successful performance. Furthermore, behavioral options are not predefined. The focus is rather on the decision-making process that an actor passes through. According to Vroom (1964, p. 321) "the model asserts that the probability of a person performing an act is a direct function of the products of the valence of outcomes and expectancies that they will occur given the act." Although there are some similarities with regard to the basic logic, managerial intentionality and expectancy theory differ in certain points. First, while expectancy theory operates on a micro level in that it sheds light on the individual decision-making process where the final outcome is the choice or rejection of a certain individual act, the outcome of managerial intentionality affects organizational change. For instance, while belief in the context of managerial intentionality can also include knowledge of organizational variables, for example, financial resources, employee qualifications, or managerial capacities, expectancy theory refers to the individual ability of the focal actor as determinant of performance. Closely linked to this differentiation is the often ill-defined, unstructured, and diffuse nature of strategic choices. Top managers often deal with issues that are hard to break down into probabilities and numbers. The complexity and uncertainty executives face with regard to both the desired outcome as well as the feasibility in terms of their beliefs makes it difficult to exactly determine their algebraic relationship, as compared with the multiplicative linkage of valence and expectancy in expectancy theory.

2.8 | Managerial intentionality and goal-setting

Goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) postulates that performance can be explained by the way goals are set. Similar to managerial intentionality, goal-setting theory also assigns an important role to goals with regard to their various functions, for example, directing attention to relevant issues or enabling persistence. Locke and Latham refer to goals as "desired outcomes in terms of level of performance to be attained on a task rather than to the desire to take a specific action" (1990, p. 24). This definition with its focus on the level of performance deviates from the understanding in the context of managerial intentionality where goal is seen as a desired outcome in terms of a certain state of affairs achieved by a certain course of action. Furthermore, contrary to goal that is a desired outcome to be achieved; the emphasis in managerial intentionality is on intention that represents a desire–belief entity including both the end as well as the means. Given the importance of goals for task performance, the focus of goal-setting researchers has been on several goal-formulation characteristics such as goal specificity, measurability, and attainability. While the importance of goal characteristics is undoubted as they inform both researchers and practitioners how to set goals to positively influence goal achievement, the focus of managerial intentionality is primarily on the specific content of goals.

3 | THE FUNCTIONALITY OF MANAGERIAL INTENTIONALITY

Up to this point, we have analyzed managerial intentionality, outlined its building blocks, and distinguished it from related concepts. We now discuss the instrumental features of managerial intentionality, that is, the roles it plays and which functions it exhibits. We first turn our attention to how managerial intentionality helps a decision maker act purposefully, after which we will consider the decision maker as part of an organization and the idea of collective intentionality.

3.1 | Managerial intentionality in the individual context

Managerial intentionality allows decision makers to project a desired future state and link it with the present (Bandura, 2001; Bratman, 2000). It is primarily reflecting the executive system of an individual top manager that cross-temporarily organizes his or her actions in a meaningful way, as compared to rather pure emotional responding led by the impulsive system (Foxall, 2014). Foxall (2014) highlights two competing managerial decision systems that are ascribed to different areas of the brain. The impulsive system is located in the limbic sytem, the executive system finds itself in the cortial system. While the dichotomy of these two systems is mainly helping to better analyse different managerial decion-making, both are rather seen as the antipodes of a continuum. The impulsive system comprises actions that lead to smaller but sooner rewards over larger but later rewards. Behavior is primarily shaped by emotions that lead to immediate and—on the cognitive level—unreflected actions. On the other hand, the executive system is associated with the prefrontal cortex that is generally recognized as a supervisor to govern the regulation of behavior. It comprises functions such as planning, valuing future events, or attentional shifting on an individual level. That corresponds to the notion of managerial intentionality as shaping decision-making in a more reasonable and strategic manner. Nevertheless, Foxall (2014) outlines the negative impact on managerial behavior when one of the two systems dominate. A dominant impulsive system might lead "[…], for instance, to preoccupation with short-term goals at the expense of undertaking longer-term planning, the reckless taking of investment decisions promising rapid high returns and a consequent over-cautiousness, and an unwillingness to invest in future. Another manifestation is rigidity in the pursuit of a previously selected goal even though the environment has changed and flexibility is called for", whereas the dominance of the executive system "[..] may lead to a lack of strategic implementation so that the short-term decisions necessary for the day-to-day operations of the firm are neglected, working capital is lacking, the firm cannot continue." (Foxell, 2014, p. 8). Although managerial intentionality encompasses functions of the executive system such as planning and anticipation of future actions, it can also manifest itself in daily managerial work as long as it contributes to the long-term strategic goals in a conscious manner. This is especially important as we conceptualize intentions to be the precursor of strategic choices, which refer to changes that affect future organizational action. We label this as the *bridge function* of managerial intentionality. The temporal range can vary from the very next moment to future days, weeks, months, or years, depending on the focal desire and the underlying beliefs. The distance between a present point of time t_0 and some point of time t_1 in the future thus characterizes intentions to be more proximal or distal. The bridging function allows decision makers to form and execute plans. These plans might not be complete in the sense that they contain all necessary present and future information and so need to be adjusted over time (Bratman, 1987). Nonetheless, they serve as mental frames of reference upon which decision makers coordinate their current and future activities. This bridge function of managerial intentionality also reflects the cross-temporal organization of behavior of executive systems. The awareness of the manager is directed toward future consequences of current behavior, which results in planning for events that will occur later (Foxall, 2014).

Managerial intentionality also exhibits a *pillar function*. Managerial intentionality serves as a pillar such that it reinforces commitment to the intended strategic choice and the actions needed to reach it. A considerable number of researchers have studied the role of commitment in the organizational context, many of them focusing on commitment to the organization itself (Luchak & Gellatly, 2007). While commitment to the organization is related to managerial intentionality, we refer in this paper to a commitment to a strategic choice and the possible courses of action involved (Salancik, 1977). In this sense, we mean that decision makers are mentally bound to their intended strategic choices and the respective organizational change. Even if a temporal bridge were to be built, without this commitment creating function of managerial intentionality, top managers would hardly finalize anything, thus nothing would be achieved. Once decision makers have built a bridge in terms of intentions and anchoring it through their commitment, they will organize their activities along them. This leads us to the *guide function* of managerial intentionality. For instance, they will search for external resources and gather information needed to implement the intended strategic choices. In this regard, managerial intentionality serves as a guide directing the attention of decision makers toward the achievement of a particular strategic choice.

3.2 | Managerial intentionality in the collective context

Our discussion of managerial intentionality has to this point been at the level of the individual. We now broaden the discussion by shifting the focus to the interpersonal role of managerial intentionality, considering it as a social fact (Gibbs, 2001). We first examine managerial intentionality as a mechanism that regulates interaction between individuals, that is, at the collective level. In this context, a collective describes the collection of individuals in an organization, for example, in terms of a work group, a department, or a division, up to the organization as a whole. In a next step, we then discuss whether there is such a thing as collective intentionality.

3.3 | External intentions as reference points

Decision makers are embedded in a social context (Granovetter, 1985). Managers have intentions, and they attribute intentions to others, this is termed "intentional stance" (Dennett, 1987). They treat other actors as intentional agents and take their desires, beliefs, and intentions into account. In a similar vein, attribution theory also argues that individuals observe behaviors and are involved in a sort of backward reasoning on the causes of these behaviors (Steers & Mowday, 1981).

In this sense, actions are recognized and assessed based on assumed intentions. We call these *external intentions*. External intentions constitute reference points that serve to interpret the actions of others. Malle and Knobe provide a helpful example:

"If considered intentional, a critical remark can be seen as a hurtful insult; a collision in the hallway, as a dangerous provocation; and a charming smile, as a hint of seduction. But if considered unintentional, that same remark may be excused; the same collision may lead to a new friendship; and the same smile might simply indicate a good mood." (1997, p. 101).

Just like individuals, groups, and even organizations make interpretations based on assumptions that form beliefs (Foss, 2007). The subjectivity of interpreting external intentions might provide an explanation for why decision makers and organizations react differently when confronted with a similar action. Perceiving and interpreting the actions of others is subject to bias and hence, leaves room for misinterpretation. This can be used to intentionally mislead others. For instance, McGrath, Chen, and MacMillan describe deception in the context of multimarket competition.

"A firm visibly sacrifices a position in a focal arena, with the express intention of enticing the competitor to divert resources into that arena to enhance its sphere of influence there. The firm executing the gambit then can focus its resources on increasing its sphere of influence in its target arena." (McGrath, Chen, & MacMillan, 1998, p. 728).

As decision makers are not able to read the minds of others to determine their real intentions, they rely on verbal and nonverbal cues. Intentions can be deduced based on past or ongoing actions and used to predict future actions. For example, chess players 'read the game', that is, they interpret past and ongoing moves and deduce from them the underlying intentions of the opponent and hence, future moves. This also applies to organizations trying to assess the intentions of their suppliers, competitors, and other stakeholders, and so their future actions.

To this point, we have elaborated on intentions in competitive settings. However, intentions also serve as reference points in cooperative settings. These external intentions can form the basis to coordinate the actions between counterparts. The role of external intentions is thereby especially important in cases where circumstances are ill-defined and when their implications cannot be specified in advance. Based on this notion, an organization can be seen as what we call a *dynamic nexus of intentions*.

We started with the assumption that intentions are held by individuals and addressed the importance of aligning intentions. In the next section, we focus on collective intentionality and collective intentions.

3.4 | Collective intentionality

In the management and organization literatures, organizations are described as purposeful social systems consisting of a relatively stable network of interpersonal links (Barnard, 1938). Furthermore, some scholars emphasize that organizations must develop a common purpose to be successful in the long run. For instance, Hamel and Prahalad (1989) introduce the concept of *strategic intent*. According to them, strategic intent infuses all organizational levels with a common purpose and "envisions a desired leadership position and establishes the criterion the organization will use to chart its progress." (1989, p. 64). The objective of strategic intent is to create and maintain a collective intentionality so as to maintain or even increase performance by reducing or avoiding intraorganizational conflict and friction.

One requirement for establishing strategic intent is the alignment of individual intentions so as to form a collective intentionality. Based on this collective intentionality, organizational members form 'we-intentions' that are articulated in terms of "we intend to do X". The question is whether one can conceive of collective intentionality in the same way as individual intentionality.

This has been discussed in philosophical studies. Some have argued that collective intentionality, that is, 'we-intentions', is not a separate category of intentions but simply the outcome of a web of individual beliefs and intentions (e.g., Bratman, 1999). Contrary to this rather 'individualistic' interpretation, other scholars have argued that collective intentionality, although held by individuals, is an independent category of intentions (Searle, 1995; Tuomela, 1995).

We argue that collective intentionality is the result of social interaction between members of an organization. Thus, collective intentions are the result of an ongoing adjustment process between individual actors, hence a temporary rather than a permanent feature of the organization. Moreover, collective intentions must be analyzed in a specific context. For instance, it is unlikely that all the members of a multinational company with various and far-flung businesses and many employees will be sufficiently interconnected at any point in time to form a collective intention with regard to a specific action. In fact,

"in contexts where collective intent can be expected to take place in an ontologically robust manner, e.g., in soccer teams, collective intent is realized through the members' awareness of and adjustment to the intentions of all or most other members of the collective" (Mantere & Sillince, 2007, p. 412).

This kind of social interaction, constant adjustment between actors, and clear context in which there is an awareness of the intentions of other organizational members, in short, a dynamic relationship, makes it different from corporate vision or corporate values.

4 | CONCLUSION

The concept of managerial intentionality contributes to the management and organization literatures, particularly to research that focuses on the cognitive side of organizational change. We argue that managerial intentionality represents the motivational dimension as well as the capability dimension of the human mind. In so doing, we add intentionality to the traditional cognitive research that has primarily explored the representational and computational characteristics and its effects in organizational settings. Furthermore, we advocate a more voluntaristic perspective that intentions, decisions, and actions of managers can shape organizational change and lead to path breaking or even path creating phenomena.

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