Futurescapes: Imagination and temporal reorganization in the design of strategic narratives

Violina P Rindova
University of Southern California, USA

Luis L Martins
The University of Texas at Austin, USA

Abstract

Recent work in organizational and strategy research increasingly accords centrality to narratives in developing and legitimating future-oriented strategies. Despite this growing interest in the use of strategic narratives for prospective sensemaking and sensegiving, the design of such narratives as persuasive vehicles that shape beliefs about possible futures and firms' potential roles in them remains undertheorized. We build on Paul Ricœur's narrative theory to develop a theoretical framework of how firms can employ imaginative thought, in the form of productive and creative imagination, to depict plausible and desirable "possible worlds." We term these worlds "futurescapes" and theorize how they synthesize heterogenous information through factual and fictive means to project different types of futures that have differential persuasive qualities. We argue that continuous or near futures are likely to be perceived as more plausible, whereas discontinuous or distant futures are likely to be perceived as more desirable by stakeholder audiences. We further draw on Ricœur's ideas about narrative time to theorize how narratives are used by firms for temporal reorganization that can alter perceptions of plausibility and desirability, thereby increasing the overall persuasiveness of their futurescapes. We illustrate our arguments using narratives created by auto manufacturers in response to the changing landscape of their industry. Our ideas have implications for research on the strategic use of narratives, future-focused strategy making as temporal work, and shaping strategies under uncertainty.

> We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time. (Ricœur, 1983, *Time and Narrative, vol. I*: 54.)

Corresponding author:
Luis L Martins, McCombs School of Business, The University of Texas at Austin, 2110 Speedway, Stop B6300, Austin, TX 78712, USA.
Email: lmartins@utexas.edu

"The very notion of strategy implies projecting organizations into the future through decisions in the present while building on the past" (Bansal et al., 2019: 145). Despite the centrality of the future in strategy making, research on strategic future-oriented thinking has remained limited (Augustine et al., 2019; Szpunar et al., 2014). A small but growing body of research is addressing this deficiency by focusing on narrative representations of the future (Augustine et al., 2019; Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018), seen as projective agency through "imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 971). Narratives about the future are employed to guide the reconfiguration of resources and the pursuit of opportunities (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Garud et al., 2014; Suddaby et al., 2019). They also play a prominent role in the legitimation of new firms (Garud et al., 2014), new strategies (Dalpiaz et al., 2016), and new technologies (Munir and Phillips, 2005). Narratives about the future enable actors to address uncertainty by framing novel strategies and technologies within established cultural accounts and by creating a sense of continuity based on narrative coherence and emotional resonance (Garud et al., 2014).

Collectively, these studies have established the importance of understanding the role of narratives in contexts of uncertainty, change, and transformation. They have contributed important insights about how narratives mobilize cultural and symbolic resources to give sense about the future potential of present-day strategies (Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018; Garud et al., 2014). Less attention has been given to the question of *how* narratives are used to promote the formation of fundamentally new beliefs about what might be possible in the future, how the future may differ from the present, and what different types of future could or should be considered (Beckert, 2016). The paucity of research on these issues is particularly apparent in the context of firm strategies, especially in light of theoretical expectations that firms need to constantly create favorable asymmetries to achieve superior firm performance (Brandenburger and Stuart, 1996; Gavetti and Porac, 2018) and define distinctive strategies in the face of fundamental uncertainty (Rindova and Courtney, 2020). Researchers have called for further theory development about how narratives are used in future thinking (Augustine et al., 2019) and strategy making more generally (Ravasi et al., 2020). In our view, addressing this gap is also important to deepen our understanding of how firms may use narratives to shape the future in their favor by influencing stakeholder audiences' prospective sensemaking in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity.

To address this gap, we conceptualize strategic narratives about the future as designed for prospective persuasion (Sommer, 2009), and we ask the following: How might firms design strategic narratives to persuade audiences about their preferred versions of the future? We answer this question by building on the philosophy and psychology of "world-making" (Bruner, 1986; Goodman, 1978; Herman, 2009) and theorize the narrative construction of "futurescapes," defined as firm-centered world-making narratives that articulate a firm's preferred future and its role in creating it. Following Goodman (1978), we conceptualize world-making as symbolic construction of versions of the world that vary in how they combine descriptions of the actual and the possible. We view the world-making function of narratives as central to future-oriented strategy making, as the future does not exist, and is instead mentally simulated (Szpunar et al., 2014) and narratively shared (Ricœur, 1991).

Our theoretical framework explains how firms construct desirable possible worlds that reflect firm-specific perspectives in an effort to narratively shape the future to their advantage. We theorize the design principles underlying the construction of such future-oriented strategic narratives by drawing on the philosophical foundation laid by Paul Ricœur's (1980, 1983, 1984, 1991) seminal work on narratives and time. Ricœur's hermeneutic perspective on narratives has been underutilized in organizational research, which has relied on more structural approaches that analyze narratives as sequences of events (Garud et al., 2014). We view Ricœur's theoretical ideas as particularly relevant for understanding the design of strategic narratives, as he emphasizes

how narratives combine and configure heterogenous elements into coherent wholes. Ricœur also articulates a view of narrative temporality that goes beyond the structuring of sequences of events, and argues that a core function of narratives is to enable actors to step outside objective, "prefigured" time and "refigure" it to expand their agentic capacities (Ricœur, 1983). These ideas resonate with the growing interest in temporal agency (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Pontikes and Rindova, 2020) and temporal perspective in strategy making (Bansal et al., 2019; Fenton and Langley, 2011; Nadkarni and Chen, 2014; Rindova and Martins, 2018a; Suddaby et al., 2010).

We theorize the central role of imaginative thought in narratively shaping the future. We propose that firms construct futurescapes by (a) using creative imagination to construct desirable "possible worlds" (Bruner, 1986: 93) that build the futurescape's imaginative potential, defined as "the capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is" (Castoriadis, 1987: 127), and (b) using productive imagination to establish "autobiographical knowledge" (D'Argembeau, 2016: 200; Bruner, 1990) about the focal firm as an agent that could turn the futurescape into reality. Thus, productive imaginative thought contributes to the plausibility of a futurescape, whereas creative imaginative thought increases its desirability. We articulate the challenges to establishing both plausibility and desirability in a given futurescape, and propose how temporal reorganization can be used to situate a futurescape in temporal structures that reframe the relationships between past, present, and future. We argue the persuasive implications of these different narrative constructions by drawing on psychological research on prospection (Szpunar et al., 2014), mental time-travel (Michaelian et al., 2016), and the interpretation of facts and fiction (Weisberg and Goodstein, 2009).

The theoretical framework we propose contributes to three main areas of research. First, we extend research on the use of narratives in future-oriented strategy making (Ravasi et al., 2020) by theorizing firms' efforts to narratively shape the future through the construction of future worlds. Second, the notion of narrative shaping through the design of futurescapes that we propose extends current understanding of strategy making under uncertainty (Rindova and Courtney, 2020) by theorizing narratives as mechanisms through which firms resolve uncertainty. Third, we contribute to research on temporality in strategy making by drawing on Ricœur's multiple temporalities to theorize how firms can use different temporal structures to construct different perspectives on the future, as relevant to their firm-specific futurescapes. In doing so, we respond to the call for further theory development about narratives as a practice for "developing and enacting strategy" (Fenton and Langley, 2011: 1177; Ravasi et al., 2020).

Our ideas extend work on future thinking by focusing on how organizations use narratives to shape the future by influencing their stakeholder audiences' beliefs about possible and desirable futures. How firms shape their environments is a question of growing interest to strategy researchers (Cattani et al., 2018; Gavetti et al., 2017; Rindova and Courtney, 2020). Current research on shaping focuses on how firms change the knowledge (Rindova and Courtney, 2020) and payoffs (Gavetti et al., 2017) of stakeholders and competitors in a preferred direction. Our theory extends this work by focusing on the role of firm narratives in the formation of "fictional expectations" (Beckert, 2016) that can affect the anticipatory strategies of a diverse set of resource providers, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders. Thus, in contrast to the extant approaches to future thinking that focus on how firms can prepare for the future and develop more "future-inspired" strategies, our theory explains how firms design narrative artifacts to enact their strategies (Fenton and Langley, 2011) by influencing beliefs about possible directions for the evolution of an industry, a market, as well as specific inter-firm competitive and cooperative relationships that constitute them (Cattani et al., 2018). Our ideas also build on and extend the growing literature on the temporal and narrative processes through which firms exercise agency and engage with temporality in purposive ways.

Our article proceeds as follows: First, we discuss future thinking in organizational research, to situate our focus on narrative shaping and rhetorical imagination relative to the broader interests of strategy and organizational scholars. Next, we offer a brief introduction to Ricœur's narrative theory to derive guiding principles for theorizing the design of strategic narratives. Then, we develop our theoretical ideas about the mechanisms through which firms construct futurescapes and establish the plausibility and desirability of these competing versions of the future. We illustrate our arguments using narratives of firms in the auto industry about the future of mobility in response to the disruption of the industry by technological and socio-cultural trends (Gao et al., 2016; Tschiesner et al., 2019). We conclude with the implications of our framework for theory and practice.

Future thinking in organizational research

Research on future-oriented thinking (future thinking for short) in the strategy and organizational literatures has been conducted from several different perspectives, focusing on different underlying processes. One body of work focuses on anticipatory thinking aimed at preparing organizations for potential events, including low-probability ones (Klein et al., 2014). Anticipatory thinking rests on organizational knowledge and experience and involves active attention management to identify critical information (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004). While emphasizing anticipating and foreseeing trends (Costanzo and MacKay, 2008), this approach recognizes that organizations cannot necessarily predict the future. Instead, they develop multiple scenarios using narratives to extrapolate and combine available information in the *present* to anticipate future contingencies and reduce cognitive anchoring in the status-quo (Schwartz, 2012).

A different set of approaches are combined under the broad umbrella of prospective sensemaking, understood as a fundamental cognitive process that "underlies all activities associated with planning and initiating change in organizations" (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012: 1233). This work has employed the idea of thinking in "future perfect tense" (Weick, 1979: 66) as a form of prospective sensemaking that could inform the present (Weick et al., 2005) through processes such as "backcasting." Backcasting provides a pragmatic process tool for developing "normative scenarios aimed at exploring the feasibility and implications of achieving certain desired end-points" and is contrasted to "forecasting studies aimed at providing the most likely projection of future conditions" (Robinson, 2003: 843).

A third group of studies focuses on the temporal dimension of organizational agency and strategy making, and conceptualizes envisioning the future as temporal work that spans and intertwines the past, present, and future (Bansal et al., 2019; Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018; Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2019). This research demonstrates that temporal work and imaginative work are closely intertwined, and that both the past and present play important roles in how actors orient and act toward the future (Bansal et al., 2019; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). Imaginative projections that are disconnected from the past and the present can backfire (Dalpiaz et al., 2016) or fail to generate organizational support (Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018). Suddaby et al. (2019) integrate these ideas by suggesting that different temporal processes are involved in the development of different organizational capabilities: Firms sense trends based on extrapolation from past data; they seize opportunities by connecting the past, present, and future to maintain stakeholder support for change; and they use future perfect thinking to project the effects of disruptive technologies and reconfigure resources accordingly.

Whereas these different approaches co-exist—often at the level of practices for strategy development (Fenton and Langley, 2011)—organizational research has increasingly brought future thinking into the fold of the study of agency as "a chordal triad" of past, present, and future elements (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 975). Doing so has made apparent the integral role of future thinking in the exercise of agency, but has shifted research attention away from the distinctive

cognitive and strategic processes involved in imagining and creating the future (Cattani et al., 2018; Szpunar et al., 2014). For example, Hernes and Schultz (2020) recently concluded that organizational research on temporality has increasingly emphasized how the past and future become related through ongoing activities in the present, with less attention given to the past and the future as temporal horizons that require distinct, and dedicated, strategic activities.

While we do not contest the importance of understanding the intertwining of temporal and strategic activities in an ongoing fashion—as an integral part of the exercise of agency—we see an opportunity to advance research on temporality in strategy making by focusing on strategic efforts to define and shape the future through purposefully designed strategic narratives. We take our inspiration from research construing history as a rhetorical resource (Suddaby et al., 2010) which can be used strategically to inform, inspire, and legitimate present-day action and future-oriented projections (Ravasi et al., 2019; Suddaby et al., 2019). In a similar vein, we argue that strategic use of future-oriented narratives can influence both present-day actions and future strategic positions. Our arguments are consistent with the growing work on socio-technical imaginaries, which has focused specifically on the construction of future-oriented narratives, arguing that "largely hypothetical possibilities may orient collective action" (Augustine et al., 2019: 10). This research builds on Castoriadis's (1987) ideas of social imaginaries as a collective cultural process, whereas we theorize futurescapes as strategic, firm-centered persuasive narratives designed to shape the future in ways that favor firms' preferred visions and trajectories of development.

Narratives and the narrative theory of Paul Ricœur

A narrative is a "representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way" (Onega Jaén and García Landa, 1996: 3; Rudrum, 2005). Researchers note that "the term 'representation' . . . is arguably one of the few methodological constants of narratology" (Rudrum, 2005: 196.) For some narratologists, a single event suffices, whereas others insist that narratives causally link a series of events (Herman, 2009). Thus, narratives encompass a broad spectrum of representational accounts, and the field of narratology encompasses a diverse set of theoretical lenses for analyzing them (Sommer, 2009).

Rhetorical approaches to narratives view them as purposive communicative acts that bring into a relationship authorial agency, textual properties, and audience response (Phelan, 2006). These approaches analyze the cognitive and communicative principles through which narratives establish meaningful relationships among authors, texts, and audiences (Kearns, 1999). This is the perspective we adopt. We focus on strategic narratives and argue that they can be purposefully designed following cognitive and communicative principles. In the next section, we derive several design principles based on Ricœur's narrative theory.

Ricœur's principles of narrative construction

French philosopher Paul Ricœur sharply distinguished between the study of narratives as texts versus their study as expression of human agency. By expressing human agency, narratives mediate multiple relations: between an actor and the world, among multiple actors, and within the actor itself as a form of "self-understanding" (Ricœur, 1991). Ricœur further viewed narratives as the expression of actors' relation to, and experience of, time and history. His extensive writings on the topic—including a three-volume set titled *Time and Narrative* (Ricœur, 1983, 1984, 1985)—represent a foundational treatment of temporality in narratives. A comprehensive review of these ideas is beyond the scope of our article. Rather, we draw on Ricœur's ideas to derive "first principles" for theorizing the design of strategic narratives.

First, scholars have argued that "Ricœur's great discovery about narrative [is] its configurative dimension" (Vanhoozer, 1991: 39). This refers to his argument that a narrative is a configurational unity that synthesizes heterogenous elements, such that "goals, causes and chance . . . [are] brought together within the temporal unity of a whole. . ." (Ricœur, 1983: 11). Central to this argument is that a narrative blends select facts, fiction, and time into configurations that have meaning as coherent wholes. A narrative's configuration is what gives the story cohesion, significance, and persuasive power (Ricœur, 1980). We emphasize the configurational dimension of narratives because it accounts for how narratives can combine heterogenous elements into coherent meaningful wholes. Both heterogeneity and coherence are critical for articulating a firm's strategic position and direction.

Second, narratives can be constructed to combine actual and fictive events, using productive and creative imagination as inputs into the figuration of elements discussed above. Ricœur's (1991) argument is that the past and the future, the real and the imaginary, the actual and the possible, have a common referent in the human experience of time. This argument is seen as "a considerable advancement over previous discussions of the relations between history and literature based on the supposed opposition of 'factual' to 'fictional' discourse" (White, 1991: 146). This perspective on narratives is important for understanding future-oriented strategies, as it explains how actors draw on their experience to imagine and narrate alternative versions of reality or possible worlds.

Third, whereas narratives are often understood through the lens of the plot—the structured sequence of events they narrate—Ricœur conceptualized narratives as creating multiple and varying structures of time. One temporal shift that narratives afford the narrator is stepping outside "within-time-ness" and reconsidering one's temporal experience (Ricœur, 1980: 178). This is a cognitive shift from "'reckoning with' time to 'recollecting' it" (Ricœur, 1980: 178). Recollecting introduces "historicality"—a second temporal shift through which actors establish their potential to enact imagined future projects. As Ricœur (1980: 181) explains, "any project implies memory and . . . no authentic anticipation of what we may 'have to be' is possible without borrowing from the resources of what we already 'have been.'" A third temporal shift creates deep temporality, which unifies the past, present, and future in a narrative, through what Ricœur (1980: 189) refers to as "the unity of the three 'extases' of time (having-been, coming-forth, and making-present)." Deep temporality enables the integration of the future with the past and present in the configuration of narratives. These mechanisms for reorganizing time, which are at the center of Ricœur's narrative theory, are captured in our opening quote, which highlights the agency of the narrator to "configure time" by narratively reorganizing the objective "pre-figured time" and gaining agentic freedom, or at least latitude, to act *on* the world, from the perspective of narratively "refigured" time (Ricœur, 1983: 54).

Designing futurescapes as persuasive strategic narratives

The configurational coherence, imaginative representation of facts and possibilities, and temporal reorganization of past, present, and future underlie the critical importance of narratives for future-oriented strategizing. We theorize how these characteristics allow firms to describe and connect heterogenous actors, events, relationships, and activities, and to do so across time and space (Cattani et al., 2018). Further, to the degree that narratives incorporate context, interactions with others, and the self, they enable firms to construct what we term "futurescapes"—self-referential preferred future worlds intertwined with the narrator's history or "autobiographical knowledge" (Bruner, 1990).

Our theoretical framework is depicted in Figure 1. In the center of the figure, we represent figuration as a central mechanism that synthesizes heterogenous elements into a coherent narrative whole. To the left, we represent the two forms of imaginative thought that provide the inputs that
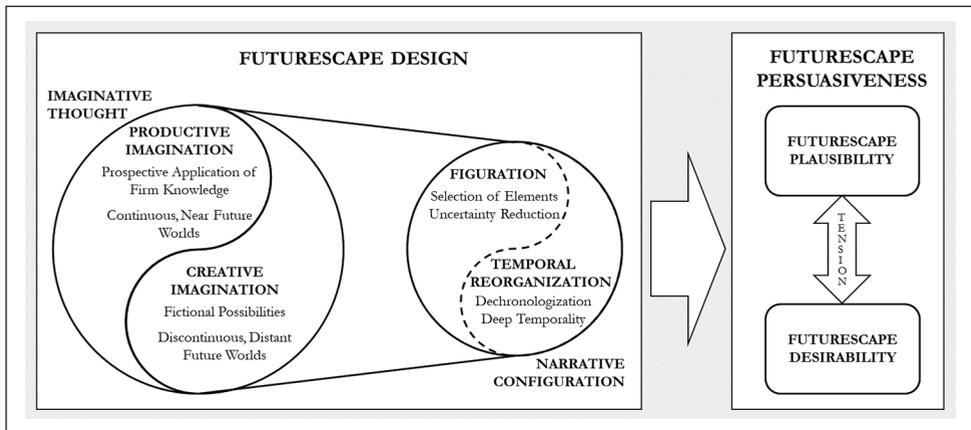
Figure 1. A framework for the design of firm futurescapes for prospective persuasion.

figuration organizes. Specifically, we theorize two forms of imaginative thought—one based on productive imagination that generates autobiographical knowledge and constitutes the agent firm as creating a continuous near future, and the other based on creative imagination that generates fictional possible worlds in idealized discontinuous "distant" futures. We theorize these imaginative inputs as having different persuasive influences on audiences regarding the plausibility and desirability of a firm's futurescape. Further, we propose that temporal reorganization provides the mechanism that situates different figurations in different temporal structures, thereby altering the perceived plausibility and desirability of these futurescapes. Temporal reorganization is represented as a complementary mechanism to figuration in the center block of Figure 1.

Next, we develop our theoretical arguments detailing the components of our proposed framework for the design of futurescapes for prospective persuasion. Throughout the exposition, we illustrate our arguments with examples from strategic narratives of firms in the automotive industry. The major disruption of the industry—driven by the convergence of four trends, connectivity, autonomous driving technologies, ride sharing, and electrification—has prompted extensive discussion about the "future of mobility" (Gao et al., 2016; Tschiesner et al., 2019). In this context, over the past few years, auto manufacturers have actively created narratives about their preferred futures and how their firms fit within these futures, often communicated in speeches by their senior leaders at events focused on future thinking. Our illustrative examples are drawn from speeches by senior auto executives made at one such event, the Consumer Technology Association's annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. We use this setting, which has attracted keynote speeches by most of the major auto manufacturers, as it presents a context characterized by "heightened, future-oriented public debate about possible futures" (Mische, 2014: 447).

Figuration: organizing a narrated world

Figuration structures a narrative and organizes its elements into a coherent whole (Ricœur, 1980). It reflects the intentions of the narrator about what the narrative should include and how what is included should be represented. Vanhoozer (1991: 42) describes figuration as "creative synthesis" that "makes a temporal whole out of an otherwise chaotic manifold of experience." Our arguments about figuration in futurescapes draw a parallel to the arguments made about the rhetorical and narrative construction of history (Suddaby et al., 2010; Tilly, 1981; White, 1984, 1991). This line

of historical analysis has emphasized the intent of the narrator in representing the past. As Tilly (1981: 13–14) explains, "what matters, among innumerable things that happened in the past, is a function of the questions and assumptions the historian brings to the analysis." The assumptions and intentions of the historian matter because much of the past is either unknown or ambiguous. History therefore involves interpretation *and* narrativization (White, 1991).

In a similar vein, we argue that, since the future is non-existent, and there are no facts about the future, a deluge of facts about the present and the past could be deemed relevant. Thus, the assumptions and intentions of strategists underlie the selection of facts to be represented in narratives. Through figuration, strategists construct a version of the world, and this world-making function is central to the attribution of meaning and the recognition of relevance in prospective thought (Szpunar et al., 2014). To paraphrase Tilly's (1981) argument, what matters among the innumerable things that could be imagined about the future depends on the assumptions and intentions of strategists. In strategic narratives about the future, we argue, figuration enables strategists to integrate a wide range of topics required to represent firm strategy, provide a coherent logic for the strategy, *and* address the multiple uncertainties associated with the future, including technological, market, ecosystem, and institutional uncertainties (Moeen et al., 2020).

Heterogeneity and coherence. To the degree that figuration involves selection and organization of heterogenous elements, it follows similar processes to those stipulated by Goodman (1978: 6) about how actors create versions of the world, that is, engage in "worldmaking." He identified cognitive and rhetorical operations, such as making groupings and distinctions, bringing together elements across time, using metaphors, repetition, and selective emphasis and weighting, and building in specific orderings of events and other inputs. We argue that the same operations can be employed in the design of futurescapes to construct versions of possible worlds. Given the strategic objectives of the construction of futurescapes, and consistent with the self-serving bias often inherent in the process (Goodman, 1978), such world-making prioritizes the role of the firm in the version of the world it advances.

To accomplish world-making objectives, firms' futurescapes need to incorporate a large number of diverse elements, including current and imagined products and their future utilities, enumeration of technological and business developments that support these products or services, as well as the future environments, including industry structures, competitor sets, alliance portfolios, and stakeholder relationships, within which these products and relationships will take hold. Figuration guides the selection and organization of these elements, as well as the use of literary techniques to represent them. The following example from a 2015 speech at CES by Dr Zetsche, Chairman of the Board at Daimler, the corporate parent of Mercedes, illustrates this point:

> Two years ago, we put an autonomous-driving X Class on the 60-mile route. After an intensive training period, the autonomous X Class found its way while reacting appropriately to everything in traffic, the cars, trucks, bicycles, pedestrians and so on. And it did this without any glitches, breakdowns, or accidents. Without the safety driver's intervention. And without getting a ticket or even the finger. (Zetsche, 2015)

The narrative incorporates technology, society, interactions, and specifics of the in situ application of technology in a vivid configuration built around a chosen approach to autonomous driving. The humorous "finger" trope contrasts the capable and "responsible" behavior of autonomous vehicles to the emotional behavior of humans and supports the assertion about Mercedes's prospective intentions, stated thus,

> Our goal is to offer an autonomous driving technology which in terms of attentiveness, discipline and foresight is really superhuman. That's beneficial to societies anywhere in the world.

We propose that by bringing coherence to the diverse elements of relevance to understanding a firm's future strategy, and transforming what otherwise would be a reporting of facts and events into a meaningful representation, figuration serves to attract interest and curiosity, prompt reflection, and potentially inspire enthusiasm about the firm-specific version of the future a futurescape constructs.

Addressing multiple uncertainties. Figuration enables firms to address uncertainties about the future, by selectively highlighting specific uncertainties and proposing solutions to them through their futurescapes. Rindova and Courtney (2020) argue that assumptions and intentions are particularly important for developing strategy under conditions of uncertainty, as uncertainty limits the applicability of prior knowledge. Figuration incorporates assumptions and intentions in the design of futurescapes, thereby emphasizing different uncertainties and revealing the logic by which a firm intends to proceed toward an unknown and uncertain future. The identification and/or omission of competitors, the foregrounding and interpretation of technological and societal trends, as well as references to the role of government are all futurescape design choices that address distinct types of uncertainties. Putting these building blocks together reveals a distinctive future landscape or world, which conveys, more or less explicitly, different meanings and implications of a firm's future-oriented strategy. In doing so, figuration—often subtly—brings into focus critical uncertainties and offers different perspectives on their potential resolution. For example, in his 2018 CES speech, Toyota's CEO Akio Toyoda draws attention to the changing nature of the technology employed in providing mobility solutions, in the following statement:

> Technology is changing quickly in our industry and the race is on. Our competitors no longer just make cars. Companies like Google, Apple, and even Facebook are what I think about at night because after all, we didn't start out by making cars either. (Toyoda, 2018)

Mercedes's Dr Zetsche draws attention to city congestion as an environmental factor that creates uncertainty about future demand. He states,

> It's getting crowded in the cities and on the roads. Some might conclude that this makes cars less attractive. Or that the car has already seen its best days. (Zetsche, 2015)

He uses this acknowledgment to set up a contrast with Mercedes's distinctive position and solution:

> For me, the opposite holds true. I believe the best times are still ahead of the car. (Zetsche, 2015)

The narrative depicts the car of the future as offering a new set of utilities of "private space and quality time." These utilities are then hyperbolized as "the single most important luxury goods of the 21st-century," signaling Mercedes's intention to shape the demand for car ownership—thereby countering disruptive ride-sharing trends—by changing the design and utility of cars.

Addressing the same current trend and issue of congestion, in a speech to CES in 2018, Ford's CEO James Hackett emphasizes different problems and potential solutions:

> Time we used to spend with each other is now time wasted in congestion and traffic. . . . The time has come to fundamentally update our approach and shift our central mission to harnessing technology as a tool to serve human needs, to improve lives and to help restore our genuine sense of community. (Hackett et al., 2018)

With this positioning, Ford's narrative (Hackett et al., 2018) then proposes an institutional solution of collectively reimagining "the street" and the transportation system:

> Today, we share just a glimpse of the model living street . . . This depiction of the City of Tomorrow demonstrates the benefits of introducing smart vehicles for a smart world into our civic life. Millions more can move into cities and they can be less congested.

These examples illustrate our proposition that figurations of uncertainties in a futurescape convey both selective attention to specific uncertainties and evocative representations of distinctive firm-specific solutions, including their implications for the firm and/or collective actions to resolve the uncertainties.

Imaginative thought: generating a version of the world

Whereas figuration synthesizes and organizes elements in a futurescape, imagination provides the inputs into figurating a projected future world. World-making is accomplished through the exercise of both productive and creative imagination as discussed in prior analyses of Ricœur's narrative theory (e.g. see Carr et al., 1991; Vanhoozer, 1991). The concepts of productive and creative imagination in Ricœur's work are based on Kant's arguments about productive imagination as a capacity that mediates "between intuitions and concepts" (Matherne, 2016: 61) and creative imagination as the "free play" of thought that "no longer has to synthesize a manifold in light of a particular concept, but is rather free to explore or play with putting the manifold together in a multitude of different ways" (Matherne, 2016: 62). In this section, we take these orienting definitions as a point of departure to theorize how firms employ productive and creative imagination to articulate different types of future projections and accomplish different persuasive goals.

Using productive imagination. Productive imagination synthesizes perceptions and observations through the use of concepts. Psychological research associates these processes with the accumulation and reorganization of knowledge (Fiske and Taylor, 2013). We argue that a firm's strategic narratives involve expressions of productive imagination when they describe the firm's knowledge and its prospective application in the development of new technologies and products in the future. Technologies embody knowledge in material form and manifest its productive functionality (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001; Moeen et al., 2020). For example, a futurescape constructed by Mercedes (Zetsche, 2015) discusses the development of autonomous driving technologies at the firm as follows:

> In retrospect, this early 1990's project was far ahead of its time. All of the research partners agreed that it was too ambitious, too complex, too expensive . . . But as the inventor of the automobile, Mercedes has been confident ever since that the next big revolution of mobility would be the self-driving car. So, we kept developing. And we made big progress on the topic.

This example illustrates a general theoretical idea that the expression of productive imagination has a temporal dimension, which attests to the accumulation of knowledge. In this example, Mercedes employs two different "long-history" time frames—first, of the origin of the automobile and second, the early (even premature, according to this narrative account) investment in autonomous driving. The use of these temporal frames accords with Ricœur's (1980) argument that past accomplishments are recounted to inspire beliefs about future potential. In this case, and more generally, the historical frames underscore the quality, depth, and/or distinctiveness of the firm's

knowledge, which prospective imagination connects to the ability to create the imagined future. The imaginative new form factor for the car described earlier is positioned as a logical outcome of this deep knowledge and experience in car making and autonomous driving technology.

In the design of future-oriented strategic narratives, we argue that the prospective application of firm knowledge—as exemplified in the imaginative artifact—is used to establish the broader strategic potential of the firm to create value in an uncertain future. This potential is conveyed in the capacity to imagine and articulate new forms of value that can shape and define that future. Such information further enables firms to claim having strategic foresight, and to justify making prospective resource commitments based on it. However, it is important to recognize that this is not foresight in an objective sense, as implied by the classical definition of the term as "the ability to predict or the action of predicting what will happen or be needed in the future" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). Rather, this narrative use of productive imagination represents imagined future trajectories of development as *possible*, and the firm as an agent capable of creating the future.

Thus, productive imagination expresses in narratives the prospective application of current firm knowledge through references to imagined, intended, or planned activities to create and capture value. It contributes two important elements in futurescapes. First, it incorporates elements of history to describe the accumulation of relevant knowledge. As a result, it points to specific types of knowledge—broadly understood to include technologies, products, and business models—that the firm sees as having value-creating potential in the future. It builds what can be construed as "autobiographical knowledge" or beliefs, expectations, and projections that establish an actor's agentic capacity (Bruner, 1990). This is accomplished through what Ricœur (1980: 184) calls "historicality," a temporal structure of recollecting the past to establish an actor's potentiality for future actions. Second, concrete examples of prospective applications of firm knowledge communicate how and why this knowledge may retain or increase its value in a future world. Productive imagination therefore could be used to depict relatively continuous futures that retain a high degree of similarity with the present, and/or can be arrived at through conceivable, even if not fully predictable, paths forward. Both figuration moves enhance the plausibility of the future world articulated by a firm.

Using creative imagination. Differently from productive imagination, creative imagination is free to conceive of relationships between objects and concepts that are independent of the empirically and conceptually established relationships among them (Matherne, 2016). We therefore propose that creative imagination can be used in narratives to create idealized fictional future states of the world and raise questions not only about what is possible but also about what may be desirable and/or morally important. Our arguments build on Ricœur's (1983: 185) idea that "[f]iction has the power to 'remake' reality" and that the "world of the text . . . intervenes in the world of action in order to give it a new configuration." We therefore suggest that strategic narratives can reflect strategists' intentions to "remake reality" and transform existing market orders (Gavetti and Porac, 2018). Futurescapes, we argue, assist strategists in such shaping efforts by enabling them to express creative imagination in fictional elements, which *blend* the real and the imaginary (Iser, 1993).

Creative imagination therefore serves strategists in creating fictional possible worlds. Fictional worlds enable people to explore possibilities through "fictive" experiences that involve cognitive and communicative processes, such as mental simulation and narrative transportation (Green and Donahue, 2009; Szpunar et al., 2014). Mental stimulation refers to "imaginative mental construction" (Roese, 1997: 134), whereas narrative transportation is "a guided form of mental simulation" (Green and Donahue, 2009: 241). Scholars of narratives (Bruner, 1986; Herman, 2009; Ricœur, 1983) emphasize that the distinctive intentionality of fictional narratives is stimulation of fictive experiences that change what is perceived as possible and desirable. Consistent with these ideas, we argue that firms' strategic narratives can incorporate fictional elements to propose possible

alternative realities, and to represent them vividly. In doing so, they interrupt and disrupt current understandings and current practices, and instead offer "mental simulations" of their imagined replacements (Escalas, 2004). For example, Mercedes's futurescape constructs a fictional possible world of mobility as a private luxury experience anchored in the complete redesign of the car around the affordances of autonomous driving. Further, the emotional and moral value that audiences place on these alternative worlds could motivate current and future stakeholders to subscribe to a future that should be, not just one that could be. Ford's CEO Hackett makes such appeals when he states the following:

> Together, we can create cities where density and diversity give life—where packed streets and sidewalks prompt the unexpected encounter or the chance discovery and feed the innovation that is the lifeblood of cities. . . . To achieve that, we need more than just new technology. We need to align our goals as a society. We need a new way of thinking about 'freedom of movement'—so that we consider not just vehicles and streets, but the destinations, too. We need a new civic freedom, where the benefits of community can be extended to many more people across many more backgrounds. . . . (Hackett et al., 2018)

In this example, the imagined fictional world of the city of the future is also a moral appeal for "a new civic freedom, where the benefits of community can be extended to many" (Hackett et al., 2018). These appeals reflect the recognition that stakeholders are motivated to engage with firms that help them enact cherished values. Futurescapes that tap into values and ideals that resonate with stakeholders may be subjected to less scrutiny regarding functional performance and may engender greater engagement, social sharing, and community participation (Rindova and Martins, 2018b).

Fictional possible worlds therefore can play a role in how strategic positions and interests become invested in the preservation of the status-quo, which Gavetti and Porac (2018: 359) term "deepening of the market order," versus being invested in change and transformation of the status-quo, or "modification" or radical "transformation" of the market order (Gavetti and Porac, 2018: 362). Firms may express differences in perspectives on the future that range from changing competitive positions, to more wide-ranging changes in patterns of demand and supply, to changes in the accepted logics of action in an industry or society at large. For example, in the example above, Ford's Hackett proposes a complete overhaul of the surface transportation system to enact values of "freedom of mobility" and more equitable sharing of public space among different types of transportation and social needs.

Importantly, by freeing a narrative from the bounds of the verifiable, creative imagination enables strategists to create versions of the world that depict futures that rework the problems of the present and/or posit worlds that better enact cherished values. Ford's futurescape (Hackett et al., 2018) depicts a distant future, similar to those constructed in socio-technical imaginaries at the collective level (Augustine et al., 2019), which construct "as if" realities that describe distant futures, which are evaluated for their desirability. Creative imagination can be used to represent distant futures, which, given the nature of uncertainty and ambiguity involved, can vary in the elements they incorporate, including those that are not currently present or anticipated. The non-verifiability of the future affords strategists considerable latitude to construct future worlds that speak to the possible rather than the predictable or foreseeable. As a result, the use of creative imagination enables depictions of relatively discontinuous futures that are markedly different from the present, and are aspirational by nature of their possibility, even if clear paths to them are not yet apparent.

Futurescapes differ from collective socio-technical imaginaries, as they are intended to shape beliefs about the future in relation to a focal firm's distinctive resources, capabilities, and strategic intentions. These firm-specific attributes are reflected both in the selection and framing of uncertainties through figuration and in the use of productive imagination to propose plausible trajectories of

development. Further, although the fictional aspects in a firm's futurescapes are freed from the constraints of the verifiable, the figuration demands for narrative coherence anchor creative imagination to the expression of productive imagination and the autobiographical knowledge it conveys. Thus, productive and creative imagination are put to work hand in hand, and balance the desirability of the ideal and imagined, and the plausibility a firm's future trajectory of action. We elaborate on the resolution of this tension next.

Futurescape persuasiveness: plausibility and desirability

Firms use narratives for prospective persuasion, meaning that they design strategic representations of the future to persuade audiences, in a bid to shape the future in ways that are advantageous to themselves. Furthermore, they do so in the context of other firms—current competitors, new entrants, or customers and suppliers—potentially seeking to do the same. Advantage in this context is reflected in the extent to which these strategic narratives stimulate support and legitimation from key resource providers for the preferred version of the world constructed in firm futurescapes (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Garud et al., 2014; Suddaby et al., 2019) based on the future potential articulated within them (Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018). The persuasiveness of the version of the future a firm advances in its futurescape can help the firm shape its environment by influencing the future direction of its industry and/or its exchange network (Cattani et al., 2018). Given that the future is unknown and non-existent, the persuasive potential of a futurescape depends on how well the version of the future world resonates with strategic audiences.

In the previous section, we discussed the differential uses of productive and creative imagination. Productive imagination is used to create futurescapes that are continuous and projectable through the extension of current knowledge. Creative imagination is used to construct fictional worlds that alter what audiences imagine and view as possible. Creative imagination is used to construct discontinuous and transformative futurescapes. Futurescapes, therefore, differ in the extent to which they present continuous or discontinuous, cognitively near or distant futures.

The figurations of the elements derived from productive imagination in a futurescape are focused on continuity, address uncertainty, and emphasize the *plausibility* of the version of the world presented, particularly in relation to the firm's potentiality to enact the proposed version of the world. They are focused on continuous change that is congruous with the current market order and consistent with existing mental models, thereby making salient to audiences evaluation criteria that prioritize plausibility. Given their focus on the productive potential of the firm, these elements project near futures, conceptualized along the lines suggested by Augustine et al. (2019) as cognitively proximal, concerned with uncertainty, and evaluated from the perspective of the status-quo. This type of figuration is illustrated in a 2017 speech at CES by Eui-Sun Chung, Executive Vice Chairman, Hyundai Motor Company, and Michael O'Brien, Vice President of Product, Corporate and Digital Planning, Hyundai Motor America. Articulating a near future, the futurescape emphasizes that, by anticipating a "connected era" of mobility, Hyundai is "continuing to develop technologies that elevate the driving experience," such as "self-driving technologies that can be commercialized in mass production cars," and claims that it is "very confident" that its version of "freedom in mobility may become a reality much sooner than everyone expects" (Chung and O'Brien, 2017).

The figurations of elements derived from creative imagination in a futurescape are focused on articulating cognitively distant futures, which represent significant departures from the status-quo and are characterized by ambiguity (Augustine et al., 2019). As in the case of social imaginaries about the distant future, the figuration of elements derived from creative imagination appeals to audiences through their incorporation of aspirations, values, and ideals (Augustine et al., 2019). As such, these elements figure possibilities within the ambiguities of the distant

future, and emphasize the *desirability* of the version of the world presented. They are focused on transformation and discontinuities, and owe their persuasiveness to articulating versions of the future that represent what could be or what ought to be. As such, they make salient to audiences evaluation criteria that prioritize desirable values and ideals. The fictional narrative elements they involve enable firms to emphasize the desirability of their preferred version of the world, as in the example of Mercedes's futurescape (Zetsche, 2015) reframing car ownership as a luxurious private "third space." They may also emphasize the desirability of a transformed market order that could be created with the participation of others, through entirely new players, relationships, or systems, as exemplified in Ford's futurescape (Hackett et al., 2018).

The tension between plausibility and desirability. The persuasive effectiveness of a futurescape depends on how it conveys both plausibility and desirability. However, to the degree that figurations anchored in productive imagination speak to plausibility and those anchored in creative imagination speak to desirability, accomplishing both persuasive outcomes may be difficult. Research finds that individuals attend to the distance between a fictional world and reality, which suggests a tension between the factual and fictional in a narrative (Gerrig, 1993). For example, Weisberg and Goodstein (2009: 71) note that,

> [f]ictional worlds that are more similar to the real world, or closer in possibility space, should by definition contain more facts that are true of the real world. Fictional worlds that are more distant in possibility space should contain fewer facts.

The implications of these ideas are that greater use of productive imagination is likely to generate a degree of incongruity with a highly fictional, cognitively distant possible world. The more fictional the version of the future world, the more ambiguous it is, and the more difficult it is going to be for audiences to believe knowledge claims made through the use of productive imagination. Thus, as the extent of the fictional in a futurescape increases, claims based on productive imagination about how the firm's current knowledge will continue to create value in a future world are harder to make, and if made, audiences are likely to discount them. Conversely, the more a firm emphasizes a future based primarily on its productive imagination, the more constrained it is likely to be in employing creative imagination to enhance the desirability of its futurescape.

Thus, while both plausibility and desirability are important to the persuasive effects of a strategic narrative about the future, the use of productive imagination constrains the imaginative capacity of the possible world based on creative imagination, whereas the use of creative imagination constrains the articulation of credible autobiographical knowledge about the firm based on productive imagination. In the next section, we theorize how the multiplicity of narrative temporalities theorized by Ricœur (1980) provides narrative means for addressing this tension.

Temporal reorganization: reconciling the tension between plausibility and desirability

A key contribution of Ricœur's (1980, 1983, 1984) narrative theory is the multiple forms of temporality he articulated. We see this multiplicity of narrative temporalities as important narrative means for addressing the tension between plausibility and desirability. A full treatment of Ricœur's conception of temporality is outside the scope of this article, but for the purposes of our discussion, we highlight his arguments that narratives enable actors to agentically construct multiple and flexible relationships between the past, present, and future.

We refer to the agentic construction of a particular temporal structure in a futurescape as *temporal reorganization*. We argue that temporal reorganization requires stepping conceptually out of "objective time" (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015) and defining one's own perspective on time. Our view of temporal reorganization as constructing temporal structures for persuasive purposes departs from the view of temporal structures in organizational research as emerging from repetitive, recurring interactions (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002; Turner and Rindova, 2018) or settled cultural frameworks (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015). Instead, we theorize temporal structures as discursive objects of reframing and collective negotiation (Phillips et al., 2004).

We propose that the reorganization of time in narratives can be used to influence the construal of continuity and discontinuity, and therefore the cognitive distance of the future world represented in a futurescape. We further argue that reorganizing of actual time into different temporal structures expands a firm's agentic capacity by narratively shaping how audiences perceive the relationships between the past, present, and future. Such shifts in audiences' temporal sensemaking (Ravasi et al., 2019) are likely to affect their understanding and evaluation of firms' future-oriented versions of the world and their strategies. Temporal reorganization thus affords firms a mechanism for shifting beliefs about the feasibility and value of future actions, which has significant implications for what stakeholders may be willing to accept, support, and contribute to.

In our view, different temporal structures can alter the perceived desirability and plausibility of different combinations of productive and creative imaginative thought. We discussed the use of historicality earlier when we discussed the use of history to construct autobiographical knowledge through productive imagination. Here we theorize the use of two other temporal structures that build on Ricœur's (1984) ideas: *dechronologization*, which redefines the relationships among past, present, and future by abolishing the linearity of objective time, and *deep temporality*, which emphasizes the inherent continuity and unity of past, present, and future. We argue that dechronologization can enhance the desirability of continuous, near futures, whereas deep temporality can enhance the plausibility of discontinuous, distant futures, which are represented in firms' futurescapes.

Dechronologization. Dechronologization enables actors to step outside the linear logic of chronology and objective time, and instead, to emphasize different temporal horizons and relationships between the past, present, and future. Through dechronologization, firms can in essence change the relationships between the past, present, and future (e.g. compressing time through statements such as "the future is now" or reordering time through statements like "we have been operating in the future for some time now"). For example, Hyundai's futurescape (Chung and O'Brien, 2017) positions the firm as a technology leader with foresight about key trends enabling it to make investments accordingly and positions itself to define the near future. To justify this claim, the firm's futurescape uses time compression, by (a) highlighting its short history ("Founded in 1967, Hyundai Motor Company has accomplished a lot, considering it is a relatively young company within the automotive industry") and (b) "deleting" the separation between the future and the present by pointing to current investments that have brought the future within reach. As Hyundai states, "Anticipating this connected era [Hyundai] is directing investment and resources to develop the hyper connected intelligent car" (Chung and O'Brien, 2017).

Hyundai's example illustrates how reorganizing time in this way is "at once 'revelatory' and 'transformative'" (Taylor, 1991: 180). Hyundai's futurescape is revelatory in the sense that it explicates how Hyundai is addressing the uncertainty of the future by focusing on technological uncertainty, and extending its knowledge along a particular trajectory of development. The future is presented in familiar technical terms, which allows Hyundai to claim an advanced position along the multiple current technological trajectories that are expected to converge in a near future. The compressed time temporal structure is transformative in that it increases the desirability of this

version of the future world it is promoting, as it makes it appear less a part of an uncertain future, and more a part of an improved "long present" (Bansal et al., 2019). The focus on the present engages aspects of agency based in pragmatic-evaluative cognitive processes (Rindova and Martins, 2018a). Hyundai's futurescape is positioned as continuous, and with a strong emphasis on accomplishment and feasibility. The key accomplished artifact—the Hyundai autonomous Ioniq concept car—"looks and performs like the production [Ioniq] car," and therefore simply "a great looking sedan" that is "a normal car, not a science project" (Chung and O'Brien, 2017). The familiarity and almost reality of this future are the basis of its desirability defined in terms of extending and deepening the status-quo (Gavetti and Porac, 2018).

Deep temporality. Another type of temporal structure that can be used to reorganize time is deep temporality, which, we propose, can be employed to enhance the perceived plausibility of discontinuous, distant futures. Firms can construct deep temporality structures by finding and highlighting continuity within activities and events in the past, present, and future, that, although may be apparently different, are similar or related in terms of their deep structures (see Sewell, 1992, for a discussion of deep structures). For example, in its futurescape, Mercedes evokes unity and continuity between the past and the present when it connects its early investments in autonomous driving technologies to its pioneering status in the industry as "the inventor of the automobile" (Zetsche, 2015). Further, it creates continuity between its present and future by redefining the notion of luxury in a future defined by population growth and "crowdedness," as cars that serve as "exclusive cocoons on wheels" that provide "private space and quality time," the value of which is further hyperbolized as "the single most important luxury goods of the 21st-century."

Mercedes's F015 "Luxury in Motion" concept car demonstrates the new utilities that will be generated by completely reimagining and redesigning the car—by borrowing from the form factor and utility of the horse-driven carriage: A place where "we'll actively want to, and enjoy, hanging out," wherein "passengers sit face to face. People have time for conversations, to read newspaper or to catch up on lost sleep" (Zetsche, 2015). In harkening back to horse-drawn carriages, the firm's futurescape notes that "back in the day, the smart horse was able to smell the barn and take its owner home safely and autonomously" and projects that the imagined Mercedes car of the future will do the same. Thus, in a surprising narrative twist, this artifact from the future is related to horse-driven carriages and the 1893 Benz motor wagon. The unity of time is explicitly underscored in hyperbolic statements, such as the following: "I admit, we first had this idea back in 1893 with the Benz motor wagon. So we are now going back to the future" (Zetsche, 2015).

As this example illustrates, firms can use temporal reorganization directed toward deep temporality in their narratives by identifying multiple temporal overlaps emphasizing the unity of the past, present, and future in the versions of the world they represent in their futurescapes. Based on the nature of the reorganization of time it enables, we propose that deep temporality can be employed to enhance the perceived plausibility of more discontinuous or distant versions of future worlds. The continuity enabled by deep temporality facilitates the incorporation of new values and ideals emphasized in representations of distant futures with the firm's past and present status and accomplishments, thereby implying the firm's agency in creating the envisioned desirable future.

Discussion and research implications

Despite the centrality of future thinking to strategy making, strategy and organizational research has developed few systematic theoretical frameworks that address the processes and mechanisms through which firms engage with and shape the future. Much of the work on the topic has focused on the unpredictability of the future and the cognitive and organizational processes through which

firms anticipate and prepare for the future (Schwartz, 2012; Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004). Less attention has been given to how organizations shape the future by creating what Beckert (2016: 61) characterized as largely "fictional expectations." Recent research on socio-technical imaginaries has brought into focus the use of discursive processes through which social collectives construct imaginary, "as if" realities that address questions of not only what *could* happen in the future but also what *should* happen. Such imaginaries however are understood as encapsulating "knowledge in the form of ideals based on fiction and fantasy rather than practical experience or analytic knowledge," and as operating at the collective level, enabling "many people to coalesce around a shared distant future, even in the absence of action towards it" (Augustine et al., 2019: 1954). Missing from the literature are theoretical frameworks that address how firms construct imaginative visions of the future as a part of competitive maneuvering toward superior positions in disrupted and changing market orders. In particular, no research that we are aware of has considered how they navigate the tension between the pragmatic knowledge required to navigate various uncertainties about the future (Moeen et al., 2020), and the ideals, fiction, and fantasy that are the hallmark of the desirable futures that social imaginaries project.

To address this gap, in this article, we argued that firms seek to shape the future by designing strategic narratives that combine productive and creative imagination in constructing plausible and desirable future worlds that we term "futurescapes." We drew on Ricœur's (1980, 1983, 1984, 1991) narrative theory to theorize how firms design persuasive representations of plausible and desirable future worlds that favor the focal firm. We theorize three mechanisms that underlie such persuasive strategic narratives: (a) selective figuration of heterogenous elements to represent multiple aspects of firms' strategies in a coherent fashion; (b) use of productive and creative imaginative thought to endow futurescapes with plausibility *and* desirability; and (c) use of temporal reorganization to align productive and creative imaginative inputs and reduce the tension between plausibility and desirability. We theorize the role of productive imaginative thought—which articulates prospective applications of firms' current knowledge—as endowing futurescapes with plausibility and representing continuous, near futures. We theorize creative imaginative thought as being used to construct fictional possible worlds, endowing futurescapes with desirability and representing discontinuous, cognitively distant futures. Further, we recognize the tension between the plausibility of near futures projected through use of the factual and the desirability of distant futures projected through the use of the fictional. In a departure from prior research that has emphasized that near and distant futures involve fundamentally different processes (Augustine et al., 2019; Nadkarni and Chen, 2014), we theorize how temporal reorganization may alter the cognitive distance associated with the two, blurring the sharp contrast between the near and the distant.

The theoretical framework we propose contributes to three main areas of research: First, we extend research on the use of narratives in future-oriented strategy making (Ravasi et al., 2020) by theorizing firms' efforts to narratively shape the future through the construction of future worlds. Second, the notion of narrative shaping through the design of futurescapes we propose contributes to research on strategy under uncertainty. Third, we contribute to research on temporality in strategy making by drawing on Ricœur's multiple temporalities to theorize how firms can use different temporal structures to construct different perspectives on the future, as relevant to their firm-specific futurescapes. Below we discuss the implications of our ideas for future research in each of these areas.

Narratives in future-oriented strategy making

By virtue of its ontological non-existence, the future is primarily a cognitive, and secondarily a communicative and discursive construction. One important line of distinction in research on future-oriented thinking therefore is whether researchers focus on prospective cognition, which refers to

how people think about the future (Szpunar et al., 2014), or on prospective persuasion, which refers to discursive processes for representing and communicating about the future (Augustine et al., 2019; Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018). Organizational research on prospective cognition has developed under the broad umbrella of prospective sensemaking, defined as the cognitive process that "underlies all activities associated with planning and initiating change in organizations" (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012: 1233; also see Weick et al., 2005). The discursive view has built primarily on sociological research on projective agency (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Mische, 2014), which has emphasized the importance of "symbolic recomposition" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 988) as a process for creating new frames and meanings. In addition, both the cognitive and the discursive views have contributed to the broader work on temporality and temporal work, with a significant body of work focusing on how individuals and organizations draw on their history as a knowledge base and a rhetorical resource to develop and legitimate new strategies (Ravasi et al., 2019; Suddaby et al., 2010, 2019).

Advancing research on future thinking in strategy making requires that we consider both the differences between cognitive and discursive prospective processes, and the connections among them. Key differences between the two sets of processes have been associated with different levels of analysis—individual and organizational in the former (Weick et al., 2005) and collective and societal level in the latter (Augustine et al., 2019; Mische, 2014). These differences reflect the different theoretical bases that these bodies of work have drawn on. To understand the role of future-oriented thinking in strategy making, however, future research would need to examine the processes through which the two become intertwined or decoupled, as well as their independent and joint effects on firms' future-oriented strategies. Linking prospective cognition to prospective persuasion is particularly important in strategy research, as narratives disseminate cognition across space and time (Cattani et al., 2018), thereby conveying strategists' visions to multiple and diverse audiences outside organizational boundaries. Narratives can influence these audiences' beliefs about strategists' imagined futures, mobilize them in favor of some futures and against others, and consequently lay the foundation for future competitive and cooperative interactions.

Our framework contributes primarily to the discursive approaches to future thinking in strategy making. First, we extend this line of research by specifying the narrative principles through which strategic narratives about the future are designed to represent the complexity of firm strategies, and establish the prospective value of firm knowledge in the enactment of possible future worlds. We theorize how narrative configuration could be put in service of communicating the complexity of a firm's future-oriented strategic choices by creatively synthesizing heterogenous elements into a coherent whole. Further, by theorizing the distinctive roles of productive and imaginative thought, we explain how firms can simultaneously provide factual content and veer into imaginative terrains that push the boundaries of current thinking in markets.

Second, a fundamental insight of our theoretical framework is that firms can use strategic narratives about the future to blend the real—what they are currently doing and investing in—and the imaginary—what they would like audiences to imagine and believe to be possible. In challenging the sharp contrast between the two that has been established in prior work, our framework poses a set of new research questions about how the factual and the fictive can be effectively combined in strategic contexts. Future research on the topic will benefit from building on the literary theory that has argued that blending the real and the imaginary is the distinctive role of fiction (Iser, 1993). Iser (1993), for example, notes that "the act of fictionalizing . . . leads the real to the imaginary, and the imaginary to the real, and thus, conditions the extent to which a given world is to be transcoded, [and] a non-given world is to be conceived . . ." This argument is consistent with our core thesis that narratives about the future may play an important role in enabling shifts in the beliefs and mental models of market actors. Such shifts in audiences' temporal sensemaking are likely to affect

their understanding and evaluation of firms' future-oriented versions of the world and strategies. Another implication of these ideas for future research is that whereas much of the research on communications emphasizes their intensity and veracity as the basis of persuasive influence, we draw attention to the importance of fictional engagement and transportation (Green and Donahue, 2009), which can inspire, promote reflection, lead stakeholders to take sides, and have other effects that are critical to mobilizing action and promoting market-level change (Rindova et al., 2004; Weber et al., 2008). More generally, we see the development of substantive understandings of the use of the fictive in firms' communications as critical to understanding both prospective persuasion *and* prospective sensemaking, and the development of research on the intersection of cognitive and discursive approaches to future thinking as a critical new direction for research in the area.

Third, we also identify temporal reorganization as an important mechanism for shifting beliefs about the feasibility and value of future actions. By reconfiguring the relationships between past, present, and future through different discursive temporal structures, firms may change the self-evident, and therefore taken-for-granted cognitive distance of imagined future events or outcomes. Such shifts have significant implications for what stakeholders may be willing to accept, support, and contribute to. This argument contrasts with the current view of stakeholder evaluations as based on relatively fixed market categories and well-established cultural accounts (Suchman, 1995; Zuckerman, 1999). While categories structure current market orders, imaginative narratives promoting alternative versions of reality can alter expectations, as expectations about the future are fluid, and even fictional (Beckert, 2016). To better understand the relationship between imaginative narratives and audience expectations and evaluations, research on the topic will benefit from new theoretical perspectives, such as communication as constitutive (Cornelissen et al., 2015; Ravasi et al., 2018) and values and emotions as integral to audience evaluations (Pollock et al., 2019).

Narrative shaping and strategy under uncertainty

Central to the view of narratives as designed artifacts for prospective persuasion is that they may play a role in the strategies through which firms can shape the environments in which they compete. Our concept of narrative shaping extends research on strategy making under uncertainty, suggesting that firms may resolve uncertainty not only through the generation of rational declarative knowledge but also through discursive narrative means that express ideals, values, hopes, and aspirations. Thus, in a departure from past research on strategy making under uncertainty, which has emphasized how firms seek to increase their information and knowledge (Moeen et al., 2020), we theorize how firms seek to generate new meanings and, through them, redefine current beliefs and interpretations through often fictive representations of possible and desirable futures.

Much of current thinking about future-oriented strategy making emphasizes the importance of scenarios and scenario planning as means to developing structured foresight (Schwartz, 2012; Slawinski and Bansal, 2015), enabling leaders to imagine multiple alternative futures, thereby expanding the range of options they would consider. Scenarios, however, are built around careful tracking of trends and canvasing of multiple interacting uncertainties. Narratives increase their vividness, but the narratives are employed to illustrate alternative futures deduced through information gathering and trend analysis.

Our framework suggests a view of narratives as means to not only imagine alternative futures but also shape the direction of future developments. Specifically, we argue that narrative shaping provides a mechanism for changing what audiences can imagine, and might be willing to accept and support. To the degree that audience beliefs and expectations are considered the basis on which opportunity creation rests (Alvarez and Barney, 2010; Dalpiaz et al., 2016), the ability to narratively shape and stretch such beliefs is an important mechanism in market creation and

transformation. Our ideas provide a springboard for future research on the use of narratives to not only legitimate new strategies and technologies but also lay down a socio-cognitive foundation for a market's anticipation and acceptance of strategic and technological innovations. Our arguments suggest that rather than using narratives to legitimate change by showing how intended changes fit with established cultural accounts (Garud et al., 2014), narratives could serve to disrupt, replace, and rewrite such accounts. This new direction for research on narratives can help strategy researchers understand when and how communications—which are often viewed as "cheap talk"—can lead the market by creating opportunity spaces based on desires, hopes, and aspirations, that firms' subsequent product launches come to fulfill.

One provocative question for future research on the role of future-oriented narratives in markets is to better understand whether inspiring audiences at scale is more important and consequential for the enactment of future strategies than the development of clear declarative knowledge that resolves the numerous uncertainties the future presents (Moeen et al., 2020; Rindova and Courtney, 2020). Elon Musk's bold strategies for space exploration and sustainable transportation can be seen as experiments of relevance to addressing this question. For example, SpaceX was conceived as an imagined alternative for the future, represented in a vivid narrative, which Elon Musk shared at SXSW in 2013. As Fast Company (Carr, 2013) reported,

> In fact, before starting the company, Musk's initial idea was to do a philanthropic mission to the red planet by sending "a small greenhouse to the surface of Mars" with dehydrated gel seeds that would hydrate on landing. "You'd have this cool greenhouse on a red background–that'd be the money shot," Musk joked.

Although less imaginative as a conception, Tesla was also designed and launched with an inspiring vision of possibility, which was communicated to stakeholder audiences years before the concrete technological, product development and production knowledge were developed. In both cases, inspiring various stakeholder audiences has played an important role in securing access to resources for Musk's ventures, including regulatory support.

Future research should consider not only how firms' futurescapes combine productive and creative imagination to address both but also how they may balance the two over time, across multiple communication acts with different audiences, and the extent to which this is done competitively or cooperatively. Future research should also endeavor to understand the different ways in which plausibility and desirability of futurescapes may affect their shaping impact. We expect that desirability of a futurescape will be important in establishing relative advantage in a competitive process for influencing beliefs and expectations about the degree and direction of change in a given industry; plausibility is likely to be important for enlisting immediate support from audiences, which may be necessary for the success of substantive resource commitments, such as lobbying efforts or installing capacity.

Understanding how narrative shaping co-occurs with other substantive shaping efforts, such as investment in industry standards, capacity commitments, or lobbying coalitions, is another important direction for future research. Considering the intertwining of narrative shaping and substantive resource commitments to shape the direction of an industry poses further research questions about how the design of strategic narratives relates to firms' strategies under uncertainty more broadly. By outlining the contours of a desirable future that is consistent with the firm's capabilities and priorities, and by highlighting partnerships and other stakeholders they enroll to create it, a firm introduces knowledge of alternatives, of similarities and differences, and points of convergence and divergence. Further, firms competing in the same industry may do so in different ways, pointing to different objectives, belief systems, envisioning capacities, and strategic intentions. Finally, our framework underscores the importance of understanding the symbolic and moral

aspects of shaping through framing and imaginative representations of plausible and desirable worlds. All these are important topics that await further investigation in the context of shaping uncertainty and ambiguity.

Temporal reorganization, multiple futures, and temporal work

Our framework also extends extant research on temporal work in strategy making (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2019), by articulating how firms figure different types of futures—continuous and discontinuous, near or distant. We identify futurescapes as strategic narratives through which firms advance explicit versions of future worlds and engage in different types of temporal work to ensure their persuasive effectiveness. These ideas direct future research toward systematically investigating the prospective persuasion firms engage in, the future construals they seek to advance, and the future-oriented framings of current resource commitments they offer.

An important argument in our framework is that the futurescapes that firms construct reorganize time in different ways to give strategic narratives coherence, and in particular, to balance the persuasive appeal of near and distant versions of the future worlds they represent. Researchers have noted that temporal framing, and the reconstruction and projection of the past and present into the future have important implications for firm actions in response to both near and distant future challenges. For example, Garud et al. (2014) show how new firms use projected near futures to attract investors, and Dalpiaz and Di Stefano (2018) bring into focus how such futures motivate transformative organizational change. In the context of more distant futures, such as responses to climate change, researchers have found that firms that have a long-term focus use scenario planning more effectively to come up with more innovative and effective strategies (Slawinski and Bansal, 2015). Our framework suggests two novel directions for future research on temporality.

We argue that rather than simply using episodic or chronological time, with a focus on a sequence of events, firms can reorganize time through dechronologization (illustrated well in Hyundai's futurescape) and deep temporality (illustrated well in Mercedes's futurescape) to create complex narratives that increase desirability while at the same time communicating plausibility. In our earlier examples, Mercedes highlighted deep-structure continuities among its past, present, and future, whereas Hyundai sought to eliminate the boundary between present and future, thus seeking to increase the positive valuation of its relatively generic technology, supply-chain, product development, and partnering strategies, within this compressed time structure.

These arguments suggest that rather than taking temporal horizons as given, firms' strategic narratives can selectively emphasize near or distant futures, or elements of both. In fact, rather than focusing on a time horizon itself, temporal reorganization involves the articulation of specific continuities and discontinuities that enable firms to construct different types of temporal structures. Firms can differ in their extent of use of these narrative means and in their focus within them (to emphasize desirability or plausibility), which suggests an interesting avenue for future research to examine the resource conditions, strategic directions, and contextual features that lead firms to use these mechanisms of temporal reorganization in specific ways.

Recognizing the diversity in the ways in which firms use temporality in strategic narratives about the future implies that additional research is needed to understand what role leader beliefs and values play in the process, and when and how they engage in strategic shaping through narratives versus more well-established approaches to shaping, such as credible signals and transformative investments (Gavetti et al., 2017). In this regard, it will be important for future research to explore systematically the differences between the use of strategic narratives as self-serving self-presentations and their use as vehicles to engage in collective action and dialogue (Mische, 2014).

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

ORCID iD

Luis L Martins   https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4136-181X

References

Alvarez SA and Barney JB (2010) Entrepreneurship and epistemology: The philosophical underpinnings of the study of entrepreneurial opportunities. *Academy of Management Annals* 4(1): 557–583.

Augustine G, Soderstrom S, Milner D, et al. (2019) Constructing a distant future: Imaginaries in geoengineering. *Academy of Management Journal* 62(6): 1930–1960.

Bansal P, Reinecke J, Suddaby R, et al. (2019) Special issue of Strategic Organization: Temporal work: The strategic organization of time. *Strategic Organization* 17(1): 145–149.

Beckert J (2016) *Imagined Futures: Fictional Expectations and Capitalist Dynamics*. London: Harvard University Press.

Brandenburger AM and Stuart HW Jr (1996) Value-based business strategy. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy* 5(1): 5–24.

Bruner J (1986) *Two Modes of Thought: Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner JS (1990) *Acts of Meaning*, vol. 3. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press.

Carr A (2013) SpaceX founder Elon Musk considered buying Russian ballistic missiles, nukes?! *Fast Company*, 9 March. Available at: https://www.fastcompany.com/3006829/spacex-founder-elon-musk-considered-buying-russianballistic-missiles-nukes (accessed 20 January 2021).

Carr D, Taylor C and Ricoeur P (1991) Discussion: Ricoeur on narrative. In: Wood D (ed.) *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. London: Routledge, pp. 160–187.

Castoriadis C (1987 [1975]) *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (trans. Kathleen Blamey). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cattani G, Sands D, Porac J, et al. (2018) Competitive sensemaking in value creation and capture. *Strategy Science* 3(4): 632–657.

Chung E-S and O'Brien M (2017) *Hyundai Mobility Vision CES 2017*. 4 January. Las Vegas, NV. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQI19rRaFrU (accessed 20 January 2021).

Cornelissen JP, Durand R, Fiss PC, et al. (2015) Putting communication front and center in institutional theory and analysis. *Academy of Management Review* 40(1): 10–27.

Costanzo LA and MacKay RB (2008) *Handbook of Research on Strategy and Foresight*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Dalpiaz E and Di Stefano G (2018) A universe of stories: Mobilizing narrative practices during transformative change. *Strategic Management Journal* 39(3): 664–696.

Dalpiaz E, Rindova V and Ravasi D (2016) Combining logics to transform organizational agency: Blending industry and art at Alessi. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 61(3): 347–392.

D'Argembeau A (2016) The role of personal goals in future-oriented mental time travel. In: Michaelian K, Klein SB and Szpunar KK (eds) *Seeing the Future: Theoretical Perspectives on Future-oriented Mental Time Travel*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 199–214.

Emirbayer M and Mische A (1998) What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology* 103(4): 962–1023.

Escalas JE (2004) Imagine yourself in the product: Mental simulation, narrative transportation, and persuasion. *Journal of Advertising* 33(2): 37–48.

Fenton C and Langley A (2011) Strategy as practice and the narrative turn. *Organization Studies* 32(9): 1171–1196.

Fiske ST and Taylor SE (2013) *Social Cognition: From Brains to Culture*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Gao P, Kaas HW, Mohr D, et al. (2016) *Disruptive trends that will transform the auto industry*. New York: McKinsey & Company.

Garud R, Schildt HA and Lant TK (2014) Entrepreneurial storytelling, future expectations, and the paradox of legitimacy. *Organization Science* 25(5): 1479–1492.

Gavetti G, Helfat CE and Marengo L (2017) Searching, shaping, and the quest for superior performance. *Strategy Science* 2(3): 194–209.

Gavetti G and Porac J (2018) On the origin of great strategies. *Strategy Science* 3(1): 352–365.

Gerrig RJ (1993) *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Goodman N (1978) *Ways of Worldmaking*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

Green MC and Donahue JK (2009) Simulated worlds: Transportation into narratives. In: Markman K, Klein WM and Suhr JA (eds) *Handbook of Imagination and Mental Simulation*. New York: Psychology Press, pp. 241–256.

Hackett J, Klevorn M, Butler D, et al. (2018) *CES 2018 Ford Keynote*. 9 January. Las Vegas, NV. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCwGVr_35hk (accessed 20 January 2021).

Hargadon AB and Douglas Y (2001) When innovations meet institutions-Edison and the design of the electric light. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46(3): 476–501.

Herman D (2009) Narrative ways of worldmaking. In: Heinen S and Sommer R (eds) *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, pp. 71–87.

Hernes T and Schultz M (2020) Translating the distant into the present: How actors address distant past and future events through situated activity. *Organization Theory* 1(1): 1–20.

Iser W (1993) *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kaplan S and Orlikowski WJ (2013) Temporal work in strategy making. *Organization Science* 24(4): 965–995.

Kearns MS (1999) *Rhetorical Narratology*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Klein G, Snowden D and Pin CL (2014) Anticipatory thinking. In: Mosier KL and Fischer UM (eds) *Informed by Knowledge*. New York: Taylor & Francis and Academic Press, pp. 235–246.

Matherne S (2016) Kant's theory of the imagination. In: Kind A (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*. London: Routledge, pp. 55–68.

Michaelian K, Klein SB and Szpunar KK (2016) The past, the present, and the future of future-oriented mental time travel. In: Michaelian K, Klein SB and Szpunar KK (eds) *Seeing the Future: Theoretical Perspectives on Future-Oriented Mental Time Travel*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–18.

Mische A (2014) Measuring futures in action-projective grammars in the Rio+20 debates. *Theory and Society* 43: 437–464.

Moeen M, Agarwal R and Shah SK (2020) Building industries by building knowledge: Uncertainty reduction over industry milestones. *Strategy Science* 5(3): 218–244.

Munir KA and Phillips N (2005) The birth of the 'Kodak Moment': Institutional entrepreneurship and the adoption of new technologies. *Organization Studies* 26(11): 1665–1687.

Nadkarni S and Chen J (2014) Bridging yesterday, today, and tomorrow: CEO temporal focus, environmental dynamism, and rate of new product introduction. *Academy of Management Journal* 57(6): 1810–1833.

Onega Jaén S and García Landa J (1996) *Narratology: An Introduction*. London: Longman.

Orlikowski WJ and Yates J (2002) It's about time: Temporal structuring in organizations. *Organization Science* 13(6): 684–700.

Oxford English Dictionary (2020) Available at: www.lexico.com/en/definition/foresight (accessed 8 August 2020).

Phelan J (2006) Narrative theory, 1966–2006: A narrative. In: Scholes R, Phelan J and Kellogg R (eds) *The Nature of Narrative*. New York:: Oxford University Press, pp. 283–336.

Phillips N, Lawrence TB and Hardy C (2004) Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review* 29(4): 635–652.

Pollock TG, Lashley K, Rindova VP, et al. (2019) Which of these things are not like the others? Comparing the rational, emotional, and moral aspects of reputation, status, celebrity, and stigma. *Academy of Management Annals* 13(2): 444–478.

Pontikes EG and Rindova VP (2020) Shaping markets through temporal, constructive, and interactive agency. *Strategy Science* 5(3): 149–159.

Ravasi D, Rindova VP, Etter M, et al. (2018) The formation of organizational reputation. *Academy of Management Annals* 12(2): 1–25.

Ravasi D, Rindova VP and Stigliani I (2019) The stuff of legend: History, Memory, and the temporality of organizational identity construction. *Academy of Management Journal* 62(5): 1523–1555.

Ravasi D, Tripsas M and Langley A (2020) Exploring the strategy-identity nexus. *Strategic Organization* 18(1): 5–19.

Reinecke J and Ansari S (2015) When times collide: Temporal brokerage at the intersection of markets and developments. *Academy of Management Journal* 58(2): 618–648.

Ricœur P (1980) Narrative time. *Critical Inquiry* 7(1): 169–190.

Ricœur P (1983) *Time and Narrative*, vols. 1, 2, and 3.23 (trans. K Blamey and D Pellauer). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ricœur P (1984) *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ricœur P (1985) *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ricœur P (1991) Life in quest of narrative. In: Wood D (ed.) *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Intrepretation*. London: Routledge, pp. 20–33.

Rindova VP, Becerra M and Contardo I (2004) Enacting competitive wars: Competitive activity, language games, and market consequences. *Academy of Management Review* 29(4): 670–686.

Rindova VP and Courtney H (2020) To shape or adapt: Knowledge problems, epistemologies and strategic postures under Knightian uncertainty. *Academy of Management Review*. Epub ahead of Print 23 July. DOI: 10.5465/amr.2018.0291.

Rindova VP and Martins LL (2018a) The three minds of the strategist: Toward an agentic perspective in behavioral strategy. In: Augier M, Fang C and Rindova VP (eds) *Advances in Strategic Management: Behavioral Strategy in Perspective*, vol. 39. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group, pp. 167–179.

Rindova VP and Martins LL (2018b) From values to value: Value rationality and the creation of great strategies. *Strategy Science* 3(1): 323–334.

Robinson J (2003) Future subjunctive: Backcasting as social learning. *Futures* 35(8): 839–856.

Roese NJ (1997) Counterfactual thinking. *Psychological Bulletin* 121(1): 133–148.

Rudrum D (2005) From narrative representation to narrative use: Towards the limits of definition. *Narrative* 13(2): 195–204.

Schwartz P (2012) *The Art of the Long View*. New York: Doubleday.

Sewell WH Jr (1992) A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1): 1–29.

Slawinski N and Bansal P (2015) Short on time: Intertemporal tensions in business sustainability. *Organization Science* 26(2): 531–549.

Sommer R (2009) Making narrative worlds: A cross-disciplinary approach to literary storytelling. In: Heinen S and Sommer R (eds) *Narratology in the Age of Cross-disciplinary Narrative Research*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, pp. 88–108.

Stigliani I and Ravasi D (2012) Organizing thoughts and connecting brains: Material practices and the transition from individual to group-level prospective sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal* 55(5): 1232–1259.

Suchman MC (1995) Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review* 20(3): 571–610.

Suddaby R, Coraiola D, Harvey C, et al. (2019) History and the micro-foundations of dynamic capabilities. *Strategic Management Journal* 41(3): 530–556.

Suddaby R, Foster WM and Quinn Trank C (2010) Rhetorical history as a source of competitive advantage. In: Baum Joel AC and Joseph L *(eds) The Globalization of Strategy Research*. Bingley: Emerald Group, pp. 147–173.

Szpunar KK, Spreng RN and Schacter DL (2014) A taxonomy of prospection: Introducing an organizational framework for future-oriented cognition. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111(52): 18414–18421.

Taylor C (1991) Language and society. In: Honneth A and Joas H (eds) *Communicative Action*. Boston, MA: MIT Press, pp. 23–35.

Tilly C (1981) *As Sociology Meets History*. New York: Academic Press.

Toyoda A (2018) *CES 2018 Toyota Keynote*. 8 January. Las Vegas, NV. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjXYYRNEZbQ (accessed 20 January 2021).

Tschiesner A, Möller T, Kässer M, et al. (2019) *Mastering New Mobility*. New York: McKinsey & Company.

Tsoukas H and Shepherd J (2004) Organisations and the future: From forecasting to foresight. *Management Today* 20(7): 18–23.

Turner SF and Rindova VP (2018) Watching the clock: Action timing, patterning, and routine performance. *Academy of Management Journal* 61(4): 1253–1280.

Vanhoozer KJ (1991) Philosophical antecedents to Ricoeur's time and narrative. In: Wood D (ed.) *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Intrepretation*. . London: Routledge, pp. 34–54.

Weber K, Heinze KL and DeSoucey M (2008) Forage for thought: Mobilizing codes in the movement for grass-fed meat and dairy products. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 53(3): 529–567.

Weick KE (1979) *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, 2d edn. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Weick KE, Sutcliffe KM and Obstfeld D (2005) Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science* 16(4): 409–421.

Weisberg DS and Goodstein J (2009) What belongs in a fictional world? *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 9: 69–78.

White H (1984) The question of narrative in contemporary historical theory. *History and Theory* 23(1): 1–33.

White H (1991) The metaphysics of narrativity: Time and symbol in Ricoeur's philosophy of history. In: Wood D (ed.) *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Intrepretation*. London: Routledge, pp. 34–54.

Zetsche D (2015) *CES 2015 Mercedes-BenzKeynote*. 5 January. Las Vegas, NV. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMmYFxe6O-I (accessed 20 January 2021).

Zuckerman EW (1999) The categorical imperative: Securities analysts and the illegitimacy discount. *American Journal of Sociology* 104(5): 1398–1438.

Author biographies

Violina P Rindova is a professor of management and organization, the Captain Henry W. Simonsen Chair in Strategic Entrepreneurship, and the Research Director of the Lloyd Greif Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. She studies how meaning-making affects the creation of value in markets. Her research focuses on the socio-cognitive and cultural processes through which firms build, claim, and sustain positions of advantage; develop and reconfigure resources; and discover and create new market opportunities.

Luis L Martins is a professor of management and the Herb Kelleher Chair in Entrepreneurship at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin. He received his PhD in management and organizational behavior from the Leonard N. Stern School of Business at New York University. His research bridges micro and macro aspects of organizations, and is focused on examining the cognitive underpinnings of strategy, innovation, and the effects of team composition.