SITUATED ATTENTION:
EXPLORING STRATEGIC RESPONSES TO EMERGENT ISSUES IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

There is increasing pressure on multinational companies to conduct business ethically and foster prosperity in countries from which they source raw materials. In response, many have started reporting on their social impact. However, for many companies, the challenges faced in sourcing countries and origin communities are unfamiliar. Trying to assess, monitor, and report on them is unprecedented. Questions about what should be measured and how remain across sectors. In this climate of uncertainty, not all assessment efforts have resulted in useful information regarding the challenges about which they intended to report.

This project uses the attention-based view of the firm (Ocasio, 1997) to analyze how strategy emerges in transnational environments of change. It explores how decision makers at a multinational company developed a baseline social needs assessment for international sourcing markets, in order to understand how information moves up organizational hierarchies. Then, it studies how decision makers pay attention to new information when developing strategy. The company's coffee supply chain in a selected sourcing country serves as a sub-case for understanding the producer- and market-level challenges decision makers intended to address with the assessment. I conducted research at multiple points in the company's international sourcing hierarchy, and at strategy workshops in which decision makers and NGO allies developed the framework.

This research contributes to theory on attention by showing how social discourses influence processes of attention allocation and strategy development in environments of change. Findings indicate that discourses embedded in organizational attention structures shape decision makers' attention allocation through rigid patterns of linguistic cues. These cues guide actors away from new, or emergent issues, and back to existing issues in the process of searching for answers. As a result, the strategic response they develop may not make sense in its intended environment of implementation.

These findings are expressed as a revision of Ocasio's (1997) model of situated attention.

Zusammenfassung

Multinationale Firmen stehen zunehmend unter Druck, ihre Geschäfte nach ethischen Grundsätzen zu führen und den Wohlstand in den rohstoffproduzierenden Ländern zu fördern.

Viele Unternehmen reagieren darauf, indem sie über ihre sozialen Auswirkungen berichten, wobei einigen von ihnen der Umgang mit sozialen Herausforderungen bisher nicht vertraut ist, und es oft an praktikablen Beispielen für deren Evaluation fehlt. Die Bemühungen bringen weder einen klaren Mehrwert für die Organisationen, noch sind sie im Umfeld ihrer Implementierung sinnvoll.

Im vorliegenden Projekt wurde erforscht, wie Entscheidungsträger eines multinationalen Unternehmens grundlegende Beurteilungen der sozialen Bedürfnisse in ihren Rohstoffmärkten vornehmen. Die *attention-based view of the firm* (William Ocasio, 1997) wurde genutzt, um das Zustandekommen von Organisationsstrategien in sich verändernden, transnationalen Umgebungen zu betrachten. Es wird gezeigt, wie Informationen sich von der Basis an die Spitze der Organisationshierarchie bewegen und, daraus folgend, wie dies die Aufmerksamkeit in den oberen Hierarchiestufen während der Strategieentwicklung beeinflusst.

Die Kaffee-Wertschöpfungskette der untersuchten Firma im ausgewählten Anbauland Kolumbien dient als Fallbeispiel. Einige der von den Entscheidungsträgern adressierten Herausforderungen dienen zum besseren Verständnis auf der Markt- und Produzentenebene. Hauptsächlich wurden die Daten auf mehreren Ebenen der internationalen Sourcing-Hierarchie des Unternehmens gesammelt. Als weitere wichtige Informationsquelle dienten Strategieworkshops, in denen die Entscheidungsträger des Unternehmens und beteiligte NGO-Partner das Raster zur grundlegenden Beurteilung der sozialen Bedürfnisse entwickelten.

Diese Forschungsarbeit leistet einen Beitrag zur Theorie der Aufmerksamkeit, indem sie aufzeigt, wie der soziale Diskurs die Aufmerksamkeitszuweisung und die Strategieentwicklung in dynamischen Umgebungen beeinflusst. Die Befunde weisen darauf hin, dass Diskurse, welche in organisationalen Aufmerksamkeitsstrukturen eingebettet sind, die entsprechenden Zuordnungen durch starre sprachliche Muster vornehmen und sie so, bei der Suche nach Antworten, von tatsächlich auftretenden Problemen zu bereits bekannten Schemen zurück führen. So ist es möglich, dass die resultierenden strategischen Antworten in dem für sie bestimmten Umfeld der Implementierung wenig Sinn ergeben. Diese Ergebnisse sollen zur Erweiterung von Ocasios (1997) Modell der situativen Aufmerksamkeit dienen.

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1. Introduction

Overview

Disparities often exist between the emergent challenges firms set out to address, and the strategic initiatives they develop in response (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006; Ocasio & Joseph, 2005; Rerup, 2009). In particular, this can occur when decision makers are required to pay attention to issues emerging from lower levels of an organizational hierarchy, many of which are unfamiliar (Rerup, 2009). Social and environmental challenges are examples of such unfamiliar challenges, and widespread demand for corporate accountability to society is pushing firms to report on social impact. Regulatory entities and consumers are demanding that multinational firms engage in more ethical practices and foster prosperity in the countries in which they are active (Porter & Kramer, 2006). When firms do not address this pressure, the potential for widespread image crises is high, due to rapid-fire information technology such as social media.

In this dissertation, I explored how the attention processes that shape strategic responses to emergent challenges influenced the appropriateness of strategies in their intended environments of implementation. I looked at a multinational corporation's process of developing a baseline intended to assess social conditions in agricultural raw materials sourcing communities in international sourcing markets. I conducted research at multiple points in the firm's coffee supply chain in a selected sourcing country, and at the strategy workshops where decision makers developed the assessment framework at their corporate headquarters. I explored examples of challenges in producer communities, how feedback from producers moved within the firm's organizational chain of command, and how decision makers negotiated strategy in response. To achieve this, I identified and explored structural and discursive

mechanisms that influenced the effectiveness of strategic initiatives decision makers in diversified firms developed in response to emergent issues.

I argue that discourses within communication channels related to the firm's structural distribution of attention (Ocasio, 1997) were highly influential in how information moved from the bottom to the top of the organizational hierarchy. The *linguistic infrastructures* signposting discussions within workshops were central in shaping how decision makers allocated their attention. Further, linguistic infrastructures influenced how decision makers noticed and valued emergent versus existing issues, and located answers. I present a revised model of organizational attention (Ocasio, 1997) that accounts for the role of discourse and linguistic infrastructure in shaping dynamic processes of decision maker attention allocation and answer-finding in response to emergent issues resulting from environmental change.

Positionality

This project emerged from my desire to support increased financial stability and reduced vulnerability among smallholder farmers in the Global South. My background is in Latin America, but the issues explored here have implications globally. My focus on challenges faced by the rural poor developed over a decade of working and studying intermittently in Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador and Colombia. While managing a coffee harvest in Costa Rica, I became distinctly aware of the difficulties faced by small farmers, workers, and management. However, in academia and in the mainstream news media, international trade often seems far removed from the human actors engaging in its processes. There is a general global understanding that agricultural raw materials producers receive a fraction of the profits, and are often vulnerable as a result. However, the perspectives, goals, and attentional focuses of actors along complex, international supply chains are often overlooked. Raw materials producers are often reduced to victims of "corporations" and "the market" in conversations about agricultural value chains, a perspective that is more antagonistic than solution-oriented.

I wanted to understand the tensions within a supply chain at the level of the individual actors participating in it. I dug into the complex interface of diverse

interests often present in rural communities during my master's work at New York University, where I studied development interventions in an indigenous town of four hundred residents in the Panamanian Darién. However, my interest was already piqued at Smith College during my bachelor's, where classes on the history of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Latin America and the Caribbean laid the foundation for everything that followed. One thing that immediately fascinated me was how much the content of a given story was contingent on who told it. Spanish explorers Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés wrote self-aggrandizing texts about successful conquests, boundless riches and inferior native populations; Spanish historian and Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas wrote about widespread exploitation, slavery and the inhumanity of conquest in *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* (Las Casas, 1992); Guáman Poma, an indigenous noble, wrote about Spanish misrule and abuse, supplementing his manuscript with brutal, unforgiving drawings (Adorno, 2000).

The above works are early examples of reporting to emphasize the positioning of the storyteller on what the story is. Each of these four men wrote their texts as appeals to the Spanish crown—Columbus and Cortés for funding and support, Las Casas to advocate ending colonial abuse and slavery in the Americas, Guáman Poma to show the human cost of Spanish brutality of what is now Peru. Each of them had a different goal in writing their accounts. While they are the clearest window we have into the colonial period, each was written from a distinct perspective, with an objective. Appeals always involve power dynamics; happenings, processes, relationships, successes and conflicts are crafted through language to tell a story that serves a purpose. Facts, if they exist, are often dirtied by needs. Looking at Cortés' derogatory description of the Aztec empire's human capital and Guáman Poma's illustrations of torture, those needs seem often to be money and survival. Reporting, which in Latin America began as explorers' letters to the Spanish Crown, brings our attention to specific issues that serve the interests of those doing the reporting. While reporting is often a necessary exercise, I do not assume it is a valid one. The examples also show that assessment, similarly, is wildly subjective. Cortés assessed what was happening in the Americas differently than Guáman Poma (beyond the fact that their writings occurred in different times in different regions), before drafting his reports for the Crown. Both saw different

Americas than those lived in by indigenous peasants, many of whom toiled under the rule of other empires before the Spanish even arrived.

The colonial history of the Global South has played a substantial role in establishing the current world order. Many countries in the Global South are critical sources of raw materials. In Latin America, conquistadors shipped indigenous gold to the Spanish crown. Other goods, including "soft commodities", or agricultural raw materials, followed. Latin America's complicated relationship with the United States gained notoriety in the second half of the 20th century. Mexico, which shared a border with the US, was particularly subject to governmental and corporate practices that benefited the northern neighbor at Mexico's expense. US neoliberal politics coupled with still weak Latin American states struggling to gain stability in the aftermath of independence enabled multinational companies to secure access to natural resources. Often, this was done at great social and environmental expense, a famous example being the Chevron-Texaco oil spill in the Ecuadorian amazon. This notorious accident destroyed swaths of rainforest and the livelihoods of numerous indigenous people living there.

In the colonial period, systems of agricultural production varied by region. In Latin American, a common phenomenon was peasants working small parcels of and for large *hacendados* in conditions that were often deplorable. This structure remained after various regional pushes for independence, the majority of which occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. Post-independence Latin America was characterized by light-skinned rich at the top of the hierarchy, followed by mestizo, indigenous, and Afro-Latino populations forming the massive ranks of the rural poor. This social structure is still visibly in place in much of Latin America. In the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, rural-to-urban migration began en masse due to insufficient employment opportunities and infrastructure in rural areas. Because of unequal distribution of services and perpetually low prices fetched by agricultural goods, many still see farming as a job for the poor, with parents sending their most academically-inclined children to towns and cities to pursue educations. Those that remain at home, following in their parents' footsteps, are frequently there by default.

The phenomenon

Normative organizational practices in many firms involve measuring impact. They do this to illustrate priorities, drive targets, understand impact, ensure the effectiveness of strategies, promote accountability within the organization, and publically justify and prove their activities. For the studied here MNC, the push to report on social impact responded to events that spurred reputational risks, growing consumer demand for social and environmental responsibility, and government and international regulations aimed at mitigating ill effects on society. Another push-factor was the widespread migration of farmers to cities in response to increasing production costs, environmental degradation, and insufficient infrastructure. Many people living in rural areas perceive there to be more jobs in cities. Generally, there is a stark contrast between city and country when it comes to educational, technological, health and social resources. That said, the conditions in which many migrants from rural areas live in when they arrive in cities are not always equipped with these resources, and jobs are few and far between.

Agricultural producers have been migrating for decades, but recently quality, traceability and certification have risen in importance to governments and consumers. This means businesses have an increasing interest in establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with producers. Some companies have programs in Corporate Social Responsibility, others in Creating Shared Value. The key challenge at the center of both approaches is that producing agricultural raw materials is not always lucrative, and farmers often do so by default rather than desire. To counteract the influences pushing farmers to urban areas and to make farming attractive, individuals designing CSR and CSV projects need to understand the specific factors putting economic strain on farmers, which often differ by product, country, region, and even municipality. To impart order to the complicated process of collecting and systematizing this information, firms often rely on baseline assessments, monitoring and reporting.

Reporting on social issues is not, however, familiar territory for many businesses. The process of developing baselines on which they can later report requires decision makers to make sense of unfamiliar information. This confusing process requires managers to interact with a huge volume of data, which they must

sort through in order to decide what is relevant to their activities, while simultaneously continuing to do the jobs for which they were hired. In the meantime, a myriad of other interactions are taking place elsewhere in the organizational hierarchy, in oversees subsidiaries concerned primarily with the operational aspects of sourcing materials from farmers living in poor rural areas. Then there are the agronomists and the farmers themselves, who have another set of objectives but are also impacted by the choices decision makers arrive at regarding what is important and what is not. Since ultimately it is the farmers' social realities that will be assessed and reported on, picking up on the challenges they face is key. However, through the course of a process of simplification that often takes many months, not all information is attended to when reporting frameworks are being established.

Further complicating the process is that it lies at the interface of multifaceted tensions. This includes the dynamics of transnational trade and raw materials sourcing, a unique process through which the very poor and very rich establish and pursue a unified objective, and social, economic and environmental challenges of increasing globalization. Interested parties located at this interface include competing multinational corporations, state governments, international, national and local non-governmental organizations and non-profits with environmental and social interests, illegal armed groups, farmers, communities and workers. Decisions and strategies materialize as a result of countless interactions about and between these actors, and are mediated by abstract structural considerations. These include actors' places in organizations or access to resources, and sociocultural and individual considerations such as education level, political orientation, the type of organizational routines actors are most comfortable adhering to, economic status, organizational goals, fluency in the language used during negotiation, experience, and confidence.

The MNC's approach to improving quality of life for producers and workers in their supply chains was Creating Shared Value. Like Corporate Social Responsibility, CSV emerged from consumer and regulatory insistence that businesses engage in more ethical practices. However, CSV responds to frequent reluctance on the part of both executives and shareholders to pump money into charitable projects that do not clearly contribute to business value. CSV is

positioned as a set of "policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates" (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Practitioners of CSV argue that the approach is different from CSR, because "Corporate Social Responsibility is widely perceived as a cost center, not a profit center. In contrast, shared value creation is about new business opportunities that create new markets, improve profitability and strengthen competitive positioning. CSR is about responsibility; CSV is about creating value" (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

The approach to assessment that decision makers at the MNC devised was internally referred to as the Social Conditions Evaluation, or the SCE. It was intended for use by all subsidiaries from which the company sourced agricultural raw materials, in all countries across the globe in which they were active. Its purpose was to determine the social needs that CSV programs could address, and show the impact of existing CSV practices. In order to develop this framework, decision makers needed to formulate strategy. However, actors at headquarters struggled to find an approach that made sense for headquarters and markets. For this reason, the case of the SCE presented an opportunity to explore organizational attention, how information moves, and strategy formulation. This thesis does not critically engage CSV, analyze its theoretical tenets, or argue its practical strengths or weaknesses, as that would require another dissertation to unpack. Here, CSV is treated as the conceptual umbrella for a set of policies, and the goal is to track how it contributed to organizational discourses and attention.

An overview of literature and gaps

To hone in on the mechanisms at play in strategy formulation that influence whether or not an initiative effectively addresses the challenge for which it was developed, I considered my phenomenon through the lens of the attention-based view (Ocasio, 1997). Existing literature on attention acknowledges that managers need to alter their attention patterns in order to notice emergent information from lower levels of an organizational hierarchy. Claus Rerup even suggests an approach, attentional triangulation, by which he argues managers can detect

emergent issues, which he calls cues (Rerup, 2009). In line with this, attention literature posits that a combination of top-down and bottom-up communication lead to effective initiatives, since important ideas often come from the bottom of the organizational hierarchy (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Furthermore, these authors contribute substantially to our understanding of channels in organizations, demonstrating how differentiation and integration of governance and procedural channels fosters effective business unit adaptation.

However, while attention literature has looked at channels, surprisingly little work has looked at the mechanisms within channels that influence actors' attention, and the implications this has for strategy. Furthermore, while attention literature has suggested that managers need to alter their attention patterns so as to notice information emerging at lower points in the organizational hierarchy (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012; Rerup, 2009) it has not explored the specific processes by which information from the bottom of an organizational hierarchy moves up the chain of command to decision makers. Furthermore, while it has acknowledged that power exists and is a dynamic influencing attention (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008) it has not looked at how power shapes communication channels. Specifically, there is room to contribute to how power asymmetries shape the focuses of existing channels at a structural level, how actors within channels transmit information at the actor level, and how this shapes strategy development. Organizational discourses and linguistic cues are the mechanisms by which legitimacy is determined, issues are valued, authority relationships are enacted, channels function, attention structures are realized in practice, and information moves. Surprisingly, however, almost no work on attention explores how discourse and language shape attention in organizations. Furthermore, much more work is needed to develop an understanding of how challenges are intensified by having organizational structures emerge out of varied social and cultural contexts in transnational environments of governance and practice.

Research questions

This dissertation explores the following research questions:

1) How does information from low in an organizational hierarchy move up the chain of command?
2) How does organizational architecture influence how decision makers attend to emergent information when developing strategy?

It studies information moving in three ways: (a) mapping channels within a firm's organizational architecture, (b) identifying contributing social discourses, and finally, (c) paying attention to what actors say.

Methodological approach

To address the above research questions and gaps in attention literature, I explored how decision makers at a western multinational corporation constructed a social impact assessment framework, the SCE, for managing their sustainable supply chains. Since actors at the MNC's Centre wanted to locate intervention opportunities and measure the impact of their Creating Shared Value (CSV) projects on farms, they wanted to understand challenges producers were facing. My research aimed to figure out how they did this and what organizational and individual contexts and behaviors affected the process. I looked in depth at their coffee supply chain in a selected sourcing country to focus in on challenges at the base if the firm's hierarchy.

The initial purpose of this research was to focus primarily on farmers. However, due to extraordinary access to the MNC's coffee supply chain, enabled me to collect data at several levels of the firm's hierarchy, including its headquarters, its subsidiary managers and strategic partners in the sourcing country studied, agronomists employed by its country-level organizational partner, and farmers and their families. Given these diverse data sources, I decided to expand by focus beyond farmers, and to how actors across the transnational supply chain transmitted feedback from farmers to headquarters.

I conducted my research between June 2012 and June 2014. My process of research and analysis was informed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and followed a qualitative constructivist format (Creswell, 2009). As such, I conducted semi-structured interviews, participant and non-participant observation, took pictures, collected supplemental published and unpublished written material,

and memoed extensively. I coded initial data and re-entered the field based on emergent themes. My research was informed by a strong interest in the role played by language and power in information transfer and strategy formation.

Foucauldian-inspired analysis of discursive practices (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) and critical narrative analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014) of participants' statements and stories guided data interpretation. As organizational communication emerged as an issue, I acknowledged the limits of attention (Simon & March, 1958; March & al., 1976; Ocasio & Joseph 2005; Bouquet and Birkinshaw, 2008) and engaged an attentional perspective (Ocasio, 2011) as informed by the attention-based view (Ocasio, 1997). An attentional lens "links individual information processing and behavior to the organizational structure through concepts of procedural and communication channels and attention structures" (Ocasio, 1997, p. 188), and enabled me to remove complexity when making sense of multi-level, multi-actor, transcultural, and often abstract, phenomena by positioning communication channels as units of analysis.

Implications for practice and theory

I make three main contributions to attention literature. First, I contribute to our understanding of how attention, and in particular organizational architecture, influences how information moves up a chain of command. Secondly, through my attention to social discourses and their manifestation in actor narratives and conversations, I show the role of power in shaping attention and its implications for how information moves and how strategy is developed. Finally, by attending to information emerging at the lowest levels of a multinational corporations' organizational hierarchy—raw materials producers in an international supply chain—I bring attention literature out of its almost exclusive focus on top management. I explore how information from farms enters international organizational communication channels, and locate power- and structure-related discontinuities that disrupt attention regarding emergent issues, preventing decision makers from receiving information about these challenges and developing meaningful strategy in response to them.

My work also bridges the theory-practice gap by contributing more broadly to the fields of knowledge management and knowledge transfer. In my study I show that because there were no communication channels focused on transmitting social information about farmers, managers were forced to consider the information emerging from existing channels, and make assumptions about what was relevant. This resulted in an overabundance of information, very little of which was useful for baselining farmer livelihood challenges. My work suggests that by making small adjustments to the professional requirements of stakeholders within supply chains, a communication channels focused on social issues could be developed with little cost to the firm. On a broader level, by providing both a micro- and macro-level analysis of how information moves up a chain of command, I provide practitioners with insights that may help them address discontinuities within communication channels, particularly when it comes to managing sustainable supply chains. This work also adds valuable insight for NGO actors working with corporate allies, who may not be familiar with the mindset of their partners and the critical need for value added and simplicity. Finally, I offer data on how farmers describe challenges in their lives. This offers a taste of the information the multinational studied here was looking for, and may provide insights to corporate actors with limited experience when it comes to the lives of producers. While this dissertation only gives a two-year snapshot of a multinational's agricultural supply chain, it offers timely empirical information on how communication in transcultural, international, multi-stakeholder sourcing structures moves and doesn't move, bringing a highly complex system usually only addressed in abstracts to the human level.

Definitions of key concepts and terms

In this dissertation, I use a number of terms that require clarification. I also employed some terms that the MNC used. Here, I explain what these terms and concepts are, and how and how I engage them in this project.

- Actors and participants. I refer to all participants in my study, from farmers to managers, as actors.

- Agricultural raw materials. These are the goods that businesses source that serve as ingredients in the products they produce and sell. They are commodities, which are goods intended for exchange, often within a capitalist system (Giddens, 1971).
- Agronomists. I use the term agronomists interchangeably with technicians to refer to the actors carrying out extension services on behalf of the firm's country-level organizational partner.
- Attention. This paper uses attention as defined by the Attention-Based View (ABV), which is explored more fully in Chapter Two. Attention is the process by which actors allocate their focus to some issues at the exclusion of others.
- The Coffee Program. This was a program intended to increase production and equip farmers in clusters near the MNC's country level factories.
- Creating Shared Value. This was the concept developed by Porter and Kramer (2011) that guided the MNC's ideology and interventions related to sustainability. It relates the idea that businesses can strive to achieve social, environmental, and economic value simultaneously through shrewdly identified ethical practices.
- Culture. While cultural processes and norms play a substantial role in the development of strategy and in the negotiation of attention, exploring all the ways in which it does so would require another dissertation. Here, culture is seen as collective, and as central in shaping the social beliefs and practices of people. It also influences inter- and intra-organizational communication, and power is often a key determinant of what cultural norms and *values* define what issues receive attention.
- Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). These are the farming practices encouraged, regulated, and defined by organizations such as the partner organization and the MNC. They are focused on the effective and efficient cultivation of high-producing, disease-resistant crops while minimizing negative environmental impacts and giving attention to a number of compliance issues defined by diverse stakeholders, including NGOs, governments and regulatory entities.

- Livelihood and social conditions. To assess rural development, the MNC employees needed to gain an understanding of "livelihood" or "social" conditions. I do not critically engage these terms, and use them to mean the conditions in which producers in sourcing communities live. Improving livelihood or social conditions in the context of this project means improving ones ability to meet their basic needs.
- Markets. The MNC talked about their subsidiaries in foreign countries as "markets". When I refer to a market, I mean a country-level subsidiary of the MNC.
- The MNC employees, decision makers and managers. In addition to the term actors, I discuss participants at headquarters as "MNC employees", "decision makers" and managers.
- The partner organization. This was an ally and competitor of the MNC in the sourcing country studied.
- Rural development. The MNC was interested in generating a baseline for and subsequently monitoring and reporting on "rural development". This is a complicated term that adheres to contentious and linear interpretations of how "development" should happen largely generated and propagated in the west. It is beyond the scope of this project to problematize the terms development or rural development, because I explore attention in organizations rather than the characteristics and implications of global development processes. Critiques of development are extensive, and suggest, among other things, that the prosperity of the Global North has required the systematic exploitation of resources from the Global South. I use the terms "development" and "rural development" only as they focus attention of the participants in my study, and do not unpack them as concepts.
- Social Conditions Evaluation (SCE). The SCE was intended to assess social conditions on the ground in global sourcing communities, and subsequently the social impact of the MNC's activities, including sourcing activities and CSV programs. It was also intended to report on compliance and demonstrate the firm's commitment to sustainable sourcing.

- Technicians. I use this term interchangeably with "agronomists", defined above.
- Tradition. I talk about tradition in relation to how it is invoked in social discourses to convince farmers to keep farming. For the purpose of this dissertation, "tradition" means beliefs and practices with historical roots that are passed down over generations, which hold symbolic meaning for the social groups in which they exist (Shils, 1981).
- Transnational. In this dissertation, transnational is used to describe processes and practices that span and imply participation from and compliance with the standards of multiple countries and regions.
- Value. I address values in terms of how they influence actors' perception and prioritization of issues. For the purpose of this dissertation, values are defined broadly as the tendency of groups or individuals to prefer certain conditions in relation to others. They are tacit or explicit conceptions that characterize how groups or individuals identify what is desirable when identifying and choosing from available options (Rokeach, 1968).

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation in structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature in which this project is grounded, particularly the attention-based view of the firm and attention in relation to organizational communication channels, sensemaking, strategy formulation, power and culture. Chapter 3 describes my methodology and approach to analysis. Chapter 4 introduces the context at headquarters of the MNC I studied, including Creating Shared Value, the Social Conditions Evaluation, and a descriptive analysis of how decision makers focused their attention in relation to the SCE. Chapter 5 positions the case in a sourcing market context. I illustrate the overlapping structures and projects related to the MNC's supply chain, sourcing, and CSV in the sourcing country studied. I also introduce challenges and priorities at the level of the producers, whom decision makers wanted the SCE to measure. In Chapter 6, I tie together information presented in Chapters 4 and 5 by showing the communication channels in place between producers in a sourcing country and the MNC decision

makers. I suggest that because there was no existing communication channel focused on transferring the desired information up the chain of command, decision makers paid attention to information emerging from existing communication channels, making subjective assumptions about what was relevant. By exploring the operational purposes of existing communication channels, selected organizational artifacts and discussions in workshops, I introduce how organizational architecture and structures of linguistic cues interact to influence strategy. Finally, in Chapter 7, I offer a discussion of my findings and present a model showing the specific contributions my work makes to the attention-based view of the firm. I introduce the term *linguistic infrastructure*, modified from "narrative infrastructure" (Deuten, 2000), to describe the complex network of cues guiding attention in strategy formulation. I also introduce the *communication space* as the transcultural zone in which SCE strategy formulation occurred, and differentiate it from my conceptualization of organizational *channels*, which refers to the lines of communication between organizational actors, units and levels. I conclude by delineating my contributions to theory and practice.

2. Literature review

Overview

As presented in the Introduction, solutions decision makers at corporate headquarters develop to address emerging challenges at lower levels of the chain of command, often do not make sense in their environments of implementation. This dissertation intends to explore how such disconnects emerge by addressing the following questions: first, how does information from low in an organizational hierarchy move up the chain of command? And secondly, how does organizational architecture influence how decision makers attend to emergent information when developing strategy in response to environmental change?

My dissertation aims to extend theory on the attention-based view of the firm (Ocasio, 1997). In this chapter, I: 1) introduce Ocasio's (1997) attention-based view; 2) discuss how literature talks about channels in organizations; 3) discuss sensemaking in organizations; 4) look at attention and strategy formulation; 5) address power in multinational corporations; 6) address how this dissertation considers and interacts with notions of culture, and 7) offer a brief summary.

The attention-based view

The attention-based view (ABV) was introduced by William Ocasio in 1997, but is rooted in earlier work, especially in the Carnegie School (Simon H. A., 1957; March & al., 1976; Cyert & March, 1963)**.** Simon (1947) was the first to focus on channels, structures and attention allocation as central to administrative behavior (Simon H. A., 1947). This later became organization theory (March & Simon, 1958). March and Simon (1958) noted furthermore that decision-makers tend to be most open to information that is aligned with their existing assumptions and frames of reference. Attention is the process by which actors choose to focus on some issues at the exclusion of others. Ocasio's (1997) ABV looks at how attention influences organizational adaptation (Ocasio, 2011; Joseph and Ocasio, 2012). It assumes that human and organizational limits on attention mean it cannot

be evenly dedicated to all issues at all times within organizations. ABV does not focus on information processing capacity, but rather "whether and how available information is attended to in a particular time and place" (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012).

Organizations are coalitions of diverse people with conflicting interests (Cyert & March, 1963)**.** In this context, organizational attention is "the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort by organizational decision-makers on both (a) issues: the available repertoire of categories for making sense of the environment; problems, opportunities and threats; and (b) answers: the available repertoire of action alternatives; proposals, routines, projects, programs, and procedures" (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189). Attention in organizations is based on three key principles:

i. The actions of decision-makers are based on the issues and answers they focus their attention on (focus of attention)
ii. The issues and answers on which decision-makers are focused depends on that actor's particular context and situation at a particular point in time (situated attention)
iii. Decision makers' contexts and situations and how they attend to them depend on the rules, resources, and social relationships within the firm, and how these regulate "distribution and allocation of issues, answers and decision-makers in to specific activities, communications and procedures (structural distribution of attention)" (Ocasio, 1997).

Structural distribution of attention is contingent on an actor's structural position, through which actors' interests and priorities vary, and by which their focuses of attention are thus differentiated across the organization's environment (Ocasio, 1997). Three processes inform the cognitive dimensions of attention: attentional perspective (top-down), attentional engagement (combining top-down and bottom-up executive attention and vigilance), and attentional selection (the outcome of attentional processes) (Ocasio, 2011, p. 1286).

Ocasio's ABV harkens back to attention structures as described by March and Olsen (1976). Attention structures are social, economic and cultural structures determining how organizational actors allocate attention when making decisions. They shape how actors value issues and answers, how organizational channels are established and distributed, and the priorities and identities influencing how

decision makers communicate and take action (March & Olsen, 1976; Ocasio, 1997, p. 195). In international business settings, attention structures are the global rules of the game. More specifically, they are "systems of formal and informal incentives that guide HQ executives in their day-to-day decisions and motivate their efforts to comprehend the global marketplace" (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011, p. 246).

Attention and channels in organizations

Channels were viewed as central in administrative theory (March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1957; Thompson, 1967; Allison, 1969). Joseph and Ocasio (2012) extended theory on channels within attention structures in their work on organizational architecture. Organizational architecture refers to how organizations structure and distribute communication, power, authority, and associated relationships and interactions; specifically, it "structurally distributes managerial attention throughout the firm, with managers within various subunits and organizational levels focusing attention on different aspects of the firm's agenda" (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012, p. 635). The authors focused on organizational architecture to explain business unit and corporate interaction in multibusiness firms. By analyzing a firms' organizational architecture, comprised of channels, they were able to contribute to theory on how business unit adaptation can be impacted by the degree of integration and differentiation of channels within organizations.

While Ocasio's (1997) model of organizational attention discusses procedural and communication channels, Joseph and Ocasio (2012) talk about governance and operational channels. My project views communication channels to encompass procedural and communication channels, and governance and operational channels, and does not find it useful to sub-classify. Interactions that occur within channels direct attention through issues on the agenda (Dutton, 1997), operations and routines (Nelson & Winter, 1982), norms, actor participation, frequency, sequence and location (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). For example, a workshop addressing producer social conditions located at the multinational's headquarters will be impacted in relation to the issues actors deem

important and pay the most attention to. If workshops happen once a week, they may become integrated into the firm's routines and operational processes and practices, whereas if they occur once or twice a year, they will likely have a lesser impact. If they occur later in the year, the focus may be on budgets and outcomes, whereas if they happen early in the year, decision makers may have the flexibility to consider broader goals and objectives.

Managers' attention is situated and shaped by interactions with other managers, which occurs both within channels and across systems of channels that comprise a firm's organizational architecture. Interactions within and between channels allow actors from different levels of an organization to develop joint attention and alignment in regards to resource allocation, corporate governance, operations and emergent issues. While cross-level channels play a critical role in aligning divergent perspective and priorities between corporate and business unit managers, "they are not sufficient to ensure that attention to long-range issues will not give way to more immediate concerns" (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). How and why interactions happen is related to the purpose of the channels in which they take place.

How attention is allocated and whether it is sustained is related to a number of factors. For example, when agendas within channels are too broad, there is a diminished chance that issues within them will receive sustained attention. If an issue is not considered central to the agenda, it will likely receive comparatively less attention than other issues (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). In diversified organizations, short-term financial and operational challenges can compromise attention to long-term strategic planning (March & Simon, 1958). A lack of integration within and across channels has a negative affect on strategic adaptation (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). While cross-level channels enable alignment between corporate and business unit managers, channels that were exclusively staff or headquarters "allowed divergent perceptions and plans to persist", with business unit managers remaining "in their 'own worlds'" (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012, p. 650). Attentional engagement is required for actors to dedicate their time and energy on a given set of environmental stimuli, which is necessary in order to develop alignment in responses within and across channels (Ocasio, 1997; Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Cross-level channels must also focus on planning (and planning

channels must be cross-level) in order to foster attentional engagement around a specific issue. When this is not the case, actor attention is pulled towards operations and financial concerns or leads to abstract outcomes without much potential for practical implementation (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012).

I find this observation to hold in the case of my project. However, Joseph and Ocasio (2012) do not look deeply at what happens when an emergent issue is stimulated by an environmental change. In these cases, actors on both corporate and business unit levels frequently have not yet developed an understanding of the emergent issues unique dynamics. As a result of this gap in the literature, I am able to extend Joseph and Ocasio's theory on channels by exploring further how mechanisms and processes within channels impact whether strategic initiatives, and resultant firm adaptation, are effective.

Furthermore, these authors found that "cross-level channels that are both cross-functional and specialized are particularly beneficial for focusing attention and, in turn, coordinating different functions that facilitate successful strategic adaptation" (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012, p. 654). Channels with minimal participation across organizational functions resulted in poor linking between corporate planning, operational and financial actors and subsequently ineffective strategies. Therefore, they say channels should be:

1. *Specialized,* "to allow for focused attention to strategic (competitive and long-term) rather than just financial or operational issues and initiatives"
2. *Cross-functional, "*to ensure linkages between planning and other functional activities in response to opportunities and threats"
3. *Tightly coupled* "in a coherent organizational architecture to ensure vertical and horizontal coordination of initiatives" (Joseph & Ocasio 2012, pp. 650).

These observations are highly relevant for information transfer and strategy formation. However, they do not take note of the mechanisms informing decision makers' interactions and negotiations within communication channels and spaces, which have powerful implications for developing effective initiatives. Specifically, where these authors posit that existing channels need to be integrated, differentiated, specialized and coupled in certain ways for effective business unit adaptation, I focus on a situation in which an emergent issue does not yet have a

set of practices and processes developed around it; in other words, a specialized channel to facilitate its consideration is missing. My project contributes to past work on channels and adaptation by digging into how organizational attention structures manifest in discourses at the level of channels and actors, enabling or constraining effective responses to emergent issues.

Sensemaking in organizations

Literature on sensemaking explores how actors understand and react to a given environment, and how this impacts organizational processes, practices and strategies. Sensemaking refers to how actors "make sense" of an event, and decide on how to respond to it (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Weick, 1995; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). It leads actors in organizations to allocate attention to events or environmental features they perceive to be relevant. How they prioritize importance is related to structural drivers of attention such as organizational architecture, and existing institutional logics. Institutional logics are socially constructed principles by which institutionalized practices are organized in social systems (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Institutional logics are built from "cognitive, normative and material forces" (Thornton & Ocasio, 2010), and are expressed and reinforced through vocabularies and communication (Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012; Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008; Ocasio & Joseph, 2005). Institutional logics developed in the field can emerge from field participants' processes of making sense of specific, localized events. As a result of these sensemaking processes, actors may develop new organizing principles grounded in the specifics of their field-level practices (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Time, place and the concrete behaviors found in a particular contexts influence sensemaking processes and can result in novel outcomes.

In addition to time, place and concrete behaviors, actors' cognitive templates, or individual schemas, also influence sensemaking processes. Managers, like all individuals, have beliefs and values that contribute to their worldviews (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008; Sambharya, 1996)**.** Cognitive templates help explain how managers allocate their attention and make decisions

about which environmental stimuli to focus on, and which to ignore. This, in turn, impacts the generation of some strategic choices and actions at the expense of others (Huff, 1990**;** Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011). Sensemaking also happens through processes of theorization and representation. Theorization is "the elaboration of abstract models of organizing structures and practices," and representation is "the use of specific exemplars or attention to specific field features to illustrate structures and practices" (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010, p. 824). While theorization highlights relationships between actors and networks, representation focuses attention on concrete environmental features of specific situations, particularly with regard to novel interactions between institutional actors (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010).

Language and symbols also drive attention and inform sensemaking. Words, phrases and signs can serve as indicators of institutional logics at larger societal and context-specific levels (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010; Zilber, 2006)**.** Extracted cues can be used to represent entire issues, projects, and perceived realities (Weick, 1995). They can highlight implications, properties, and consequences of issues, answers and actions more effectively than attending to all specificities of each environmental whole. By using extracted cues, social actors can show complex situations and environments through simplified, abstract models (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Key performance indicator frameworks are an example of extracted cues standing in for a more complex situation. However, past theoretical models influence actors. These models represent existing institutional logics shaping attention allocation. Existing models can serve to highlight anomalies actors cannot explain, categorize, or put in context, and focus actors' attention on deviations (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010).

Cues not only describe linguistic indicators of attention, but emergent challenges that managers need to address in their environments. "Weak" (Rerup, 2009) or "subtle" (Weick & Sutcliffe, Mindfulness and the Quality of Organizational Attention, 2006) cues can help actors in organizations make sense of what is going on around them. They draw from available institutional logics and routines in order to categorize cues, and representation to communicate about them. When there is no available category for a given cue, actors must engage in "a moment of conceptual mindfulness…because the void is momentarily tough to

categorize and label" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 516). Interventions can bring more attention to anomalous cues and promote their discrimination. "When cues are noticed, routines that had been unfolding mindlessly are interrupted, and when routines are disrupted…. Past experience no longer serves as a firm guide, and the disruption stirs the cognitive pot" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 517). Drawing attention to the importance of mindful discernment of subtle cues, they say, "Accidents are not sudden, they are incubated and give daily warning signals. This is why attention needs to be made more stable (i.e. norms and routines must specify and reward attention to intended objects) and more vivid (i.e. distractions need to be removed)" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 517). Overall, more work remains to be done on how organizations notice cues.

Literature on mindfulness offers insights into how actors can address deviations they notice through attention to cues. It also helps explain challenges that can arise in processes of organizational sensemaking and attention allocation. Organizing is about "impermanent special cases, impermanent fitting, and impermanent repertoires of actions" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 514). Behavior is related to automaticity, routine, mindlessness, habit, path dependence, momentum ad inertia, whereas mind is related to alertness, attention, abstraction, and awareness. Mindfulness is related to how diverse processes within the mind interrelate (Weick & Quinn, 1999**;** Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Less mindful practices normalize stimuli, and more mindful practices anomalize them (Weick & Sutcliffe, Mindfulness and the Quality of Organizational Attention, 2006). Rather than using mindful sensemaking practices to attend to unfamiliar challenges, actors in organizations often try to normalize them by assigning them to existing categories and routines that may not be appropriate. This can also be viewed in terms of adhering to and reinforcing dominant organizational and cultural discourses, which I explore in a later subsection. While allocating attention as directed by routines simplifies decision-making processes (Ocasio, 1997; Gavetti, Levinthal, & Ocasio, 2007**;** Rerup, 2009), it prevents organizations from noticing or allocating sustained attention to cues that do not adhere to existing categories (Levinthal & Rerup, 2006).

Mindful practices can be critical when decision makers in organizations attend to unfamiliar challenges or "weak cues", which actors have to address so as

to retain their distinctive features. Their distinctiveness can help organizations notice potential problems (Rerup, 2009). When firms fail to notice emergent threats, it is either because they do not see them as problems (Weick, 1995) or because they lack attentional resources (Ocasio, 1997). Another explanation is that organizational actors do notice emergent challenges, but are too low in the chain of command to have the power, resources, or capabilities to address them (Lampel, Shamsie, & Shapira, 2009; Sole & Edmondson, 2002; Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008). Rerup (2009) proposes attentional triangulation as the unifying concept behind a set of mechanisms through which executives can pick up on cues emerging from lower in the organizational hierarchy, by which they can detect threats to the firm before they become crises.

Attentional triangulation relies on the integration of three attentional dimensions: stability, vividness, and coherence. Attentional stability is sustained attention to issues, attentional vividness is the richness and detail of organizational scanning and interpretation and attentional coherence is the similarity or compatibility of attention to issues across levels, units and people (Rerup, 2009). Power plays a key role in determining attentional vividness. It requires actors in integrate figure, ground, periphery, and center (Weick, 1995), because "vivid awareness of what goes on in a context is derived from relationships, not parts" (Rerup, 2009). If the periphery of an issue receives less attention than the center, than the position of the center loses meaning through diminished context. Without the periphery, "the center vanishes" (Weick, 1995, p. 1040). Attentional triangulation provides mindful managers with tools by which to notice emergent cues. However, it does not identify or explain the mechanisms within a firm's structure of attention that prevent managers from noticing weak cues regardless of taking a mindful approach to management. Decision makers in firms do have to use more observant approaches in order to detect information emerging from lower in the organizational hierarchy. However, we must still better understand the mechanisms within structures that prevent managers from paying attention to these cues as part of business as usual.

Failing to pay attention to emerging issues as they present themselves through anomalous cues reduces an organization's sensitivity and ability to respond to environmental changes (Rerup, 2009). Compounding this, Weick and

Sutcliffe (2006) suggest, "when building strategy in complex environments, actors begin to experience greater intellectual and emotional distance from the phenomena picked up by direct perception" (Weick & Sutcliffe 2006, p. 529). While managers' attention to unprecedented challenges may be high, their cognitive schemas, or established patterns of processing information (related to actor focus of attention, situated attention, organizational structure of attention and dominant discourses), shape their interpretations of the challenges in question. Managers' cognitive schemas, personal characteristics and individual circumstances thus play a role in influencing their positions on how emergent issues should be addressed. However, managers' "characteristics will only be reflected in strategy insofar as they are first reflected in attention" (Cho & Hambrick, 2006, p. 454).

Events both internal and external to the organization contribute to organizational sensemaking and shape attention. Critical events (Hoffman & Ocasio, Not all events are attended equally: Toward a middle-range theory of industry attention to external events, 2001), shocks (Fligstein, 1991), jolts (Meyer, 1982), and discontinuities play a role in shaping industry evolution (Baron, Dobbin, & Devereaux Jennings, 1986; Hoffman, 1999; Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001). Critical events are occurrences that are dramatic in their given contexts. They direct actor attention, and encourage collective analysis and redefinition of issues (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010; (Pride, 1995). The extent of an event's impact on institutional logics is defined by the extent to which it is able to direct attention of diverse actors to previously unnoticed characteristics of the event and the environment.

Critical events can jump-start sensemaking of not only the event itself, but the organizational field as a whole. Attention to the event in question can lead to new approaches to environmental representation, theorization, associated practices, and resultantly, institutional logics. However, since events occur over the course of longer processes, not all features of events receive attention and influence sensemaking (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Theorization processes sparked by events integrate top-down, or "societal-level logics and the logics of identity groups", and bottom-up, or "attention to representative environmental features and exemplars made salient by the event". New logics resulting from the bottom up

part of the process emerge "in a piecemeal fashion as actors in the field abstract from specific exemplars and features to characterize specific dimensions of the organizational field" (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010, p. 838). Situations that contradict or are not explained by existing institutional logics drive attention and critical evaluation (Seo & Douglas Creed, 2002; Nigam & Ocasio, 2010).

An event's salience within an organization is related to prior knowledge, expectations, novelty and goals (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). These and other factors determine the selective attention it receives, which "is driven not by the objective characteristics of the situation or event, but by its *enactment* in the environment" (Weick & Kiesler, 1979; Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001, p. 415). Enactment can be viewed as a middle step between Nigam and Ocasio's (2010) explanation of theorization and representation. In their processes of sensemaking, enactment enables managers to "construct, rearrange, single out, and demolish many of the objective features of their surroundings" (Weick & Kiesler, 1979, p. 164). Enactment orders the environment by imposing causal maps on the issues at which organizational actions are directed (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001) Through processes of enactment, organizational orientations of attention will come to dominate or remain dominant, whereas others will be deprioritized, or disappear (Cho & Hambrick, 2006). Attentional orientation results from decision-makers perception of reality (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) and is often related to the level of uncertainty surrounding an event or situation (Byström & Järvelin, 1995; Cho & Hambrick, 2006).

Attention and strategy formulation

Strategy formulation is the iterative process of resource allocation (Blettner, 2011; Noda & Bower, 1996; Burgelman, 1983). It is an amorphous and widely distributed process, in which factors at environmental, organizational and individual levels are relevant (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Ocasio, 1997; Ocasio & Joseph 2005). When studying decision processes, issues can serve as better points of focus than the decisions themselves because defining the boundaries of decisions is challenging and because issues reflect discourse in organizations, whereas decisions reflect outcomes. Decision makers consider issues in reference

to performance and personal objectives. Political decision makers oversee strategic proposals, and are guided by attention to limited resources while attempting to manage their business responsibilities and careers simultaneously (Langley, 1989; Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, & Saint-Macary, 1995). Decision makers often deal with information overload, or a high ratio of available information to information needed to address an issue (Hansen & Martine, 2001, p. 1). The inundation of information impacts availability of attention.

Strategy formulation addresses how actors in decision-making channels make choices and retain or discard strategic initiatives, processes which are driven by event salience, attentional selection, enactment, and attentional orientation. Decision-making is defined by:

1. Selective attention to organizational issues and initiatives.
2. Selective attention takes place within in a network of (operational and governance) channels.
3. Formal channels inform development of informal channels.
4. Varying degrees of coupling of channels informs strategy formulation through selective retention of initiatives.
5. Selective retention of initiatives is a source of competitive advantage (Ocasio & Joseph, 2005, p. 41).

Agendas across channels need to be aligned for strategy to be effectively carried out. Tight channel coupling facilitates managers' top-down control of the organizational agenda and focuses attention on corporate strategies at subsequent levels of the hierarchy (Ocasio & Joseph, 2005, p. 52). However, diversified firms acting on a global playing field face unique challenges developing and realizing strategy because of wide variation between the local contexts of their subsidiaries (Doz & Prahalad, 1991). For strategy to be effective, "both top-down and bottom-up communication is required" (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). The authors further suggest that top managers need to alter attention in order to foster successful adaptation, since initiatives are rarely established through a purely top-down approach and also emerge from lower in the organizational hierarchy (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012).

Whether actors and subsidiaries are open to top-down initiatives varies according to local contexts, including cultural norms and operational relevance.

When channels at the level of headquarters and within geographically distant global markets have disparate focuses of attention, their worlds take on distinct and at times separate priorities. There may not be alignment on issues, and initiatives may struggle for budgetary consideration (Ocasio & Joseph, 2005). Managers pay attention to some proposals instead of others "in the light of the reward and measurement systems that determine whether it is in their interest to provide impetus for a particular project" (Burgelman, 1983, p. 64). In this perspective, in the case of diversified firms, international attention in strategy development (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011) is motivated by incentives such as "material rewards, social status, and/or other forms of symbolic credits" (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011 p. 247). Local industries, such as agriculture, are likely to be characterized by diverse local practices that vary on a country-by-country basis, possibly with little coordination across locations, and "perceived value of international attention in such contexts may be proportionally lower" (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011, p. 248). Similarly, when developing global strategies, managers' actions are shaped by their specific contexts, or situated attention. External issues, such as those transpiring in foreign markets, can be viewed as abstract and challenging to reframe in terms of strategies and actions (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011; Weick & Kiesler, 1979; Weick, 1995).

Loosely coupled channels make it more likely that international managers will integrate contextual factors within operational channels into the attentional perspective of corporate governance channels. In these channels, there are more issues and actors to consider, and centralized, top-down action is not as effective (Doz & Prahalad, 1991). However, because of this, loosely coupled channels lead to initiatives that, while encompassing strategic objectives at the top, are informed by operational issues in disparate local subsidiaries. This is because issues and initiatives generated and addressed within governance channels must reflect and account for priorities within operational channels for those actors to support them, and for effective strategy implementation to occur (Ocasio & Joseph, 2005).

Unfocused or abstract agendas have little likelihood of gaining long-term importance in the firm. Positive evolution of activities requires decision makers to pay attention to and respond to issues "by adding, abandoning, or altering strategic activities" (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Senior managers have to be able to focus

attention on issues and activities at multiple levels of the organizational hierarchy. This facilitates accuracy and integration with regard to information considered (Ocasio, 1997). Therefore, it ensures decisions made at subsequent levels of the organization relate to top managements' strategy objectives (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). However, as shown above, when initiatives are too top-down they do not resonate with managers lower down in the organization, and may not be seen as relevant or prioritized within operations. An important guide of attention during strategy formation is managers' "cause-effect beliefs …defined as understandings regarding the effects of the environment and of strategic inputs on organizational effectiveness" (Barreto, 2013, p. 689; Chattopadhyay, et al. 1999; Nadkarni & Barr, 2008).

Global strategies emerge according to the processes by which the attention structures and channels direct the focus of top executives (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011). A diverse and dynamic collaboration is needed to generate global strategy, which are resultantly social properties coming from experiences in praxis, joint observations and cooperative actions of involved stakeholders (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011; Chia, 2004; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007). Therefore, to understand global strategy and attention, researchers must pay attention to executives as complex actors, including actions, where mindsets are evident (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011).

A central challenge when developing global strategies in multinational firms, especially when it comes to unfamiliar challenges, is how to determine what part of the hierarchy or which unit should be responsible or accountable for developing or implementing a given strategy, or part of a strategy. Researchers have suggested that international attention is a shared property of the firm, informed by actors and processes at all levels, rather than a group of executives at the top of the organization. Executives at times interfere in practices and processes that could be delegated to other actors in operational channels when it comes to making sense of the firm's global environment (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011).

The confusion that comes with strategy development and allocation of responsibility in complex international contexts and projects is partially addressed by foundational work on organizational choice. In ad hoc decision making environments that occur in exception to existing organizational practices, actor

sensemaking and collective processes of strategy development follow an at times unruly trajectory. For example, if decision makers detect an emergent issue and develop an unprecedented approach to addressing it, that approach is not initially accompanied by established routines. In the case of a workshop that incorporates new partners and addresses a new issue, there may be no clear accompanying agenda to guide the process, and actors may not have clearly defined expectations regarding outcomes. Observing this, Cohen et al. (1972) presented a "garbage can model of organizational choice". In this process of decision-making, "problems, solutions, and participants move from one choice opportunity to another in such a way that the nature of the choice, the time it takes, and the problems it solves all depend on…the mix of choices available at any one time, the mix of problems that have access to the organization, the mix of solutions looking for problems, and the outside demands on the decision makers" (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972, p. 16). In the garbage can model, problems and choices can become disconnected, and as a result, decision-making does not necessarily solve problems. Problems are worked on in the context of available choices, but "choices are made only when the shifting combinations of problems, solutions, and decision makers happen to make action possible". Often, conditions align for actors to make choices only "after problems have left a given choice arena or before they have discovered it" Cohen et al. 1972). In sum, when it comes to strategy development, paying attention to a number of choices is possible (although limited by power structures and cultural norms and values within the firm), but making a choice is constricted by conditions regulating the organizational environment.

Attention, power and multinational corporations

When exploring how subsidiaries and other actors operate in relation to central headquarters, power can offer a helpful lens (Bouquet & Birkenshaw, 2008). Power can determine an individual's effectiveness in and access to organizational processes. An actor's structural position refers to where they are located within an organizational chain of command; "In large organizations, the structural position of a manager can refer to his or her location in different subgroups or units (e.g. corporate headquarters, specific business units)" (Baretto

2013, p. 690). This position often decides their power in the organization by mediating their ability to command or direct attention to an issue.

Activities people engage in without thinking, for example doing the job expected of them by those above them in the organization, involve assumptions that legitimize existing power dynamics. Behaviors are naturalized, and function on ideological foundations. Ideological power, "the power to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense', is a significant compliment to economic and political power, and of particular significance…because it is exercised in discourse" (Fairclough, 1989). Those with power may exercise it through coercion (threatening others with sanctions, violence, or death), or consent (convincing others to willingly acquiesce to their authority), with degrees of overlap.

Scholars of diversified firms have argued that the firms' multidivisional structure leads to more effective information processing and decision-making capacity, however more empirical work is needed to support this (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Generally, in diversified firms, corporate headquarters handles strategy and business units focusing on operations (Chandler, 1962; Stinchcombe, 1990). To develop strategy in multinational corporations, top-level executives must collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to formulate a comprehensive idea of the diverse operational environments in which the firm is doing business. This leads enables strategy that is relevant to local contexts (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2011). Multinationals offer excellent potential for researchers, since by carrying out activities across national and cultural borders, they create research opportunities to push the boundaries of existing theory (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008).

International attention refers to how diversified firms allocate attention to and among international contexts. It is a meta-construct focused on explaining "the extent to which headquarters executives in the multinational enterprise (MNE) invest time and effort in activities, communications, and discussions aimed at improving their understanding of the global marketplace" (Bouquet, Morrison, & Birkinshaw, 2009, p. 109). Multinationals have to pay attention to and make sense of competitive dynamics in various multicultural environments (Athanassiou & Nigh, 2000; Carpenter, 2002). They have to present a streamlined approach to

doing business (Roth & O'Donnell, 1996). Simultaneously, they need to cultivate a level of responsiveness to unique contexts that allows them to locate emergent opportunities in their environments (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Murtha, Lenway, & Bagozzi, 1998). This requires a high level of knowledge, awareness and attention from executives (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Bouquet, Morrison & Birkinshaw, 2009). Procedural and communication channels also apply to international operations, and are the spaces in which international attention is developed (Joseph & Ocasio 2012; Bouquet, Morrison & Birkinshaw, 2009). International attention is influenced by several factors, including the personal characteristics and abilities of actors in top management positions, and the structural and environmental issues influencing or placing demands on executive attention. For example, executives' prior experiences in international markets have a bearing on international attention, along with the independence of subsidiaries (Bouquet, Morrison & Birkinshaw, 2009).

Bouquet and Birkinshaw (2008) identify three central findings related to how headquarters pays attention to "low-power" actors in multinationals:

1. Attention is partially based on the structural positions, or weight, of subsidiaries in a global corporate system.
2. A subsidiary's 'voice' is its tool for attracting attention.
3. Geographical distance and competence mediate a subsidiary's weight with regard to headquarters' attention (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008; Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1990; Nohria & Ghoshal, 1997; Hirschman, 1970; Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

Furthermore, headquarters' attention can be reduced to three sub-constructs: relative attention, or how much recognition headquarters gives to one subsidiary in relation to others; supportive attention, or what resources headquarters gives a subsidiary for its development (Luo, 2003; Rugman & Verbeke, 2001) and visible attention—the attention a subsidiary receives from headquarters regarding its achievements (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008).

Many approaches to studying power in organizations emphasize relationships and networks between actors (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008), since a given actors' structural position in the firm is frequently a predictor or symptom of their power. These relationships and networks can impact openness to, deployment

of, and adoption of new ideas in organizations. A new idea can bring power to the actor who came up with it, but only to the extent it is recognized by someone with the power to initiate its dissemination into the organization (Andersson, Forsgren, & Holm, 2007; Andersson & Pahlberg, 1997; Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008).

Bouquet and Birkinshaw (2008) suggest that low-power actors can increase their importance in an organization by achieving legitimacy, controlling resources, and gaining centrality. However, low-power actors must actively achieve influence, since power rarely flows to powerless actors, or actors lacking legitimacy (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1987; Suchman, 1995; Weber, 1947). Here, I view legitimacy as "a recognized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). I am aligned with Weber in viewing legitimacy "as a form of social approval that facilitates the acquisition of power because it determines how social actors are understood and evaluated" (Weber, 1947). Low-power actors must achieve legitimacy in intersections of increasing complexity, adapting to numerous institutional and business features of the environments in which they are active (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008; Geppert, Matten, & Walgenbach, 2006; Geppert & Williams, 2006; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994), and "they must also find ways to translate corporate ideals into a tangible set of local practices that effectively bridge the expectations of the head office, if they are to exert any influence on MNC decisions" (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008). Gaining legitimacy is about redistributing power through connections, confrontation, and collaboration (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008).

Agricultural raw materials, whose producers are the focus of the monitoring framework this research studied, must be looked at through a specific lens. While agricultural raw materials certainly constitute a critical resource for many multinational corporations, they are widely available, making no particular group of producers of particular strategic importance unless they develop additional capabilities and services that are particularly attractive and useful to headquarters. Since supply exceeds demand, farmers are at a disadvantage when it comes to earning sufficient money from their goods. Under the existing structures of international trade, civil society, shareholder activists and NGOs need to become

engaged in order to apply regulatory pressure to multinationals, pushing them to invoke ethical business practices and diminish harmful social and environmental impact (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008).

Culture and communication

Culture arguably plays a critical role in almost all processes and practices in which individuals engage, including in intra- and inter-organizational communication. The idea of "culture" and its impact has been the focus of empirical and theoretical work in numerous fields, including communication, organization studies, management, anthropology, literature and sociology, among others. Studies of culture have often explored how social practices are influenced by and influence phenomena such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and perceptions of nationhood. Power asymmetries in society are frequently central points of focus, and discourse analysis is a common approach to exploring language and symbols as units of analysis enacting and reproducing power and relations of authority and ideological domination. That said, researchers have used a wide range of methodological and theoretical approaches in studying culture, and have at times been criticized for this reason. Further complicating studies of culture is its amorphousness and lack of clear borders.

This project sees culture as playing a critical role in whether communication in organizations is effective, and the subsequent successes or failures of strategies developed. Shared culture oversees the influence behavior norms have on relationships (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). Despite critiques, examinations of culture have been invaluable in destabilizing dominant positivist assumptions regarding social phenomena. By considering culture, researchers can talk about differences between groups of people based on disparate values, practices, and behaviors, and frequently also economic disparities. They can also engage how these differences impact processes and practices in groups and organizations. So-called cultural differences can often influence a given group or individual's access to resources, their values, the goals they develop and how they pursue them. Conducting studies with attention to culture enables researchers to explore the tacit assumptions that inform practices and processes performed within

groups and organizations. I explore communication channels and what I call communication *spaces,* which are grounded in existing organizational and social structures and processes informed by culture.

Organizational culture in a social constructionist tradition relates to how actors make sense of organizational events (Fiol, Hatch, & Golden-Biddle, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Like culture more generally, organizational culture consists largely of tacit, collective interpretive schemas (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). It provides actors with cues for making sense of (and giving sense to) events and processes within their organizations (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Past work has suggested that actors often attach substantial meaning to the "cultural heritage" of their organizations (Ravasi & Schultz 2006; Martin, 1993; Schein, 1992). Artifacts, rituals, symbols and practices unique to a given organization, including corporate architecture (Berg & Kreiner, 1990), are visible manifestations of the organization's defining characteristics, and as such denote collective history (see for example Martin, 1993; Schein, 1992).

Managers are positioned to influence shared definitions of am organization's perceived identity and culture more dominantly than employees lower down in the hierarchy (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Whetton & Mackey, 2002). By distributing a consistent organizational narrative, managers unify diverse actors (Pfeffer, 1981) and give sense to changes and unfamiliar events (Corley & Gioia, , 2004). This sensegiving function facilitates members of organizations and external actors adapting their perceptions of what the organization is and what it stands for (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Comparing perceived characteristics of one organization or group in relation to another solidifies how members perceive and categorize their core characteristics (Albert & Whetton, 1985). Organizations are often concerned with being viewed positively by external audiences, and as such strive to align internal beliefs with external perceptions (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1993; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). This serves to solidify a cohesive organizational sense of self (Cheney & Christensen, 2001) and energize members (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

In my project, paying attention to culture is important because culture varies between organizations, groups and individuals active in the MNC and the coffee supply chain. At the MNC's headquarters, employees came from a wide

variety of nations, and their cultural associations were shaped by their diverse individual histories and experiences in addition to their organizational affiliations. The resultantly complex and fluid convergence of the widely diverse social phenomena that in turn shaped how individuals valued information and interacted with one another can be considered transcultural. Transcultural as a concept relates to the re-adaptations and hybridizations that happen across cultural boundaries in zones of amorphous cultural "identity" (Rogers, 2006; Pratt, 2008; Castañeda, 2009). Transcultural zones are non-absolute interfaces and overlaps between, or rather among cultures. In this sense, communication channels and spaces are transcultural zones, where interacting cultural beliefs and behaviors of participants are enacted and adapted and shape strategies. Actors' interpretation of stimuli is heavily impacted by their organizational and personal cultural affiliations. As a result, in SCE workshops, at the MNC headquarters, and in the coffee supply chain in the sourcing country studied, potential for misunderstanding and misalignment was high. The space in which actors engaged in processes and practices was informed by events taking place and organizational structures in place, but also by a global, socially constructed idea of how things are. It is also amorphous, dissociated from territorial boundaries, and changes according to actor (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31).

Knowledge management and knowledge transfer

This work interacts on a general level with the fields of knowledge management and knowledge transfer, both of which are also heavily informed by attention to culture. A discipline since the early 1990s, knowledge management is concerned with how to capture, share, generate and use organizational knowledge. In his foundational article in the Harvard Business Review, Nonaka (1991) posits that, primarily in western companies, few managers are able to identify, create, and manage knowledge. This is because they misunderstand and subsequently misidentify knowledge, particularly "tacit" knowledge, and are therefore unable to make use of it (Nonaka I. , 1991). Instead, many companies in the west focus on "hard" data and universal principles. In contrast, many successful Japanese companies have gained competitive advantage by locating, trying out and making

use of their employees' tacit knowledge, which exists within daily practices, activities, and cultural characteristics of individuals. In Japanese companies, managers' comfort with and ability to use slogans and symbols that resonated culturally with the people they employed was a key to success. In contrast, many western managers have often seen slogans and symbols as irrelevant or nonsensical (Nonaka, 1991).

Since the organization is a "living organism", effective knowledge management is "as much about ideals as it is about ideas" (Nonaka, 1991). In other words, people and their cultural practices in organizations are key resources when it comes to effective knowledge management. Emerging from knowledge management is, among other focuses, knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer views the transfer of information between different parts of an organization to be a complicated process, since substantial important knowledge is tacit rather than explicit (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Argote & Ingram, 2000). Furthermore, power asymmetries impact knowledge transfer, along with the presence or absence of shared social and cultural identities (Kane et al. 2005), geography and distance between individuals (Galbraith, 1990) and technological limitations in communication (Roberts, 2000). Scholars have observed that while organizational and cultural differences have a positive influence on knowledge transfer, social conflict impacts it negatively (Vaara et al 2008). While not surprising, these findings encourage us to consider and pay close attention to the dynamics of the relationship between the MNC and its partner organization, and consider how it may influence how MNC decision makers pay attention to feedback from the base of the chain of command. Others have argued that in intracorporate networks, authority has to be decentralized if members of the network are to determine how to best make use of available knowledge (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). This has challenging implications for the case explored, in which there are substantial power disparities between the MNC actors involved. The case is further complicated since the network explored (MNC, organizational partner, farmers) is inter-organizational, with different actors possessing different degrees of power and authority. Dissipating centralization of authority is challenging without engaging in proactive efforts to achieve this end. Tsai (2001) argues that business units occupying a central organizational position are best situated to transfer

knowledge. However, this relies on central units being able to both acquire new knowledge, and replicate it. For this, they need to have access to external knowledge, and an internal capacity for learning (Tsai, 2001). Scholars have also argued that knowledge is most effectively transferred when embedded in the interactions between people, the tools they use and tasks they carry out (Argote & Ingram, 2000). However, the toolkit for how this might be achieved is not entirely clear.

My work has implications for the fields of knowledge management and knowledge transfer, since I critically engage an organizational process in which knowledge, which I discuss as "information", was neither effectively managed nor transferred.

Chapter summary

It is clear that a maturing body of work on attention has offered critical insights to studies of organizations in the past several years. In this chapter, I attempted to contextualize my research interests in attention literature by outlining the attention-based view of the firm (Ocasio, 1997) and work on communication, channels, sensemaking, and strategy in organizations. Since in addition to a multinational's strategy formation I study communication in one of its international supply chains, I also aimed to outline scholarship on power, multinational corporations, culture, and knowledge management. In the next chapter, I will discuss my research methods and analytical approach.

3. Approach to research and analysis

Overview

In this dissertation, I explore how information moved up the organizational chain of command in a multinational corporation's international supply chain, and examine what mechanisms shaped how decision makers at headquarters paid attention to and valued emergent issues.

The purpose of this chapter is to, 1) describe my approach to research, including paradigmatic approach, research design and reflexivity, 2) explain my process of data collection; 3) explain my approach to analysis, and 4) address research quality, validity, ethics and limitations.

Philosophical approach

My research was informed by social constructionism. Social constructionism views all knowledge and what we perceive as reality as depending on human practices. Meaning comes from interpretations of interactions with the social and physical world and is constantly in the process of becoming (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructionist approaches view participants as making meaning collaboratively through constant interpretive processes. How participants make sense of their environment and events is guided by their unique experiences at work, home, and in relationships (Weick, 1995).

In the perspective of social constructionism, researchers actively co-produce data, and participants actively co-create knowledge. This is because the interests, questions, analyses and findings of the researcher are informed by his or her worldview and interpretation of the historical emergence of the research context. This leads the researcher to make a series of subjective choices. I made choices about what issues and themes were interesting for further study, about my research design, my methods and approach to analysis, and reacted to limitations and opportunities related to time, money, and the locations for the study.

Reflexivity

At the outset of this project, my intention was to write about what to include in a KPI framework based on ethnographic research on farms. However, as the data collection and analysis process evolved, discontinuities in organizational information channels and the impact they had on strategy processes related to the SCE emerged a central challenge and fruitful area for research. Funding from the MNC was supplemented by a stipend from the Prodoc at program in Dynamics of Transcultural Management and Governance at the University of St. Gallen through the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

For reasons of confidentiality with the MNC and its partner organization, I do not reveal the country that served as my case study or the country in which the MNC was based.

Research design

Methodology

This is a qualitative study using interpretive grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory emerged in response to quantitative positivism committed to "narrowly scientific…ways of knowing" (Charmaz, 2006). As quantitative research gained momentum, new theory emerged at diminishing rates. Grounded theory is a qualitative approach for generating theoretical explanations for grounded social observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 1994; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Earlier incarnations of grounded theory in the tradition of Glaser and Strauss (1967) took a positivist approach, in other words worked under the assumption that there was a "reality" to be discovered. Corbin and Strauss (1994) distanced themselves from positivism in grounded theory, taking the position that instead of being there to be found, "truth is enacted" (Corbin & Strauss, 1994). Later, Charmaz (2006) clarified the dimensions of a comparatively interpretivist approach, which is what informed my research. In grounded theory, the researcher stays grounded in data by engaging in an iterative process of data collection and analysis, thereby developing substantive or formal theory to explain the social process he or she is observing. Substantive theories explain particular phenomena,

whereas formal theories seek to explain universal phenomena on an abstract level (Charmaz, 2006). The grounded theory research process is characterized by the following practices:

i. Collecting and analyzing data simultaneously
ii. Allowing data to inform the construction of analytic codes and categories, rather than relying on deductive hypotheses
iii. Engaging in constant comparison at all stages of analysis
iv. Advancing theory development constantly throughout the process
v. Writing memos to expand on categories, identify relationships and locate gaps
vi. Sampling as needed to saturate the data set for theory development, rather than for representativeness
vii. Conducting a thorough review of the literature only after having developed an autonomous analysis of the phenomenon, so as to allow themes grounded in data to emerge without regard to existing work (Charmaz 2006).

Site and participant selection

Case selection

The MNC was selected opportunistically, due to the chance to procure funding and research access resulting from my supervisor's connection with the head of corporate agriculture at the company. Therefore, I knew at the outset of this project that my research would concern the MNC and its transnational supply chains. Under the terms of the collaboration, I was required to produce a key performance indicator framework for measuring Creating Shared Value. I address quality and ethics in regards to this collaboration later in this chapter, however my choices were autonomous in terms of the content and focus of my dissertation. In the tradition of grounded theory and discourse analysis, my data to guided me to emergent questions leading to interesting opportunities for further research—in this case, discontinuities in organizational communication channels and the impact they had on strategy development.

Site selection

Three sourcing countries served as sites for preliminary data collection, however focused the majority of my research in just one, with primary criteria being ease of access and the strength of relationships. Actors at the municipal offices of the MNC's country-level partner organization selected the farms that hosted me. The partner organization was a large non-governmental organization with a for-profit branch. It sold the MNC its coffee, and acted as the its local partner in CSV programs. I talk more about challenges associated with conducting research with the organization in Chapter 5.

Participant selection

The data included in this dissertation come from 10 semi-structured interviews with 4 employees of the multinational's corporate headquarters, and 2 SCE workshops taking place over a total of 3 days. They also included 17 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 participants in the sourcing country studied, including farmers, their spouses, employees of the MNC's subsidiaries and employees of relevant country-level partners. Countless conversations with additional parties supplemented the data listed here.

Agronomists employed by the local partner organization chose participating farmers. They said they selected farmers according to whether they wished to have a houseguest, if they lived in a potential conflict zone, and if they had a place for me to sleep. Selection may have been influenced by how well farmers adhered to "good agricultural practices" and the personal relationships between agronomists and farmers. For example, one of the producers with whom I was placed was related to an agronomist at the municipal section of the partner organization, and one was an exceptionally successful farm, belonging to the president of the local cooperative of coffee growers. All participants explored in analysis here were part of the multinational's supply chain, which was the partner organization's supply chain in a coffee sourcing country, and all were adults. During my final trip to the field, I selected additional participants affiliated with the partner organization at local, regional and national levels of the organization's supply chain. This was to saturate my data set regarding discontinuities in information channels between

farmers and decision makers at the MNC's headquarters, which was mediated in the sourcing country by the partner organization.

Participants

Participant*	Country	Place in supply chain	Number of interviews + types of additional interaction
Farmer 1	Sourcing country	Farmer	2 + multiple conversations and observation
Farmer 2	Sourcing country	Farmer	2 + multiple conversations and observation
Farmer 3	Sourcing country	Farmer	2 + multiple conversations and observation
Farmer 4	Sourcing country	Farmer	2 + additional conversations
Farmer 5	Sourcing country	Farmer	1 + multiple conversations and observation
Farmer 6	Sourcing country	Farmer	1 + multiple conversations and observation
Farmer 7	Sourcing country	Farmer	1 + multiple conversations and observation
Ricardo	Sourcing country	Country-level head of purchasing	3 + multiple conversations
Michael	MNC headquarters	Manager	3 + observation at SCE workshops

			and other meetings, multiple additional conversations
Dan	MNC headquarters	Upper-level manager	2 + observation at SCE workshops, multiple additional conversations
Gabrielle	MNC headquarters	Coordinator, Social Conditions Evaluation	2 + observation at SCE workshops, multiple additional conversations
Mario	MNC headquarters	Manager	2 + observation at SCE workshops, additional conversations
Peter	MNC headquarters	Upper-level manager	1 + multiple conversations, observation at additional meetings
Jon	MNC headquarters	Manager	Observations at meetings

* *Names changed to protect the identity of participants*

Data management

I recorded interviews on my iPhone, and uploaded them into my personal, password-protected iTunes. I transcribed recorded interviews following each trip to the field using the transcription software f4, and then saved the documents in Microsoft Word. Due to the volume of collected material, I enlisted the help of transcribers. Transcribers were social or professional acquaintances or friends-of-friends, and I shared recordings using Dropbox. Transcribers did not know the last

names of participants whose interviews they listened to, nor did they have details regarding where they lived. As soon as transcribers completed their work, I blocked them from accessing original recordings. I stored all data on my personal computer, which I keep at my home. I backed up photographs and voice recordings in Dropbox, and transcribed interviews and written material in Dropbox and on my password-protected professional computer. I continue to respect the confidentiality of informants by keeping their interviews password-protected, and their names changed. In addition to interviewees and associated actors, I changed the names of the programs I researched, and obscured the identity of the MNC, the local partner organizational, and the sourcing country studied to protect the privacy of participants and confidentiality wishes of the organizations.

Data techniques

I conducted both participant and non-participant observation. I supplemented observation with semi-structured interviews aimed at further exploring actors' perspectives and meanings, as well as social and organizational processes and practices. I memoed extensively throughout the research process and recorded interviews when possible; when participants objected or the presence of a recording device impeded open and discursive conversation, I took notes.

I summarized contents and addressed emergent themes in a journal directly afterwards. I engaged in constant analytical comparisons so as to highlight unique information as it emerged; for example, I paid attention to and memoed about the differences between farms and participants, offices at different levels of the supply chain and attentional focuses of participants in different offices and units in the sourcing country studied and at headquarters. I supplemented my data with hundreds of photos and collected published reports, newspapers, and other material from the MNC and the partner organization.

Participant observation

Observation is often described as participant or non-participant. However, a more responsive delineation of observer roles can be typified as complete

observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and complete participant (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Gold, 1958; Jarvie, 1969). My role fluctuated between observer as participant and complete observer, however depending on the location and situation my actual involvement fell on a spectrum.

In the sourcing country studied, I stayed for periods of four days to a week with three farming families during two separate research trips spaced approximately six months apart. I joined farmers in coffee fields, helped process coffee, chatted with women as they cooked and did housework, went to points of purchase, to the market, to make deliveries of subsidiary crops and to visit friends, and engaged in conversations that arose with visitors and agronomists. I consider my role observer as participant, falling more on the side of complete observer, since periods spent with families were short. This gave me a glimpse into their lives, but not experiential insight into how it felt to be a coffee farmer. That said, it could be argued that no length of time would be sufficient to render a researcher fluent, or even proficient, in the detailed meanings of an actor's life, including that of a coffee smallholder.

In addition to talking to agronomists from the MNC's local partner organization when they visited farms at which I was staying, I went with them on farm visits, observed evaluations, joined on capacity-building visits, and attended group capacity-building workshops. I also observed processes at the point of purchase for coffee and a plantlet nursery funded by the MNC. I view these research interactions as complete observation.

At headquarters, my role fluctuated. At the SCE workshops, I acted as observer as participant, going in the direction of participant as observer. Since I was called upon to actively consult on indicators and methods, I contributed to discussions. Furthermore, I spent time with MNC employees both formally and informally while working on the SCE for the sourcing country studied here, which I was hired to conduct as a contract separate from my stipend for doctoral research. I was a complete observer at additional internal meetings on rural development between stakeholders at the MNC.

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with actors at the MNC and in the sourcing country studied, opting for a discursive, conversational approach to interviewing so as to encourage participants to introduce issues they perceived as most relevant. Semi-structured interviews are a powerful tool when studying complex issues and processes about which little is known, because it enables researchers to follow interesting avenues of conversation as they arise, rather than following a pre-determined order of questioning (Wengraf, 2001). Asking about participants' experiences leads to rich accounts (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). It encourages active interviewing, in which the participant and researcher establish a conversational rapport, rather than "a procedural directive" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 76). For that reason, it also results in data more representative of participants' perspectives.

At the MNC headquarters, I conducted multiple interviews with the central actors involved with SCE development, adjusting my questions in accordance with issues that had emerged in previous interviews, interviews with a given actors' colleagues, or the contents of SCE workshops. I conducted interviews before, between, and after the two workshops. The first round were loosely focused on what actors wanted the SCE to accomplish; the second and third, conducted after the first and second workshops, respectively, explored actors' reflections on the first workshop, working with NGO partners, and next steps. After coding the interviews and workshops and taking on an attentional (Ocasio, 1997) lens, I conducted another set of interviews, with the intent to identify actors' perspectives on why the SCE was initiated to begin with, namely, what event(s) had spurred its development within the organization.

On farms in the sourcing country, in a first round of semi-structured interviews, I asked participants for histories of their lives and farms. I interviewed husbands and wives separately when possible, in order to understand differences in how they paid attention to issues, and as a method of triangulating data. In a second round of data collection, I initiated conversations focused loosely on the communication discontinuity issues that had emerged in the first round. I did this mostly by prompting farmers, in familiar and colloquial language, to discuss issues such as: the parameters of their relationships and interactions with actors

from the partner organization and the MNC; what they talked about with actors associated with both organizations; what the partner organization and the MNC actors were most interested in when (and if) they visited farms; which certifications farmers upheld, whether they received support, and whether they perceived a benefit; what programs the partner organization and the MNC had in place aside from those focused on amplifying coffee production; and, what additional organizations were active in the area, particularly on to social issues.

With agronomists and municipal actors associated with the partner organization, I asked about what challenges farmers faced, what assistance farmers received and how they interacted with the MNC, if at all, how they perceived the MNC and the partner organization, how sourcing worked and what they paid attention to when they visited farms. I followed topics of conversation actors brought up. I triangulated emergent issues brought up by the partner organization and MNC actors and farmers.

Research questions

1. How does information from low in an organizational hierarchy move up the chain of command?
2. How do decision makers attend to and systematize anomalous information when developing novel management approaches?

Data analysis

In the tradition of grounded theory, I collected and analyzed data in an iterative process. I analyzed observational data descriptively. Descriptive analyses are interpretive and subjective. Coding on transcripts of semi-structured interviews and workshops was informed by my modified grounded theory research design. Strauss and Corbin describe coding as the process by which "data are fractured, conceptualised, and integrated to form theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 3). In other words, it is the act of "identifying a chunk or unit of data (a passage of text of any length) as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 493). Grounded theory promotes coding at high levels of abstraction, such as word-by-word and line-by-line. I coded my

data according to meaning units based on key points framed by my research question, since I conducted discourse analysis in order to highlight attention processes. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that "well performed grounded theory meets all the requirements of 'good Science': significance, theory—observation, compatibility, generalisability, reproducibility, precision, rigor, and verification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 27).

I began the coding process manually and switched to Atlas.ti after my second trip to the field in order to manage the large amount of data that resulted. However, using the software minimized my need to repeatedly re-read all categorized excerpts. This promoted an approach too removed from data for my purposes, prompting me to revert to manual coding. I grouped codes with similar thematic content into categories, and looked for connections and links between categories by re-reading the material. I used scissors and markers to categorize participants' statements thematically and labeled the categories with post-it notes. Codes were both "in vivo" and paraphrased summaries of the content of participants' statements.

Discourse analysis

Studying discourse is a well-established approach to exploring social phenomena and processes in the field of organization studies (see e.g. Grant, Michelson, Oswick, & Wailes, 2005; Grant D. , 2004; Van Dijk, 2011). Theory on discourse acknowledges the role language plays in organizing social fields. Within social discourses, language expresses rules and assumptions and provides tools for enacting and resisting them in the form of discursive practices (Foucault, 1970). Foucault posits that discourses, such as science and literature, are taken to be self-evident, even though in his view they should be challenged. He argues that instead of serving as the static base of infallible assumptions on which we can pose other questions, these discourses imply a host of their own questions related to how they are defined, their limits, what laws they obey, what they articulate and in what context and by who they were developed (Foucault, 1970).

Discourse analysis offers a methodology for examining the social production of organizational phenomena that can be abstract, amorphous, and hard to pin down (Phillips, Sewell, & Jaynes, 2008, p. 549). It is a particularly

appropriate method of analysis for the case studied here, since it is well suited to identify mechanisms of power in strategy texts (Vaara, E., Sorsa, V., & Pälli, P, 2010). There are many methods for conducting discourse analysis. In this project, I use an approach inspired by the foundational work of Foucault (1970), and informed by Fairclough (1989). Studies of discourse pay attention to the specific conditions in which social processes happen. Exploring discourse and discursive practices in society enables the researcher to explore how power manifests, is enacted and reproduced through language.

Discourse analysis is aligned with social constructionism. It holds that when people use language, what they say and produce is shaped by and shapes social phenomena. It overarches the individual, influencing collectives of individuals within social spaces or fields (Foucault, 1970, 1972; Diaz-Bone, Bührmann, Rodríguez, Schneider, Kendall, & Tirado, 2008). Discourses affect individuals in that actors construct and constitute them through discursive practices (Foucault, 1970, 1972; Butler, 1993; Diaz-Bone, Bührmann, Rodríguez, Schneider, Kendall, & Tirado, 2008). Discursive practices form statements, which are the objects of study in Foucauldian analyses of discourse. Actors with varying levels of power enact and reproduce systems of authority through language. Actors with more power constrain participation of actors with less power, with constraints applying to the contents of actors' statements and actions, relationships they may enter, and their subject positions (Fairclough, 1989).

The array of approaches to conducting discourse analysis has led to some studies being more rigorous than others. Some researchers use the term 'discourse analysis' without engaging in deep analysis of discourse. This is in part due to confusion within the field regarding what discourse is, and relatedly, what discourse analysis is. Some scholars employ discourse analysis to study textual and linguistic features of specific situations, with these situations remaining local and non-generalizable (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). Others are more interested in paradigmatic features of discourse, and focus on "historically developed systems of ideas" (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011, p. 1129). My interest in this project is structural and paradigmatic rather than linguistic at a micro-level. I want to know how social worlds are created and recreated through systems of ideas expressed through language.

Foucauldian discourse analysis arguably focuses on macro- (structural and paradigmatic) rather than micro-level practices (Diaz-Bone, Bührmann, Rodríguez, Schneider, Kendall, & Tirado, 2008). In my work, this is an advantage, since I am interested in language to the extent that it comprises discursive practices. Discursive practices are the micro-level units of analysis through which I explore how social discourses (systems of ideas) materialize through statements at the level of the actor and social field. Foucault argues that all (or a vast quantity of) statements within a discursive formation have to be explored, with the intent of bringing their positivity into question by paying attention to their historical existence and emergence (Foucault, 1972). It is important to acknowledge that the process of interpreting as a researcher also happens in relation to power in society and socially constructed local circumstances specific to the time and place in which analysis happens. The process of selecting samples is informed by positivist assumptions. To mitigate the risk that bias informs sample selections of statements, the researcher must consider a wide array of statements. This is compatible with the inductive approach encouraged by grounded theory, as researchers must make decisions as guided by themes emerging in data. In discourse analysis, the intent is to destabilize the contents of discourse in a social field to the extent that actors within that field accept them as facts.

Foucault proposes that discourses are structured by the rules of objects, "enunciative" modalities, concepts and strategies. When studying discourse in Foucauldian perspective, the researcher may ask first what kind of knowledge is being produced, what logic shapes terminology, what actors and structures hold a position of authority, and what aims are being pursued by engaging discourse (Foucault, 1972; Diaz-Bone, Bührmann, Rodríguez, Schneider, Kendall, & Tirado, 2008). Discourse analysis is appropriate in this project because actors value some issues over others in accordance with existing attention structures. Attention structures can be viewed as discourses, which regulate communication channels, spaces, and the information they transfer through discursive practices. Attention structures are shaped by linguistic and non-linguistic social influences; how people use language is "dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which they were generated—as well as being socially transmitted and, in our society, unequally distributed" (Fairclough, 1989).

In this project, the discursive practices comprising social discourses were based in two interlinked social arenas: the MNC's global headquarters, and their coffee supply chain in a sourcing market. I looked at how actors enacted and reproduced discourses within channels and communication spaces. When conducting discourse analysis, I paid attention to statements as outcomes of discursive practices within discourses and conduct a close analysis of texts (Fairclough, 1989) or statements (Foucault, 1972) to identify discursive practices. These practices included vocabulary, metaphor and simile, who speaks when, and the structure of interactions between actors (Fairclough, 1989). Interaction and social context are important points of consideration when studying discourse as historically reproduced systems of ideas, and involve "*description* of text, *interpretation* of the relationship between text and interaction, and *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context" (Fairclough, 1989, emphasis in original). Researchers can study discourse through vocabulary, grammar and textual structures. Since I am conducting a paradigmatic study, I omit grammar, but consider vocabulary through:

- Experiential value of words, classification schemes, if words are ideologically contested, rewording and overwording
- Relational values of words, euphemisms, formality and informality
- Expressive values
- Metaphors (Fairclough, 1989).

Experiential value represents a participants' experience of the natural or social world. This can show how ideologies in discourses are coded in language. *Relational value* shows dynamics of social relationships enacted through discursive practices, reinforcing discourse. *Expressive value* shows how a participant made sense of a process. I also pay attention to textual structures in relation to conventions of interaction of participants, such as whether and how they control turns and contributions of others (Fairclough, 1989). While I take guidance from Fairclough regarding linguistic features to consider in studying discourse, he discusses analysis of *texts*. I analyze discourse and discursive practices through *statements* (Foucault, 1972). This is because discussing text conceptually emphasizes the literary elements of local outcomes of social

processes, whereas I am looking primarily at the role of *spoken* language in influencing how actors find answers for emergent issues.

Critical Narrative Analysis

Discourse analysis has the flaw of being abstract. It has "been employed by researchers without a robust connection to linguistic concepts and features, remaining at the macroanalytic level" (Souto-Manning, 2014). While discourse analysis enabled me to locate power structures and ideologies in participants' interviews and stories, these manifestations of power were not always the participant's central focus. Using discourse analysis as a sole analytic tool gave untruthful weight to questions of power in participants' responses, instead of allowing power to emerge as part of a complex whole.

Narratives give insight into how actors make sense of their environment, important events, and processes in which they are involved or observe. Critically analyzing narratives with attention to discourse "can help us assess and understand institutional and power discourses in society in more concrete ways" (Souto-Manning, 2014). As mentioned, discourse analysis addresses power differences in society through language, which has been surprisingly overlooked in much narrative analysis. In this sense, critical narrative analysis "allows us to learn how people create their selves in constant social interactions…. and how institutional discourses influence and are influenced by personal everyday narratives" (Souto-Manning, 2014).

In my work, a critical narrative approach to analyzing the impact of discourse on how information moved in channels associated with the coffee supply chain enabled me to explore what farmers saw as critical in their lives. It also allowed me to identify power structures shaping their perceptions in the language they used to describe their goals, obstacles and experiences. Critical narrative analysis also enabled me to identify how attention structures manifested linguistically within communication channels between farmers and decision makers, reinforcing but also offering potential to destabilize the dominant attentional perspectives of the partner organization and the MNC; "Discourse not only serves to maintain social stability, but is also …a space where change can be negotiated" (Souto-Manning, 2014).

Research process

Because of my collaboration with the MNC, I had exceptional access to its supply chains in three countries. The MNC initiated contact with their subsidiary offices and country-level organizational partners. Over a two-year period between 2011 and 2013, I visited all three countries two- to three times, spending approximately three months total in the sourcing country comprising my case study. For the purpose of this project, I decided to focus only on one country because examining how information moves up a chain of command is a detailed and time-consuming process. I perceived the project of critically engaging a large volume of qualitative data from and about three different subsidiaries, countries, products (coffee, cocoa and milk) and supply chains to be too large in scope for a single dissertation. I selected the sourcing country I studied largely due to practical considerations such as ease of access, safety, and the relationships I formed with producers.

During my first trip to the field, I conducted non-participant and participant observation and semi-structured interviews on farms, with country-level employees of the MNC, and executives and agronomists working for the partner organization in its national, regional, and municipal headquarters. During this first trip, I focused on interpreting the situation I encountered on a broad level. I asked general questions guided by grounded theory, such as "what are the basic social processes? What are the basic social psychological processes?" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 20). I mapped relationships between participants, and began to explore how and through what mediums they communicated. I looked for and took note of words and phrases that seemed significant to participants, and paid attention to variances between how participants talked about common issues. I also paid attention to how farmers talked about the challenges they faced and what their goals were for the KPI framework I was researching as part of my contract with the MNC.

As I became increasingly submerged in the data I became increasingly confused, because what the MNC said they were doing regarding Creating Shared Value was not necessarily clear on the ground. Farmers did not have a clear understanding of how the MNC was supporting them, and it was challenging to

distinguish between what practices the partner organization were undertaking on behalf of the MNC, which was providing funding for specialized CSV projects, and what practices the partner organization would have carried out regardless of the MNC's funding. Furthermore, I did not understand the relationship between farmers and the MNC. The MNC said they were sourcing coffee "directly" from farmers, and yet in practice, it had no relationship with farmers at all. Rather, the partner organization sourced coffee directly from farmers and then sold it in bulk to the MNC. Once purchased by the MNC, it was nearly impossible to determine from which department the beans in any given bag had been sourced, much less which farm. It became clear that the partner organization controlled coffee production and sourcing at almost every stage of the process. Therefore, to develop an understanding of how the MNC's CSV practices affected farmers, I needed to determine what specific projects the partner organization was carrying out on company's behalf.

I returned to the field with this in mind and selected participants myself on the basis of their position in the supply chain. I asked farmers, agronomists, and employees at local, regional and national levels of the partner organization what, precisely, the MNC was doing for farmers, and where. Were these practices distinct from what the partner organization was doing independently? In response to issues emerging in data, my interpretation was that the goals of the partner organization and the MNC, compounded by their competing bureaucracies, led to holes and inefficiencies in communication channels that compromised the transfer of information regarding challenges farmers were facing.

In response to this observation, I conducted additional research across the supply chain to bolster my understanding of what communication channels existed, and what actors, locations, and mechanisms were implicated in information transfer related to farmers. According to grounded theory, a researcher has achieved theoretical saturation when she ceases to find new information on established categories and relationships between categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). I returned to farms and conducted additional interviews and observation, and visited new farms with the partner organization's agronomists. I observed agronomists in the field as they carried out their jobs, including farm evaluations. I took pictures of evaluations to identify the specific kinds of information that was

being recorded and communicated up the chain of command. I attended capacity-building sessions focused on small business management to enhance my understanding of how the partner organization communicated with farmers. I visited the partner organization and intermediary points of purchase to identify differences between sourcing practices of each.

Quality

Research has to demonstrate certain indicators of quality. To qualify as "good" discourse analysis, a study needs to demonstrate the research process and sequence of decision-making and analysis from raw data to interpretation to conclusions (Wetherell & Potter, Discourse analysis and the identification of interpretative repertoires, 1988). Research needs to present a set of claims and show the statements from which the researcher derived them. The researcher must triangulate claims by referencing data of different kinds and from diverse sources, in order to demonstrate that claims are valid (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Researchers must demonstrate how she has accounted for details in data, that the analysis is grounded in data, that alternatives have been considered, in addition to plausibility and coherence in relation to other studies (Wetherell, 1998; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Analyses that do not demonstrate satisfactory quality standards are characterized by, for example: under-analysis through summary, taking sides, over-quotation or isolated quotation; circular identification of discourses and mental constructs (simplistically using quotes illustrating "common" ideologies to validate perceived discourses so as to get on with subsequent political analysis); false survey; and, spotting and stating features (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003).

Limitations

All research and methods utilized come with limitations. I faced limitations in terms of my extent of access to the partner organization; the completeness of information I received from the MNC the partner organization and farmers; how I was integrated into farms; the time I was able to spend in the field; and, my imperfect abilities in the language of the sourcing country. Observational research

techniques are limited in that they are colored by the researchers subjective interpretations of events. Using interviews for research also imply limitations, in that the social position, assumptions, and attention, of the interviewer and interviewee shape the content and interpretation of interview data. The challenges I faced using interview for data collection varied depending on whether I was speaking with farmers or decision makers. With farmers, power discrepancies rooted in different access to economic and social capital between myself and participants likely influenced the content of interview data. However, this may have been a benefit in light of my goal to understand how information moved through an organizational hierarchy. With regard to interviewing decision makers at the MNC, a limitation was that my position as an outsider and a researcher might have caused actors to answer questions guardedly. However, sometimes people share more with interested outsiders, particularly if they know their identity will be kept confidential, since they perceive it to be safer than to speak with people who are part of their social, familial, or professional groups.

Data triangulation

Using both participant and non-participant observation in tandem with interviewing was my primary approach to triangulating my results. To control for the challenges in interview research noted above, I conducted intermittent participant observation at the firm over a two-year period, which supplemented potentially incomplete information from interviews. I also conducted observation in the sourcing country studied for a total of three months. I also triangulated interview data by comparing what I heard from participants with subsequent participants. I asked a variety of actors to talk about issues that arose in data and analyzed comparatively to highlight potential inconsistencies. As such, I also cross-referenced my findings, located additional ideas, and gave participants the opportunity to correct misunderstandings and elaborate their and my interpretations of events. I conducted multiple interviews with the same actors over a two-year period, asking for perspectives on the same issues over time and introducing new issues as they emerged. This controlled for any possibility of previous interviews having been untruthful or incomplete.

Ethics

Over the course of my doctoral work, I have been questioned about the ethicality of my project. The research relationship was certainly complicated, since during the data collection and analysis process, I consulted with the firm studied regarding methods, accepted funding, and took on a short-term contract to conduct the SCE in the sourcing country studied prior to the conclusion of my doctoral work. As a result, some colleagues expressed concern about scientific freedom and biased findings. In the perspective of a social constructionist worldview, no research is free from bias, however I took great pains to compartmentalize my professional and doctoral work into two separate outcomes. I viewed my activities for the MNC as part of a job for which I had to collect certain data, and my doctoral work as a separate, autonomous objective. I accepted that it would rely on some of the data I collected as part of my professional work for the MNC, but would also require me to collect additional data in response to emerging research questions.

Particularly at the beginning, creating a divide between the two projects was challenging. However, it became increasingly easy to separate them. What I did for the MNC remained at the level of indicators, methods and evaluating, and what I did for my doctoral work became a theoretical project in which I used my access to the MNC and its supply chains to extend theory on the attention-based view.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I explained data collection and analysis. After summarizing my philosophical orientation of social constructionism and touching on reflexivity, I described my interpretive qualitative approach to research, which was informed by a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). Then, I addressed my data collection process including site and participant selection, the techniques and tools used and data management. Subsequently, I addressed data analysis, including coding, discourse analysis (Foucault, 1970) and critical narrative analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014). Finally, I discussed concerns and considerations related to research quality, the limitations of the study, data triangulation and

research ethics. In Chapter 4, I turn my attention to findings, and describe the dynamics of SCE development at the MNC Centre.

4. Existing issues, emergent issues, and articulations of discourse in SCE strategy development

Chapter overview

To explore the disconnects that can exist between emergent issues and the solutions decision makers develop to address them, this dissertation explores how information from low in an organizational hierarchy moves up the chain of command, and what mechanisms influence how decision makers attend to it when developing strategy. This chapter explores the context informing Social Conditions Evaluation development at the MNC headquarters. It describes the firm's approach to sustainability, and how this ideology interfaced with existing corporate priorities and practices to inform the development of the SCE. It also explores organizational processes and actors' perspectives related to the SCE by looking at discourse and actors' use of language.

I begin by summarizing my approach to research and analysis at the MNC's headquarters. Next, I describe and analyze sustainable business ideologies at the MNC, paying attention to both ideological and practical implications of the approach. Then, I describe MNC employee perspectives on the SCE, organizing findings in terms of goals, resources and means, and challenges. Finally, I address on power in SCE meetings by exploring language. I conclude with a summary.

Approach to research and analysis

As discussed, I wanted to know how employees at the MNC's Centre paid attention to and used information emerging at the base of their supply chains, specifically feedback from farmers. The firm did not have established routines for collecting, processing and using this information, and I wanted to know why actors made the choices they made. I conducted participant observation at the MNC headquarters while consulting on evaluation methods for the SCE. The SCE relied on feedback from MNC employees and NGO and academic allies, and was constructed between 2011 and 2014.

Since I was simultaneously consulting with the MNC on research methods for the SCE, I visited the headquarters on a number of other occasions. During visits I held several informal conversations about rural development, farming and sourcing with the MNC employees. I supplemented data gathered in workshops during conversations and follow-up interviews both in person and via telephone. To mitigate the risk that personal assumptions would influence the content of conversations and interviews, I collected data at workshops before conducting individual interview research. This enabled me to observe how participants talked about rural development, the SCE, organizational practices and goals in conversations they steered themselves. I then clarified meanings and ask for reflections in interviews. These interviews also served as a method for triangulating my data. I analyzed the SCE workshop transcripts with attention to social discourses (Foucault, 1972) using critical narrative analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014). Due to restrictions associated with confidentiality, I took detailed transcripts instead of tape-recording the workshops. Grounded theory informed my initial data analysis.

Creating Shared Value (CSV) at the MNC

The MNC adopted CSV as a guiding set of principles for its sustainability initiatives shortly after Porter and Kramer coined the concept in the Harvard Business Review in 2006 (Porter & Kramer, 2006). They say,

> The concept of shared value can be defined as policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates. Shared value creation focuses on identifying and expanding the connections between societal and economic progress (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 6).

In line with these justifications, decision makers at the MNC explained that the firm was historically not aligned with the tenets of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), since the approach was primarily concerned with isolated philanthropic acts with little measurable business benefit.

Using CSV to explain organizational actions and focus attention

CSV was a strong discourse within the firm, which was concerned with integrating it into what it described as its corporate DNA. Invoking CSV as a conceptual guide for sustainability policies justified many existing business practices, and also framed new activities. It served as the umbrella under which the MNC explained its social and environmental intentions and projects, and played a strong role in how the firm described its identity. Creating Shared Value had a tab at the top of the company's webpage, and actors at global headquarters and the subsidiary headquarters I visited were typically familiar with the language of CSV. Employees I spoke with explained that CSV enabled the company to simultaneously reap business, environmental and social benefits.

CSV extended organizational discourses surrounding the meanings and purposes of particular activities, but was also limited by the existing structure of the firm and associated processes and practices. Peter, an upper-level manager at headquarters, said that the MNC needed to, 1) figure out how to measure CSV; 2) determine how to "drive the agenda" in the "right direction"; 3) establish that whatever was done related directly to ensured supply, 4) avoid interventions being

charity or philanthropy; and 5) stay focused on quality raw materials. Here, we see CSV as mediated by dominant organizational discourses, specifically that measuring, *driving the agenda* in the *right direction* of *ensured supply*, not being philanthropic and staying *focused* on raw materials set the parameters of the firm's structure of attention when it came to CSV activities. These issues were at the center of the firm's attentional perspective, and needed to be accounted for in actions taken by decision makers.

Operationalizing CSV with stories

In line with discourse analysis, the above issues can be viewed as ideological frames structuring firm attention and setting the priorities for CSV. Subsequently, executives had to motivate mid-level managers to develop operational objectives related to CSV, or reframe existing practices as CSV. Employees at the firm said it had to *prove* it was *doing* CSV. This meant specific practices had to be developed, implemented and monitored. For managers to see the added value of CSV and communicate it down the chain of command, executives had to clearly express what it could accomplish and why it was important.

One method by which they accomplished this was converting abstract language about the social, environmental, and economic aims of CSV into simple goals that made sense in a business context. Since CSV was a multi-level and complex challenge, involving various countries, sectors, it was often difficult for actors to visualize. MNC employees did not always have a deep understanding of how sourcing functioned on a day-to-day basis in subsidiary markets, since processes varied by country and were constantly evolving. Stories aided the goal of mobilizing CSV practically by demonstrating multi-faceted challenges at a practical level. Peter often mentioned the need for *entrepreneurial farmers* and *agripreneurs*. He defined and elaborated these terms using selected observations from the field, which enabled him to verbally illustrate rural development problems to diverse internal and external stakeholders. An anecdote he told frequently concerned "how much of an impact having a motorbike would have". This story helped him explain the comparative economic success of workers in a sourcing market who commuted by motorbike, in relation to those who relied on

traditional bikes. Peter said workers with motorbikes achieved an average of eighteen more months of work and as a result averaged higher incomes. Therefore, he saw motorbikes as an indicator of wellbeing in that context. While many actors at the MNC's global offices could not picture what daily life looked like for an agricultural worker in a given country, they knew what a motorbike looked like and what function it served. In this sense, stories gave decision makers visual tools that helped them understand dissociated labels, such as "poor infrastructure", through frames (Fairclough, 1989), in this case of traditional bikes versus motorbikes.

Categorizing social impact

Executives delegated the grunt-work of operationalizing CSV to mid-level managers. These managers converted CSV's conceptual tenets to practice by sub-dividing it into the three "pillars", of which improving social conditions was the third. All market-level CSV practices were organized within these categories. This enabled further delegation of CSV activities. Strategic business unit managers typically outsourced market specific decisions and strategy formation to managers in those markets. The Coffee Program in the sourcing country I studied was one example of CSV's theoretical tenets being put into practice, and the Social Conditions Evaluation was an attempt to baseline, monitor and report on the social conditions pillar of the MNC's CSV commitment. I explore both of these in depth later in this chapter, and in Chapter 5.

Practical considerations related to CSV in global markets

Vast differences between country level needs and relative autonomy of subsidiaries resulted in projects that were typically designed, operationalized and overseen by the market in which they were implemented. MNC actors described the organization as "decentralized". Employees at headquarters were constantly entwined in the delicate process of disseminating organization-wide global strategy, while trying not to encroach on, impede, or roll out projects in conflict with market level activities. However, presenting a unified global front and achieving universal objectives meant that activities and projects in foreign markets

had fall within the attentional perspective, or overarching strategy, of headquarters. Differences between country needs, their goal, and levels of advancement meant that some markets had already rolled out practical approaches to achieving CSV. Others were further behind, and in these cases headquarters needed to convey the "added value" of CSV to rally motivation to build projects. The level of involvement headquarters had in interventions in sourcing countries varied. Numerous factors influenced what a CSV intervention looked like in a given market (Figure 1).

Figure 1

First, the raw materials produced in a given market impacted operations. For example, sourcing milk required different organizational practices and structures than sourcing cocoa or coffee. Cows produced milk on a daily basis, and milk is highly perishable. Therefore, the MNC had to ensure it was stored in safe conditions while still on the ranch and collect it regularly.

With coffee and cocoa, this urgency was not present, since neither was perishable to the same degree as milk and both generally underwent processes of fermentation and drying prior to transportation to points of purchase. In the

sourcing country studied, the MNC's partner organization equipped many farmers with wet-milling machinery on their farms. Farmers then dried and transported their coffee to the closest point of purchase. In the case of coffee, producers were concerned with the logistics of transportation, whereas with milk, the MNC took on these challenges.

Operations in the markets impacted decisions related to interventions and the likelihood of a given project's success. For cocoa, the local market I visited already carried out CSV interventions and had hired additional agronomists to provide extension services to farmers. For milk, the market had long employed technicians to provide support cattle ranchers. For coffee in the sourcing country studied, the MNC did not work directly with farmers, instead purchasing coffee from the partner organization, which dealt with sourcing operations, offered extension services, and carried out a number of other activities related to bolstering the country's coffee infrastructure. The MNC's involvement in sourcing was primarily related to its financial contributions to small-scale CSV programs impacting a regionally determined sample of farmers.

Each market was affected by the infrastructural conditions of the country in which it was located. Transportation was a challenge in many markets. This was related to road conditions and the size of the country in question. If roads were poor, as was frequently the case in producer countries, transportation represented a substantial obstacle for production and sourcing. Therefore, it could be a promising opportunity for CSV intervention. In terms of size, smaller countries required less coordination between teams and units across regions than larger countries. Larger markets generally required time-intensive organization processes that spanned projects, programs and teams. Meanwhile, climate and weather affected interventions through factors such as rainfall and flooding of local infrastructure. In Ecuador, many cocoa farms were unreachable by road during the rainy season, when rivers became key for transportation in coastal regions.

The political stability of a given country also impacted interventions. In the sourcing country studied, security was a concern in in some agricultural regions. In all countries, formal organizational actors and political concerns impacted choices made regarding interventions. Where other NGOs or state agencies were present and focusing on issues of interest for rural development, the MNC at times

tried to align with existing projects, meaning partner organizations carried out the company's interventions, or carried out their own interventions with financial support from the MNC.

Measuring CSV: the Social Conditions Evaluation

In order for CSV interventions to bring value to the MNC, the SCE had to measure and report their impact, which included all three pillars of water, nutrition and rural development. The MNC already had business units focused on water and nutrition, and the indicators for tracking their progress were comparatively straightforward and quantitative. With rural development, intervention opportunities were less obvious. As described, prospects varied depending on local market operations, products sourced, local partners and contexts. MNC actors decided that to identify local opportunities for CSV intervention, they needed to conduct baseline assessments. After locating opportunities and priorities, they would develop interventions in partnership with market actors and other relevant allies, both internal and external to the MNC.

SCE workshops

Decision makers at headquarters organized the SCE collaboration to gain guidance on how to measure rural development. The SCE workshops included participants from different units of the MNC, allies from selected NGOs, and myself as a representative of academia. However, the workshops faced a challenge from their outset. The MNC had made a commitment to carry out the SCE in pre-determined number of countries by a specific date. This pledge had been made without consulting managers and units from which it would require participation and with whom it needed to be aligned. There had been no collaborative determination and development of roles, responsibilities, priorities or plans. As a result, the implicated managers were generally willing to contribute conceptually to the framework, but not necessarily monetarily, through resources of which they controlled allocation. Critically, making global commitments applicable across markets had high potential to complicate local commitments made by subsidiaries. From the start, many managers were focused primarily on operations in an effort

to prevent potentially intrusive overlaps in sourcing countries that could strain relations with local managers.

SCE workshops were held approximately six months apart. The first I attended was held at an international airport, and the second at the MNC's headquarters. Employees from the MNC's headquarters involved in the SCE came from beverages sustainability, confectionary sustainability, corporate agriculture, stakeholder relations, public affairs and human rights. There was also an SCE coordinator who facilitated the process and dealt with administrate responsibilities. At times, managers at headquarters brought in employees visiting from country-level subsidiaries, to provide operational insight or explain day-to-day processes.

Goals, resources, means and challenges of decision makers at the MNC headquarters

Here I discuss how decision makers talked about their goals for the SCE, their resources and means for building it, and challenges. I explore how they focused their attention and prioritized issues, and identify what factors and mechanisms informed this process. I examine in particular how discourse impacted structure of attention and how language shaped the workshop proceedings.

Goals

Public purpose of the SCE

The purpose of the SCE was to baseline social and environmental conditions in local markets. Subsequently, it would be used to monitor and report on the impacts of CSV interventions. At the conclusion of negotiations and months of revisions, the public purpose of the evaluation was to: show that farming was sustainable and benefited producers; show that farming and working on farms was appealing for individuals in sourcing countries, because of respect for human and labor rights by employers; and ensure that communities in the supply chain were progressing economically, socially and environmentally.

These objectives position the SCE as a tool by which the MNC intended to show its positive role in the lives of farmers. This was despite widespread problems managers commented on in workshops: that farming was often not profitable, that rural employment was frequently unattractive and that rural communities were not necessarily progressing. However, as a written document, the SCE in many ways reframed what was happening in rural communities. It provided data emphasizing that of the MNC's sustainability practices were effective. In an international organizational environment of high employee turnover and frequent changes of positions, reports like the SCE proved impact and effectiveness both internally and externally, even if realities on the ground were more complicated and nuanced.

Decision makers' priorities for the SCE

Peter, the executive concerned with agri-services, did not want CSV to be a conceptual project; he wanted "our partners in the markets to see the value". He delegated practical issues of program development and implementation to managers lower in the hierarchy. For Peter, this frames the SCE was a tool by which larger ideological and conceptual objectives were to be achieved. He asked of the stakeholders at workshops, "How do you lift the most miserable people into, beyond subsistence agriculture?" Then he immediately turned his attention to ensured supply. While likely unintentional, this implied that Peter assumed that ensured supply for the firm was related to the well-being of producers, and the two could be achieved simultaneously and through the same mechanisms. He explained, "Ensured supply is about having a base of farmers able to cope with future demand, at the same time having communities that are intact, prosperous, have the opportunity not to damage natural resources. The question is, where are the real drivers, enablers, for this?" This comment compounds the apparent desire on the part of executives and managers at the MNC for farmers to want to be farmers. However, it overlooks certain complexities, such as the potentiality that farmers with "the opportunity not to damage natural resources", who live in "prosperous" communities, may become expensive, unattractive sourcing partners. Managers talked about the SCE as tool by which the firm might compel producers to find farming more appealing. They laid out ensured supply as a central issue,

illustrating its importance to the firm's structure of attention. Key performance indicators were the tools linking rhetoric with existing firm practices. Peter asked,

> What are the KPIs to get to that direction? When prosperous farmers make money, they pay better wages, they use better technologies. You have farmers who can make a decent life and who have for the first time the choice to be farmers. Most are there by default, not by choice….how do you give them a choice?

In this passage, Peter assumes a link between ensured supply and "when prosperous farmers make money. This is then inferred to cause farmer and worker wellbeing. He asks how "you give them [farmers] a choice", which situates the firm as both having the power and right to give farmers a choice, and as the helper of farmers. Participants in the workshop did not question that complex underlying challenge. Did implementing programs to make farmers choose farming give them choices, or alleviate their most pressing needs to the point that they would remain in a line of work from which they did not benefit? This tension was not related directly to practices carried out by the MNC, but rather to the larger system of global capitalism that make smallholder production challenging.

Dan wanted the SCE to provide a "snapshot". He explained that so far, the SCE "starts to look at where is the social need, and business importance." He wanted the framework to help managers find out, "What activities can deliver on both outcomes...There's nothing new in any of this stuff, but it does make it more explicit for the organization. Here's a snapshot of activities that we already have. It's not about how good they are, just do we have enough activities to support this." In short, he wanted the SCE to give the firm an idea of what was happening in sourcing communities, and which social and business objectives were interrelated. He also emphasized his awareness that the SCE was in early phases of development, and that quality of programs, initiatives and partnerships was not yet the focus. Most critically, Dan wanted to know what was in place, or had potential to grow: "With farmers, we have a lot going on, with workers less, and with communities even less… When it comes to coffee, there's less then dairy. When it comes to cocoa, there's less than coffee. Where do we have activities we can build upon?" The SCE would be "a snapshot of where we are—the baseline assessment will tell us how good we are."

For Dan, this "snapshot" was part of achieving alignment. He explained the two kinds of sourcing in which the firm engaged, and said some sourcing channels would be easier for SCE implementation than others. He said the majority of smallholders from whom the firm sourced would be challenging to reach, since channels led through other companies and various intermediaries. Dan was concerned about achieving alignment when it came the intermediaries providing the bulk of goods purchased, since in these sourcing relationships it was difficult to build, maintain, and enforce consistency in when it came to source communities. Dan concluded by saying, "We will be in a phase for a few years where we go from having no data, to terrible data, to good data." What became evident in managers' testimonies, however, was that public priorities for the SCE, concerned primarily with *why* questions, were often removed from the practical questions related to *what* the firm wanted and *how* to get it.

Michael, a mid-level manager, was strongly focused on operations. He said the role of the SCE should be to tell the MNC how to make farmers "bankable" and to serve a "business-monitoring" purpose. Dan wanted a "snapshot" and Michael wanted "the big picture". He said the SCE could become "endlessly complex, so you have to simplify," however the framework had to be "specific enough for specific situations." He wanted to reduce complexity, and saw focusing on what "was working" in particular market contexts as a way to achieve this. He said that with the SCE, the company needed to define, "this is where we are, and this is where we want to go". The SCE needed to be "how we do business".

Michael translated Peter's ideological rhetoric into business terms. For example, where Peter discussed giving farmers the "choice" to stay in farming (as opposed to being there by default), Michael talked about making farmers "bankable". As such, he absorbed unfamiliar challenges related to rural development that many employees had a hard time visualizing, and restated them in the dominant language of the firm. This made it easier for MNC employees to make sense of what they were doing, but risked downplaying the uniqueness of challenges and compromising managers' attention to them.

Michael's focus on operations and simplicity show the challenges implied by conceptualizing a new, unprecedented strategy within the practices and processes already in place within the firm. The company's organizational structure

often dictated what the SCE could pay attention to, and how it could potentially be used. It was important to "simplify" and "take away complexity" because the SCE had to be "piggy-backed" onto "existing processes". This was necessary in order for employees to see it as "already their job". If employees did not see practices associated with the SCE as part of their job, it would lose priority and add needless work to employees' already packed agendas. Development and implementation of the SCE was also complicated by budgetary concerns. The money available for the SCE was limited and came from various funds distributed across the organization. Part of Michael's job was to locate funding for initiatives, including carrying out SCE assessments in markets. Because of this, he was interested in making the SCE "as lean as possible".

One of the strongest emergent themes in workshops was that the SCE needed to be simple. This was crucial to uniting diverse actors in a highly diversified, multinational, transcultural company around key objectives. However, it also needed to be dynamic and respond to unique contexts in multiple foreign markets. "Simplicity" helped achieve "consistency", and "adaptability" helped get a "buy-in from the markets". MNC managers and external workshop participants seemed to agree without discussion that the SCE would rely on KPIs. These helped achieve consistency. There was also consensus that the organization needed to publically define and prove progress on commitments.

The climate of increasing consumer awareness and international and governmental regulations made this goal paramount. As mentioned, many multinational corporations were under increasing pressure to demonstrate social and environmental accountability. Dan explained in his introduction to external stakeholders:

> We wanted to drive a degree of consistency across the organization. We got challenged by the CSV advisory board to up our game. We said if we're going to report on rural development every three years publically, we need to show that we have something in place. That is what we started from.

Dan clarifies the link between outside pressure, the need to "report on rural development…publically", and the imperative to "show that we have something in place". While the SCE was intended to report on livelihood challenges farmers faced and show opportunities for improvement, a key motivator pushing change

despite challenging obstacles related to rigid organizational structure was external pressure. Michael confirmed this:

> We see the urgency to do it now since 2015 is around the corner. What are the indicators referring to plantlets, training, but also outcomes? …I am here trying to find out what is a realistic work plan to make it happen. I want to establish a work plan.

This sums up the tense position in which employees at the MNC found themselves. The spoken objectives of the SCE were to promote rural development, but the political objectives were to demonstrate action by 2015. While many NGO workshop participants did not understand the company's internal structures and therefore struggled to contribute to the "work plan", that was what Michael needed in order to fulfill the requirements of his job. In this climate of multilayered pressure, considering the needs of diverse and far away markets, much less farms, was fraught with obstacles.

In the meantime, MNC workshop participants wanted alignment. Due to the highly diversified character of the company, employees worked in and across multiple units, divisions and in collaboration with diverse stakeholders from numerous countries. Because of this, alignment and simplicity were both key to achieving consistency within the company. However, diversified nature of the company also required the MNC to at times hire or align with external actors or organizations when it came to implementing initiatives, including social and environmental interventions in sourcing communities. For example, the MNC relied on a well-known, globally active environmental NGO to carry out CSV projects and evaluations in an important sourcing market in Asia.

Alignment was also critical because within the firm, decision makers tended to work on similar issues through differing lenses, or with varying focuses of attention. For example, with regard to coffee, one decision maker dealt with sustainability, whereas another handled sourcing logistics. As mentioned, SCE funding came from various sources within the firm. This had the potential to create complications for alignment, since different units had different interests, expectations, and terms for a given project. Where the money for a given project came from depended on the country and product in question. Since the sourcing country studied provided coffee, in that country a beverages-focused unit funded

the SCE. However, for cocoa producers, the money came from a different source, since cocoa was not associated with beverages. Therefore, decision makers from both the beverages and confectionary units had to be involved in the SCE workshops, since they needed to be aligned, reducing the likelihood of "doubling efforts", "reinventing the wheel", or "re-doing" things. This also increased the likelihood of agreeing on a "way forward" (having to do with consistency) that was "suitable for everyone around the table" (related to alignment).

Again, an emergent challenge was that since rural development was an emergent and unfamiliar challenge without associated existing practices, it remained largely conceptual, and often appeared a secondary priority in relation to the obligations of decision makers' primary jobs.

Resources and means

Specific discursive practices and existing organizational practices were the resources and means by which decision makers developed the SCE in meetings.

Dynamic interactions between simile, routinized organizational language and conversational speech

The SCE was intended to address challenges and employ methods that were unfamiliar to the firm. Michael explained how decision makers dealt with a lack of existing processes and practices for addressing the emergent challenges by saying, "We did not know what to do. That's the main thing. As Dan normally explains, we were building the plane while it was flying." This metaphor connotes an uncontrolled process that is hard to make sense of, leading to a potentially catastrophic outcome. While SCE workshops did not suggest a situation in which managers feared catastrophe, they did display uncertainty and tension. The plane metaphor indicates that managers moved on the SCE project before they grasped the issues, defined needs and outcomes, considered targets, or identified responsible actors. The use of metaphor reduced the need to explain all the dynamics of the project's complexity. "Building the plane while it was flying" simplified the SCE by preventing managers from having to describe the dynamics of their confusion each time they addressed it. Metaphor allowed them to categorize it as something actors had made enough sense of to move forward. It

also suggested that decision makers saw the process of developing something so unfamiliar and unprecedented as risky.

"The big picture" was also a commonly used phrase that reduced the need for actors to reflect on situational specificities, or on the complexity of measuring rural development. If they described the purpose of the RDF being to generate "the big picture", they did not need to conceptually unpack specific outcomes. Labeling complex challenges with slogans made it easier to return attention to existing organizational processes and practices. However, as a result, unique challenges and emergent issues related to rural development could be labeled "the big picture" and then pushed aside, and those related to the SCE specifically could be glossed over as part of "building the plane while it was flying". This minimized opportunities to respond to critical opportunities in both strategy development, and subsequent learning processes. An interesting approach to researching the role of slogans, like those above, might be asking managers to avoid using such reductionist phrases in similar situations, and not the impact this has on attention. An interesting topic for future research might concern the role risk and fear of the unknown play in shaping organizational attention.

When actors elaborated beyond such phrases, they typically began by adhering to organizational clichés and routinized patterns of speech before falling into more conversational approaches. When they employed conversational speech, it brought to light to issues and challenges that were part of an SCE process that remained murky and unresolved. For example, Michael explained the process of building the framework initially through figures of speech, "We put our minds together, there are a lot of smart brains." However, as he moved beyond the capabilities of routinized corporate language to express challenges around which there were not yet routines, he described his personal sense-making:

> We were talking to a lot of people. We had to revise a lot because everyone has their own perceptions. We wanted to make three pilots, and based on them come up with a coherent way forward. Now, through work with you and Gabrielle, we are in a position to know what we want, but we didn't. We knew we wanted greater visibility with the SCE, how to differentiate between monitoring and evaluation, and broader impact measurement on the rural development side… We focused a lot on livelihood zoning, we did

> a more comprehensive field survey, but there was too much data so we learned a lot.

Michael jumps from point to point. He describes the process of building the SCE, then explains goals, then states initial confusion about goals in contrast to the then-current understanding of "a coherent way forward." He provides an overview of the dynamics of the trial-and-error approach to data collection and analysis, the challenges that arose through increased complexity ("too much data"), and finally loops back to process. Interestingly, in the final sentence, Michael says, "there was too much data, *so* we learned a lot" (emphasis added). For the causal relationship of this comment to correlate appropriately, he might have opened his statement by saying there was *a lot* of data. By beginning with *too much* and then employing *so*, Michael appears to change his tone partway through. However, the content of his explanation is cognitively edited going forward, and summed up, like with most SCE challenges actors perceived to be overly complex, as "building the plane while we were flying."

Michael's explanation of the next steps for the SCE also exemplifies the interaction between routinized language and conversational speech:

> We will work with partners internally and externally and follow a four-step approach through goal alliance, target planning, and bring it into organizational master-planning so that the steps are embedded in operations… to be honest, there are so many things which are interlinked. It's about broader stratification, not just knowing people get water from the river. If coffee is going down the drain, maybe we shouldn't distribute plantlets.

In the beginning of this excerpt, Michael's answer follows a bullet-point approach to outlining the next steps. He says that in tandem with internal and external partners, "we will follow a four-step approach". His use of "we" suggests actors are aligned on main priorities, and Michael is speaking on the part of the firm. Secondly, he begins to outline the four-step approach and names "goal alliance", "target planning" and "organizational master-planning" to "embed steps in operations". Here, however, he strays from this organizational formula of procedural next-steps, evidently because it does not allow him to describe the nuances of complexity, which require empirical examples to explain. He marks

this change by saying "to be honest" and then continues, "There are so many things which are interlinked". The rest of the excerpt shows Michael simultaneously try to consider three sets of issues: the next steps for the SCE, specific farm-level livelihood conditions, and building links to future business strategies. His break into conversational speech shows that the stress placed on individual actors when existing corporate language or practices did not contain the tools to consider or express dynamic emergent issues, such as those associated with rural development. Decision makers struggled with where and how to direct attention when confronted with this high level of complexity.

Processes, practices, and priorities guiding formation of SCE strategies

With a lack of existing practices for dealing with the challenges presented by the SCE, existing organizational and processes and practices coupled with personal habits, priorities and assumptions were the guidelines decision makers used to construct the framework. To learn more about what these were, I conducted semi-structured interviews, in which I asked managers how they knew what to do when making choices associated with the SCE, how they decided they needed the SCE, and if any events had been particularly influential in starting the process. Responses typically showed that actors started by applying familiar problem-solving frameworks to rural development challenges, rather than getting to know the specifics of the new challenges and developing issue-specific processes. Mario, who described extensive experience working in foreign markets, which perhaps directed his focus to the idealistic objectives of the SCE. He said:

> I think we started—and maybe this is based on not knowing enough, or feeling comfortable enough, or pressed to get things started—we started from what we knew. We know markets, training, plantlets. We never did a holistic approach, what does [a sourcing country in Africa] really need.

He said "CSV is also having positive feedback, or positive impact on us" and "we never did that so holistically as the SCE." The word "holistic" is another example of a proverbial black box—that is, a term used by corporate actors to avoid unpacking a complex concept. Again, future research might explore the impact restricting the use of such terms has on attention, strategic relevance and creativity. Mario goes on to explain that because of a need "to get things going, we

did things our way, but I think the SCE will give us many new views. It looks more towards farms and countries and less towards brands." While Mario's response suggests he wanted the SCE to reframe the organization's traditional focus on "markets", "training" and "plantlets", it does not say how he hoped it would do this. The "holistic approach" focused on "farms and countries" served as a placeholder, enabling Mario to avoid considering specific methodologies and intended outcomes.

Michael, who wanted markets to see the "value added" of the SCE and incorporate it into their existing operations, also talked about challenges associated with paying attention to emergent as opposed to existing issues. He said, "We tend, from outside pressure, to come in with a lot of initiative and emphasis on benchmarking—this was in contrast to find out what really matters at the farm level." Like Mario, Michael said acting quickly in response to outside pressure pushed them to rely on established organizational practices that were not necessarily appropriate for rural development challenges, including benchmarking, training and plantlets. Michael goes so far as to say that benchmarking "was in contrast to find out what really matters at the farm level".

Challenges

Methods

Building a framework that would be relevant and usable in each market implied four central methodological challenges. The first was collecting data, since practices would vary according to location. Dan explained, "In some places we'll have complete data, and in some we'll have permanent and temporary sampling. Each place will be different, built up country by country." This country-to-country diversity interfaced with the universal objectives for SCE coming from headquarters and challenged the goals of alignment and consistency.

The second methodological concern was determining who and what influenced "how development happens" according to location. Dan said, "The intention is also not to attribute what we're doing with outcomes. We might not be the only company buying, in some cases the government is involved, there are other partners." The firm called this stakeholder mapping, with guidance from a

prominent environmental NGO. This exploration into the specifics of local environments implied complexity beyond what the MNC dealt with when it came to their supply chains, because it involved external actors and influences involved with more than logistical sourcing issues.

The third methods-related consideration was whether and how the firm should track causality between their interventions, and subsequent consequences for farmers' quality of life. Dan said, "We need to be able to ensure that the income of the farmer, coffee growing, is an attractive crop for farmers. When we come on to quality of life of communities, we can monitor where our money has gone, but claiming that that has led to broader change might be a bit much." Decision makers did not want to go into detailed processes of attribution, but ensuring money spent led to progress they could report on was key when it came to securing funding.

Relatedly, the fourth challenge was justifying SCE spending to superiors and shareholders. Dan explained, "Monitoring is traditionally something that is difficult to justify spending money on. If you give me 100,000,000, you have to do something fantastic. We have to give good value for money." In other words, not only did decision makers have to demonstrate that social spending was worthwhile from a business perspective, but that the SCE itself consisted of solid methodology and would generate helpful information. Dan said, "The recommendation is that you demonstrate that you are being consistent, report transparently, illustrate progress with stories, but do not aim to have perfect reporting with perfect attribution."

Reconciling consistency with adaptability

One way in which decision makers tried to achieve consistency while allowing for adaptability was by structuring it around three overarching categories: farmers, farm workers and communities. These were focal points around which managers organized indicators and interventions. In the process of trying to determine indicators that could ensure both consistency and adaptability, however, decision makers became overwhelmed with the seemingly endless possibilities, and resulting potential for excessive and unruly data. They became focused on a "starting point". They also wanted to know "the minimum we think we should be

doing", the "non-negotiables", and the "compliance indicators". While developing priorities is a key step in developing successful strategy, the consequence was that it awarded supreme value to the needs of headquarters. By default, this downgraded the importance of the markets in the framework. If some indicators were "non-negotiable", the implication was that others, namely those at the country level, were negotiable. Furthermore, if headquarters generated a list of "the minimum we think we should be doing", everything else was thereby categorized as *not* the minimum, and likely would not get done. Finally, "compliance indicators" emphasizes the SCE's role as a reporting mechanism for proving social accountability to both internal and external actors applying pressure related to CSV. If the SCE were comprised of "compliance indicators" supplemented by local indicators perceived to *not* be "non-negotiable" (falling outside of "the minimum we think we should be doing"), then its primary purpose would be demonstrating adherence to regulations, rather than improving producers' wellbeing.

When decision makers reflected on the implications of an emphasis on non-negotiables, they became concerned about losing the "buy-in" from markets. Michael said, "One aspect is to develop a credible process, which will lead to selective, localized activities that will get us away from benchmarking, to try to focus on gaps as opposed to aggregated indicators." In other words, developing a credible process required a consistent approach. However, determining "localized activities that will get us away from benchmarking" required adaptability. Giving priority to the credible process over localized activities threatened alignment by devaluing market input. Michael explained, "We had a discussion on animal welfare. Do we have a standard? Make a commitment in every market? But if we come to Pakistan, he [the market/farmer] might say thanks, but I have these 10-15 other topics…how are we able to balance these aspects?" In sum, enforcing irrelevant or inappropriate "standards" or "commitments" had the potential to be a waste of time, a distraction, and even damaging in markets for which they were not designed.

Achieving alignment and deciding what was relevant

As discussed, MNC actors perceived alignment as critical, but hard to achieve in the SCE. Due to multiple projects focused on similar issues from different perspectives, there was a lack of clarity on which business units would be responsible for gathering and reporting which information. As an example, Jon, an MNC employee focused on human rights, asked, "Should nutrition be integrated into rural development, or should nutrition people be mindful as they move on with their own programs? Rural development is very broad, it includes a little bit of everything, keeping in mind that we need to be careful in terms of what we can achieve." Nutrition and rural development were two different initiatives addressed by different actors in different units, but with substantial overlap. Dan ended this line of questioning, saying "Yes it's true, we haven't had a discussion with the nutrition people about that. We should align around that, but that's an internal thing." Despite the aims expressed previously, to avoid "re-doubling efforts", "re-doing" things and "reinventing the wheel", the chances of doing things redundantly were high due to the size and diversification of the firm. Decision makers had organized the SCE workshops to glean feedback from external allies. However, they had not predicted the project overlaps they would encounter between internal units. Since they were unable to immediately determine and reconcile the overlaps between rural development, water and nutrition, they could not be certain of what, specifically, they should be aiming to accomplish. This compromised the level of specificity that workshops were able to achieve, and the quality and relevance of strategy development.

Alignment was also challenging to achieve within the workshops themselves. Multiple external actors, many of which were not familiar with the MNC's sourcing structure and worked for NGOs (integrally different kinds of organizations), had been called upon to help develop the SCE. However, it was not clear to many SCE participants, including MNC employees, what challenges existed in markets, communities and on farms. To address this, Michael brought in an agronomist from an Asian market to describe sourcing and processes related to code of conduct. He said the goal was, "to explain exactly what the MNC is doing in sourcing operations so you can see what the missing pieces are. We want to avoid doing double the work and adding additional processes, which have huge

overlap to existing processes. What kind of complementary can we find?" Michael uses a variety of vocabulary to describe the same issue—he wanted to make organizational processes clear so participants could begin to identify gaps. To him, the most important feature of the SCE was its simplicity and usability.

During the agronomist's presentation, several MNC and NGO stakeholders broke in with questions. Michael often reminded the group that the presentation was intended to generate understanding and alignment around "touch points", "main activities", "opportunities to integrate" and how to "get leaner". He focused his attention on how the SCE would interact with existing issues and practices. If the SCE was not compatible with existing firm practices as well as independent activities of sourcing markets, challenges between headquarters and markets could arise. While Michael's push for touch points was critical to developing a plan among diverse stakeholders in a short amount of time, it repeatedly rerouted SCE discussions away from farmers and back to the operational dimensions of headquarters and markets. This prevented workshop participants from being able to develop and sustain attention on emergent challenges.

At its conclusion, the presentation from the subsidiary manager seemed to unintentionally clarify how varied unique market environments could be, and led to a default discussion on whether capacity building created value for the company. When the agronomist shared the number of farmers the MNC was capacitating versus the (lower) number that were loyal to them, Thomas commented, "I don't see why we're making [a certain number] of farmers [code of conduct compliant] but only buying from [a fifth]. Seems inefficient." Most stakeholders present agreed. "Even though we're paying a premium…and training, et cetera, they're still not loyal to us?" An employee from a branch of the MNC focused exclusively on premium coffee explained, "The MNC's buying some days, and farmers are selling some days. We have to be there every time. You have to have larger farmers so you always get coffee." Thomas repeated, "Sounds inefficient". Michael responded, "This is one of the examples where we're not good at sharing value, because we don't get it back. This is an area of concern, but I think this is something on an operational level we have to address, not in SCE context." This interaction highlights the varied levels of understanding and diverse perspectives decision makers had at headquarters in terms of sourcing across

markets and crops. It also shows how challenging it was to embed social programs into operations, and the risk of spending money without benefitting from increased, high quality supply of goods. Finally, decision makers chose to leave this isolated case and the unique features preventing it from adding value unexplored, because they did not perceive it to be relevant in the context of the SCE workshops. In this sense, anomalous characteristics of a challenge result in it being left, at least here, unexplored. While actors at the MNC talked about realities being "different in every market" and that the SCE needed to reflect that, when a confusing issue at the market level was identified, it ran the risk of being classified as an operational or internal issue not relevant for the SCE.

Deciding who was responsible for defining goals

Decision makers at SCE meetings were not sure who would be responsible for implementation, or whose responsibility it was to define goals and priorities. Having expected one NGO partner, acting in a long-term consultant function, to develop a proposal of opportunities, an MNC actor appeared irritated when the document was lengthy and failed to clarify priorities. "How can you prioritize?" Thomas asked the woman presenting. "I don't think you did. We had to read everything." The NGO actor responded that it was not her role, but the role of the MNC to define priorities. Thomas said, "What benefit is the report if you're not giving us the priority?" In Thomas' view, it was the NGO's job in a consultant function to reduce complexity for the MNC by making decisions and showing them a short summary of next steps. However, the NGO representative had also received feedback that they should not be "prescriptive" since it would prevent the market from being able to address issues unique to their circumstances. Michael interjected that "priorities" needed to be linked to "sourcing activities", however the NGO actor was not aware of the nuanced proceedings of diverse markets, and neither were many of the MNC decision makers present at the workshop.

All stakeholders present wanted relevant key performance indicators, and the MNC actors saw KPIs as multi-functional tools critical for establishing a "starting point", "snapshot", and "conclusion", as well as "alignment" and "consistency". However, MNC employees had not reached consensus on whose responsibility it was to provide the KPIs. For example, at the conclusion of the

second meeting, Thomas told Gabrielle that he had been "expecting that you would say, we have all these KPIs, we compared them to these others, the remaining are mainly blah, income and yield. Maybe you did this and didn't show it. Then at least we would know whew, that one's done. It would be helpful." Thomas illustrated that he had been expecting Gabrielle's output to be usable KPIs. Gabrielle, however, was "still waiting on some KPIs, a list of KPIs. Do we [headquarters] define other KPIs? For me that was not clear." The question of responsibility when it came to determining and assigning KPIs seemed unclear to other MNC actors as well. Dan asked, "Then is that something we should do at [headquarters]? Bring down, these are basic KPIs that are key to our plans? I know that would ensure that at least there's some consistency…. we've got some ideas on KPIs, but what if we make them more solid? Say, it's open to local interpretation, do your own thing here." Michael mentioned that the most important outcome for the assessment was a "helicopter view", which he wanted KPIs to be able to generate. Mario pointed out that with regard to the KPIs Gabrielle had used in the pilot study, the focus had been only on "inputs". He said, "If we distribute trees but don't know how many there are, there's no worth."

Reflections

Power and intervening in how farmers talk about farming

In negotiating the objectives and content of the SCE, decision makers had to consider and identify what they believed should happen in rural communities in their supply chains. Farmers were poor because farming was not profitable, however the price of goods was abstractly defined by the global market, and to remain competitive, the firm could not exceed the accepted prices paid, other than incremental premiums awarded for factors such as quality. Therefore, whatever interventions the firm implemented would have to be related to decision makers' subjective ideas regarding what would support communities in "thriving". Regarding contributions in communities, Dan said, "We've been less descriptive in this, so you might think it's a bit woolly. But we want communities to define this." This had to do with it being "different in every market", and by extension, different communities having different needs. However, the comment also

divested actors at headquarters of responsibility and accountability when it came to contributing positively to producer communities. By saying that markets should define interventions that made sense locally, decision makers positioned markets as responsible for program development and implementation, as well as accountable for failures.

Dan also attributed value to what kinds of interventions would be appropriate: "If they [communities] identify motorbikes, we can't help them. If they identify water, etcetera, we can step in. Even though education is theoretically the role of the government, we may have to step in and do it anyway." This indicates that the firm sees its power to intervene as unlimited. Even though the MNC had no track record of providing educational services beyond training and support on agricultural production, the discourse in which decision makers lived and acted was one in which the firm had the power to reinvent life in producer communities as it saw fit.

Thomas stated, "I don't think we're aligned in rural development. What is rural development? Is it good that cocoa farmers are leaving? Other people can buy up land, would we have a better system? Or do we want to crystallize what it is now?" His question hinted at the generally accepted fact that inputs were too expensive and prices too low for small farms to be profitable. Therefore, farmers had to get bigger, or get driven out. Peter's repeated assertion that "entrepreneurial" farmers would be more successful, leading to rural development, becomes more complicated in this context. Entrepreneurial ambitions would lead to procuring more land, more technologies, and bigger farms, necessarily resulting in poorer, less ambitious or less privileged farmers being pushed out of farming. Thomas' comment suggested that subsidizing farmers' income was an ineffective approach to countering poverty, and was not "rural development". An actor from a Latin American market, Guillermo, said, "I want to take the previous point about having entrepreneurial farmers. In many countries, being a farmer means being poor. That's why we see migration. They get a chance to be seen as richer. If we could demonstrate that being a farmer doesn't mean being poor, then we have something." Thomas responded, "That's the crux of the matter. Are we supporting little inefficient farmers?" At the level of organizational discourses of power, Thomas and Guillermo's discussion illustrates once again that decision makers

perceived the firm to have the power to "crystallize what we have now", or to foster new approaches. Either way, the base assumption guiding actions was that the firm could influence the future of agricultural production and "rural development" as it saw necessary.

Dan said in an SCE workshop that the firm should achieve alignment and consistency through "something reminiscent of the I-way". He elaborated that one could walk into an Ikea anywhere in the world and recognize it as an Ikea "because of the way things are being done." He said that everyone should "be able to walk into communities anywhere in the world and know it's [the MNC] because of the way things are happening." This comment indicates Dan's belief in the importance of building a powerful ideological structure reinforced by repetitive practices and language on a global level. Creating something like "the I-way" involves establishing, extending, and reinforcing the social discourse of the MNC in a transcultural space of adaptation, borrowing and becoming, and then implementing it practically through the actors at multiple levels of the organization, as they reproduce it in their jobs and lives.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I attempted to show how overwhelming complexity in the SCE workshops pushed actors to use familiar approaches to dealing with issues that often did not sufficiently respond to the challenges at hand. The complexity was characterized by the disparate professional priorities of the actors in attendance, and widespread confusion in regards to purpose, methods, indicators, responsibility, and funding. Most actors were not sure of the point of the SCE, and could not envision how it would help them do their jobs better. In this context, the rural development challenges that existed in sourcing communities and how they might be addressed were often secondary to operational issues. Attention was messily distributed across numerous issues and levels of the hierarchy. Language acted as the medium by which complexity was communicated, compounded, made sense of and negotiated. CSV was a discourse justifying existing behavior and at times new ideas. Actors at SCE workshops used metaphors and stories to communicate their opinions and priorities to the other participants. Language also

impacted, and often inhibited, actors' abilities to give attention to emerging issues unique to rural development. The MNC's organizational structures of attention were reinforced and enacted through networks of linguistic cues, such as words and slogans, which were built up over time, tacitly restating organizational norms and priorities when they were invoked in everyday conversations and SCE negotiations. Actors struggled to move away from these familiar cues, since language for the emerging issues they were observing did not yet exist. As a result, the power struggle between existing and emergent issues was not a fair fight. In the next chapter, I explore these challenges more deeply by examining the coffee supply chain in a selected sourcing market in order to contextualize the SCE across multiple hierarchical levels of the raw materials supply chain.

5. Information transfer in a transnational supply chain

Chapter overview

This project explores first, how new information from low in an organizational hierarchy moves up the chain of command, and secondly, how decision makers attend to it when developing strategy. In Chapter 4, I explored how actors at headquarters allocated their attention when negotiating the Social Conditions Evaluation, and how this impacted strategy. I conducted additional research in sourcing markets to determine what information reached headquarters and how. In this chapter, I use a country from which the MNC sourced coffee as a case study.

I start by giving a brief summary of my approach to research and analysis in the sourcing country studied. Next, I describe the MNC's sourcing structure in simplest terms. I try to contextualize the overlap of projects and structures carried out by the MNC's corporate and country level headquarters, and their local organizational partner. To understand discrepancies between the information managers developing the SCE wanted and information that reached them, I explore some of the goals, means and resources, and challenges that farmers described. I conclude with a summary.

Approach to research and analysis

I wanted to explore farmers' perspectives, and learn what information was leaving farms and through which communication channels. In the sourcing country, I conducted participant and non-participant observation on farms, with agronomists from the MNC's local partner organization, and at that organization's municipal, departmental and national headquarters. I stayed on three farms for periods of three to five days on two visits to the field spaced six months apart, spending approximately three months total in the sourcing country. I supplemented observation with semi-structured interviews with farmers, local employees of the MNC, and the partner organization. To mitigate the risk in qualitative research that personal assumptions would influence the structure and content of interviews, I used a discursive, conversational approach, and began by

asking producers to tell me the stories of their lives and farms. This allowed participants to bring up the issues they deemed important (or thought I would see as important). My objective was to gain a basic understanding of the challenges shaping their perspectives, but above all to discover what information entered the chain of command (See Chapter 3 for a thorough description of methods for research and analysis).

Limitations

To provide balance to the analysis that follows, it is important to clarify once again that the MNC's supply chain in the sourcing market studied was unique. In many markets, it worked directly with farmers, not through external partners. This project looks specifically at one supply chain, and does not extrapolate findings to apply to additional supply chains.

It is also important to emphasize the vast complexity of both organizations studied. The processes and structures I describe within both the MNC and the partner organization are arguably simplistic. Not all employees of the MNC had the same interpretation of the organization's structure, but they all felt it was so complex it could hardly be summarized. Nonetheless, to show the opportunities for farmer feedback to reach headquarters, I attempt to map channels and process relationships.

Another limitation I faced when learning about farmers' perspectives was that the partner organization gave me thorough briefings on what it perceived key issues in coffee to be. These presentations covered coffee production history, practices, and the challenges and opportunities, as they perceived them. These presentations were given at national, departmental and local levels. This enabled me to study dominant ideologies and discursive practices within the partner organization at a deep level, however it resulted in my having assumptions as to what issues farmers confronted before I spoke with them directly. I explore this tension further in a later section.

A third challenge related to how farmers perceived me, and how this likely affected interview content and behavior. I was integrated into farms by agronomists from the partner organization. Therefore, farmers may have viewed

me as an employee of the partner organization, the MNC, or both. This perception sometimes seemed to persist, even when I explained that I did not work for either organization, but in collaboration with both, and was an independent student associated with a Swiss university. Farmers understood that I was trying to understand the challenges they faced. I tried not to stimulate farmers' expectations regarding outcomes, however this was not always successful. Farmers may have hoped there would be advantages to cooperating with me. That I am a white woman from the U.S. and speak the local language imperfectly likely influenced issues farmers discussed with me. Farmers may have talked about coffee production and their lives from a certain angle, behaved self-interestedly, and said things they would not say to their peers. However, since I was interested in communication channels and information transfer between farmers and decision makers, I do not view this as a strong limitation. Rather, it showed what information entered the chain of command.

The fourth limitation was related to practices I used in coding. While I conducted and transcribed interviews with farmers in the local language, I coded transcriptions in English. This made it easier for me to move quickly between themes, codes and categories in the analysis process. Since Foucauldian discourse analysis is more interested in historical systems of ideas than the micro-practices of language, I do not consider this to inhibit my exploration and identification of social structures and ideologies. However, translating transcripts into English means initial linguistic subtleties may be lost. Since critical narrative analysis is interested in the details of how participants use language as well as their stories as narratives, this may have compromised the depth of analysis. To ameliorate this risk, after selecting representative texts for further analysis, I returned to the interview language to crosscheck original wording.

The MNC's coffee sourcing practices in the country studied

The MNC's approach to sourcing varied according to country. In the country studied, it was not involved in sourcing at the micro-level and did not have systematic contact with farmers. It purchased about a fifth of its coffee in bulk from the partner organization, and the majority from intermediaries. CSV

initiatives primarily targeted coffee sourced through the partner organization, because that coffee typically had higher traceability than coffee purchased from intermediaries. The MNC had factories where it prepared green coffee (purchased from the partner organization) for sale. Headquarters sourced premium and lower quality coffees from the market. As part of CSV efforts, the Coffee Program was a collaborative effort with the partner organization and focused on production for instant coffee, not premium coffees. Since much of the Coffee Program was negotiated between the market and the organizational partner, headquarters had to be careful not to overstep its bounds when carrying out in-country activities, including the SCE.

To bolster local "clusters", the MNC focused CSV efforts on coffee producers in the regions close to its factories. However, the coffee processed in these facilities, purchased from the partner organization, was sourced from all over the country—that is, it was not necessarily grown locally. Despite the difficulty of tracing the exact origins of this quality of coffee, the MNC considered its purchases from the partner organization as direct transactions with farmers, due to its partner's strong discourse of representing small farmers.

Local market structures and activities impacting the SCE

As discussed in Chapter 4, CSV was promoted at headquarters to guide social and environmental interventions in subsidiary markets. The market studied promoted CSV through the Coffee Program, intended to improve production, good farming practices, and thereby farmer income. Decision makers at headquarters hoped the SCE would help the MNC to report on the impact of the Coffee Program. Figure 2 summarizes the interacting structures and initiatives in the sourcing country at a very basic level:

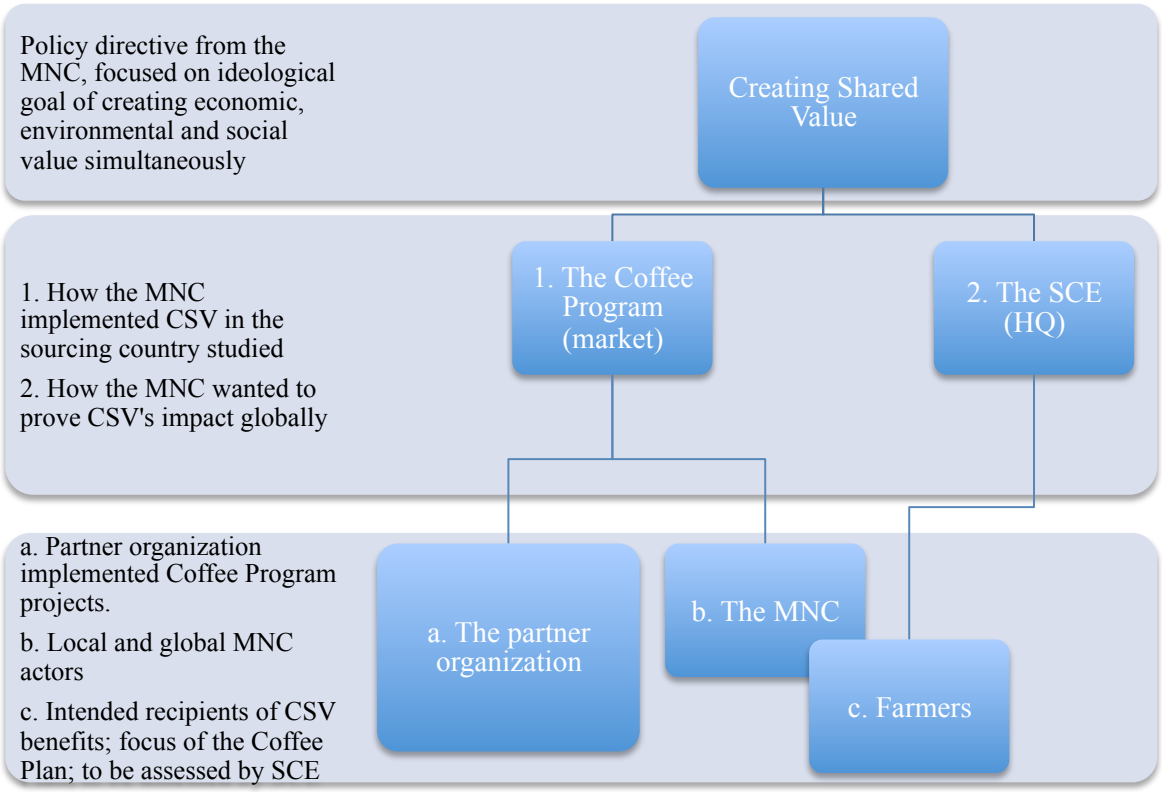

Figure 2

The partner organization

The partner organization acted as a trade association, private enterprise, and non-profit organization. It was the MNC's partner, competitor, and positioned itself as the representative of farmers themselves. Its stated purpose was to foster coffee producers' social development, guarantee the sustainability of the coffee business, and position the country's coffee as the best in the world. It dealt with the implementation of Coffee Program activities, including a plantlet nursery and distribution program. The Program also provided technical support, but did so through the partner organization. This resulted in activities being strongly related to projects it already carried out.

The partner organization was highly diversified and complex. The national headquarters drove the central organizational vision and developed strategy. A research department addressed a wide variety of production-related challenges, including developing high-yield, disease-resistant coffee plants. The organization

also had a corporate branch, which was a competitor of the MNC. Another segment dealt with sourcing operations, traceability, quality control and reporting. Regional committees located in departmental capitals dealt with projects related to specific local needs and opportunities, in addition to the strategic objectives of the organization overall. In constant interaction with but not part of the organization were cooperatives, which the managed a number of local projects including extension services and the activities of agricultural technicians. A critical function of the organization was that it offered international market price for coffee, set daily. This resulted in a quality-control effect on intermediaries, since they were forced to keep their prices fair to compete with the organization in procuring farmers' coffee.

The partner organization provided valuable services to farmers, and was responsible for developing and maintaining a country-wide network of smallholders who were fairly paid for their goods, received training and other services, and had access to markets. However, the organization also had high administrative costs, due in part to the volume of agronomists it employed. It supported small farmers and promoted the continuation of a coffee production system based on small farms. However, due to high input and processing costs for coffee and the extremely small properties of many producers, it was quite common for them to simply not be profitable. A local NGO reported that the partner organization did not focus on whether farms were economically viable. That was "not a question they asked", since a large number of farms were so small, the answer was clearly that they were not. Furthermore, the partner organization did not have the governmental financial backing it had received in the past, since coffee was no longer the critical export it once had been. While many thousands of rural families and employees of the organization depended on coffee as their livelihood, the state at the national level did not.

Discourses within the partner organization: challenges for research

The partner organization's hierarchy fostered the development, enactment, and extension of a powerful social discourse. This discourse, and the organization's discursive practices of distribution, had widespread practical implications.

In my first trip to the field in the sourcing country, the partner organization's well-established routines when it came to socializing external actors heavily mediated data collection. Employees at the national offices in the department of communications gave me an introduction to the organization's mission, history, departmental and hierarchical structure, and practices. Multiple presentations unfolding over the course of a few days at headquarters also covered how the organization sourced coffee, their local and international alliances, the cultural value of the coffee producing regions of the country, and their department of research and development. Subsequently, they facilitated my contact with offices in the regional headquarters, where I was given presentations on departmental objectives, facts and figures, the challenges the organization felt producers faced, and how they provided capacity building. The regional offices then integrated me into the local municipal committee offices, one of four municipalities in which the MNC wanted to improve coffee production and quality through the Coffee Program due to their proximity to the firm's local factories. There, I was given presentations on seed and plantlet distribution and local projects underway as part of the Coffee Program. Actors at the municipal offices of the partner organization then selected the farms at which I stayed.

Before I stepped onto a farm, I had already been briefed on what were framed as the *facts* of the process from international, national and local perspectives. Negating the effects of this process entirely is arguably impossible, but I made a concerted effort to initiate conversations with farmers in which they had the freedom to bring up issues that were important to them. In initial discussions I did not bring up the way farming *was* according to the partner organization's presentations. I did, however, ask farmers to discuss these talking points in subsequent trips to the field, so as to engage a comparative process of analysis regarding key challenges on the ground.

Teaching "coffee culture": discourses of tradition as control mechanisms

The partner organization and its affiliates managed production at every level. When it came to farmers, the organization provided resources. It established a perceived community among far-flung coffee growers related to "tradition" and "coffee culture". Many farmers had strong emotional connections to these

discourses of tradition and national identity, and talked about wanting to stay in coffee for those reasons. However, in numbers, coffee farming in the sourcing country was not always profitable for producers, and many lost money cyclically and increasingly. Its important not to frame farmers as victims, since some struggled due to ineffective financial management and poor choices. In these cases, the amount of money they earned would be unlikely to change whether or not they were in debt. However, through credits, the partner organization facilitated a cycle of dependency that left both farmers and the organization itself in a financial deficit.

The partner organization and affiliates provided extension services, educated farmers on new technologies and "good agricultural practices", facilitated their integration into a sure market, offered access to certification schemes, gave classes on small business management, but most importantly provided loans and credits. Financial and practical support helped producers pay for wet mills in their farms, financed crops renovation, supported agricultural inputs (such as fertilizers and pesticides), and helped them maintain conditions on their properties at levels necessary to produce high quality coffee, uphold access to markets, and maintain certifications.

Producers faced many of the same challenges as smallholder farmers all over the world. They often did not have the liquid resources to invest in their farms or to deal with costs associated with production, including labor, inputs, processing machinery and transportation. Meanwhile, the price of coffee was chronically low and volatile. Farmers were often indebted to the partner organization due to its aforementioned provision of resources. However, producers perceived these resources to be critical, saying without them, it would be difficult or impossible to continue farming coffee. One farmer described the relationship between the farmers and credits as that between addicts with heroine; once they began, they needed increasing amounts.

I spoke with three general categories of producers who did not sell to the partner organization. The first consisted of farmers with larger landholdings and as a result, lower production costs and higher profits. Farmers who were not as reliant on loans were generally not baited by the partner organization's offer of credits. They found its stringent regulations around quality to be time-consuming,

costly, and inhibiting. Intermediaries' quality standards were typically lower, and it made sense for larger producers to concern themselves with quantity over quality. The second category grew coffee due to tradition and desire, but did not necessarily rely on it for profit and subsistence. One farmer I spoke to supported himself through a pet store he owned. He farmed coffee on the side, and marketed it through his own label on social media. This farmer's experience was not the norm. Another family lived in a town, but was in the process of building a farm near their family to visit on weekends and holidays. Farmers in the third category were typically poor, older, had not attained a high level of education or were illiterate. These farmers shied away from or did not have the capacity to conduct detailed record keeping, adapt their growing practices, and learn new technologies, which the partner organization required. Unable to produce coffee of sufficient quality, they sold to middlemen. There were certainly many other categories of farmers not selling to the organization, but these three give some context.

By producing coffee, farmers were participating in a "culture" and "tradition". An older smallholder said "we" need to keep coffee culture going, and make sure the "next generation stays in production". Meanwhile, a younger farmer said that while he wanted to continue his family's tradition of farming coffee, he was not sure he could provide for his wife and daughter if he did so. The partner organization used strong rhetoric related to the national and cultural value of coffee. Since it was committed to positioning country's coffee as the best in the world and small farmers were the base of their power in numbers, it had a strong interest in keeping farmers farming. On its website the organization positioned itself as an independent state, describing its long history of improving farmers' quality of life, supporting their families, and developing coffee producing regions of the country. It said that what bound the institution together was the shared goal of promoting social, agricultural, environmental, educational, and infrastructural development. Because of its presence on multiple national stages, it argued it had achieved national and international recognition as being efficient, transparent and committed.

In a section of its website intended for farmers, the organization said that the culture of coffee was one of farmers' "best values", and that it had been passed between generations. It expressed the hope that producers' children would carry

on the model, which the organization strongly implied was the farmers' biggest asset. In doing so, they would enable hope for the future, and foster stronger communities based on coffee related activities. This message to farmers carried the strong implication that while they were part of something valuable as coffee growers, by leaving farming, they would compromise this. In turn, their children needed to carry on this value for the future. The organization distributed these messages with text in the form of publications, newspapers, educational materials and pamphlets. It also lobbied for the specialness of the country's coffee in international arenas by building alliances with global NGOs and multinational corporations, and pursuing recognition with international cultural entities. This expanded producers' imagined community beyond national borders and onto the global stage. The corporate section of the organization also added perceived cultural and economic value to the national coffee tradition.

The deep effects of these multilevel communication strategies were reflected in how farmers talked about their role in coffee production, culture, and tradition. Farmers often assigned value to their activities in accordance with how they contributed to coffee traditions. For example, Farmer 1 said, "It's excellent, I think that in that sense we're, we're well accompanied as coffee growers." Here, the partner organization is providing the accompaniment. He went on to explain, "Because of that, I think coffee culture in [the sourcing country] will last many years." Farmer 1 implied that in his perception, the partner organization was critical to many farmers' choices to stay in coffee. He concluded, "For [many] years coffee culture has existed, and we've lived from it for a long time, and many generations of people have depended on this product called coffee." Above all, this final sentence reflects the impact the organization's rhetoric had on farmers, as Farmer 1 paraphrased its mission statement. Farmer 1, due to the longstanding presence the partner organization had in coffee production, asserted coffee's cultural importance, and emphasized the crop's traditional value by saying that generations have depended on it. In such, he reproduced the organization's discourse. Choosing to stay in farming emerges here as an enactment of this discourse.

This reproduction and reinforcement of power relations, in which the organization was dominant and farmers were dependent, was in many regards

hidden because of the organization's claim that it represented coffee growers. It convinced coffee growers that it was promoting, not constraining, their power on national and international levels. However, conditions on the ground, communication channels available to farmers, and the organization's activities in practice, illustrated that the power belonged to the organization, and international trade as an abstract force. The discourse the organization propagated appeased coffee growers with illusion of representative power, while structures of social domination, hidden by spatial and temporal separation between participants, organized relations systemically beneath the surface.

In social discourses, divides between producers and interpreters of statements or texts resulting from discursive practices can obscure power relations (Fairclough, 1989). The partner organization's assertions about cultural value of coffee production engaged producers in projects they implemented, aimed to foster producer loyalty, and painted the picture that producers were part of something bigger (in this case The sourcing country studied's "cultural" tradition of growing coffee). Farmers, as the subjects of the organization's discursive practices, appropriated the message as it applied to their lives, thereby reproducing discourses about the importance, value and tradition of coffee production through enactment; that is, by continuing to produce coffee. By believing rhetoric about representation, community, and the societal value of coffee, coffee growers consented to existing power structures, which manifested in production practices. Through consent, producers overlooked coffee's often-negative monetary value. In some regards, they accepted practical challenges such as low coffee prices and increasing debt, in favor of ideological goals. In spacially and temporally distributed communication spaces, discourse "has built into it a subject position for an ideal subject, and actual viewers or listeners or readers have to negotiate a relationship with the ideal subject" (Fairclough, 1989). For coffee growers, this meant seeing published images of thriving producers and healthy plants, drawing comparisons between these pictures and their own lives, and following path set for them by the organization that "represented" them.

The Coffee Program

The MNC pursued its Creating Shared Value objectives (discussed at length in the previous chapter) in the sourcing market studied by establishing the Coffee Program, in collaboration with the partner organization. In the case of the sourcing market studied, the firm emphasized its impact with numbers, but these figures had little meaning without context. For example, the numerical goal for directly sourced coffee stated on the company's website was, in fact, the number of farmers the responsible for producing the coffee the MNC bought in bulk from the partner organization. These were not necessarily farmers with whom the firm had direct contact. Of the total farmers stated in the numerical goal, the firm intended to impact between .05 and one percent through extension services and the provision of plantlets. However, the limited capacity of potential readership to interpret the numbers advertised out of context was an advantage in making projects sound ambitious. When exploring the numbers, the partner organization was focused on providing services to an extremely more substantial number of coffee-producing families than the MNC. This resulted in a lack of clarity regarding what was being done in pursuit of which organization's goals; for example, it was not always clear which activities would be pursued by the partner organization with or without MNC funding.

Michael, a decision maker at headquarters, said the Coffee Program was "one of the very few where [the MNC] has come up with forward-looking targets." In contrast, he said, "Normally, we are eager to set internal targets and try to reach them, and then try to communicate them." With the Coffee Program, decision makers at headquarters had decided to shorten the supply chain, ensure compliance with a code of conduct used globally, and move farmers "to a higher level of sustainability." The code of conduct was a widely recognized baseline for responsible agriculture. Michael described it as a "starting point of a journey." While agronomists were intimately versed in what it meant to be compliant with the stipulations of the code of conduct, this was not always the case for decision makers or external stakeholders, including those constructing the SCE. Firms state rates of compliance to prove effectiveness in sourcing, however in practice the code of conduct used focused on supporting very basic practices, such paying workers fairly and preventing child labor. In the code of conduct, farmers were

graded in colors according to their levels of compliance. Using labels to communicate sustainability commitment was similar to the firm's use of numbers out of context—they expressed enough action to appease many external stakeholders, but often meant little on the ground.

According to Michael, achieving compliance "requires training, not just certification, but set of activities which will help us to reach this target." The firm decided to instigate the Coffee Program because "from an operational perspective; we see declining yields, declining outputs, and we have factories in place. If we want to maintain factories, we need to ensure local supply." In turn, to ensure local supply, the firm had "to see, what does it take that coffee farming is attractive so we can fill our factories?" Michael continued that in turn, the question became how to relate these issues to improving farmers' social conditions and CSV. This was the potential overlap between the Coffee Program, CSV and the SCE.

In the next section, I explore how farmers talked about goals, resources and challenges in relation to coffee production and their lives. This sets the stage for examining information emerging, information entering organizational communication channels, and information that reaches decision makers at headquarters and is paid attention to in SCE strategy development.

Farmers' goals, resources and means, challenges

I present findings on farmers' perspectives in the same three subsections I used for decision makers at headquarters in Chapter 4. First, I explore goals, or what farmers said they wanted to achieve. Most farmers wanted to provide food, sustenance and necessities to their families, ensure their children had opportunities to succeed, pay off their debts, and achieve respect and acknowledgment for things they did well or for others. Secondly, I look at resources and means, or what farmers said enabled them to pursue their goals. Resources and means farmers mentioned included credits from the partner organization and support from social networks, but they particularly emphasized their own hard work. Finally, I identify the challenges, or the factors that hindered farmers when they pursued their goals.

Goals

Farmers described their central goals as sustaining their families, fostering the futures of their children, and paying off their debts. Farmer 1 said his main goal was for his farm to be self-sustaining. Farmer 2 said he wanted his daughter to pursue an education, so she would not be forced to work her whole life and "never see results", like he and his father. Farmer 3 wanted to continue living on a small farm and only buying and using what she needed so as to get out of debt.

However, more than concrete goals, when talking with me farmers addressed their pride in things they felt they were good at, and their desire for recognition. This may have been related to power dynamics between participants and myself, which were unequal when defined by our different levels of access to social and economic capital. In terms of this project, farmers may have viewed me primarily as an informal channel, and focused on information that they wanted to move up the supply chain. Participants may have perceived an opportunity to gain something from our conversations. For these reasons, I do not frame farmers' pride, self-advertisement and desire for respect and acknowledgement as defining characteristics of coffee producers in the culture and country studied. However, since my goal in data collection was to locate information that entered the chain of command, I pay attention here to the information farmers emphasized to me, as a channel (while acknowledging that this may not be the information that emphasize to all conversation partners).

Communicating hard work and pursuing recognition

Farmers lauded hard work as a positive characteristic in individuals, especially their partners and themselves. They referenced hard work in pursuing recognition and consideration from others, including the partner organization. Farmer 1 explained that the partner organization had first approached him in the late 1970s because of what he described as his good work ethic and exceptionally productive coffee trees; he "worked well, I was always one of the best coffee producers. The agronomists began to notice, the people who walked by, this beautiful coffee. The trees, green and beautiful." In this excerpt Farmer 1 links working well with beautiful coffee. He repeated the critical link he perceived between working hard and building a sustainable small farm on numerous

occasions. He said, “I want to learn to capacitate myself to produce, so things don’t have to be given to me.” When he was still in the process of establishing his farm, he said, “I started to get attention, and they said oh, this man, who is he working with? Is he with the committee? Who’s loaning to him? How is he working?” Farmer 1’s comment indicates that in his view, agronomists and the committee set the standards by which other producers and residents valued coffee as good or bad. That people wondered with whom Farmer 1 was working indicates that he perceived support from the partner organization to lead to a quality of coffee plantation that received widespread admiration. He said agronomists and others “wanted to visit, because the lot I was growing was beautiful. When a grower produces well and works well, they ask a favor—that we let them bring people to see our lot as an example. Because some can [grow coffee well], and others can’t.”

Farmer 1 discussed his abilities as a coffee producer at length on multiple occasions. However, his pride did not seem to be misplaced, since over the next several years, the partner organization frequently brought groups of visitors to his farm. On my second research trip to sourcing country I observed a visit. The group included academics from Europe and upper-level employees of the partner organization. Farmer 1 said that employees of the MNC’s global headquarters had also visited his farm, and he had helped them each plant their own coffee tree to watch grow over time. For the visit I observed, Farmer 1 gave a lecture on how to run a sustainable small farm and referenced a self-drawn map of his property. He spoke slowly and clearly, indicating he was familiar with addressing non-fluent speakers of his language. Meanwhile, Farmer 3 (his wife) prepared samples of coffee she and Farmer 1 had grown and roasted for all the guests, which she served in small disposable coffee cups with single-servings of sugar she kept on-hand for such occasions. Next, Farmer 1 guided guests on a tour of his farm, pointing out different lots of coffee and noting distinguishing characteristics of each. He demonstrated what ripe coffee looked like, explained how the coffee was processed, washed and dried, and described how he handled wastewater and other byproducts sustainably. The visit took approximately two hours. After the guests left, while Farmer 3 prepared dinner, she confided in me that she wanted the partner organization to give a gesture of appreciation, recognizing Farmer 1 for all

the work he did on its behalf. She asked me if I would tell people in the upper levels of the organization to honor Farmer 1 in some way, indicating she saw me as a channel by which to appeal to actors higher up in the organization's hierarchy.

While Farmer 1 and Farmer 3 wanted to be recognized for their successes as farmers and their hard work for the partner organization, Farmer 4 emphasized how her neighbors admired her for being able to fulfill her role as a housewife while maintaining an exceptional garden. She seemed to perceive her abilities as inherent, and emerging organically. She said, "Look, I was a girl, recently married, I married and no one taught me. But just like I was born, I began to sow a garden around the house and up there, and the boss, the boss, he was in love with the house because I grew a beautiful garden." She described a far-reaching garden, the expanse of which emphasized her unique skills. "I planted [flowers] everywhere, sowed the garden around the house, everywhere around was a garden. I don't know how I did it, because I had to attend to it a lot. And I had to make lunch for the workers and keep order in the house, I had to, the workers, all of these men, and I still maintained a beautiful garden." Like Farmer 1, she talked about how other people wondered at her garden, which was proof of her productivity and efficiency: "People admired me. And I tell you, they remembered me, they remembered me… the people admired me because I was very industrious to maintain all this."

Hard work emerged recurrently when participants valued or described the positive characteristics of their partners, peers, and children. Farmer 4 said of her husband, "my parents liked him, he was a good worker". Older farmers said the younger generation did not work as hard as they had in the past. However, younger farmers also valued hard work. Farmers talked about their spouses in terms of how well they worked, implying willingness and ability to work hard were critical characteristics for a potential partner. Farmer 2, when talking about his wife Farmer 5, said that he thanked God for such an industrious wife, who could carry plantains, cook, and maintain a beautiful house. In addition to being something for which farmers wanted to receive recognition, hard work was an important means for pursuing goals.

In addition to willingness and ability to work hard, many farmers noted successful adherence to certain social roles as a deserving of recognition. I did not

dig deeply into what kind of recognition farmers wanted in my data collection process, so in this dissertation, their hopes and expectations in this regard remain unexplored. However Farmer 6 said, "Here in the region are witnesses, and I am today publically collaborating with you all [the partner organization], to get some consideration. For everything we have said. We don't drink, we don't smoke, yes? We don't have any—are we people that are of—that mistreat the gender [women], no. But nonetheless, there's no help with my debts." This example seems to show an overt request for debt relief. Farmer 6 perceived this to justified by the recognition that he did not drink, smoke, or abuse women. Like Farmer 3, Farmer 6 saw me as a point of access, or channel, to actors higher up in the partner organization's hierarchy.

Resources and means

Hard work

In addition to justification for recognition, hard work and industriousness were critical means to pursuing goals. When I looked at how hard work came up in participants' stories, informal labor performed by women emerged as critical to many farms' subsistence or success. Both men and women told me repeatedly how hard they worked, and frequently discussed it in relation to not being recognized, rewarded or reaping any benefits. Here, I look particularly at the accounts of women participants. Farmer 3 said that women worked harder than men, because at least on Sundays and holidays men could rest, while women cooked and cleaned unrecognized every day of the week. Farmer 4 said her hard work was critical to her family's survival "… after a year I had my first son, but I worked very hard because I had to manage many employees," she explained. Soon, she

> …became pregnant quickly with the next, with the next, and…and my daughter was two months old when he agreed to provide food to 11 policemen that were posted there, up there. There was a post of policemen and he agreed that we would make them food, but he was, he wasn't… it was me. He made the agreement but I had to respond with the food.

Here, we learn that Farmer 4's husband had volunteered her labor to others without consulting her. As a result, in addition to fulfilling her work around the

house and related to child rearing in line with her assumed role as a wife, she had to address a wide-ranging new assortment of tasks. She described a number of logistical challenges, saying,

> It was really hard, because some [of the policemen] came at some time for breakfast, others—there was preparation, and to prepare the pots for lunch and everything… and with workers… I worked really hard. Yes, really hard, but despite that I did well. I dealt with all these people and washed clothes, fixed the clothes of the, those policemen. I had to press and clean the police uniforms.

While repeatedly emphasizing how hard she worked, Farmer 4 also underscores how well she did. She said,

> Like this I worked my whole life. I worked very hard, I worked with the officials, with workers, when there were workers [on the farm] it was 18, 20 people, sometimes more, up to 30 people I had to take care of [with cooking]. I worked very hard. And when that, the stoves weren't like this, one had to put wood, and use a lot of strength, and then use a lot of strength to make the arepas—one got very hot. So I worked like that my whole life, only now can I live like this, comfortably, because I got sick. I got sick, so now I can't work hard in the kitchen because it's a lot of work. Everything he has was off my ribs, because look how hard I worked.

Throughout her interview, Farmer 4 used minor variations in language to underscore the same point, which was that she worked very hard her whole life. She repeats that she was industrious, and that in the face of hardship, she persevered. Generally, she described work as imposed on her by her husband and her circumstances. When she talked about work, she spoke about herself and her experience, not a partnership with her husband. She said that while her husband offered labor to the policemen, she did the work, and as a result, "everything he has is off my ribs".

Regarding local and historical context, Farmer 4's husband, Farmer 7, may have offered his wife's labor to the policemen as part of an exchange, for example to gain protection in the armed conflict simultaneously underway in rural areas of the country. Alternatively, he might not have considered Farmer 4's housework to be work. This was what he suggested in his interview; he said he would never send

his granddaughters “to work”, despite that both his granddaughters worked daily in the household. Farmer 7 later clarified he meant they would never work in the field. However, his comments are representative of the generality that many male farmers did not see housework, cooking, and raising children, and serving workers as labor. On the other hand, they expected this work to be performed. Farmer 7 said that to be a good wife, a woman had to keep a beautiful house. For some women, while their husbands did not necessarily see their daily activities as work, failing to complete them meant they were not fulfilling their roles as good wives. While at times unrecognized, the informal labor many women provided were critical means to keeping farms running. Women ensured workers were compensated through food, conducted day labor themselves when cash flow was insufficient to pay workers, cooked, cleaned, raised children and tended gardens with subsistence goods.

Credits from the partner organization

Farmers said credits from the MNC’s partner organization were critical to their survival. I explore the downside of credits in the following subsection on obstacles, but here examine it as a means and resource to achieving goals. Farmer 1 described the impact of credits when telling the story the farm he established with Farmer 3:

> This farm was a farm that was totally abandoned. This is to say, there was no production, no coffee, just weeds. What was really difficult was beginning to work on the farm because we didn’t have any resources, we didn’t know anyone who could lend us resources. So, it was like this because at that time the technicians weren’t there to assist us.

He explained that instead, the partner organization delegated technicians to assist farmers.

> One day, one of these people arrived and asked me what resources I was working with. And I told him I didn’t have any resources, that I was doing quite badly, that I didn’t have anything with which to buy food, and the situation was very difficult. And he told me, he told me, go to the committee, and there we can lend to you so you can grow your coffee and also build a coffee mill, because I didn’t have anything.

Here, we see that in Farmer 1's view, to establish a productive and sustainable farm most producers needed external support. In Farmer 1's story of his farm, only after the technician approached him and told him about the local committee could he start working, using the resources they provided to begin farming coffee. While some farmers told me that credits indebted them in the long term, Farmer 1 described them primarily as a means, not an obstacle to achieving his goals. He said that without financial support, producing coffee

> …would be very difficult. To, not just for us, but in this moment, here, the family, if it didn't exist, for all the coffee producers, if the partner organization, if the [local allied bank] didn't exist, it would be very difficult to grow coffee because one requires, as a producer, something that—support. From the government. Governmental support, support of the partner organization, the cooperatives of producers that also help a lot with purchasing the coffee growers' products.

In Farmer 1's view, without support from the partner organization, coffee production would not last. In practical terms, without loans and credits, farmers would not have the liquid capital to invest in and maintain their coffee plantations. This dynamic, demonstrative of the unprofitability of coffee in the sourcing country, introduces the negative side of the partner organization's widespread, deep-rooted support. Through credits, it enabled farmers to continue in a line of work through which they grew progressively indebted.

Optimism and Motivation

I asked farmers what personal characteristics were important means to success. Farmer 2 said farmers had to be "optimistic", and explained that in the face of various hardships, he and his wife and daughter continued farming because they were optimists. On the other hand, Farmer 1 said that farmers should be "motivated". He described his own motivation and agency in relating to supplementing his family's income with livestock, citrus, and other subsistence goods. Farmer 1 said that "educating oneself in the country the same as they do in university" and "being open to learning new ways to produce more at less cost" were both outcomes of motivation. He said every farmer was responsible for advancing himself (he did not refer to female farmers), "since the agronomists

have many people to visit". Farmer 1 said he tried to help farmers "capacitate themselves" through his work with the municipal committee, and showed them "what they can do with their land." However, Farmer 1's views on motivation are framed by his collaboration with and exposure to the partner organization. The organization educated producers to see their farms as businesses, and emphasized an entrepreneurial approach to farming. However, these entrepreneurial activities can also be viewed as subsistence tactics through which smallholders can procure the minimum resources they need to survive, but rarely improve their economic positions.

Challenges

Farmers faced a number of obstacles to improving their economic standings, above all that coffee cost more to produce than they could earn selling it—that is, it was quite simply unprofitable. Despite that in practice, producing coffee made little economic sense, many dynamic forces interacted to facilitate the continuation of coffee production. Here, I note three. First, to communicate a discourse of tradition and coffee culture, the partner organization used a multi-pronged discursive approach to convincing farmers that what they were doing had unique cultural value. I explore this above, in the sub-section on the partner organization and farmers. In sum, though, the organization appealed to farmers' hearts, families, notions of self-worth, patriotism and nostalgia in doing this. Secondly, the partner organization provided easy access to credits in an environment with few opportunities. Third, poverty, short-term needs and at times, misunderstanding of the terms of the loans, pushed farmers to take credits, and they became indebted. Because of mounting interests and the aforementioned unprofitability of the crop they were farming, this was a cycle that few producers emerged from.

> ***Low price of coffee → not enough cash flow → taking out credits → can't decrease debt***

Low price of coffee

Most farmers said the price of coffee was the main source of their financial problems. They said that prices were so low, coffee production was unprofitable. At the time of data collection, farmers said the money they earned growing coffee amounted to less than the money they spent producing it. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the price of coffee set daily in New York dictated what the partner organization and other coffee buyers paid. Coffee quality also influenced price paid, but to a smaller extent. Quality was determined by what percentage of a given sample was damaged by pests and coffee rust or was not harvested at the appropriate time. Certifications validated quality and could affect price in the form of premiums.

Many certifications required additional work or investments from farmers, which were not always balanced out by they premiums they received. Farmer 2 said, "we'll have to see" what happens with specialty coffees, but that even though his coffee was of high quality and he said some was certified by a well-known European seal, this had not notably impacted his income. "We're indebted. When you don't receive a good price for your coffee, you don't have the money to pay salaries and sustain work throughout the week. And food. So I do the work together with my father, picking coffee, mowing, fumigating, various things fall onto us and we get tired, and never see the fruits (of our labor)".

Not enough cash flow

Insufficient cash flow was a side effect of the low price of coffee. Diminished liquid assets generated a number of challenges, for example when purchasing fertilizers and other inputs necessary for production, paying workers' salaries and buying household items and supplementary foods that could not be produced on the farm. Insufficient cash flow also often required women to perform more informal labor, since it impacted farmers' abilities to pay workers. Furthermore, combined with other obstacles, it could negatively impact farmers' health. For example, while producers theoretically had access to medical care, the time and cost of reaching clinics without reliable transportation, contingent on cash flow, could impede them.

When farmers talked about problems or successes with production, they usually explained them in relation to their ability to procure food. Farmer 4

explained that the chickens given to her by her mother-in-law and neighbor were the first indication that her farm was growing. Farmer 1 told me that during his early days as a farmer, production was so low he and Farmer 3 had to purchase their groceries from local stores on faith and pay for them later. Eventually, they became so indebted that the stores did not allow them to continue. As a result, he and Farmer 3 had lived off of plantains and unprocessed sugar for a period of time. Farmer 6 said when coffee prices were low, the inability to buy groceries outside of the home was the first hardship. He said when he sold coffee, all the money made went to food items and household needs.

> …it's not enough to pay debts, nor to sustain a farm, nor to keep one's family eating, from only what little you produce in the farm. Plantains, yuca, corn, but the, the other things you have to buy—then, the rice, things that we don't produce here, the fat, the oil [for cooking], the chocolate, you have to buy it outside [the household]. Soap, yes, pre-made articles, those are from outside, and they're not given out for free. So then, the producer, what does he have to do? To go to the store and get things on faith? And this is how we survive…

These challenges also impacted many farmers' ability to transport their coffee. Farmer 2 and Farmer 5, for example, lived down a poorly maintained dirt road about ten minutes by car (thirty minutes on foot) outside the center of a small town. The town was an additional thirty to forty-five minutes by car from the closest municipal point of purchase run by the partner organization. While they owned a small motorbike to ease access to nearby towns, it did not enable them to transport their coffee. Instead, they relied on a transport service, which Farmer 2 said was costly. Sometimes environmental and weather-related factors also impeded cash flow by rendering infrastructure unreliable. During one of my trips, a landslide washed out a portion of the road to the municipal center, making the local point of purchase hard to reach for many farmers.

Most farmers I spoke with said they had little control over cash flow. In their stories, events and circumstances arose, and affected their liquid assets and subsistence. On the other hand, some farmers, such as Farmer 1, said they tried to ensure that they had other sources of income to mitigate cash flow problems that arose from relying exclusively on coffee.

Taking out credits

Farmers took out credits to both maintain and renovate their crops. While they said that credits were a critical means by which they were able to remain in farming, they also said they were perpetually indebted as a result. While I was conducting research, the partner organization was combatting past problems with disease by promoting renovation on a massive scale. It encouraged producers to replace aging and susceptible lots with resistant varietals developed by researchers in an effort to prevent rust in the future, and boost production. However, for farmers, renovation was labor-intensive, expensive, and they had to accept income consequences of lower volume while young trees matured. The organization's technicians tried to mitigate this by rolling the renovation process out in stages according to the number of lots on a given farm, but farmers still had to accept losses and increased debts. They also had to trust that the partner organization was providing high-quality, productive trees. Farmer 4 said, "When they plant a new coffee, we don't know anything about it."

Farmers received support for the agricultural inputs they needed to maintain production. Farmer 6 explained, "the inputs are very expensive. Yes? The cooperative lends you money, but they take interest from you. And you have to pay them." However, regarding payment Farmer 6 says the terms are not always clear to farmers. He said,

> On this, the cooperative isn't very honest. Then, there are interests in the future. If they lend you 300 thousand [pesos], they take interests going forward. Yes? … This, sometimes producers don't understand this. Yes? This is something lacking, that the cooperative could make a little clearer. They give the producer a credit that he has to pay.

He suggests here that farmers accepted credits and entered into loan relationships without knowing the terms or long-term repercussions of their decision; that by taking loans with interest to produce an unprofitable crop, there was a high likelihood of becoming increasingly indebted. As a result of these debts, Farmer 6 explained, "the [organization's] pot is boiling over because of the producer, but we're going bankrupt. The majority of producers…are going bankrupt. Because we're working at a loss." He continued, "the majority of producers, we're leaving,

we're going. The majority." He concluded, "We've already had eight years in this farm, all of which we've been indebted, and now we're still indebted. And what we had before and now has been chipped away by interests."

Can't decrease debt

Farmers said repeatedly that they wanted to pay back their debts and become self-sufficient. As shown, their narratives tied indebtedness to a lack of cash flow, having to purchase things on faith, and going through phases during which they ate only what they grew on their farms. Farmer 1 explained that low production and low income had for years prevented farmers from becoming economically viable.

> It doesn't allow them, or it doesn't give them what they need to be able to sustain themselves with their families, and to be able to pay whatever credits they've acquired. So I know, and have difficulties with some producers being able to pay those credits. In reality, it's not that the producer doesn't want to pay—the coffee producer is, they are very honest people, people that want to pay what they owe. But in the face of such a difficult situation, they are not capable.

Farmers said it was impossible to reduce their debts and that therefore they could not move forward economically. Indebtedness also influenced how they made decisions about to whom to sell their coffee. Farmer 6 said he and many other farmers sold to the partner organization even when intermediary buyers were paying more "for the simple reason that—the majority of producers, we're in debt to the cooperative. We're in debt to it. The majority of producers need loans." Most farmers said they did not think it mattered how hard they worked, because they remained in debt regardless.

Chapter summary

In this chapter I attempted to show what farmers said and through which channels their feedback reached headquarters in the case of the sourcing country studied. I also aimed to show features of the local market that shaped both farmers' lived realities, and external stakeholders' ability to hear their feedback. In

particular, the powerful discourse surrounding the social importance of coffee production influenced society, business, and communication on multiple levels. The partner organization played a central role in furthering this perception. What farmers said was muddied by a lack of communication channels designed to transmit their feedback, and the strong, at times competing ideologies of the MNC and the partner organization. The partner organization had the advantage that many internal and external stakeholders at both national and global levels perceived it as the representative of small coffee farmers. However, farmers, not the organization's administrators (even if they were from farming families), suffered the effects of high production costs, crop diseases and low prices. Nevertheless, stakeholders and consumers often assumed they understood farmers' challenges and needs as communicated by the partner organization because of its longstanding and widespread influence. While the stories farmers told about their lives showed that coffee was unprofitable, they continued to produce it because of the perceived social value of coffee, and because of their crippling debt. In Chapter 6, I explore how organizational architecture and communication channels linked the sourcing market with headquarters. I look at the role played by organizational structure influenced how decision makers paid attention to emergent issues and developed strategy for the SCE.

6. The channels linking headquarters with markets: the case of one supply chain

Chapter overview

My research questions were, how does information from low in an organizational hierarchy move up the chain of command? And, what mechanisms influence how decision makers attend to new information when developing strategy in response to environmental change? The preceding chapters explored the perspectives and priorities of corporate decision makers, the organizational structures in which actors were positioned in the market studied and at headquarters, and the information emerging on farms.

In this chapter, I address both research questions interpretively. I suggest some preliminary conclusions about the structural challenges shaping the process of developing and implementing the SCE using the context provided in Chapters 4 and 5. I explore how communication channels in place between farmers and MNC decision makers shaped what information left farms. I suggest that the priorities of existing communication channels mean social information from the bottom of the chain of command often could not easily reach the top, and explore why based on participants' perceptions of organizational structure. In this environment of transnational complexity, managers were inundated with a high volume of information from numerous channels, much of which was not relevant to the SCE. The information available to managers was that emerging from the existing communication channels, which spanned multiple countries and departments. They had to make quick decisions about what could be used for the SCE. In this context of extreme complexity and multilevel demands on their attention, they tended to focus on global priorities, while delegating local (market) concerns to sourcing countries.

This chapter is based on interviews from a small sample of employees involved in SCE workshops, determined opportunistically through availability and access. Its aim is to explore complexities in channels and attention leading to

discontinuities in attention. It does this by summarizing structures as described by employees, but acknowledges that discrepancies between participants' perspectives resulting from the different areas of expertise required by their jobs do not allow for solid conclusions. This chapter does not make claims about how the MNC functioned at a high level of detail, which is outside the scope of this project. I only reference the case of one, in many ways unique, sourcing market. The SCE, as explored in Chapter 4, emerged from the needs of multiple stakeholders and was informed by diverse knowledge about multiple sourcing markets, making its construction a deeply transnational and transcultural project. This overview of channels between the sourcing market studied and headquarters shows some of the information comprising the knowledge base about one market to suggest how discontinuities in information transfer about farmer wellbeing came about. It contextualizes the environment in which decision makers had to address unfamiliar challenges, fed by an abundance of information that they could not always make use of in the new context of the SCE.

Communication channels between producers and decision makers

The communication channels available to farmers mediated their feedback, and affected the information that reached MNC decision makers. The way in which decision makers framed indicators in the SCE shaped how they paid attention to farmers' challenges. MNC actors categorized social needs indicators under producers' *goals*, *needs* and *constraints*. In the view of attention, communication channels are shaped by the structure of attention of the organization, and the focus of attention of actors. This, in turn, hinges on actors' situational context within the structure of the firm. In the case of sourcing markets, communication channels were often not just intra-, but inter-organizational. In the case of the sourcing country studied, the MNC did not have a strong presence on the ground. Since its partner organization dealt with sourcing at both micro and macro levels, for the SCE the MNC would have to rely on internal to that organization. However, routines for gathering, transmitting and processing this feedback had not yet been constructed. That meant when it came to potentially implementing the SCE, there were not yet familiar practices for systematically

identifying the goals, needs and constraints of farmers. Since the structural distribution of attention within channels determined what information reached decision makers, the information that arrived did not necessarily address on farmers' livelihood challenges. Decision makers interested in the SCE, therefore, were left in an informational void that made their task of developing or implementing the evaluation unpredictable and overly complex. At the same time, they had to remain focused on the requirements of their jobs and the expectations of their superiors.

In the case of the sourcing market studied, information about farmers with potential relevance to implementing the SCE came from three channels. First, the multiple communication channels of the partner organization in the country contained the most feedback from farmers. Secondly, communication channels between the MNC and the partner organization facilitated the company's coffee sourcing activities and separately, handled the Coffee Program. Third, some producer opinions and challenges traveled through informal communication channels between farms and decision makers.

Communication channels at the partner organization

This section does not comprehensively address all communication channels at the partner organization. Rather, it summarizes points of contact, and addresses the focuses of evaluations carried out by agronomists on farms, which were the most direct way in which farmer feedback entered the organizations' chain of command (critical points of contact summarized in figure 3). This was separate from the MNC's chain of command.

Figure 3

Technicians were located the partner organization's chain of command, not the MNC's. The information they gathered on farms was intended for internal use by

the partner organization, and was not directly relevant to the MNC. For SCE implementation, some of this information in relation to a small number of farmers (those impacted by the Coffee Program) became relevant to the firm. However, for farmers and technicians, data about goals, needs and constraints did not need to be collected, because the organization was not focused on these categories of indicators. Additionally, for farmers and many technicians, this knowledge was tacit. It was not part of technicians' jobs to categorize or report on these issues; they were primarily interested in information about production and agricultural practices. Evaluations were called registers of recommendations, and began by asking for general information such as the names of the technician and producer and their location within the country. In the second section, the purpose of the visit was pre-typed, and described as transmission of technologies and practices in order for producers to become increasingly productive, efficient, profitable and competitive. Next, the technician was prompted to describe the situation he or she encountered on the farm. One technician noted that a farmer had verified planting plantlets delivered by the Coffee Program and offered details about which lots were implicated, the number of plantlets used, and the area required. Then he commented on the health of the plantlets, noting that they showed spots of coffee rust. He also noted that the farmer had done a good job of preparing his plantations. In the subsequent recommendations section, the technician wrote that the farmer evaluated needed to fertilize coffee his younger coffee trees, manage coffee rust, and renovate some of his lots. He added technical guidelines and input usages on charts that included months, doses, products and proportions. He also noted that the Coffee Program would continue to deliver disease-resistant plantlets and fertilizers to support renovation.

This suggests that central focuses of attention for agricultural technicians employed by the partner organization were teaching farmers new technologies for growing coffee, assessing existing agricultural and sustainability practices on farms, observing the conditions of coffee crops, and suggesting practices for increasing productivity. This information did not directly relate to farmers' goals, needs and obstacles, which made sense in local context, since those indicator categories were not prioritized by the partner organization and most country-level actors already understood many farmers' goals, needs and constraints. However, it

also meant that at the most direct point of contact between farmers and the intra-organization chain of command, the information the MNC was looking for did not have the opportunity to enter. With regard to the information the evaluations did contain, much of which was relevant for reporting on the Coffee Program, the partner organization treated it as internal. In terms of existing structures, the evaluations did not reach actors at the MNC, since prior to the Coffee Program the firm only purchased bulk coffee from the partner organization and was not involved in production. However, because of the Coffee Program and the fact that the partner organization was implementing its programs, the MNC was interested in some of its internal data. This complicated the relationship between the organizations and necessitated adaptation of communication channels to facilitate information transfer and reporting. However, structures had not yet been developed to facilitate the transmission of this information. Another complication that would have to be addressed was that the partner organization tracked performance data for hundreds of thousands of farmers, and the MNC only needed data for the few thousand affected by the Coffee Program. The disaggregation of data was not in the job description of anyone at either organization.

To summarize, actors at the MNC faced a number of obstacles in trying to locate information in the case of the country studied, because of the nature of their relationship with the partner organization. While they financed the Coffee Program, they did not carry out its processes on the ground. The information they would need to report on it was internal information collected by their partner organization. Information from farmers entering the intra-organizational communication channels focused on the partner organization's priorities, not the MNC's. This made it challenging for them to get information for their global indicator categories in the case of the sourcing market studied.

The MNC's communication channels in the sourcing country studied

The MNC's sourcing and operational channels were central avenues of communication transnationally, across markets. This section does not describe the firm's communication structures comprehensively, because its size and complexity are too great. However, Mario, Gabrielle and Michael described the

MNC's organizational structure as they perceived it. The typical process in smaller countries, such as the case studied, is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

In the sourcing country I studied, the market head of the region was based in the country I studied. The country-level purchasing manager bought coffee for the MNC's country level subsidiary, meaning he was only loosely connected to the market head for the region studied, but strongly connected to a separate department focused on global coffee procurement. Meanwhile, the market head for the region reported to the executive director for the Americas at headquarters. In sum, at the level of the MNC, communication about markets often happened at high levels and because of the basic focus of activities on profit and loss, had little to do with farmers. While selected actors might concern themselves on an individual level with social challenges farmers faced, the communication that was part of their jobs did not focus on these issues.

With regard to the market studied, the MNC sourced a large volume of high quality coffee from the country through departments at headquarters, while the local market simultaneously carried out local purchasing and manufacturing activities. That meant alignment was extremely important, since the MNC's global actors were working within the same space as country-level actors. As a result, headquarters had to be careful not to make commitments, establish programs or engage in practices that would negatively interact with the priorities of the local market. This was particularly the case with projects driven by headquarters, such as the SCE. As Michael put it, "we are on the same playing field, and our actions have consequences for the local market."

Another avenue of communication about farmers with regard to the country studied was external auditing of the Coffee Program activities. As means for controlling what their partner organization was delivering in relation to funds

provided, the MNC hired a third party to conduct an assessment of inputs and outputs, which involved visits to farms and interactions with farmers. In audits, the focus was primarily on whether collective activities with the partner organization were transpiring in the agreed-upon way, and leading to desired results.

Informal communication channels between farmers and headquarters

Informal communication also happened between farmers and headquarters, as shown in figure 5.

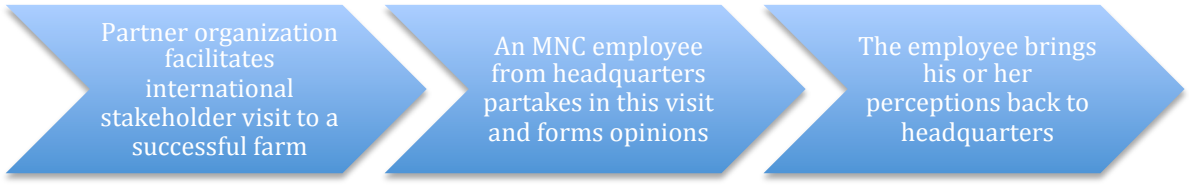

Figure 5

Farmers with access to actors higher up in both the MNC's and partner organization's hierarchies, such as Farmer 1, had a substantial role in shaping informal communication channels, because they interacted with them more readily. Farmer 1 talked about hardships imposed by the price of coffee, but he also addressed potential solutions. He adhered to the perspective of many actors from both he MNC and their partner organization—that higher production would ease the economic strain on farmers and help "them avoid the impact of low prices". By using "them" to refer to farmers, he identified himself in this context as a representative of the partner organization, rather than a farmer. His role as a leader in the community enabled him to interact with people and attain information that not all farmers were able to access, for example MNC actors who visited his farm. Farmer 1 used language to frame his position differently depending on the focuses of our conversations. When he explained, "only very few of us have changed" from traditional to "good" agricultural practices, he aligned himself with producers. He juxtaposed "capacitated" producers with "traditional" farmers who dealt with "low production" and struggled to sustain their families and pay credits they had acquired.

Decision makers' attention allocation for the SCE

Allocating attention for SCE development and implementation were separate issues. Allocating attention in SCE implementation also varied according to market. In the case of the sourcing country studied, while many communication channels existed between sourcing markets and headquarters, in the case of the country studied there was no communication channel between farmers and decision makers focused on transmitting social information. This forced decision makers to work very hard to identify what information the SCE required, and determine where to find it. Because social information on farmers did not easily flow upwards, when MNC decision makers tried to locate social indicators, they focused on information from existing communication channels that they perceived to be related. Within the ad hoc group of actors tasked with building the SCE, no existing organizational routines for processing the high volume of diverse, complex, and often unruly information had been developed due to the newness of the project. Actors faced an imposing task, and had to: 1) determine what was important to farmers, what was important to markets, and what was important to headquarters; 2) develop a replicable process for collecting information in diverse local contexts, and; 3) identify who would be responsible for getting it done. The only actor at the workshops focused solely on the SCE was Gabrielle, an intern on a temporary contract. Other participants addressed the SCE in addition to the tasks required of them by their jobs, meaning the evaluation required additional work from them, which they struggled to find time to carry out. As a result, it made sense for MNC decision makers to consider KPIs that were aligned with their job descriptions, such as how much money had been allocated to the Coffee Program, who was carrying out its objectives, and at what levels of which organization. Other indicators that made sense at headquarters included how many plants the company financed, how many farmers it impacted and where it would be implemented.

Because of these challenges, the interests of headquarters were strongly represented in the SCE. As discussed in depth in Chapter 4, MNC actors wanted "the big picture", a "helicopter view" and "a snapshot" of unique market-level

realities. To do their jobs and for the SCE to be relevant, they needed to be able to highlight "gaps" and locate "starting points" that would show opportunities for intervention. Multiple stakeholders and markets required "alignment", and comparable results required "consistency". "Consistency" was needed for the SCE to be usable and provide helpful, reportable information, and in turn "adaptability" was needed for country-level markets to see the purpose of SCE evaluations and projects. "Starting points", "conclusions", "road maps", "guidance where there are gaps" and "a pragmatic way forward" would help establish consistency. These features of consistency are all static outcomes, which reduced complexity and laid the groundwork for achieving alignment. Consistency and alignment overlapped, however MNC actors typically used the word *consistent* to describe approaches and indicators. They used *alignment* to describe relations between actors; for example, the MNC wanted *consistent* key performance indicators, however actors needed to be *aligned* to agree on them.

Developing a replicable process in diverse local contexts

Actors at the SCE workshops talked about getting feedback from many places, and needing to figure out how to use it. This made it challenging to determine what could be applied globally, what only made sense in some contexts, and what processes would enable activities related to the SCE to happen consistently across markets. Michael summarized this challenge, saying, "So far we have no guideline on what to measure. What is it we want to measure? …When there is no structure, we have had no starting point to start measuring." It was difficult for decision makers to determine what information they were looking for, since it was not clear what the SCE should accomplish and in what channels. Each sourcing country dealt with a different combination of challenges, stakeholders, sourcing practices, certifications and products, and MNC actors often responded to questions and comments from NGO allies by explaining it was different in every market. Illustrating these differences, Michael said,

> Sometimes the agri-services function is not under technical but under supply chain or procurement. How are we able to define a process with the critical control points somehow considered, that we have the process established? Maybe there's scope for a partner to manage the process, if we

> go with universities or something, do we do this with the market, or do we have other things in place?

These variances made it difficult to determine whether key performance indicators should be determined at headquarters or in markets. In some markets, organizational partners were already addressing and/or measuring some challenges related to social conditions in specific operational contexts. Decision makers said many processes and priorities were *interlinked*, and they wanted to use the organizational knowledge that already existed or was being produced both within the firm and among its partners in order to avoid "re-doing" things and "reinventing the wheel". However, aligning the SCE with existing projects required decision makers to identify where relevant projects were happening and where usable data was being produced. Regarding the extreme complexity of trying to synthesize diverse information emerging from multiple organizational actors, Thomas said,

> I mean it looks crazy doesn't it. We have all these different sources, and they're not working together. But that's the way things develop. So what should we do? Tell all these agencies to stop and be consistent, or take the different elements and work it into something consistent? What do we want in the end?

Thomas says the process is "crazy" and implies it is because multiple stakeholders who normally carried out their jobs in different channels, departments and countries were struggling to work together. Thomas was aware of the challenges, but did not know what to do about them and could not determine who was or should be in charge. Was it the responsibility of contributing actors to align on how to collect and provide information? Was it the job of actors at headquarters? This uncertainty increased the likelihood for "reinventing the wheel", "re-doing" things, and generating "redundant" information—all of which decision makers frequently said they wanted to avoid.

Identifying who would be responsible for getting it done

MNC actors could not develop a universal approach for who would carry out the SCE in markets, since each market had different needs, products and processes, and each operated autonomously. One participant wanted to know how

much information could be gathered within the MNC, and what needed to be externally verified. Identifying who was responsible was related to figuring out what information was needed. This was because what information was important depended on the business unit making sense of it. Because the MNC actors did not know who was responsible for the SCE and its implementation, they used passive voice when talking about tasks and processes. During a presentation on how the SCE might be carried out, Mario suggested that "a core team would" guide the process and establish country specific goals. This team "would be a sounding board" to make sure the MNC prioritized "well and are all on the same page". In order to get a buy-in from the market, "an engagement kit would be developed". He continued, also in passive voice, that stakeholders and their respective roles "needed to be identified and defined". For all stages, Mario maintained passive voice, showing that it remained unclear what actors would take on responsibilities associated with the SCE, and in which organizational channels they would be located. As a result, despite Mario's use of familiar corporate language to explain the process, the ideas he communicated remained conceptual, and the specifics of implementation remained unclear.

Establishing global "non-negotiables" and delegating market-level specifics

MNC decision makers chose to identify "non-negotiable" indicators for all markets and to delegate the determination of context-specific indicators about producers to markets.

Non-negotiables

MNC actors were concerned about how to reconcile transnational "global", "non-negotiable", and "compliance" indicators with "specific" indicators focused on individual market needs and priorities. They wanted to know what "level of harmonization" was necessary, how the SCE might guide different countries in focusing on different "priority areas" and still deliver consistent information. Dan wanted key performance indicators that were the same for everything, and demonstrated consistency of application across the MNC. As discussed in Chapter 4, he also wanted to establish "the minimum of what we think we should be

doing". Because of limited financial investment in the SCE, the non-negotiables threatened to be the only remaining indicators over time. In the competition for attention between the global and local in the SCE, the global won, in part because it was an initiative emerging from headquarters to address CSV goals to begin with. Therefore, non-negotiables for cross-comparison and global consistency would be used in all markets, and market-specific indicators would be developed in countries.

The delegation of context-specific indicators

While focus on the market was encouraged to motivate stakeholders to consider what was needed on the ground, it was the primary reason for delegating identification of the most challenging indicators to countries themselves. The attention challenge here was that the SCE was a goal for a specific delegation of employees at headquarters, not all employees, and not for markets. Some momentum came from the CSV board, which wanted the MNC to prove its engagement on CSV practices. The commitment headquarters made to carry out the SCE in a pre-determined number of countries before adequate pre-alignment, budgets, and responsibilities had been established resulted in managers being cautious when it came to designating funds for the framework. Countries would be asked to conduct the SCE only because headquarters wanted it done, and in many cases they did not see the value. If the non-negotiable indicator framework did not include indicators relevant to farmers, then those indicators were by contrast negotiable. Market level employees already had job descriptions, and negotiable extra work was not likely to make it into their priorities. Nonetheless, decision makers at headquarters expected the markets to take over management and implementation of the SCE after they developed it.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I showed how information from farmers in one sourcing country had the opportunity to reach decision makers at headquarters. I described existing communication channels, and in doing so illustrated how discontinuities developed in regards to how information moved up the chain of command.

Without a clear avenue of information transfer delivering focused data about social conditions on farms, decision makers had to use information emerging from exiting channels and make assumptions about what was usable. They were inundated with an enormous amount of information, much of which did not make sense for SCE. There were also not yet routines for making sense of information that emerged. Decision makers prioritized non-negotiable indicators and delegated the construction of market- and producer-focused indicators to stakeholders in markets. In Chapter 7, I explore what these findings mean for the attention-based view, and present a revised model of organizational attention in environments of change.

7. A model of unstable attention in change environments

Through the course of this dissertation, I explored two research questions concerning organizational architecture: first, how does information from low in an organizational hierarchy move up the chain of command? And secondly, what mechanisms influence how decision makers attend to unfamiliar information when developing strategy in response to environmental change? In this chapter, I present a refined and elaborated model of organizational attention (Ocasio, 1997) based on the empirical findings of my research in multiple levels of a multinational corporation's supply chain.

Ocasio's (1997) model of attention allocation shows the various influences on decision makers as they allocate attention and spur organizational moves. Ocasio demonstrates dynamic interplay between issues and answers and attention structures in the environment of decision. These influencers feed into procedural and communication channels, in which decision makers are situated. The model visually represents theory that is succinct in summing up forces competing for actor attention in organizations.

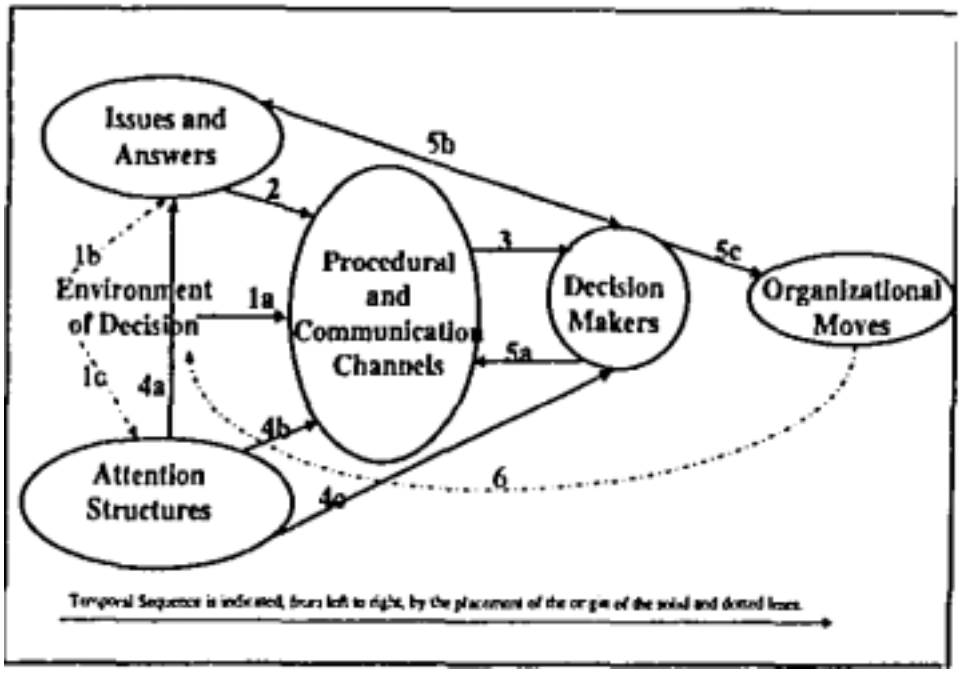

Figure 6

The model I present expands on Ocasio's model. It is aligned with the central theoretical tenets, but demonstrates some critical nuances of organizational

attention in environments of change. It focuses specifically on forces that compete for or redirect actor attention when they try to pay attention to emergent issues stimulated by change. I found that it was critical to split up issues and answers in my model of attention allocation in environments of change, which differs from Ocasio's model, in which they are classified together. The other critical difference between my model and Ocasio's is my model's representation of the role of language and discourse in guiding decision makers' attention. My model retains attention structures, issues and answers and decision makers. However, I make a number of adjustments, since I focus on attention in response to a change in organizational environment.

A model of unstable attention in change environments

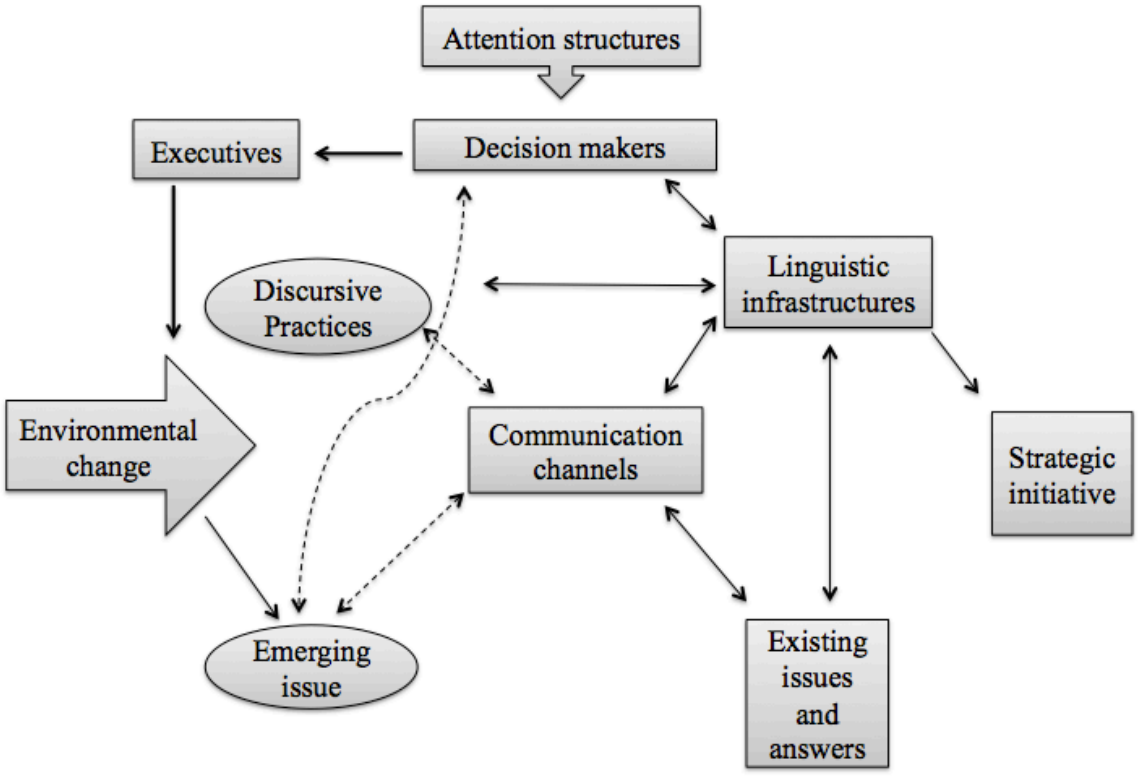

Figure 7

I found that when decision makers tried to attend to issues they previously ignored, existing organizational architecture did not allow them to place sufficient focus on the new challenge they observed in the environment. The communication channels in place were not designed to transmit the information managers were

looking for. As a result, they tended to focus their attention on information that was random and often irrelevant when developing strategy in response to the new issue. Furthermore, the dominant language they used to describe issues in the firm prevented them from discussing the issues for which that language failed to account. Rather, the language, or *linguistic infrastructure* available to actors, was rooted in established organizational practices, priorities and channels. In this regard, available linguistic categories and cues did not enable them to articulate or discuss the new issue, around which shared understandings and assumptions did not yet exist.

My model of organizational attention in change environments attempts to account for the above by showing how an emergent issue enters and is moved by actors through the organization's architecture, decision process and strategic response. I introduce the *environmental change* as the critical stimulus spurring the strategic response. Stimuli emerging from the environmental change prompt *executives* at high levels of the organization to notice and name an *emergent issue*. The emergent issue begins moving down the organizational hierarchy when *executives* delegate solving it to *decision makers*. While the stimulus to address the issue comes from the upper echelons of the chain of command, the *answers* for addressing it are typically looked for lower down. The search for answers is the impetus for strategy discussions, and is regulated by *existing issues* and *communication channels*. Decision makers pay attention to the emergent issue disjointedly, largely as guided by their stronger attention to the executives telling them to solve the problem. Existing organizational *attention structures* shape the entire process, both ideologically and structurally, through regulation of existing communication channels. Actors use *discursive practices* (Foucault, 1972) at all points of the communication process. Discursive practices are the tools by which decision makers navigate and negotiate the repertoire of answers available for addressing issues. *Linguistic infrastructures* refers to a category of discursive practice defined as a network of practiced linguistic cues actors use to summarize issues within existing communication channels. They are rigid, and guide attention back to familiar or issues prioritized by existing attention structures. Therefore, my model differentiates between emerging issues and existing issues to highlight how attention moves between them.

The interaction between organizational structures, linguistic infrastructure and discursive practices is dynamic, with a circular process of enactment and reinforcement reifying existing attention structures, linguistic infrastructures and organizational practices. The cognitive stimuli within linguistic infrastructures prompt decision makers to introduce existing issues within established communication channels into their process of addressing the emerging issue. Discursive practices allow them to discuss the emerging and existing issues in parallel to an extent, but the lack of linguistic infrastructure surrounding the emerging issue progressively weakens the attention it receives, while the strong linguistic infrastructure surrounding existing issues strengthens the attention they receive. Organizational repertoires of answers available to decision makers are based on past responses to past and existing issues. As a result, the answers they find and use in response to new issues are positioned within communication channels structured to address existing issues. Using these answers therefore involves enacting existing linguistic infrastructures that cyclically reintroduce the predominance of existing issues. Attention to answers based on existing issues is reinforced in the *communication space* within which the modeled process takes place. As a result, discontinuities in attention to the emergent issue grow. Within this specialized communication space, competition for attention, fueled by strong linguistic infrastructure on the side of existing issues and weak linguistic infrastructure on the side of new issues, leads to a progressive whittling of attention the new issue receives. Diminishing attention to the new issue can be somewhat tempered by discursive practices, which serve as a tool for mindful attention allocation to enter the space.

Situated attention or attention on the move?

The original model of attention (Ocasio, 1997) offers substantial insights about organizational attention. However, it shows organizational attention in a static environment. While it does feature actors, in the form of decision makers, it does not acknowledge the dynamic interaction between attention to existing and emergent issues, and the critical role played by communication channels in the search for answers. The relationship between existing organizational practices and

the organizational environment is assumed to be unproblematic; in other words, organizational moves are assumed to make sense in the organizational environment. Therefore, to explain what happens when an organizational response does not adequately respond to its environment, in this case a change in environment, new explanatory dimensions need to be added to the original model.

Linguistic infrastructure and situated attention

Actors respond to their environments through language and actions. The organizational allocation of attention to issues and answers cannot happen without language, and language serves both to destabilize and reinforce dominant logics. Ocasio's model tells us the mechanisms by which situated attention influences firm behavior, and assumes the organizational move makes sense in the firm's environment. Situated attention, while acknowledging the importance of time and place, implies an unmoving attention. It does not explain what happens when decision makers face a challenge that cannot be explained in terms of existing attention structures. Therefore, I introduce a dynamic model of organizational attention stimulated by environmental change, showing the central role played by language. Language is used to structure responses, but also to destabilize them. I introduce the concept of *linguistic infrastructure* to illustrate how rigid patterns of linguistic cues embedded in existing organizational architecture and channels guide actors away from emergent issues and back to existing issues as they search for answers. The term was inspired by scholarly work proposing the role of "narrative infrastructure" in product creation processes (Deuten & Rip, 2000), and adapted to account for the phenomenon I address, which does not consist solely of narratives.

While linguistic cues allow actors to talk about complex issues without constantly rearticulating their specific dynamics, the linguistic infrastructure they form together cyclically reinforces the dominant assumptions cues stand in for, through the dynamic network of relationships between cues. These networks of cues comprise an organizational discourse, and serve as "a community of meanings, symbolic links, an interplay of resemblance and reflexion… which allows the sovereignty of collective consciousness to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation (Foucault, 1972). In this view, what I call linguistic

infrastructure serves as the socially constructed network of verbal and written cues within a discourse that summarize decision makers' collective, largely cultural assumptions about what issues and answers are important. The word "infrastructure" is important, because the described network of cues function as a system of roads through known territory. "Infrastructure" helps us picture tools for accessing different geographical localities, and this metaphor holds true for regions or organizational knowledge. Without sufficient infrastructure, areas where emergent issues linger remain unexplored. The roads we have already built guide us repeatedly to what we already know.

Communication spaces, discursive practices, and focus of attention

Communication spaces are punctuation points, zones and intersections within and between communication channels, in which actors discuss agendas and formulate strategies. In these spaces, actors also have the opportunity to use discursive practices (Foucault, 1972) to invoke intentional as opposed to automatic responses to issues. Discursive practices are the written and verbal tools by which decision makers engage in discourse. Discursive practices can enable or constrain decision makers' adherence to linguistic infrastructure within channels. They comprise practices by which decision makers can navigate and negotiate the repertoire of answers available for addressing issues. What I refer to as communication spaces, namely workshops, strategy meetings, and both formal and informal conversations, have been discussed in past work on attention as channels. I differentiate between *spaces* and *channels* because I view *channels* specifically as chains of information transfer built around a purpose related to the firm's structure of attention. In contrast, I view *communication spaces* as locales with potential to enable attentional negotiation and allow actors to question dominant assumptions.

Tensions between emergent and existing issues and repertoires of answers in environments of change

In Ocasio's (1997) model, we do not know whether the organizational move effectively addresses the issue it is trying to address. We also do not know

what mechanisms shape attention allocation at the level of the decision maker. Issues and answers are at the center of how decision makers allocate attention. In my model, *environmental change* prompts the attentional and strategic response. An environmental change is a critical shift in the organizational environment requiring organizational attention. Drivers of this change can include consumer demands, new competition, or a critical event, such as a public relations crisis. While an environmental change could be classified as an issue in Ocasio's model, I explicitly label it so as to draw distinctions between *emergent issues* and *existing issues*. Emergent issues are issues to which actors direct attention (and for which they develop strategy) as the result of the change. Existing issues already receive focus in organizational attention structures. They are defined and prioritized according to organizational norms, and set the purpose for existing communication channels. This, in turn, cyclically reinforces their predominance.

The tension between types of issues impacts the available selection of answers. Answers are the repertoire of responses decision makers have to choose from when addressing issues that demand their attention (Ocasio, 1997). In my conceptualization of how decision makers allocate attention in response to change, answers are strongly tied to existing processes and practices associated with the firm's dominant attention structures, enacted within communication channels in response to existing issues. While decision makers often assign these answers, or ready-made syntheses, "unqualified, spontaneous value… they concern only a population of dispersed events" (Foucault, 1972). These answers are separate from new issues, and are used at the expense of specialized responses. In other words, in change environments the repertoire of responses for the new issue has not yet been elaborated. In this void, answers, which are strongly embedded in the linguistic infrastructure of the firm, serve as signposts leading decision makers away from the new issue and back to existing issues.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I described my contribution to attention theory based on the findings of my research and analysis. While Ocasio's (1997) model of *situated* attention illustrates organizational attention allocation in a static environment, in

my model I try to capture the dynamic complexity of strategy processes in transnational change environments. In my study, decision makers' attempts to allocate attention to emergent issues was impacted by the predominance of existing issues, built into organizational attention structures by way of language, which I call *linguistic infrastructures*. Even though decision makers designated a specific *communication space* in which to focus on the emerging issue (the SCE workshops), actors were not able to achieve sustained attention to the new challenges. Transnational, transcultural, trans-unit, trans-channel and human complexity interacted and collided dynamically, and led to information overload reducing attentional capacity of decision makers. The result was highly *desituated* attention, leading decision makers to develop a strategy that was not necessarily helpful for the organization, or the diverse environments in which it would be implemented. In my final chapter, I revisit the purpose and findings of my research and share some final reflections on meaning, describe implications for theory and practice, and offer recommendations for future research.

8. Summary, conclusions, and recommendations

Summary of research and implications for theory

My initial motivation for this dissertation was to learn what challenges smallholder farmers faced, and to identify the role of multinational companies in responding to them through more effective sustainability practices. However, since my collaboration with the company also enabled access to individuals, meetings and workshops at headquarters, my focus expanded. I decided to study the development of the Social Conditions Evaluation, a baseline social needs assessment to be used in global sourcing communities. The objective of the SCE workshops, comprised of MNC employees and external NGO actors, was to determine how to assess social conditions on farms. However, my research showed this to be a difficult aim to achieve.

I observed SCE workshops, interviewed participants, and conducted research at local, departmental and national levels of a sourcing market. By identifying what decision makers paid attention to in workshops and what information existing channels transmitted, discontinuities impacting actors' abilities to pay attention to farmers' challenges emerged. I used the attention-based view of the firm (Ocasio, 1997) to explore how emergent information from farms and markets moved up the MNC's organizational chain of command, and how decision makers paid attention to it when developing SCE strategy. My findings contribute to our current understandings of organizational attention, and I used them to propose a revision of Ocasio's (1997) model of situated attention, which I discuss as a model of desituated attention in change environments.

I conducted my research with partial funding from the MNC, and the initial terms of my funding required that I provide key performance indicators for evaluating the social impact of CSV. My role was revised over the course of the collaboration, with my eventual role being to consult on methods for the SCE by attending meetings and supporting MNC actors with a *deep dive* into farmers needs based on research in communities. I chose to focus on one supply chain, through which the firm sourced coffee and in which it had implemented the Coffee Plan to achieve CSV goals. While collaborating with the MNC was delicate given my position as a researcher, I viewed it as a valuable opportunity.

As a lens, the attention-based view of the firm (Ocasio, 1997) gave me a framework through which to analyze a highly complex international dataset. The attention-based view posits three principle assumptions: actions of decision makers are based on the issues and answers they focus their attention on (focus of attention); issues and answers decision makers focus on depend on their context and position in space and time (situated attention); and, decision makers' contexts depend on rules, resources and relationships within the firm, and how these shape the distribution of issues, answers and decision makers into practices, processes and communications (structural distribution of attention) (Ocasio, 1997). Exploring the varied focuses of attention and situated attention of the participants in my study helped me conduct initial coding, and better understand the diverse perspectives and positioning of stakeholders across the supply chain. Looking at the structural distribution of attention within the MNC and its partner organization in the sourcing country studied enabled me to identify some of the ways in which communication happened between producers at the base of the supply chain and decision makers at the top. Mapping communication channels in the context of organizational architecture (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012) helped me visualize features of the highly complex organizational structure in which communication channels were distributed.

Some work on attention has suggested that decision makers need to pay attention to "weak cues" emerging from lower in the organization in order to notice, address and avoid potential crises (Rerup, 2009). Weak cues often do not reach decision makers because the actors noticing them do not always have access to communication channels. Decision makers can also miss weak cues through false categorization, classifying unique issues as a familiar and minimizing their distinctive features. This impedes the organization from effectively responding to them (Rerup, 2009). In my project, social challenges in sourcing communities can be viewed as weak cues, but the circumstances explored are unique from what Rerup (2009) describes in a few key ways. Whereas Rerup suggests that decision makers engage in cross-channel searches for information that may be relevant in order to notice weak cues, in my project, decision makers were already looking for this information in order to develop strategy for addressing them. However, despite expressly searching for weak cues, decision makers struggled to maintain

attention to them in strategy formulation. This indicates that for organizational actors to locate weak cues and sustain attention to them, cross-channel searches need to be bolstered by accompanying organizational structures. Executive attention needs to support these structures, but within cross-channel searches, power disparities leading to the dominance of practiced organizational linguistic infrastructures need to be tempered. This may allow stronger sustained attention to emergent issues, through the development of new descriptive language that responds to the challenge at hand.

Attention literature has also suggested that critical events (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001), shocks (Figstein, 1991), jolts (Meyer, 1982), and discontinuities (Lorange et al., 1986) can shape and redirect attention. These events influence actor and organizational sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995; Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). I look at how attention is influenced by a change in environment. While certain events were stimulated by the environmental shift and initiated the firm's move to address it, the change itself was what made these events relevant. A dynamic process unfolded at the MNC when decision makers tried to pay attention to issues emerging as a result of an environmental change. Social discourses profoundly impacted attention processes through language. The potential for future research to explore the relationship between language and attention is exciting. I contribute to this research opportunity by offering one explanation, based on empirical data, of how social discourses manifest in processes of organizational attention allocation. I explain how these discourses, strong influencers of attention structures, shape priorities through language at the level of channels and actors, thereby acting as a key determinant of the effectiveness of organizational responses to emergent issues. This deepens, in particular, work on attention in organizational architecture (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012) and weak cues (Rerup, 2009).

I used a qualitative approach informed by an interpretive grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Guided by grounded theory, I collected and analyzed data in an iterative process, constantly comparing my findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). I conducted preliminary fieldwork in three sourcing countries, but chose to focus the majority of subsequent research in one. I conducted participant and non-participant

observation at multiple levels of the firm's hierarchy at headquarters and the sourcing country studied, including on farms, with local organizational partners, and at strategy workshops. I supplemented observation with semi-structured interviews. To develop a deep understanding of the role played by discourse an language in inter- and intra-organizational communication processes, I used a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972; Diaz-Bone, Bührmann, Rodríguez, Schneider, Kendall, & Tirado, 2008) informed by critical narrative analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014). The outcome of my research was a revised model of organizational attention, which contributes to our understanding of the role the structure of channels, social discourses, and language play in determining what information reaches headquarters, and how decision makers pay attention to it in strategy formulation.

The MNC pursued its CSV goals on the ground in the sourcing country studied through the Coffee Plan, which was carried by its partner organization. I conducted research at various levels of the partner organization's organizational hierarchy and on farms in the sourcing country studied, in order to explore the kinds of information that reached the MNC's headquarters and through what channels. I found that farmers' feedback had few avenues through which to travel to the top of the hierarchy, despite decision makers specifically searching for it in the case of the SCE. To find out why, I mapped the communication channels in place between farmers and decision makers, and studied attention within these channels.

I found that language cyclically reinforced organizational structures of attention. At headquarters, actors justified dominant social discourses by promoting the conceptual goals of CSV. Executives mobilized adoption of the ideology by using stories to make abstract goals appear practical. Decision makers tasked with constructing the SCE carried out chaotic discussions in workshops tempered by dynamic interactions between metaphor, routinized organizational language and conversational speech. Routinized organizational language formed complex networks of attention-focusing linguistic signposts in communication channels, which I call *linguistic infrastructure*. In the meantime, the partner organization discursively reinforced their role as the perceived representative of smallholders in the sourcing country studied, and the social importance of coffee

at multiple levels. This influenced the perceptions and attention of both farmers and MNC decision makers, shaping what information moved between them and how. Compounding this was the delicate complexity of the relationship between the partner organization and the MNC, whose dual-relationship as competitors and partners created confusion about what inter-organizational channels should be communicating.

In relation to SCE construction, the sourcing country studied here was just one of many global markets from which the MNC sourced and which informed the framework. However, despite the number and diversity of communication channels between headquarters and global markets, few contained information about farmers' livelihood conditions. As a result, decision makers struggled to locate information despite actively looking for it. When trying to construct the SCE, they were inundated with too much information, and were faced with the challenging, time-consuming, and largely subjective process of deciding what was relevant. A commitment about SCE implementation had been made at the MNC's headquarters without consulting the decision makers it affected and without defining roles, outcomes, and a budget. As a result, decision makers were hesitant to allot resources to it, and remained focused on their roles as defined by their existing professional activities. Finally, decision makers had no precedent for assessing social needs or working so closely with NGOs. In an environment of uncertainty and complexity, linguistic infrastructures within existing communication channels guided decision makers back to established organizational priorities reinforced by conceptual and monetary resources, and tried to establish an SCE that made sense in relation to their own jobs.

Ocasio's (1997) model of situated attention explains many important features of organizational attention. However, it shows the process of attention allocation as happening in a static environment. He includes decision makers in the model, but does not explain the structures and mechanisms dynamically competing for their attention. The original model groups issues and answers together, which does not acknowledge the attention-altering competition that can arise between existing and emergent issues in channels. The model also assumes that the relationship between organizational moves and the organizational environment makes sense. Ocasio's (1997) model of attention introduces the study

of attention as critical to understanding organizational moves. However, as organizations become increasingly transnational and carry out their activities in ever more complex environments, our understanding of attention needs to evolve to account for this.

In my model of unstable attention in change environments, I try to explain what can cause the development of strategic initiatives that don't make sense. I attempt to show a dynamic and disorganized process of attention allocation. It is characterized by competition between emerging and existing issues in channels, which is mediated by discursive practices and linguistic infrastructures. I introduce linguistic infrastructures, which organize and reinforce attention structures, to describe the widespread network of words and phrases that behave as cognitive road signs, leading actors to divert attention from new issues and return to existing issues. They are structures of cues and terms that name assumptions and stand in for abstract concepts, cooperatively developed by actors as they try to make sense of issues, and arrive at shared understandings. Discursive practices describe all linguistic expressions, and include tools for destabilizing dominant organizational assumptions. However, since iterations of strategy are also informed by linguistic infrastructures, through the course of the strategy process actors are pulled further away from the emerging issues they were initially attempting to address, and back to existing issues embedded in linguistic infrastructures. This is reflected in the strategic outcome.

Questions raised and implications for practice

The case I studied was characterized by extreme complexity. It spanned transnational and transcultural zones. Even employees of the MNC struggled to explain how the organization functioned, how diverse departments interacted and achieved objectives, much less how the SCE fit into these operations. This section offers some questions, and concludes with a brief comment on practical implications.

First, how can we maintain attention to emergent challenges when we don't yet have the language to discuss them? Based on findings in attention and more general literature in management (see for example Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008;

Joseph & Ocasio, 2012), attention from executives is critical for issues to become priorities across multiple levels of diversified organizations. In line with this, executives in the upper echelons of the MNC would need to emphasize the strategic rather than conceptual importance of the SCE, and prove their commitment to those below them by allocating substantial time and money to the project. More time may have prevented stakeholders from coming under pressure to get the project off their desks prematurely, and get back to what they saw as real work. Attention from the top of the hierarchy may also have facilitated the creation of new operational channels and units focused on the emerging issue, or cluster of related issues. Still, this leads to another question, which is how do we compel accountability to social issues on the part of executives?

Furthermore, how can we come up with answers that make sense when the practices at our disposal were developed in response to potentially unrelated challenges? Critics of multinational corporations and their practices in the Global South frequently argue that companies are more concerned with image and sales than they are with farmers and the environment. However, part of what this dissertation has tried to show is that this is a vast oversimplification. Rather, employees are stymied in trying to address social and environmental challenges by the mechanisms of rigid organizational structures reinforced by powerful discourses regulating how they talk about challenges and priorities and determining their focuses of attention. While many employees at headquarters demonstrated a desire for sourcing communities to enjoy improved quality of life, pushing this in meetings could lead to additional work for them, or result in the redirection of resources they needed for existing projects. Sometimes, employees tried to make positive contributions in communities through funding and projects, only to learn later that their local contact point had given them false or misleading information about the potential usefulness of the initiative in question.

Third, what capacity do multinational corporations have to positively impact communities in which they are active, and what right so they have to decide what local social needs require support? While the ideology of CSV posits that helping communities thrive benefits a social, environmental, and economic bottom line, the extent to which this holds true in practice remains murky. Businesses thrive when they save money sourcing materials and make money

selling products or providing services. As Thomas asked, should the MNC be trying to "crystallize" what the system looks like now, specifically, sourcing from smallholders?

Solution-oriented (as opposed to problem-oriented) approaches within communication spaces might foster creativity, support actors in avoiding roadblocks posed by linguistic infrastructures, and reduce fear of failure. Communication spaces, unlike channels, allow for mindful sensemaking practices (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006), and can be taken advantage of as transcultural zones in which the usual rules do not apply. Decision makers at the MNC were concerned that the SCE meetings would become unruly, and engaged in constant and inhibiting vocal redirection as a result. To minimize this concern, practitioners might find approaches such as design thinking appealing. Since design thinking offers a step-by-step toolkit that promotes brainstorming followed by the generation and selection of prototypes, it may reduce practitioners' fears that the process will fail to provide a useful outcome.

Directions for future research

My findings need to be tested in the contexts of other organizations. Specifically by observations about the role of language in preventing actors from attending to new issues need to be further explored. One way to do this would be to restrict the use of practiced corporate slogans, such as "building the plane while it was flying" and using a "holistic approach". This would help us assess if discourse really does play a prominent role in how actors allocate their attention when developing strategy. Basic discourse early in strategy processes could help managers understand what issues they are "black-boxing", and enable them to carry out negotiations with more awareness of what they may not understand. This would also prevent false-categorization of unique issues.

Much more empirical work is also needed on the bottom of organizational hierarchies. At present we have a top-heavy understanding of multinational organizations that focuses disproportionately on executives and upper-level management. A richening of our understanding of communication discontinuities between actors at different "ends" of organizational chains of command necessitates research on what all actors are saying, not just the ones at the top. Similarly, future empirical studies might explore the specific discursive practices

used within intra- and inter-organizational channels and units, asking how they influence practice and strategy development over time.

While my study attempts to crystallize the co-created knowledge established in the research process into formal theory, the MNC is one company, and arguably a unique and exceptional case. More work is needed to flesh out our understanding of how decision makers pay attention to emergent information in environments of change. I would posit that social and environmental responsibility are particularly rich opportunities for study in corporate contexts, since most businesses find these issues unfamiliar, challenging to justify to shareholders, but nevertheless critical to address in the face of consumer criticism and stiffening regulations. Now is a critical moment when it comes to ethical business practices, sustainable sourcing, creating shared value, and corporate social impact overall. It remains to be seen which business will be the first to meaningfully address these emerging challenges over the long-term.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Date of Birth	October 7th, 1984
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Academic Experience

2011 - 2015 **University of St. Gallen, St.Gallen**
Doctoral candidate in the Organization and Culture (DOK) Program
Dissertation, submitted June 2nd, 2015: *Situated Attention: exploring strategic responses to emergent issues in transcultural environments*

2009 - 2010 **New York University, NY**
M.A. Latin American and Caribbean Studies, GPA 3.9.
Master's Thesis: *Development in Panama's Darién Province: collective agency and the economy of aid in Arimae*

2004 - 2007 **Smith College, Northampton, MA**
B.A. Latin American and Latino and Latina Studies. GPA 3.5.
Bachelor's Special Studies: *The Juarez Femicides: free trade and violence against women in the Texas-Mexico border region*

Awards

- SNF stipend through the research module *Dynamics of Transcultural Management and Governance in Latin America* at the University of St. Gallen, 2011-15
- Henry MacCracken Fellowship, fully financed master's at NYU, 2009-10
- Tinker Field Research Grant. Financed master's research in Panama, 2010
- Dean's list at Smith College, 2005-07
- Robert P. Sibley Prize for students with excellent writing skills at Mt. Holyoke College, 2004

Presentations, Publications & Activities

- Co-organized and participated in colloquiums at the University of St.Gallen,

2011-15
- Panelist Farming Forward, co-hosted by Nestlé and the University of St.Gallen, 2014
- Presented research to doctoral class at Texas State University, 2014
- Presented to master's class at the University of Texas at Austin, 2014
- Reviewer, Academy of Management Journal, 2013
- Invited presenter for Business Association of Latin American Studies (unable to attend), 2013
- Presented research at Prodoc conference at the University of Bern, 2013
- Published co-author of *Immigrant Women and the Struggle to House and Educate their Children,* Cambridge Scholars Press; presented at St. Thomas University, Florida, 2004

Professional Experience

2011 - 2015 **Executive School, University of St.Gallen (ES-HSG), St.Gallen**
Program Manager of Corporate Programs
- Management of course development projects and relationships
- Contribution to conceptual development of program
- Administration

2011 - 2015 **University of St.Gallen, St.Gallen**
Doctoral candidate and research associate
- Translations (German – English, Spanish – English)
- Presentation of research at conferences
- Drafting of reports
- Co-organization of colloquiums and conferences
- Administrative work

2011 - 2014 **Nestlé S.A., Switzerland, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico**
Freelance consultant
- Development of a baseline assessment for social and environmental impact of Creating Shared Value (CSV) projects
- Conducted the Rural Development Framework (RDF) assessment in Colombia
- Collaboration with managers, international NGOs, agronomists and farmers
- Conducting research, analyzing data
- Communicating with local media (Ecuador)

2009 - 2010 **Latin America News Dispatch (latindispatch.com), New York**
Co-founder, journalist
- Co-founded an online newspaper
- Wrote articles about Latin America and Latinos in the United States

2007 - 2009 **David Bach, New York**
Executive assistant
- Organized and managed long- and short-term projects
- Managed employees
- Oversaw finances and generated budgets

Languages
- English (native speaker)
- German (C1)
- Spanish (B2)
- Swiss German (good understanding)

Interests and Hobbies
- Rock climbing, mountaineering, hiking, trail running