Fueling climate (in)action

Title

Fueling climate (in)action: How organizations engage in hegemonization to avoid transformational action on climate change

Abstract

This study examines how organizations avoid the urgent need for transformational action on climate change by engaging in a hegemonization process. To show how this unfolds, we draw from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, focusing on the case of BP and its engagement with the climate change debate from 1990 to 2015. Our study takes a longitudinal approach to illustrate how BP defended its core business of producing and selling fossil fuel products by enacting three sequential hegemonization strategies. These included: adopting new signifiers; building 'win-win' relationships; and adapting nodal points. In doing so, we demonstrate how hegemonic construction enables organizations to both incorporate and evade various types of stakeholder critique, which, we argue, reproduces business-as-usual. Our study contributes to organization studies literature on hegemony by highlighting how the construction of hegemony operates accumulatively over an extended period of time. We also contribute more broadly to conversations around political contests and the natural environment by illustrating how the lack of effective climate responses is shaped by temporal dynamics.

Keywords

Climate change, hegemony, discourse, Laclau, BP, sustainability

Climate change is considered one of the most pressing grand challenges facing humanity today (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016). To ensure that the most devastating effects of climate change do not materialize, global leaders recently reached a long-overdue agreement during the Conference of Parties in Paris stressing the need to keep warming well below 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC, 2015). To achieve this, *transformational climate action* is imperative. This involves making fundamental changes to energy systems in order to rapidly decarbonize all sectors of the economy before the end of the 21st century (IPCC, 2014). Organizations play a crucial role in realizing this goal. Large corporations in particular are often regarded both as powerful mechanisms for stemming climate change (Stern, 2007), and conversely as significant contributors to global carbon emissions (IEA, 2012). However, while some organizations have responded in productive ways by adopting carbon-mitigating business practices (Hoffman & Woody, 2013; Kolk & Pinkse, 2005), many others continue to fail or, worse even, actively avoid the need for transformational climate action (CDP, 2017; Wright & Nyberg, 2015).

Scholars often suggest that the lack of effective responses to climate change derives from the way prevailing organizational processes, such as short-termism and risk evaluation, fail to internalize complexities posed by issues surrounding the natural environment (Slawinski, Pinkse, Busch, & Banerjee, 2017; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). Another perspective goes further to highlight how organizations engage in political struggles largely 'outside' the organization to ensure the continuation of business-as-

usual (Levy & Spicer, 2013; Nyberg, Wright, & Kirk, 2018; Wittneben, Okereke, Banerjee, & Levy, 2012). In this regard, Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony is commonly utilized to explore how powerful corporations strategically maintain a dominant ideology that downplays the need for radical climate solutions (Banerjee, 2012; Levy & Egan, 2003).

Our study draws from this "neo-Gramscian" tradition. However, instead of following the more prevalent approach of conceptualizing hegemony as a static position maintained from the top down, we adopt a longitudinal, process-based perspective to consider how actors carefully craft hegemony as a bottom-up process. To do so, we draw from Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory of hegemony which explicitly foregrounds practices involved with hegemonization as an ongoing process (Nyberg et al., 2018; Spicer & Sewell, 2010). Laclau and Mouffe (2001) theorize how hegemony is constructed by piecing together a "chain of signification," or the linguistic arrangement of various signifiers (i.e., words, terms or actions) linked together in a cohesive manner (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). Hegemonization refers to this process of unifying, or temporarily "fixing" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 8), different signifiers within a chain to produce an all-encompassing hegemonic discourse (Laclau, 1990).

BP, one of the world's largest oil and gas companies, is an exemplar case in this context. On the one hand, BP has been fervently active in the climate change debate since it famously broke ranks within the fossil fuel industry in 1997 by publicly recognizing climate change as a serious issue (Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013). On the other hand, BP

has failed to successfully shift towards producing alternative energy on a meaningful scale and instead continues to defend its core business—producing and selling fossil fuel products—that, if left unchanged, in many ways advances dangerous climate change (Heede, 2014; McKibben, 2012). To demonstrate how BP engaged in hegemonization over a period of about two decades, we situate this case within a broader hegemonic struggle that includes resistant voices of environmental NGOs, media organizations, policy makers, and investor groups, among others. The primary source of data are texts that collectively represent BP's attempts at hegemonic construction from 1997 to 2015. Specifically, we analyze BP's "CEO-speak" about climate change (Amernic & Craig, 2006) and newspaper articles about BP's engagement with the natural environment.

Our findings suggest that BP's avoidance of transformational climate action was enabled by enacting a three-part hegemonization process. In doing so, we argue that BP was able to both evade and incorporate various forms of stakeholder critique regarding its approach to climate change. Our study makes two key contributions. First, we contribute to organization studies literature on hegemony (Banerjee, 2012; Levy & Egan, 2003; Nyberg et al., 2018; van Bommel & Spicer, 2011) by demonstrating how hegemonic construction operates accumulatively, as a process that evolves based on (political) interaction between organizations attempting to (re)construct hegemony, and critiquing stakeholders. Second, we contribute to literature on organizational responses to climate change (Kolk & Pinkse, 2005; Slawinski et al., 2017; Wright & Nyberg, 2017) by adopting a longitudinal perspective to show how the lack of effective organizational

action on climate change may be determined by organizations engaging in hegemonization processes. This furthermore highlights how certain temporal dynamics enable organizations to swiftly respond to changing business environments and stakeholder critique.

Organizational (in)action on climate change

Much of the work addressing organizational responses to climate change takes a productive tone, emphasizing processes by which organizations become 'greener' (Hoffman, 2005; Kolk & Levy, 2001; Kolk & Pinkse, 2005; Kolk & van Tulder, 2010). However, given the general ineffectiveness of organizational responses to climate change on a global scale (CDP, 2017), scholars now also consider why organizations fail to act on climate change (Wright & Nyberg, 2015). Unfavorable market conditions deterring organizations from addressing climate change (Pinkse & Kolk, 2010), managerial processes related to short-termism (Lê, 2013), uncertainly avoidance (Slawinski et al., 2017), and translating climate change into everyday business practice (Wright & Nyberg, 2017) are all regarded as exemplar factors that discourage organizations from effective climate action.

While these studies usually consider climate inaction as the outcome of organizations' confinement to internal dynamics, another perspective highlights how some organizations maintain business-as-usual by engaging in broader political struggles (Banerjee, 2012; Levy & Kolk, 2002; Nyberg et al., 2018). Here, emphasis is placed on organizations' strategic attempts to undermine environmental regulation, often in

response to the threat climate change poses to fossil-fuel-based economies (Wittneben et al., 2012). In studying this type of organizational activity, researchers often draw from Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony (Levy & Egan, 2003).

Theorizing the process of hegemonization

As Gramsci (1971) theorized, hegemony concerns the way ruling classes are able to maintain power not through coercion but by gaining active consent of subordinate groups. This is achieved by constructing what is considered "common sense" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57) through a series of strategic accommodations that represent particular interests of different groups as part of a collective whole. These moves and counter-moves are aimed at forging links between groups with dissimilar interests and ideologies (Cox, 1983). For example, Nyberg, Spicer, and Wright (2013) illustrate how corporations in Australia built alliances with media actors, academics, and think-tanks to form common identities that legitimated market-based approaches to climate change. In doing so, a "historical bloc" of actors can be established (Gramsci, 1971, p.137) that enables groups with differing interests to ascribe to the same hegemonic project without necessarily forgoing their own interests. Although theories of hegemony are useful to explore, in particular, the relative *stability* of certain industries—and thereby the reproduction of business-as-usual—it is less useful for examining the processes by which hegemony is constructed from its origins. Here, Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) post-structuralist retheorization of Gramsci's work offers additional insight.

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) adopt a discourse-based approach to the concept of hegemony (Willmott, 2005). A key aspect of Laclau and Mouffe's theory is that hegemony presents itself as unifying diverse groups/interests through commonalities articulated by discursive practices (Nyberg, Spicer, & Wright, 2013). According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001), hegemonization predominantly involves the articulation of a linguistic arrangement, referred to as a "signifying chain" (Spicer & Sewell, 2010; van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). This chain represents a manifestation of signifiers—i.e., units of meaning such as literal terms, actions, or actors—linked together in a coherent way to create a semblance of order. For example, Stavrakakis (1997) illustrates how signifiers including, amongst others, 'sustainability,' 'social justice,' 'ecology,' and 'decentralization,' were forged together by environmentalist movements to construct a 'green ideology.' Signifiers can thus be considered "building blocks" of hegemonic construction, so to speak, cobbled together through a process of articulation.

Importantly, for hegemony to form, a signifying chain must be *unified*, or at least must appear so (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). Signifiers within the chain cannot seem to be at odds with one another as this may result in a "fractured" (Nyberg et al., 2013) or "splintered" hegemony (Spicer & Böhm, 2007), which risks exposing a hegemonic project's weak links. Instead, to create a sense of unity, one signifier—referred to as a "nodal point" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 112)—is emphasized to unite a chain (Laclau, 2005, p. 70). As van Bommel and Spicer explain (2011, p. 1722), nodal points are "grand terms that bring together a series of more minor terms or themes, to provide some degree

of temporary stability." For example, the Slow Food movement created the nodal point "eco-gastronomy" by linking together several disparate signifiers such as "taste," "slowness," "artisanal," amongst others (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011).

Overall, these theorizations prove useful to understanding how organizations engage in political activity to maintain the continuation of business-as-usual in spite of the impending ecological crisis. However less is known about how organizations avoid the need for transformational climate action by (re)constructing hegemony as a *process* over time. To address this, we engage in an analysis of BP's discourses around climate change that draws upon Laclau and Mouffe's processual understanding of hegemony, and pose the following question: how do organizations avoid the urgent need for transformational action on climate change by engaging in a hegemonization process over time?

The study

This study is centered on an "extreme" case: the relationship between one of the largest non-state-owned oil and gas companies – BP – and climate change. Based on a longitudinal analysis over two decades, we focus on how BP avoided making substantive changes to its business model by engaging in hegemonization, despite being seriously implicated by climate change given the nature of its core product (Heede, 2014). We begin our analysis in the late 1990s as this marks the point when BP first engaged with the climate change debate publicly (Ansari et al., 2013).

Focusing on the fossil fuel industry is useful for the purpose of this study as companies such as BP have a "vested interest" (Wittneben et al., 2012, p. 1432) in avoiding the radical decarbonization of energy systems; after all, transformational climate action may significantly reduce the demand for fossil fuel products (CDP, 2016). Because of this, it is well evidenced that fossil fuel companies influence the climate change debate by engaging in corporate political activity usually intended to promote "business friendly" climate change approaches that do not threaten the status quo (Wright & Nyberg, 2015). BP has arguably been one of the most influential corporate voices regarding climate change, both through its own public disclosures and as a political actor within the climate policy arena (Ansari et al., 2013; Kolk & Levy, 2001). However, though appearing progressive in terms of its approach to climate change relative to its peers (Kolk & Pinkse, 2005), BP has failed to reduce GHG emissions both from its own direct operations[i], and in terms of its indirect emissions – i.e., GHGs stemming from the consumption of its core product (Heede, 2014). Indeed, indirect emissions are vastly more significant—mainly given their scale—in the fight against climate change compared to BP's direct emissions (Downie & Stubbs, 2013).

Data sources and data analysis

Our analytical framework is centered on organizational discourse analysis which involves exploring the patterns, structures and compositions of discourses, including their constitutive effects on organizational life (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Discourses are, simply put, structured collections of texts (written or spoken) that give

meaning to social life through their production, dissemination and consumption (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Although discourse analysis is applied in various ways, our approach draws largely from Laclau and Mouffe's work given our theoretical interest in exploring hegemonization as a process. This approach allows us not only to trace the evolution of discourses over time, but also to foreground *how* these are articulated based on political struggles between actors attempting to stabilize, or temporarily "fix", a discourse (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000).

We analyzed two sources of data as illustrated in Table 1. First, we analyzed BP's CEO-speak (Amernic & Craig, 2006) – i.e., the CEO of BP's public speeches and statements, letters to stakeholders in sustainability reports, and media interviews/contributions (63 texts in total). These are important "texts that leave traces" (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 640) as CEOs convey strategic intent and outlook, and are often seen as the social face of the organization. CEO-speak of fossil fuel companies is particularly important regarding issues surrounding climate change as CEOs are tasked with publicly justifying their firms' actions in light of the environmental impacts (e.g., Hoffman & Jennings, 2011).

---Insert Table 1 here---

Second, we analyzed media articles that addressed BP's involvement with climate change directly. This enabled us to trace how hegemonic struggles between BP and other key actors—e.g., environmental NGOs and investors groups—unfolded over time (e.g., MacKay & Munro, 2012; van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). Media articles are useful for

analyzing hegemonic construction because of the media's dual function as actively shaping the character of society and mirroring discursive struggles (Carragee, 1993). We analyzed 283 news articles amassed from a Factiva media database search of articles referencing BP in relation to climate change. We focused, in particular, on the *Financial Times, Guardian, Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* given their extensive coverage of the climate change debate over the past 25 years both from European and American perspectives. These media are also ideologically diverse—i.e., center left (Guardian and New York Times) and more conservative (FT and WSJ)—and therefore reduce bias toward either side of the political spectrum (Carvalho, 2007).

We analyzed the data in four phases. The first involved immersing ourselves in the data to familiarize ourselves with BP's narrative around climate change focusing both on media articles and CEO-speak. We then constructed an event timeline (van de Ven & Poole, 1995) to establish "who *did* what, and when" and "who *said* what, and when" (Maguire & Hardy, 2009, p. 153). We engaged in a close reading of the text and noted key events occurring each year regarding BP and climate change. These events were plotted on a timeline (see Figure 1).

---Insert Figure 1 here---

During the second phase, we were specifically interested in identifying different discourses that emerged from the data (Phillips et al., 2004). To do so, we separately engaged in open coding of a random selection of 15 texts; at this point, we reached "theoretical saturation" – i.e., no new themes emerged from our analysis (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). Our analysis involved using qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to first identify each statement where BP's CEO referred to climate change, or issues surrounding the natural environment more broadly. Thereafter, each statement was assigned a descriptive code – e.g., "[solutions] require the use of advanced technology in the form of improved manufacturing and separation processes [...]" received the code "technology." This descriptive process produced around 100 first-order codes. We combined codes to form themes where we noticed significant overlap. For example, codes including "shareholder value," "profit," and "returns" were combined under the theme "profits." We compared results and in cases where there were discrepancies, reordered codes. Illustrated in Table 2, we eventually identified seven key themes: 'climate science'; 'sustainability'; 'progress'; 'technology'; 'profits'; 'markets'; and 'policy'.

---Insert Table 2 here---

During the open coding process, we both noticed that certain themes were more prevalent during certain time periods. This prompted a third phase of analysis in which we analyzed how BP's climate change discourses evolved over time. As shown in Table 3, we began by counting how often themes, including descriptive codes from the previous phase, featured in BP's CEO-speak during each year of our study using NVivo's word frequency analysis feature[ii]. While this process provided us with a rough estimation of each theme's salience within a given period of time, it did not account for the reasons *why* certain clusters of themes were more prevalent during certain periods (see darker shaded areas in Table 3).

---Insert Table 3 here---

This led to the fourth phase of analysis in which we engaged with "temporal bracketing" (Langley 1999), analyzing how certain events and actions (from the event time line) prompted turning points in BP's climate change narrative across time periods. Contrasting the previous phase, here we both analyzed the entire data corpus in chronological order using previously identified themes, coupled with the event timeline. Through this process, we discerned three periods (see Figure 1): *The days of technology and progress* (2000-2007); *Back to shareholder basics* period (2007-2012/13); and the *Pushing governments for a carbon price* period (2008/9-2015). Importantly, while transitions between periods are not strictly definitive as discourses often endure (Langley 1999), in some cases certain events (e.g., changes in CEO) triggered a noticeable change in BP's climate change discourses.

Until this point, our analysis was largely based on inductively identifying key themes and analyzing how BP's climate change discourses evolved over time. What emerged strongly was that BP's discourse surrounding climate change was an important mechanism employed to avoid transformational climate action; however, *how* they did this – i.e., the discursive practices they used – was not clear. Therefore, we turned to the literature where we came across the concept of hegemony similarly explaining the maintenance of business-as-usual in relation to climate change (Wittneben et al., 2012). Our emphasis on discourse resonated in particular with Laclau and Mouffe's work, facilitating the discursive analysis of hegemonization. This also aligned with our

longitudinal, process-based approach (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013).

In this final stage of analysis, we followed a core tenet of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory: that hegemonization means producing a sense of commonality – i.e., arresting the flow of differences to "fix" a discourse (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). We therefore identified instances within the data where different themes (now considered signifiers based on Laclau and Mouffe's work), events, or actors were linked to create positive associations, leading us to initially identify two strategies: *adopting new signifiers* and *building 'win-win' relationships*. For instance, we noticed BP established mutually beneficial working relationships with environmental NGOs; likewise, BP articulated positive associations between being a profitable oil company and protecting the natural environment – both strategies were categorized under *building 'win-win' relationships*. We also noticed how, during each period, signifiers were combined and bundled together to form more abstract concepts; drawing from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, we consider these nodal points (*techno-progress, shareholder wealth,* and *climate price policy*) identified through thematic analysis of each time period and by corroborating our findings with the results of our frequency analysis (see Table 3). As nodal points often changed based either on BP's evolving business environment, or emerging stakeholder critique, we identified a third strategy – *adjusting nodal points*.

Findings – BP, climate change, and hegemonization

This section illustrates how BP engaged in hegemonization by enacting three strategies: (1) adopting new signifiers upon entering the climate change debate; (2) building 'win-win' relationships throughout; and (3) adjusting nodal points, forming three distinctive attempts each defined by a central nodal point.

Adopting new signifiers

By publicly recognizing climate change as a legitimate concern, BP adopted two signifiers: 'climate science' and 'sustainability.' As illustrated in Table 2, BP's signifying chain thus contained seven signifiers, as John Browne's (1997) famous "Stanford speech" evidences: (a) 'climate science'; (b) 'policy'; (c) 'profits'; (d) 'technology'; (e) 'sustainability'; (f) 'markets'; and (g) 'progress':

a) *"There is now an effective consensus among the world's leading scientists and serious and well-informed people outside the scientific community that there is a discernible human influence on the climate [...]"*
b) *"We support that [policy] debate, and we're engaged in it, through the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, through the President's own Council here in the United States, and in the UK where the Government is committed to making significant progress on the subject [...]"*
c) *"Real sustainability is about simultaneously being profitable and responding to the reality and the concerns of the world in which you operate [...]"*
d) *"[solutions] require the use of advanced technology in the form of improved manufacturing and separation processes [...]"*
e) *"Our overall goal is to do no harm or damage to the natural environment."*
f) *"[...] market based solutions are more likely to produce innovative and creative responses than an approach based on regulation alone [...]"*

g) *"Actions which sought, at a stroke, drastically to restrict carbon emissions […] would crash into the realities of economic growth. They would also be seen as discriminatory - above all in the developing world."*

BP adopted these signifiers by engaging in different articulation practices. The first signifier—'climate science'—was adopted relatively effortlessly by BP, given a longstanding emphasis on science; a cornerstone of the oil and gas industry. This signifier ('climate science') was thereby added to the existing signifier ('science') given a significant overlap between the two. To do so, BP needed to acknowledge the science behind climate change, or as Browne (1997) suggested: "[…] it would be unwise and potentially dangerous to ignore the mounting [scientific] concern. […] We in BP have reached that point." Relatedly, BP distanced itself from climate science denialist organizations such as the Global Climate Coalition (Kolk & Levy, 2001) – a move welcomed by many environmental NGOs. As WWF suggested: "We hope this is the beginning of a realignment of industry" (in Boulton, 1996).

In contrast to 'climate science,' the signifier 'sustainability' posed a challenge; merely adjusting similar signifiers would not suffice to accommodate this new signifier. Instead, adopting the signifier 'sustainability' occurred by being framed as *integral* to BP's approach to climate change through an extensive rebranding campaign. This involved morphing its 70-year-old logo, an iconic shield, into an emblem representing Helios, the sun god of ancient Greece (Barrionuevo, 2000). As BP (2001) explained: "[...] the new logo is intended to exemplify dynamic energy in all its forms, from oil and gas to solar." BP's rebranding efforts also related 'sustainability' to several core aspects of

its business. For instance, 'sustainability' was closely aligned with BP's business model, or as Browne (1999) put it: "I believe that if we're going to meet the world's needs for energy, including oil and gas, we have to help resolve the risks of climate change." As such, BP increasingly forged commonalities between its core business and 'sustainability' signifier, a move embodied by BP famously changing its initials from "British Petroleum" to "Beyond Petroleum" (Browne, 2002a). Overall, the main purpose of this initial strategy in terms of BP's hegemonization process was to identify particular signifiers that posed a threat to BP's relationship with the environment, and to incorporate these into its climate change discourse.

Building 'win-win' relationships

BP's acquisition of 'climate science' and 'sustainability' coincided with constructing positive 'win-win' associations between different signifiers within its chain. While the previous strategy absorbed counter-hegemonic signifiers into BP's climate change discourse, this step aimed to establish robust connections and build credibility among these signifiers, and the rest of BP's chain. To do so, BP somehow needed to demonstrate that these signifiers were mutually reinforcing. For example, BP linked 'sustainability' to 'profit' by stressing that its financial performance and CSR efforts, which focused on environmental themes, could coexist: "I am confident of the ability and the commitment of the BP team to demonstrate that corporate social responsibility and outstanding competitive performance are mutually reinforcing characteristics of a great company" (Browne, 2001). Similarly, positive associations were also established between

'technology' and 'markets,' or as Browne (1997) asserts: "Looking ahead it seems clear that the combination of markets and technology will shift the energy mix."

The practice of building 'win-win' relationships between signifiers featured extensively in BP's marketing material at the time. For instance, an ad accompanying BP's rebranding campaign proposed: "[is] it possible to drive a car and still have a clean environment. Can solar power become mainstream? Can business go further and be a force for good? We think so" (Trivedi, 2000). As indicated, "car" is reinforced by "clean environment;" likewise, "mainstream" and "solar," and so on. It is conceivable that, without building 'win-win' relationships between signifiers, dissimilar signifiers would seem particularly disjointed; BP's chain would lack cohesiveness.

This particular strategy was not only evidenced by BP's discursive moves; during this early period BP also forged 'win-win' relationships with NGOs. As Browne noted at Chatham House in London*:* "It is a mistake [...] to think that companies and NGOs are locked into an immutably hostile relationship [...] in some of the most complex areas in which we work, the progress we can make is dependent on the cooperation and skills of NGOs" (Browne, 2002b). The types of alliances ranged from local level initiatives—e.g., partnering with WWF to address issues with oil exploration in the Indonesian rainforest (Garten, 2002)—to global programs, such as working with Environmental Defense Fund to implement BP's internal emissions trading system (Cowell, 1998). A particularly notable development concerned BP "joining forces" with Greenpeace at a World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) organized event during the

Johannesburg Earth Summit in 2002 to stress their shared commitment to stem climate change. A joint statement highlighted: "we are shelving our differences on other issues on this occasion" (Greenpeace, 2002). Although the WBCSD noted that differences between companies such as BP and Greenpeace remain—insisting that "this is not a merger" (Revkin, 2002)—the intimation of a potential common understanding on climate change arguably made disparities within BP's signifying chain appear less incongruent.

Nevertheless, despite BP engaging in these first two strategies, critique remained regarding the tension between BP's purpose as an oil and gas company, and its efforts to address climate change. As an environmental activist remarked: "A few years ago, BP spent about US$200 million to rebrand the company as beyond petroleum [...]. But this rebranding did little for their green image; they are after all an oil company" (Greenpeace, 2001). Indeed, although BP began strengthening links between different signifiers within its chain, at this point there was no single, inclusive force that could unify *all* signifiers. This, however, did not persist indefinitely as the oil and gas supermajor soon began emphasizing particular nodal points.

Adjusting nodal points

Below we illustrate how BP, on three different occasions, created specific nodal points that each facilitated BP's hegemonization process in slightly different ways.

Attempt 1 – The days of technology and progress: During the early 2000s until approximately 2007, BP's climate change discourse was dominated by references to the

virtues of technology and human progress as indispensable for "the spread of prosperity" (Browne, 2004). As this became a general theme within BP's CEO-speak during this early attempt, the 'techno-progress' nodal point emerged, the composition of which is exemplified in an interview with Browne (2002b):

> *Energy is going to be the motor of growth for not just places like the United States or Europe, but also for the rest of the world that is not as well off as we are. [...] So we have to produce it and let people consume it in a way where they don't take an unnecessary tradeoff against the environment. I believe that technology can do that for us.*

As demonstrated, Browne argues that "energy", used as a metonym for oil and gas, is necessary to stimulate 'progress' ("*motor of growth*"), not only for industrialized nations ("*United States or Europe*") but as a means to help impoverished nations ("*the rest of the world that is not as well off as we are*"). To achieve this, "technology" is hailed as a panacea. Here, the signifier 'sustainability' (*"tradeoff against the environment"*) is highlighted; thereby, nature is recast as something to control, measure, and manage in the name of human progress. This illustrates an important function of 'techno-progress' nodal point in BP's hegemonization process; namely to redefine particular signifiers under a universal meaning system, thereby potentially unifying BP's chain. This function is also evidenced with other signifiers, such as 'profit':

> *[...]only practical solutions would be ones which recognized the human desire for improved living standards. The answer came through efficiency and technology*

> *and through better management of the energy we use ourselves. That is the route to creating a sustainable, profitable business* (Browne, 2002a).

In this example, the signifiers 'progress' ("*improved living standards*") and 'technology' ("*efficiency and technology"*) are reframed as preconditions for "*creating a sustainable, profitable business."* In other words, the signifier 'profit' does not operate independently within BP's chain, but is shaped by its relation to the universal techno-progress nodal point.

The techno-progress nodal point became increasingly less prominent around 2007, a shift that largely stemmed from a change in BP's CEO. John Browne's term as CEO of BP ended 17 months ahead of schedule in May 2007 due to a media scandal regarding his personal life (Cowell, 2007). Despite public statements that BP would not forgo Browne's legacy, its new CEO, Tony Hayward, took a discernably different approach to climate change and "firmly distanced himself from his predecessor" (Crooks, 2007). While Browne was often referred to as an industry "visionary" in terms of climate change (Herron, 2007), which may have contributed to BP's grand techno-progress emphasis, Hayward's plans for BP's approach to climate change were more "practical" (Harding, 2007).

Attempt 2 – Back to shareholder basics: In line with BP's change in CEO, a new period emerged during which BP primarily referenced climate change through an amalgamation of two signifiers – 'profits' and 'markets'. The newly formed nodal point, 'shareholder wealth,' is exemplified during a speech by Hayward (2009a) to Stanford

Graduate School of Business: “We had too many people working to save the world, we sort of lost track of the fact that our primary purpose in life is to create value for our shareholders.” Clearly, times were changing – as Hayward insisted, “working to save the world,” reminiscent of the previous techno-progress era, distracted BP from its core purpose “to create value for my shareholders.” This move had significant implications for BP’s climate change strategy. For example, shortly after becoming CEO, Hayward controversially discontinued BPs strong stance not to invest in tar-sands, a move the Guardian newspaper critiqued: “BP’s decision last week to invest in the world’s dirtiest oil production in Canada’s tar sands indicates that Big Oil might be giving up its flirtation with renewables and going back to its roots” (Macalister, 2007).

A key function of the ‘shareholder wealth’ nodal point was “getting *BP* back on the rails” (Hayward in Crooks, 2009 emphasis added) – i.e., from a hegemonization perspective, this was predominantly an attempt to align BP’s climate change strategy under the leadership of Tony Hayward, with its emerging climate change discourse. However, this strategy was not exclusively driven by a change in CEO, but also major shocks that seriously challenged the company as a whole, including the Deepwater Horizon accident in the Gulf of Mexico in which 11 people died (Hayward, 2010). BP was also increasingly financially constrained as global energy markets became volatile. In 2009 the oil price dropped from $150 to $35 – largely due to the global financial crisis (IEA, 2012). BP cut 5000 jobs and began a $3bn cost-saving program (Crooks, 2008). Relatedly, its Alternative Energy Division’s budget was downsized from $1.4bn to

$500m (Macalister, 2009). Vivian Cox, who led the Alternative Energy Division since its inception in 2004, resigned, stating: “It was now right to look at the array of options before us, and to step back and say ‘what can make commercial returns?’” (Teather, 2009).

While the above may have facilitated BP, or more accurately Tony Hayward, to articulate its new cash-strapped approach to climate change, the ‘shareholder wealth’ nodal point failed to produce a hegemonic discourse. A key reason concerns renewed critique significantly undermining BP’s sole focus on ‘shareholder wealth’ in relation to climate change. Each year, three reports that have attained Bible status in the energy business are published: BP’s *Energy Outlook*, the *Annual Energy Outlook* by the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), and the International Energy Agency’s (IEA) *World Energy Outlook*. In 2012, the IEA’s (2012, p. 25) *Outlook* report warned: “No more than one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuel can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world is to achieve the 2°C goal” (see also Carbon Tracker Initiative, 2011). Several investment banks published similar findings; HSBC for instance concluded that that 25% of BPs oil reserves could become ‘stranded’ (Spedding et al., 2013). As a result, some institutional investor groups inquired about how BP assesses financial risk related to climate change (Monbiot, 2012). BP responded with a statement tucked away in the final page of its *Energy Outlook* (2013): “[...] emissions remain well above the required path to stabilise the concentration of greenhouse gases at the level recommended by scientists (450 ppm).” The significance of this statement cannot be emphasized enough – based on

BP's own "most likely" scenario, the world is heading toward an increase of 450 ppm. When cross-referenced with IPCC (2014) data, an increase of 450 ppm will see a global temperature rise of 4°C, which could have devastating consequences (World Bank, 2012, p. xiv). The irony here is that BP, to a certain degree, contributed to this critique. By prioritizing 'shareholder wealth,' investors became alarmed about the extent to which BP incorporated climate risks into their decision making. As a letter written by the US's biggest state pension fund, addressed to BP's executive committee, warned: "We cannot invest in a climate catastrophe" (in Crooks, 2013).

Attempt 3 – Pushing governments for a carbon price: During this attempt, BP's climate change discourse was strongly influenced by a blend of two signifiers, 'policy' and 'markets', which produced the nodal point 'carbon price policy.' The first noticeable development occurred around 2008 as BP increasingly emphasized the need to effectively price carbon: "The big missing link at present is a global carbon price–one that applies equally to all carbon, whether from a smokestack or a tailpipe" (Hayward, 2008). Crucially, BP's emphasis on a carbon price was underpinned by the demand for government policy: "For the market to meet the world's growing demand for energy in a sustainable way, governments need to set a stable and enduring framework. Most importantly, they can and should establish a price for carbon" (Hayward, 2009b).

Emphasizing state actors became increasingly pronounced during the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. Before the conference, BP signed the Copenhagen Communiqué, which acted as "a call from business for an ambitious,

robust and equitable global deal on climate change" (CPSL, 2009). The central role of governments was paramount - while the Copenhagen Communiqué referenced the need for "robust global greenhouse gas emissions market", it also stressed that governments should develop "additional policy measures, because a strong carbon price alone will not be enough" (CPSL, 2009, p. 5). The 'carbon price policy' nodal point was again pronounced ahead of the 2015 Climate Change Conference in Paris. A crescendo moment occurred a few months before the conference as BP and five other oil and gas companies (Shell, Total, Statoil, Eni and BG) formed the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI). The industry coalition strongly advocated discourses reminiscent of the 'carbon price policy' nodal point: "we need governments across the world to provide us with clear, stable, long-term, ambitious policy frameworks. We believe that a price on carbon should be a key element of these frameworks" (Elliott, 2015). Some environmental groups were even cautiously supportive of the OGCI's statements; the Environmental Defense Fund (2015) for example stating: "The global oil and gas industry may not yet be playing to full potential, but they are now clearly in the climate game, and that deserves applause."

During this third period (2008/9-2015), BP's climate change discourses—centered around the 'carbon price policy' nodal point—visibly started to overlap with a wide variety of stakeholders. For example, several NGOs utilized the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen as an opportunity to publicly voice their support for a global price on carbon (Meckling, 2011). WWF led the charge, co-authoring the Copenhagen Communiqué, also signed and promoted by BP and other oil companies including Shell.

Despite highlighting that effectively pricing carbon "is an important step," the WWF, similar to BP, also warned of the need for government leadership: "we have to be cautious that individual action doesn't detract from what government still needs to do at Copenhagen and beyond" (Guardian, 2009). A comparable picture transpired several years later during the 2015 Climate Change Conference in Paris. Here, BP promoted the 'carbon price policy' nodal point alongside environmental NGOs such as the Nature Conservancy, WWF, and Environmental Defense Fund as "strategic partners" of the newly formed Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition (2016). The support for a global carbon price was likewise echoed by various other stakeholders ranging from financial industry (e.g., BNP Paribas, 2016) to policy actors and multilateral institutions (e.g., World Bank, 2015).

This way of coalescing around a specific discourse by a diverse set of actors—particularly when organized through the formation of coalitions and alliances as illustrated above—alludes to establishing, to borrow Gramsci's term, an emerging 'historical bloc'. In our case, this "climate regime" (Levy & Newell, 2005) operates under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and is composed of transnational climate governance actors – i.e., national governments, civil society actors, environmental NGOs, multinational corporations, and multilateral institutions. Hence, this third attempt facilitated BP to effectively hegemonize its climate change discourse by aligning this discourse with the dominant ideology of a historical bloc largely centered around carbon pricing. Of course, critique

had not dissipated as dissident voices continued to challenge BP's approach to climate change, even long after this attempt (see Schifeling & Hoffman, 2017). However, more importantly, BP and many of its adversaries—all of whom belong to the same bloc—increasingly propagate the same ideology, which has particular implications for BP's avoidance of transformational climate action, as discussed next.

Discussion and concluding thoughts

We began this article by emphasizing how many organizations either fail to effectively respond to climate change, or actively avoid the urgent need for transformational action on climate change (CDP, 2016; Levy & Spicer, 2013; Slawinski et al., 2017; Wright & Nyberg, 2015, 2017). To better understand how and why this occurs, we focused on BP and its involvement with the climate change debate. Drawing from Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000; Spicer & Böhm, 2007; van Bommel & Spicer, 2011), we demonstrated how BP, over a period of about two decades, engaged in an extensive hegemonization process. Based on these findings, we argue below that BP was able to avoid making substantive changes to its business model both by *incorporating* and *rapidly evading* stakeholder critique.

Incorporating stakeholder critique

Our findings suggest that BP avoided engaging in effective climate action by, during each stage of hegemonization, *incorporating* critique (Nyberg et al., 2013). Along with neutralizing immediate threats posed by critiquing stakeholders, incorporating critique obfuscated obvious tensions between being a fossil fuel company and concurrently

engaging in environmental protection (Ferns, Amaeshi, & Lambert, 2017). Consider, for instance, how BP's nodal points were abstract enough to mask certain tensions within BP's chain; for example, the 'techno-progress' nodal point linked together seemingly incongruent signifiers of progress (i.e., economic growth) and environmental sustainability. Indeed, as Wittneben et al (2012, p. 1436) suggests: "the deliberate breadth and vagueness of these [hegemonic] concepts glosses over contradictions and emphasizes a common interest in both sustainability and economic development in an attempt to create consensus among a diverse group of actors." Obfuscating tensions without resolving them may contribute to organizational climate inaction. After all, as many sustainability scholars have suggested (Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss, & Figge, 2014; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015), visible contradictions, tensions, and conflicts stimulate organizational change as they "shape consciousness and action to change the present order" (Benson, 1977, p. 8).

The practice of incorporating critique is well researched in organization studies of the natural environment, particularly discourse-related scholarship (Fleming & Jones, 2013; Livesey, 2002b; Nyberg et al., 2013; Shamir, 2004; Tregidga, Milne, & Kearins, 2014). Our longitudinal process-based perspective complements this work, illustrating how incorporating critique can be an *accumulative* process evolving over time between organizations attempting to (re)construct hegemony and their critiquing stakeholders. Indeed, as highlighted in our findings, each time BP enacted a hegemonization strategy and incorporated critique, its climate change discourse evolved. We evidenced how this

occurred through three sequential hegemonization strategies: (1) counter-hegemonic threats are neutralized by incorporating new signifiers into a signifying chain – BP did so by acknowledging climate science and accepting the natural environment as a legitimate concern; (2) thereafter, to strengthen links between newly acquired signifiers and build credibility for a signifying chain, 'win-win' relationships are reinforced among divergent signifiers and with dissident organizations – in BP's case this included environmental NGOs; (3) and, finally, the arrangement of signifiers is adjusted in response to internal and external stakeholder demands; the resultant discourse thus fulfilling multiple stakeholder demands.

As an outcome, we suggested that BP could form a hegemony by aligning its all-encompassing climate change discourse (centered around a 'carbon price policy' nodal point) with the dominant ideology of market-friendly climate solutions (e.g., carbon pricing) as espoused by a historical bloc – i.e., the transnational climate governance regime (Banerjee, 2012; Levy & Newell, 2005; Newell, 2008). In doing so, the interests of multiple organizations become synchronized around a common understanding, or "discourse coalition" (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005), which mitigates contestation between constituents by claiming to represent the interests of all its members simultaneously. Moreover, being a member of this "club of carbon markets" (Keohane, Petsonk, & Hanafi, 2017) to a certain extent legitimates the lack of transformational climate responses given that the bloc's emphasis on carbon pricing is far from transformational. Indeed, as a policy instrument, carbon pricing by itself offers "limited" potential for

radical decarbonization of energy systems (IPCC, 2014, p. 28). Nevertheless, to reach this stage, each hegemonization step was arguably necessary to build upon the next. Without incorporating challenger discourses (step 1) and building win-win relationships (step 2), the signifying chain may well have been too fragmented to create nodal points. In addition, the resulting discourse would arguably fail to produce a climate change discourse that is all-encompassing enough to represent multiple stakeholder views. But, how does the accumulative nature of incorporating critique more broadly inform our understanding of hegemonization as a process in organization studies? Here, we offer two key contributions.

First, we contribute to the literature on hegemony in organization studies (Banerjee, 2012; Levy & Egan, 2003; Nyberg et al., 2018; Okereke, Bulkeley, & Schroeder, 2009; Wittneben et al., 2012) by adopting a process-based approach to illustrate how an organization engaged in constructing hegemonic discourse over an extended period of time from the "bottom up." Surprisingly, with the exception of some studies of hegemony (e.g., Levy, Reinecke, & Manning, 2016), this "bottom up" perspective of hegemonic construction is largely overlooked; most studies consider hegemony as an inert state of domination rather than a continuously crafted structure embedded within rich historical contexts (e.g., Prasad & Elmes, 2005). By *"bottom"* we mean the historical point at which an organization radically altered its discursive practices in response to a serious threat – Laclau and Mouffe (2001) refer to this as a "period of dislocation." By *"up"* we focus on the accumulative, step-by-step arrangement of

signifying chain, which exposes both micro-linguistic practices of arranging signifiers within a chain (e.g., BP dropping the signifier 'markets' and adding 'policy' to create a new nodal point), and the evolution of this arrangement vis-à-vis broader changes in the organization's ever-shifting environment. Future studies of hegemony would benefit from closely analyzing how hegemonic structures are constructed from their inception, including the emergence of hegemony based on political struggles between organizations and multiple critiquing stakeholders over time.

Second, our process-based perspective implicates literature regarding the construction and function of a historical bloc (Levy & Egan, 2003; Levy & Scully, 2007; Nyberg et al., 2013). Studies of hegemony often frame powerholders as dominant enforcers of an ideology – maintaining a hegemonic bloc from the top down in coalitions with other well-resourced elites (e.g., Banerjee, 2012). In contrast, dissidents and challenger actors are often caricaturized as willfully consenting subordinates with "limited [...] reach and efficacy" (Nyberg et al., 2018, p. 247). Our analysis, however, suggests more nuanced dynamics. For instance, apart from a certain exceptional instances (e.g., Browne's Stanford speech and the rebranding of BP as Beyond Petroleum), an organization's hegemonization activity may manifest as rather subtle – e.g., making minor tweaks to signifiers, briefly "sharing platforms" with a challenger organization (Greenpeace, 2002), signing a communiqué (CPSL, 2009), or joining a multi-stakeholder coalition (Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition, 2016). These seemingly inconspicuous activities accumulate over time to form a historical bloc (Cox, 1983) as our findings

illustrate. Importantly, environmental NGOs—usually considered counter-hegemonic actors within the climate debate (Ansari et al., 2013)—may play a leading role in reproducing the very ideology of the organizations they critique (e.g., BP and WWF's promoting of carbon pricing during climate summits). In this way, the threat posed by counter-hegemonic actors paradoxically emerges as a significant factor in maintaining hegemony (Okereke et al., 2009). Instead of simplifying the duality between power elites and subordinate challengers, the construction of hegemony and by implication arrangement of a historical bloc can occur as a relational process between organizations and critiquing voices that mutually reinforce one another.

Rapidly evading stakeholder demands

Our findings further illustrated how an organization avoids making substantive changes to its business model in light of climate change by dodging counter-hegemonic attacks. We thereby contribute to literature on organizational responses to climate change (Hoffman, 2005; Kolk & Pinkse, 2005; Slawinski et al., 2017) by highlighting the importance of considering temporal dynamics involved with hegemonization, as organizational (in)action on climate change may be informed by *rapidly evading* various stakeholder critiques over an extended period of time. In our case, this involved continuously tweaking a signifying chain by engaging in a process of "creative, yet pragmatic bricolage" (Spicer & Sewell, 2010, p. 937). For instance, evading critique was noticeable when BP swiftly reorganized its chain after receiving criticism from several investor groups regarding the possibility of its fossil fuel assets becoming stranded

(Spedding et al., 2013). Here, BP began to de-emphasize 'shareholder wealth,' instead prioritizing the nodal point 'carbon price policy.'

We suggest that discursive (hegemonic) construction is therefore an ephemeral process – seemingly impervious to critique. Consider for instance how other oil and gas companies, notably European supermajors (e.g., Shell and Total) often shift climate change discourses in line with stakeholder pressure (Livesey, 2002a). Interestingly, this differs somewhat from North American counterparts (e.g., Exxon and Chevron), which have traditionally been more steadfast regarding climate strategies (Skjærseth & Skodvin, 2018). Indeed, an organization's national context (see Matten & Moon, 2014) may affect the malleability of hegemonic construction, which could be further explored. Moreover, other carbon-intensive industries subject to extreme stakeholder pressure regarding climate change, such as the coal industry, may similarly evade critique. Arguably, a key factor determining the 'need for speed' when sidestepping counter-hegemonic threats could be the *public* nature of a corporation's engagement with a contested issue, including the *severity* of stakeholder claims – e.g., as stakeholders aim to stigmatize an organization (Devers, Dewett, Mishina, & Belsito, 2009). Therefore, organizations able to evade severe public scrutiny regarding climate change despite significant carbon footprints, e.g., the cement industry or state-owned fossil fuel companies (Heede, 2014), may not require a particularly 'fluid' hegemonization process. Hence, how processual dynamics—e.g., flow, speed, malleability, etc.—implicate the construction of hegemonic discourses over time (Langley et al., 2013) must be explored. After all, based on our findings, maintaining

the dynamic flow of climate change discourses is important to evading counter-hegemonic threats.

These insights together have an important implication for how organizational studies literature conceptualizes 'inaction' on climate change, commonly defined as the failure of an organization to "reduce absolute [greenhouse gas] emissions due to a lack of effective measures" (Slawinski et al., 2017, p. 256). Inaction in this sense focuses on how organizations deal with immediate environmental impacts of their operations. Yet, as highlighted here, this understanding is limited: while some organizations exhibit a state of *inaction* as per the definition above, they are by no means inactive regarding climate change. Instead, some organizations' climate actions contradict the goal of keeping warming well below 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC, 2015). Such 'action' may thereby reproduce business-as-usual as organizations downplay the need for transformative business models.

We therefore propose that literature on organizational responses to climate change distinguish between "inaction on climate change" and what we term "ineffective action on climate change," or organizational responses to climate change that actively hinder a rapid decarbonization of energy systems. Indeed, focusing on an organization's (in)ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from its own operations only paints part of the climate change picture, as is the case with BP. This is especially important for organizations selling fossil fuel products, as they may engage in ineffective action on climate change due to threats of transformational climate action on their core business (CDP, 2016).

Arguably, emphasizing the need for fossil fuel companies to reduce direct emissions (i.e. scope 1 emissions), distracts from more serious indirect emissions stemming from the end use of fossil fuel products (i.e. scope 3 emissions) (Downie & Stubbs, 2013).

Future research

This study presents several avenues for future research. First, although we used the 'extreme' case of BP and its relationship to climate change, there are many other cases and companies that could be explored such as industries with similar or worse environmental impacts like coal manufacturing. There are also many silent cases that go unnoticed such as the beef and international shipping industry that have escaped both public and academic inquiry (at least amongst organization scholars) despite relatively large environmental impacts. Examining these cases may yield fruitful insights regarding how different industries avoid transformational climate action. Additionally, as suggested previously, is possible that industries differ in ways they engage processes of hegemonization. This raises questions about whether certain industries are more (or less) capable of incorporating and/or evading critique.

Second, this study foregrounded text as its main source of data, necessary here to trace how discursive arrangements evolved over time (Hardy & Phillips, 1999). However, due to this focus we could not analyze the production, consumption, and distribution of discourses in real time, examining text and talk in action. Future research could involve, for instance, attending CEO speeches or gaining access to board meetings. Regrettably,

this is a difficult task with the fossil fuel industry given the sensitivity espoused by the industry regarding environmental issues.

A third avenue for future research relates to extending theory on the affective dimension of hegemonization (Dey, Schneider, & Maier, 2016), outside the scope of this study given our discursive emphasis. However, micro-level studies could examine emotional dynamics evoked by hegemonization, especially useful to examining the human-nature relationship. Emphasizing affective dynamics would facilitate exploration of how resistance movements employ emotive symbols in their struggle against fossil fuel industries. Moreover, in response to our focus here on BP, future studies could demonstrate how hegemonization unfolds based on practices of environmentalist groups and grassroots activists (Schifeling & Hoffman, 2017); a perspective largely absent from organizational theory regarding climate change.

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Tables and figures

Table 1 – Data corpus for BP's CEO-speak from 1997-2015

	CEO letters	**Media articles**				**Speeches**				
	CSR reports	*Guardian*	*FT*	*WSJ*	*NYT*	Industry	Policy	Business	University	*Total*
1997	-	7	11	1	1	-	2	-	1	*23*
1998	**1**	**1**	2	**3**	**1**	**1**	-	**1**	2	*12*
1999	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	-	*11*
2000	**1**	2	**3**	2	**1**	2	-	**1**	-	*12*
2001	1	2	2	3	1	-	-	-	-	*9*
2002	**1**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**1**	-	**1**	-	**1**	*12*
2003	1	4	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	*7*
2004	**1**	**1**	**1**	-	2	-	-	**1**	**1**	*7*
2005	1	1	3	6	1	2	3	-	-	*17*
2006	**1**	**12**	**6**	**2**	**3**	**2**	-	-	2	*28*
2007	1	10	7	3	1	1	-	1	-	*24*
2008	**1**	**9**	**6**	**3**	**1**	**2**	-	**1**	**1**	*24*
2009	1	9	4	2	1	4	-	-	1	*22*
2010	**1**	**17**	**15**	**10**	**4**	-	**2**	-	**2**	*51*
2011	1	8	4	1	1	4	1	1	1	*22*
2012	**1**	**4**	2	**1**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**1**	-	*14*
2013	1	5	2	2	1	2	-	-	2	*15*
2014	**1**	5	**4**	**1**	**1**	**3**	-	-	-	*15*
2015	1	13	14	5	4	2	-	-	-	*39*
Total	*18*	*116*	*92*	*47*	*28*	*29*	*11*	*9*	*14*	*364*

Figure 1 – Event timeline of BP's climate change narrative

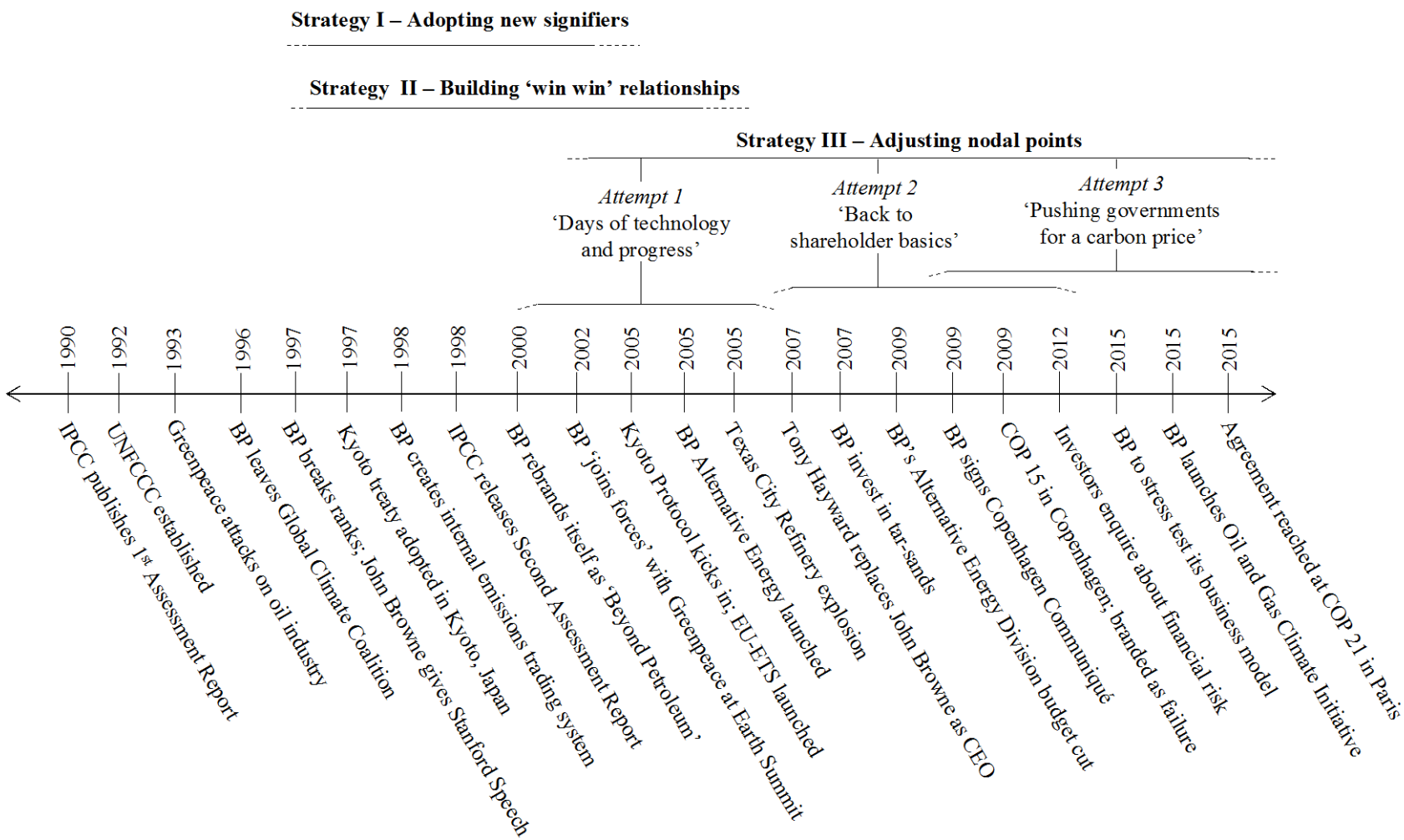

Table 2 – Signifiers, descriptive codes, and nodal points

Signifiers	Descriptive codes*	Illustrative quotes---
Climate science	Science; climate science; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; academic	"Some of the detailed science on environmental issues such as climate change is imperfect and incomplete [...] but the fact that we don't know everything isn't a reason for ignoring the evidence which does exist" (Browne, 1998).
Sustainability	natural environment; nature; eco-system; wildlife, mother nature	" We've drawn up an exploration plan which has started with an Environmental Impact Assessment this year to ensure we don't have unacceptable impacts on wildlife or the environment" (Dudley, 2013b).
Progress	economic growth/development; human progress; civilization; prosperity; living standards.	"To sustain supplies and meet the growing levels of demand that population growth and prosperity are generating we continue to invest for the future" (Browne, 2005).
Technology	Technology; effic ency; innovation; engineering;	"for us, the key question is which technologies will make the greatest contribution to meeting energy demand while providing BP with strong growth businesses" (Hayward, 2008).
Profits	Profit; financial; earning; revenues; shareholder	"We believe we can help meet energy demand and create returns for investors by applying our distinctive skills, capabilities and technologies in these demanding areas" (Dudley, 2010).
Markets	Markets; trading; price; market-based solutions; tax	"The very simple lesson is that emissions are reduced when the low carbon option is also the low cost option. The market is the most effective way to deliver a solution" (Dudley, 2013a).
Policy	Policy; government; UNFCCC; partnerships;	"Climate change remains a major risk for the planet – yet one that competes for government attention with more immediate concerns over security and the economy" (Dudley, 2014).

Nodal points	Illustrative quotes
Techno-progress	"Our role in society is to innovate, to apply knowledge and technology to problems and to turn them into opportunities. Business is not a passive force. Business is one of the most creative and progressive elements in society – providing the means and the choices which make human progress possible". (Browne, 2004).
Shareholder wealth	"BP's mission for 2011 and beyond is to grow value for our shareholders in a way that is safe and sustainable. We are also including a carbon price in new project development plans to encourage efficiency" (Dudley, 2010).
Carbon price policy	"As you probably know, BP has a 15 year record of calling for more action from governments, including the wide application of a carbon price" (Dudley, 2011).

* Includes stemmed words (e.g., both science and scientific)

Table 3 – Frequency[ii] of signifiers within BP's discursive arrangement

	Climate science	*Sustainability*	*Progress*	*Technology*	*Profits*	*Markets*	*Policy*
1997	0.13%	0.25%	0.19%	0.24%	0.20%	0.36%	0.39%
1998	0.26%	0.36%	0.18%	0.20%	0.25%	0.11%	0.12%
1999	0.09%	0.46%	0.20%	0.34%	0.42%	0.23%	0.32%
2000	0.11%	0.08%	0.19%	0.28%	0.11%	0.31%	0.31%
2001	0.00%	0.35%	0.36%	0.37%	0.25%	0.18%	0.18%
2002	0.13%	0.15%	0.45%	0.33%	0.42%	0.35%	0.32%
2003	0.19%	0.28%	0.47%	0.46%	0.33%	0.33%	0.20%
2004	0.09%	0.14%	0.45%	0.44%	0.31%	0.36%	0.17%
2005	0.25%	0.15%	0.50%	0.49%	0.40%	0.38%	0.36%
2006	0.08%	0.10%	0.30%	0.31%	0.35%	0.44%	0.28%
2007	0.09%	0.18%	0.25%	0.36%	0.36%	0.36%	0.36%
2008	0.16%	0.21%	0.16%	0.35%	0.44%	0.50%	0.29%
2009	0.03%	0.14%	0.15%	0.36%	0.49%	0.45%	0.47%
2010	0.02%	0.07%	0.13%	0.33%	0.40%	0.44%	0.26%
2011	0.03%	0.06%	0.22%	0.28%	0.48%	0.60%	0.28%
2012	0.05%	0.05%	0.18%	0.26%	0.23%	0.40%	0.22%
2013	0.05%	0.06%	0.18%	0.32%	0.19%	0.36%	0.40%
2014	0.04%	0.05%	0.11%	0.28%	0.14%	0.37%	0.50%
2015	0.14%	0.18%	0.10%	0.22%	0.07%	0.40%	0.58%
Total	*0.10%*	*0.17%*	*0.25%*	*0.32%*	*0.31%*	*0.36%*	*0.32%*

X < 0.30%
X ≥ 0.30%
X ≥ 0.40%

Appendix A - BP's inaction on climate change

	Overall GHG emissions (Mte CO2 equivalent)	Year on year change (Mte CO2 equivalent)	Real sustainability reductions** (Mte CO2 equivalent)	Total capital expenditure ($ billion)	Spend on renewables ($ billion)
2006	64.4*			17.2	
2007	63.5	-0.9		20.6	
2008	61.4	-2.1		30.7	
2009	65	3.6		20.3	
2010	64.9	-0.1		23	
2011	61.8	-3.1	0.2	17.9	
2012	59.4	-2.4	0.2	23.2	
2013	50.3	-9.1	0.2	24.5	
2014	48.7	-1.6	0.1	22.8	
2015	49	0.3	0.1	18.7	
TOTAL	*269.2***	*-15.4****	*0.8*	*218.9*	*8.3*****

* *figures all from BP's sustainability reports*
** *term used by BP to account for deliberate climate change mitigation measures*
*** *based on data from 2011-2015 for comparison*
**** see Macalister (2015)

[i]As illustrated Appendix A, BP's overall investment into renewable energy, especially in contrast to its investments into non-renewables, is relatively small. From 2005-2015 BP invested approximately $8.3 billion in renewable technologies, which only equates to about 3.8% of their total capital expenditures during this period ($219 billion). Recently, BP retracted most of its investment into renewables, and does not anticipate any major change in its investment strategy in the near future (Dudley, 2017). Furthermore, BP has not significantly reduced its greenhouse gas emissions. Although the company has reduced its overall GHG emissions by approximately 20% since 2006 (this is the first year BP began measuring GHG emissions from all its operations globally), the bulk of this reduction stems from what BP refers to as 'operational changes' (Dudley, 2015) – e.g., closing down a refinery due to poor financial, as opposed to environmental, performance. In contrast, changes in emissions from targeted efforts to improve environmental performance—BP calls these 'real sustainable reductions'—account for a miniscule proportion of the overall figure. For example, despite reducing its emissions by 9.1 megatons of CO2 in 2013, only 0.2% of this reduction can be attributed to 'real sustainable reductions'.

[ii] 'Frequency' refers to the amount of times a specific term (or, in our case, a collection of terms) is identified relative to the total words within the text(s).