

HANDBOOK OF Historical Methods for Management



Edited by
Stephanie Decker • William M. Foster
Elena Giovannoni



HANDBOOKS OF RESEARCH METHODS IN MANAGEMENT

HANDBOOK OF HISTORICAL METHODS FOR MANAGEMENT

HANDBOOKS OF RESEARCH METHODS IN MANAGEMENT

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1. Introduction: why historical methods in management?

Stephanie Decker, William M. Foster and Elena Giovannoni

Everything has a past. That is, everything has evolved over time to be what it is now. But the past and history matter to different people in different ways. Organizations and management are no exceptions. Yet, despite the recognition that the past, history and memory are important, we still hear the question ‘why does history matter to management and organization studies?’. We hear this even though historical research is published more frequently in top journals (Anteby and Molnár, 2012; Decker et al., 2021; Durepos, 2015; Foroughi et al., 2020; Hargadon and Wadhwani, 2022) and there are more special issues and books on the topic (Bucheli and Wadhwani, 2014; Decker et al., 2022; Godfrey et al., 2016; Maclean et al., 2020; McLaren et al., 2015; Wadhwani et al., 2018).

The growing awareness that history matters in management and organizational studies suggests that the field continues to develop and mature. We sometimes forget that it was less than 20 years ago when Booth and Rowlinson (2004) proposed that scholars embrace the historic turn – a recognition that history is more than just the study of days gone by. This has led to a ‘history boom’ in management and organization studies, a more substantial volume of research, both theoretical and empirical, that has at its central focus, the past, history and memory.

With all the advances in the field, why, then, do we need a *Handbook of Historical Methods in Management*? We are fortunate to have been able to draw on the rich and varied contributions from an interdisciplinary community that has, over time, established a common ground for historical methods in management studies. A significant number of publications have pushed the boundaries of what historical research in management can look like (Barros et al., 2018; Decker, 2010; Foster et al., 2011; Hassard, 2012; Mutch, 2018; Sasaki et al., 2020). Momentum built with important publications such as *Organizations in Time* (Bucheli and Wadhwani, 2014) which laid the ground for historical methods in management studies (Kipping et al., 2014; Lipartito, 2014; Wadhwani and Decker, 2017; Yates, 2014).

Yet methods cannot be removed from their theoretical and epistemological basis. A number of key contributions outlined how historical research can be integrated in management research (Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014; Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014). The debate broadened out into different subject areas such as strategy (Argyres et al., 2020; Suddaby and Foster, 2017; Vaara and Lamberg, 2016), international business (Buckley, 2016; da Silva Lopes et al., 2019; Jones and Khanna, 2006), accounting (Carnegie and Napier, 2016; Gomes et al., 2011; Hoskin and Macve, 1986; Mattessich, 2007; Miller et al., 1991; Quattrone, 2015) and entrepreneurship (Decker et al., 2020; Wadhwani, 2016; Wadhwani et al., 2020). As the field matured, the relationship between history and memory (Coraiola et al., 2017; Decker et al., 2021; Foroughi et al., 2020; Foster et al., 2017), especially in terms of the rise of approaches such as rhetorical history (Foster et al., 2017; Rowlinson and Hassard, 1993; Suddaby et al., 2010) and uses of the past (Wadhwani et al., 2018) have become a new area of scholarship.

Empirical contributions also developed the scope for historical methods to contribute to diverse theoretical debates such as materiality (Giovannoni and Quattrone, 2018), path dependency (Perchard and MacKenzie, 2021), identity (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Ravasi et al., 2019; Schultz and Hernes, 2013), craft (Kroezen and Heugens, 2019; Lamertz et al., 2016) and management learning (Tennent et al., 2020). But, as van Lent and Durepos (2019) highlighted, historical methods have not seen the same level of development as the debates around history and theory. Key pieces on methods (Decker, 2013; Kipping et al., 2014; Lipartito, 2014; Yates, 2014) are now becoming somewhat dated, given the vibrant nature of this research field. This also means that there have been substantial new developments in terms of different methodological approaches.

Therefore, the purpose of this *Handbook* is to reinvigorate historical methods in management and organizational studies by providing guidance on historical methods and methodologies from multiple perspectives and approaches. This paradigmatic diversity has certainly been evident in past academic debates and has influenced the question of ‘what is history in management studies’? Although there are clearly many answers, the related diversity of views and constructs can make it more difficult, but also more compelling, to navigate the field.

We also consider the *Handbook* as a toolkit. Much like how a hammer is a good tool for some jobs and not others, we hope to provide guidance and direction about when some methods are best suited for different types of historical research. Historical methods, when used properly, can provide nuanced ontological and epistemological perspectives and insights into management and organizations, their past(s), present(s) and future(s). This *Handbook* recognizes and embraces different ways of seeing the world and, as a result, this requires different methods and data.

To begin, we define historical methods in management: (1) as the practices of investigating traces from the past; (2) the reconstruction of accounts of past events; (3) for the purposes of management and organizational research. We offer this definition because history is, of course, an established academic discipline, and books about methods have been, and continue to be, published in this field (Dobson and Ziemann, 2009; Green and Troup, 1999; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). Our *Handbook of Historical Methods in Management*, however, is different; it is different because it specifically addresses management and organization scholars, students and others (i.e., managers, scholars and students from other fields outside of history) who may not have access to the training and professional discourse of historians or management scholars familiar with archival research and historical records. More importantly, our focus with this *Handbook* is different than if it was only written by historians for historians. Our *Handbook* aims to bring together contributions by scholars who have focused on describing and developing historical methods that have been used, and are relevant to, a wide range of academic and professional interests in the broad field of management and organization studies.

Our deliberately broad approach was designed to strike a balance between well-known, established approaches and emerging, innovative perspectives. Some chapters in this *Handbook* offer practical advice on using specific data sources, data collection and data analysis methods (Buchnea, 2023; Napier, 2023; Nix et al., 2023; Tennent and Gillett, 2023), from a range of perspectives (Platts, 2023; Carnegie and McBride, 2023). Other chapters are more concerned with theoretical (Harvey and Maclean, 2023; Mutch, 2023), epistemological (Durepos, 2023; Rintämäkki et al., 2023) and conceptual issues (Phillips et al., 2023). Still others are focused on exploring and demonstrating the application and use of different or new methods (Mengis et al., 2023), and their utility in addressing relevant questions in and about management and

organizations (Bastien and Coraiola, 2023; Giovannoni and Ruggiero, 2023). Our hope is to provide insight into research that takes place at the intersection of history and memory, as well as the past and present.

STRUCTURE OF THE *HANDBOOK*

The *Handbook* is structured to make sense of a diverse collection of current perspectives regarding how to research the past in management. To do so, we have arranged the *Handbook* into four sections to provide shape and meaning to this vast and growing field. Imposing some structure on the field is our way of helping several different groups, such as students (mostly doctoral, but also masters and undergraduates) as well as management scholars, who may not be familiar with many (or any) of the diverse approaches and methods that are currently in use or being explored in the field. Lastly, we also hope to intrigue the occasional manager who could be interested in unlocking some new or past understanding of their firm.

Our imposition of some structure on the field is not intended to be definitive; it is meant to help shape our understanding of the questions we ask about the past in management and how this understanding impacts the methods that we choose. That is, studying the past in management and organizations is not merely looking back at what happened to managers and organizations many years ago. It means understanding the questions that can be asked of the past, the present and the future.

The *Handbook* begins with a conceptual section, ‘Perspectives on historical methods’. Broadly, the chapters in this section debate and engage with different discussions about the past and how it can be studied by management and organization scholars. In Chapter 2, Harvey and Maclean describe and explain how scholars can best approach and investigate historical organization studies (HOS). Specifically, the chapter provides guidance by listing and explaining the five key principles of HOS and outlines how to best achieve dual integrity, the lynch pin of all HOS research. Their three empirical examples – the global hotel industry, executive remuneration and entrepreneurial philanthropy – demonstrate how researchers can best balance organization theory and history to illustrate and uncover institutional and organizational dynamics.

In Chapter 3, Lubinski elaborates the ways that rhetorical history can be identified and uncovered within management and organizational settings. Specifically, she discusses the different mechanisms that make rhetorical history more effective as an organizational resource. Lubinski describes four different mechanisms: analogy, strategic ambiguity, outpasting and forgetting, which operate to make rhetorical histories meaningful. In addition, she explores the impact that context (McLaren and Durepos, 2021) has on the effectiveness of rhetorical histories. Lubinski draws upon her studies of German companies in colonial India to explore ways that rhetorical histories evolve over time and, thus, in different contexts. This chapter addresses an important, yet still unanswered, question posed within the uses of the past literature (Foroughi et al., 2020): why are some rhetorical histories more effective than others?

Durepos, in Chapter 4, discusses and details the processes involved when conducting an ANTi-History. Specifically, Durepos begins by outlining the eight facets of ANTi-History. The chapter then provides an important, practical example: a history of Nova Scotia museums, illustrating how an ANTi-History can be conducted. Durepos expertly navigates and explores the ways that an ANTi-History can be used to critically engage with organizations and

management. Of particular importance is the future agenda put forth in the chapter, whereby Durepos explains not just the reasons why ANTi-Histories are important and necessary to the development of management and organizational history, but also, she cites different, current empirical examples as possible fruitful avenues where an ANTi-History might be applicable.

In Chapter 5, Rowlinson, Decker and Hassard explore the utility of narratives for studying management and organizational history. The authors, in a post-modern twist, explore the importance of historical narratives by constructing their own historical narrative about the development of the field of management and organizational history. Even though business historians and strategy scholars trace the origins of their fields back to Chandler's contributions, it was only with the move of business historians into business schools at the turn of the millennium, that they became part of a new community of management scholars interested in history. This community had different disciplinary origins and comprised different understandings of the nature and purpose of narratives. The authors demonstrate how a narrative of these developments can be constructed, and what authorial choices this entails. In so doing, their chapter highlights the variety and usefulness of historical narratives to investigate the past in organizations.

Barros, in Chapter 6, raises specific questions about what constitutes an archive and the implications this has for management and organizational research. He highlights the importance of archival reflexivity, by which he refers to the researchers' understanding of the corpus of the sources and how it influences knowledge claims. By approaching archives from a conceptual angle, Barros considers them as organized collections of documents that already exist within narrative frames as the result of their collection. Barros argues that historical research in management would benefit from engaging further with archival studies.

Part I of the *Handbook* concludes with Chapter 7 by Mills and Helms Mills. In this chapter, these two pioneers discuss both the development of the field and how the *Handbook* reflects this development. Their discussions explore how the field has engaged with some of the more controversial issues that have arisen in recent years. Importantly, they ask how inclusive the field is, and what work still needs to be done to realize the potential of historical methods in management. In sum, the chapters in this section help set the stage for the discussions in the other sections of the *Handbook*.

Part II, 'Historical data and sources', is intended to introduce readers to the different practical considerations and data available to researchers when they embark on projects that involve investigating the past. For example, the authors in this section address questions such as: how to approach archives, both physical and digital, how do historical records differ and why is this important and how does oral history differ from more familiar research techniques? These practical, and necessary, questions should be addressed for anyone embarking on a historical research project. This section further explores the different types of data that can be approached historically and the different methods that are best suited to examine and interpret this data.

In Chapter 8, Tennent and Gillett build upon Barros's critical discussion of the archive. In this chapter they provide researchers, both those new to archival research and those more experienced, with a step-by-step guide as to how best to prepare for, and then engage with, archival research. They offer a practical and hands-on discussion about how to access an archive and what to expect once there. This guidance made memorable by their acronym CLUMOP, which introduces different types of archives: corporate archives, local authorities, universities, libraries and museums, other, and public collections. Tennent and Gillett have

penned a 'must-read' chapter for anyone interested in exploring archives, regardless of how they are defined or where they are located.

In Chapter 9, Giacomini discusses the field of oral history in the context of management research to highlight its evolution, and its main tenets. She also provides a list of important, but underused, resources. Oral history is a particularly useful method because it is associated with different ontological and epistemological positions. These range from postpositivist approaches seeking to triangulate oral history interviews with other types of sources and contextual information, to more social constructivist concerns about how memory is co-constructed by interviewee and interviewer in a specific place at a specific time. The chapter outlines one such oral history project at Harvard Business School that draws on interviews with business leaders from emerging economies, to provide an alternative understanding of business dynamics in countries that are less frequently studied.

Accounting is a social and institutional practice (Hopwood and Miller, 1994). As such, management researchers have the potential to examine accounting records, as well as their use and function at various organizational levels, to illuminate key business, communication, decision-making, management and governance processes, as well as broader social and institutional processes. In so doing, researchers can reveal important aspects of organizations in their specific historical contexts. These points are highlighted in Chapter 10, where Napier offers guidance and suggestions about how accounting records can be used as insightful sources for historical research into organizations, management and organizing processes. In so doing, he highlights the importance of understanding accounting conventions and practices at the time the records were prepared. Furthermore, he notes that it is also useful to look beyond the mere technical aspects of accounting and consider its role in shaping different processes and relations to understand management and organizations in their historical context.

Turning to a more contemporary type of historical record, Nix, Decker, Kirsch and Kuppili Venkata discuss digital archives in Chapter 11. In particular, the authors highlight both the continuity with existing methods of source analysis as well as the affordances of new technological approaches. Their typology of digital archives highlights a variety of different archives available in the digital sphere. In so doing, Nix et al. reflect on the attendant technological and methodological challenges as well as some ethical concerns. An important distinction they make is between digitized versus born-digital material. Often scholars assume that they are accessing digitized materials: electronic images of original documents. However, digitization projects are becoming rare and, since the 1990s, born-digital materials are becoming increasingly common in archives. Such records come with meta-data and may present new opportunities and challenges due to their networked nature (e.g., emails).

Platts, in Chapter 12, furthers the discussion of data and sources by bringing her perspective as historian and archeologist to bear on a discussion of how multisensory analysis and sources can help inform historical research. She draws on her own experience in researching the Roman house, as an ancient organization, to illustrate a range of sources that can be used to reconstruct not only visual elements of the past but also other sensory elements (i.e., sounds, smells, touch and taste). This vast array of sources is important for spatial organizing through sensory experiences because of the way they shape and control power structures that influence perceptions, movements, relations and the environment. Platts, therefore, emphasizes the relevance of multisensory methods for the reconstruction of important dimensions of management and organization such as individual and group dynamics, social status, and governing

processes. This cross-disciplinary approach exemplifies how management and organization scholars can apply multisensory research methods when exploring the past.

In Chapter 13, Smith introduces process-tracing as a method to interrogate the past in organizations and management. Although new to management and organizational research, process-tracing is widely used in other social science research such as political science and international relations. As Smith notes, process-tracing is intended to add rigor to qualitative historical research. The typical approach to process-tracing is to formulate causal explanations for decisions that have had a significant impact on many people. According to Smith, process-tracing is grounded upon significant historical, archival research. The goal is to empirically test and formulate explanations for past events. The chapter concludes with recommendations for new empirical sites where the method could be best applied in management contexts, such as how senior managers make decision or how changing social opinions impact organizations.

Part II concludes with a discussion about the use of the case method for historical research in management. In Chapter 14, Buchnea highlights the significance and importance of context when developing historical case studies. In particular, she explains how the goal of the method is ‘contextualized explanation’. Moreover, she provides a detailed explanation as to how cases can be developed. To demonstrate the utility of the method, Buchnea draws upon examples from her own research on the historical Liverpool to New York shipping trade route. In so doing, she highlights the significance and utility of working on contextualized cases, and the opportunities to provide in-depth explanations of both seen and unseen phenomena through this approach.

In management methods, analytical techniques loom large. Textbooks in history, however, rarely provide meaningful guidance to management researchers. Our *Handbook* seeks to fill this gap by outlining a range of methods in Part III, ‘Historical analysis of data and sources’. In Chapter 15, Wadhvani’s discussion comes ‘full circle’ when he reflects upon the continued relevance of the hermeneutic tradition in management and organizational research. Specifically, he highlights the hermeneutical foundations of historical research and interpretive practice through his discussion of canonical authors such as Gadamer and Ricoeur. Of note, however, is that hermeneutics in management research does not address the issue of ‘temporal distance’ between past and present that is central to historical interpretation. In the chapter, Wadhvani focuses on the practice of hermeneutic interpretation of historical texts and how temporal distance requires a greater appreciation not just of the cultural context of the past, but also of that of the interpreter in the present.

In Chapter 16, Mutch reflects on the challenges of relating the philosophical tradition of critical realism to the practicalities of historical emergence. Drawing on the work of Margaret Archer, he highlights the construction of an analytic narrative of emergence as central to critical realist historical research. Often, social theorists who draw on history develop sweeping statements based on rather limited historical evidence and secondary material. To overcome this limitation and address how the phenomena identified are to be investigated Mutch proposes that researchers focus on concept formation, the status of evidence and the unique nature of historical events. As support, he provides evidence from his research where he identified quotidian practices as significant, even though, for historians, who cannot directly observe phenomena, this is methodologically challenging. In the chapter he expands upon how historians can recover patterns of practice by attending to the form, as much as to the content, of the past.

In Chapter 17, Carnegie and McBride outline the key features of prosopography and micro-history. They suggest that both methods are exceptional tools for ‘giving voice’ to the past of under-represented groups in history, such as the oppressed, Indigenous people, or ‘voices from below’ who are disadvantaged because of systemic discrimination based on gender, race and class. The chapter deftly contrasts prosopography, the collective investigation of a group of actors, delving into their common background, connections and relationships, with micro-history, a focus on specific, micro, units of research, such as an event, an episode, or an individual. As explained in the chapter, despite their distinctive features, the two methods share several commonalities that enrich historical research by investigating time-specific events, groups of actors and lives. Carnegie and McBride also discuss the importance of researchers placing micro accounts, local episodes, and findings into their broader contexts, looking for later developments, and remaining open to, unusual, unexpected, or previously undocumented results.

Israelsen and Mitchell, in Chapter 18, call our attention to one of the most widely used methods in management and organization studies: grounded theory. They present a critique of this method specifically addressing the privileged ontological position that the theory cedes to proximate, real-time observations. Their position is that this focus on the present, as opposed to the past, limits the effectiveness and utility of grounded theory for management and organizational studies. This chapter raises questions as to what qualifies as data and how best to study management and organizations. The solution that Israelsen and Mitchell suggest is a reconciliation between grounded theory and historical organization studies (Harvey and Maclean, 2023). They suggest that historical research provides greater practical use for grounded theory in the study of management and organizations. Because grounded theory is typically limited to interviews and current observations, there is, arguably, a paucity to the data that is examined. The synthesis of historical organizational studies with grounded theory offers a way forward for the development of a more useful form of grounded theory research.

Arguably, this *Handbook* would not be complete without a chapter discussing Foucault and his immense impact on historical research and the study of management and organizations. Yet, Cummings and Bridgman, in Chapter 19, do not present a typical summary of Foucault’s work; instead, they demonstrate how his ‘counter-histories’ can be used to explore taken-for-granted assumptions. As an example, Cummings and Bridgman show how the scholarship attributed to Kurt Lewin regarding organizational change has been represented and bears only slight resemblance to Lewin’s actual work. In fact, by looking at Lewin’s work through a Foucauldian lens, they argue that Lewin did not present or create the model of change for which he is known. Cummings and Bridgman brilliantly demonstrate the utility of Foucauldian ‘counter-histories’ and how this approach might be employed to explore other cases in management and organization studies.

In Part IV, ‘Historical research for organizations and society’, the common thread that connects the chapters is an engagement with the past to demonstrate the utility of historical research methods for the study of organizations and management. Each chapter presents a unique, practical discussion of the different ways that historical methods can be used to build and test management and organizational theory. These chapters also further the debates about ontology and epistemology by asking what counts as data, who is writing about the past, and what is the intent and outcome of this approach.

Postcolonial historiography and the Global South are topics of great importance, and Kumar’s discussion of both opens the section about the empirical application of historical

methods. In Chapter 20, Kumar takes an autobiographical/auto-ethnographic approach to discussing the strengths and weaknesses of a postcolonial historiography of management studies. He notes that although welcome, this form of critique has created a vacuum whereby the post-colonial national form is largely uninterrogated. Kumar laments how the initially positive and critical aspects of postcolonial historiography have led to an uncritical stance regarding the role of management in postcolonial India and how postcolonial histories are being appropriated as justifications for the rise in right-wing nationalist movements.

Bastien and Coraiola, in Chapter 21, further complicate and problematize how we understand historical research. They argue that history is a Western, colonial construct that is the cause of suffering for Indigenous peoples. Western history has located Indigenous people in a fictional past. To fully embrace an Indigenous ontology and to access the past, Bastien and Coraiola argue for a conversational inquiry approach to the study of the past in Indigenous communities. *Past occurrences* (Bastien et al., 2021) refer to 'the collection of individual memories about the past that exist in stories held by members of a community and passed on over time, linking the past, present and future'. Indigenous knowledge is located in oral traditions and, thus, to fully appreciate and understand Indigenous communities, the past must be accessed by talking and listening to Elders. They augment their discussion by pointing to a set of core principles that are built upon humility, reflexivity and cultural awareness. Bastien and Coraiola question the foundation of Western discussions of the past and, in so doing, they raise new questions about how the past can be studied and by whom.

Chapter 22 by Cornelius and Pezet introduces the notion of heterotopia as 'a space apart', drawing on a Foucauldian concept (heterotopia) and method (genealogy) to analyse the role of a powerful institution embedded in the development of a nation and a system of government. They narrate the history of the City of London from its early Roman origins and the development of London as community in Norman times to the present. Over time, the city became the home of the guilds, of traders and bankers, and increasingly independent, despite ongoing conflicts with the crown. The city retained its own system of governance, and this status of being an organization apart from normal systems of oversight provides a potentially important framework for historical research in management.

In Chapter 23, Giovannoni and Ruggiero discuss the role of historical research methods for exploring organizational identity. They point to the importance of historical research for uncovering core labels and referents associated with organizational identity, as well as their fluid interpretations, meanings and enactments across different space-time contexts. Here, historical methods enable researching organizational identity as a living collective phenomenon by unpacking the web of actors, sites, resources, material objects and relationships through which the enduring, distinctive and central features of an organization are enacted over time.

The past as corporate social responsibility is the focus of Chapter 24 by Phillips, Schrempf-Stirling and Stutz. They propose the study of historic corporate activities from a business ethics perspective in terms of their contemporary relevance. Their approach seeks to understand how different actors shape how the past is understood through a contest of narratives by focusing on public controversies regarding past actions of organizations. Nevertheless, they highlight the importance of objective elements, or 'brute facts of the past', as the essential context or baseline for empirical exploration of contemporary uses of the past. While there has been substantial research into corporate irresponsibility, they highlight the need for greater conceptual development of 'noble' organizational activities in the past.

In Chapter 25, Mengis, Petani and Scholz outline a research method for uncovering the affective, embodied, historical living of a city, as a way for revealing often neglected histories. Trained as ethnographers, they propose ‘embodied microhistories on the move’ as a method for researching the historical texture of an organization, or a city, by unpacking affective recollections of the past and how they come to matter in the present, through embodied mnemonic traces and as these traces are ‘lived’ while walking. Here, the authors call for greater methodological reflection and nuanced perspectives on how to research the historical layers of material objects and spaces, their lived experience, and how this affects organizing processes. In their proposed method, they combine microhistory with sensory ethnography and walking tours, and they provide practical examples on the application of the method in the context of urban planning of a city space.

Organizational authenticity, and how it can be studied, takes centre stage in the chapter authored by Lamertz. This is an interesting topic that is a subject of significant debate in management and organization studies (e.g., Pozner et al., 2022; Schifeling and Demetry, 2021; Voronov et al., 2022). In Chapter 26, Lamertz specifically asks how it is that organizations become perceived as authentic? Authenticity claims are rhetorical and can be narrated by an organization. Through a detailed analysis of two Canadian beer breweries, he demonstrates that authenticity hinges on the presentation of rhetorical histories (Suddaby et al., 2010) that resonate with key organizational stakeholders because they are consistent with the organization’s own past and compliant with or connected to a past relevant to stakeholder audiences. Lamertz offers guidance for others who want to investigate rhetorical histories and collective memory as a way to investigate organizational authenticity. The link between rhetorical history and authenticity further advances current understandings of organizational authenticity and the reasons why some organizations may be considered more authentic than their rivals.

In the penultimate chapter of the *Handbook*, Chapter 27, Rintamäki, Mena, Foster and Zundel challenge the belief that interviews are inappropriate for the study of collective memory. This unfounded assumption is built upon the foundation of methodological individualism. That is, the interview and the interview process only access the inner most thoughts of the person-their collected memory. Yet, as Rintamäki et al. demonstrate, the interview, as well as group interviews and focus groups, have significant utility for investigating not just the thoughts and recollections of individuals but also the social and relational aspects of their recollections-a collective memory. In particular, the authors explain that remembering is not done alone or in a vacuum. Moreover, the content of memory is not something that is merely accessed like finding a file on a computer. Remembering is social and occurs in and through relations and the recognition of what ‘is’ remembered and what ‘is not’. Thus, the interview, focus groups and group interviews can, when used skillfully, find insight into the collective past. Rintamäki et al. present six guidelines that can be used as a guide for investigating collective memory through interviews. In so doing, the authors demonstrate that the distinction between collected and collective memory can be overcome using interviews, group interviews and focus groups.

The *Handbook* concludes with Chapter 28 where Plakoyiannaki, Paavilainen-Mäntymäkki and Hafeez challenge the mythical beast of historical research from the perspective of International Business (IB) researchers. They focus on three ‘myth-buster’ explanations, starting with history being only about past, rather than also reflecting on the present and the future. Second, IB scholars assume that all historical research relies on archival data – while that is frequently the case, other data types are being used, especially in management. Finally, history

is presented as purely narrative in character, rather than also analytical and process-focused, as well as quantitative and variational. These myth-buster explanations set the stage for greater interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration between IB scholars and historical researchers (Decker, 2022; Hoorani et al., 2023; Plakoyiannaki et al., 2020).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The chapters in the *Handbook* represent how we see the current state of historical research in management and organizations. Our inclusive approach was designed to further build the community of scholars, researchers, students and managers and to provide guidance to those interested in trying their hand at historical research. The discussions contained within also reflect the interdisciplinarity and breadth of the scholars in this field. For example, some of our contributors were trained in history, others in management; some identify more as scholars of memory, others as accounting historians, or qualitative researchers. Ultimately, we hope that the diversity of the contributions will make this *Handbook* accessible to both management scholars not familiar with historical research, as much as historians interested to work on management issues.

The *Handbook* was also intentionally designed to provide space for voices that have traditionally not been heard from in both management and historical research. For example, the chapters on postcolonial and critical approaches highlight the potential of historical methods and how they can bring greater critical insight to management research through their methodological orientation (Schaefer and Alvesson, 2020). This meant that we wanted to expand beyond the classical methods such as source analysis. This is a notable omission; however, it is not discussed in the *Handbook* because it is probably the best elaborated aspect of historical methods (Howell and Prevenier, 2001; Kipping et al., 2014). And while historical research often draws on documents, we were also concerned that a discussion of source criticism would provide an overly narrow view of how the past can be (and is) researched.

Among other examples of ‘lesser studied’ (Shipp and Jansen, 2020) methods that we felt were important to include in the *Handbook*, oral history, for instance, offers established methodological guidance and resources that few management scholars have even begun to explore (Giacomin, 2023; Giacomin and Jones, 2022; Jones and Comunale, 2019; Maclean et al., 2017). Perhaps less obvious but equally relevant is multi-sensory research, especially in a field like management which is in many ways overly focused on text rather than oral or visual approaches, or other sensory resources (Platts, 2023). Clearly, work on practice and new methods such as video ethnographies (LeBaron et al., 2018) are addressing this oversight; but we also believe that historical methods can offer some insight.

Our inclusive approach meant that we wanted to hear more voices and from a wide variety of perspectives. But, despite our attempts, we are also keenly aware of what is *not* here and who we do not hear from, despite the many and varied contributions. For example, we recognize that none of our authors explicitly engage with gender or feminist approaches, even though this is clearly an important aspect of management and historical research (Aston et al., 2022; Haynes, 2010). Nevertheless, the approaches and sources discussed in our *Handbook* are useful for researching gender and for analysing the power dynamics in a world that always stays one step ahead of academic theorizing. Both Kumar’s (2023) and Bastien and Coraiola’s

(2023) chapters on postcolonial and Indigenous research dynamics are good examples of how historical approaches can provide relevant insights into contemporary issues.

There is always more that can be done, more approaches that can be explored, more contributions that should have been included. Subjects such as race, gender, the Global South, global challenges and the role of the environment, are all important areas that merit further exploration. Historical research exists in all these areas – environmental business history, for example, has seen substantial growth in recent years (Elmore, 2013), as has queer history (Brown, 2019). However, much of this research does not translate to research on management and organizations because of the differential emphasis the disciplines place on theory building and theory testing. These examples reflect the disconnect between historical and management research and how there is more work to be done to create spaces for conversations that bring together historical research and management studies.

Our focus in compiling this *Handbook* has been on new epistemological approaches that challenge what currently counts as knowledge in both management and historical research. At the intersection of management and history, what we can collect as data and how it is analysed should be different from what is accepted by management scholars or historians. If fact, we could have pushed harder and gone even further in this direction – we do not have chapters on quantitative or mixed methods, or on phenomenology or (auto-)ethnography. The absence of an explicitly critical chapter addressing the issue of power in history and memory may also appear as a similar oversight. That said, our *Handbook* chapters highlight the wide range of critical approaches already available: critical hermeneutics, critical realism, postcolonial and Foucauldian approaches. We still believe, however, that work on how power operates in organizational history and memory is necessary, and requires further exploration of how it affects methods, and importantly, who can write histories and what is remembered and/or forgotten.

To conclude, we return to our opening questions: why a *Handbook on Historical Methods in Management* and why now? We believe it is now time to revisit how management and organizational researchers approach and understand the past, history and memory. Moreover, it is time to push the boundaries about how we can study the past, what counts as data and whose voices we should hear. Our *Handbook* consciously seeks to enable more scholars to investigate the past from a wider set of ontological and epistemological positions and methodological approaches. Handbooks are rarely the endpoint of a scholarly journey – like other key contributions gone before this book, we hope this will become the basis for further developments in the field, with new scholars bringing new ideas and issues to the fore.

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PART I

PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORICAL METHODS: THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HISTORICAL METHODS FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

2. Historical organization studies

Charles Harvey and Mairi Maclean

INTRODUCTION

Historical organization studies (HOS) denote organizational research that draws on historical sources, methods and knowledge to promote historically informed theoretical narratives attentive to both theory and history (Maclean et al., 2016: 609). It is an outgrowth of a distinctive academic movement that over recent decades has called for more serious study of the role of history in shaping the past, present and future of organizations and institutions (Zald, 1993; Kieser, 1994). The ‘historic turn’ in organization studies is in effect an epistemological paradigm shift promoted by scholars who argue that business and management research has been constrained by its preoccupation with contemporary cross-sectional studies covering limited periods of time, paying little or no attention to history or context (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Mills et al., 2016). The error in preferencing synchronic over diachronic research methods, it is argued, lies in ignoring the sheer weight of the past as a determinant of present strategies, structures, cultures and practices (Kieser, 1994; Wadhvani and Bucheli, 2014). As Hobsbawm (1998: 31) observes, ‘we swim in the past as fish do in water and cannot escape from it’. Only by rebalancing away from the synchronic and toward the diachronic, embracing transdisciplinary convergence, might full account be taken of temporal forces and contexts when theorizing about stability, reproduction and change within organizations and institutions (Leblebici, 2014; Wadhvani et al., 2018). This necessitates engagement with historical sources, including the documents found in organizational archives (Decker, 2013; Lipartito, 2014), which, in the words of Rowlinson et al. (2014: 251), are of value not only as sources of data, but also because they ‘represent evidence that remains largely unexplained by organization theory’.

Building on these ideas, Maclean et al. (2021c: 4) set out a vision for HOS as ‘a distinctive epistemological and methodological approach that develops a historical research strategy within the broad field of organization studies’. Central to this endeavour is the principle of *dual integrity*, which holds that HOS should exhibit both *historical veracity* and *conceptual rigour*, the former a *sine qua non* for historians and the latter prized by organization theorists. On the one hand, historical veracity refers to the test routinely applied by historians that their reconstructions and interpretations of past events should be congruent with all known evidence, not just a selection of that evidence (Collingwood, 2001: 7–38). It is an article of faith that inconvenient evidence cannot be ignored. Veracious historical research is predicated on ‘an exhaustive ... review of everything that may be germane to a given investigation’ since observation of ‘this principle provides a manifest and efficient safeguard against the dangers of personal selection of evidence’ (Elton, 2002: 60). On the other hand, conceptual rigour demands mastery of the relevant theoretical terrain in order to, *inter alia*, frame questions, develop lines of enquiry, form and test hypotheses, identify connections between events and systemic variables, and ultimately form coherent explanations of organizational and institutional phenomena. As Sutton and Staw (1995: 378) observe, strong theory, besides identifying the nature and direction of causal relationships ‘is laced with a set of convincing and logically

interconnected arguments’ with implications that often ‘run counter to our common sense’. We hold that historically informed theoretical narratives, the authenticity of which stems from both historical veracity and conceptual rigour, make a strong and singular claim to scholarly legitimacy within the broad field of business, management and organizational research.

In this chapter, we outline and illustrate the main methodological principles underpinning HOS and its implications for the study of organizations and organizing. Our purpose is to offer interested scholars practical insights based on our own experience of researching and writing in the genre. In the next section we identify and discuss five defining principles of HOS. We then consider how each of these informed and shaped three recent and ongoing projects. In the final section, we consider the lessons learned from conducting these and other projects, and the prospects and possibilities for HOS.

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Organization studies is not the first sub-field within the social sciences to undergo a trans-disciplinary convergence with history. Economic history and historical sociology are notable precursors (Leblebici, 2014). Only since the late 1980s, driven by dissatisfaction with the limitations of neo-positivism, have fresh avenues gradually begun to open for building a fruitful relationship between history and organization studies (Üsdiken and Kipping, 2014). In recent years, however, what was formerly a trickle of historically rooted organizational scholarship has become a groundswell boosted by special issues of leading journals across nearly the entire field of business and management. What is particularly impressive, as a recent collection of essays on HOS confirms (Maclean et al. 2021a), is the range and diversity of the historical scholarship on display, spanning many eras, cultures and topics, and the novel theoretical ideas stimulated by the authors’ research. The development of a theory of historical reflexivity by Durepos and Vince (2021), and Bastien et al.’s (2021: 101) study of how indigenous organizations connect with their past (Bastien and Coraiola, 2023), are telling examples of how engaging with history can help challenge ‘taken-for-granted universal theories’ of organizations and organizing.

We propose that by historicizing organizational research, the contexts and forces bearing upon organizations may be more fully recognized and analyses of organizational and institutional dynamics improved (Wadhvani et al., 2018). Delivering on this promise, however, is made problematic by the challenge of dual integrity because, as Maclean et al. (2016: 609) point out, ‘the authenticity of theory development expected by organization studies and the authenticity of historical veracity required by historical research place exceptional conceptual and empirical demands on researchers’. In other words, it is not a simple matter to write theorized narratives attentive to the demands of both history and organization theory. Hence the need to articulate more fully the methodological principles underpinning HOS. In doing so, we are informed primarily by personal experience of jointly authoring 15 articles in the mode of HOS and responding to the challenges set by journal reviewers and editors. In the remainder of this section, we consider in turn each of the five methodological principles of HOS.

First Principle (Engage with a Contemporary Issue of Substance and Import)

According to Geoffrey Elton (2002: 59), ‘the first principle of historical understanding’ is that ‘the past must be studied in its own right, for its own sake, and on its own terms’. This is a view still shared by many professional historians who see their primary purpose as creating narratives of the past based on evidential traces found in documents and other artefacts, and driven by two fundamental questions: ‘what evidence is there, and exactly what does it mean?’ (Elton, 2002: 59). From this perspective, historians are under no obligation to infer lessons for the present based on their research into the past. Indeed, it would be unwise to do so because all past events existed *sui generis* within a complex web of relationships, imperfectly known and irreproducible. Thus, the value of history lies not in directly imparting practical lessons, but in ‘its true purpose ... its contribution to the intellectual improvement of mankind’ (Elton, 2002: 107–108).

We do not lightly dismiss the traditional empiricist view of history championed by Elton (2002), but, as proponents of HOS, we contest the claim that history should always be studied ‘for its own sake’. Rather, following Friedman and Jones (2011), we suggest that historical research is vitally necessary to discovering and understanding many of the root causes of the big challenges facing the world today. This is because many of these challenges – increasing inequalities of income and wealth, climate change and environmental degradation, for example – are not the outcomes of passive evolutionary processes, but of socially constructed and episodic human interventions and actions impacting differentially and cumulatively on individuals, organizations, institutions, economic, social and political systems, and the natural world. Discovering, documenting and explaining how these challenges have arisen is a necessary first step in the quest for solutions. Therefore, the first methodological principle of HOS we propose is to *engage with a contemporary issue of substance and import*.

Second Principle (Embed Studies in Relevant Literature)

Rowlinson et al. (2014) highlight significant epistemological differences between history and organization theory relating to explanation, evidence and temporality. Underlying and reinforcing these are equally profound differences in working methods. Differences in the use and referencing of prior literature are exemplary. As in any academic discipline, historians read extensively on and around their topic, and critically appraise the literature to identify what is already securely known, what is not known, or what is said to be known, but for whatever reason cannot be trusted (Tosh, 2010: 175–210). Knowledge is advanced both by filling in lacunae and by taking issue with other historians whose representations of past events are perceived to be flawed, either for want of evidence or sound logic in the interpretation of evidence (Carr, 1990: 7–30). Disputes over evidence and interpretation are commonplace and integral to the (re)emergence of consensus within the field (Evans, 2000: 224–253). However, the context for such disputes and resolutions is rarely established by means of a systematically presented literature review. The preferred method is seamlessly to interlace prior findings, new research findings, and argumentation within the structure of historical narratives (Braudel, 1980; White, 1987: 1–57).

In marked contrast, organization studies, HOS included, proceeds according to established social scientific procedures. No empirical article is likely to be accepted for publication in a leading business and management journal without the research being underpinned by a for-

mally conducted, systematically ordered and coherently presented literature review. A sound literature review does much more than summarizing what has been written on a topic to date (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021: 23–66). Rather, it serves as an orienting device that both establishes a credible *raison d'être* for the present study and introduces the terminology and constructs that will be drawn on subsequently in advancing novel arguments and theoretical ideas. It is essential to show how the present study builds on prior research while demonstrating the potential to go further and add in a meaningful way to the established literature. This might be achieved variously by drawing on relevant authorities from diverse quarters, reviewing how knowledge of a topic has evolved, or by exposing theoretical or empirical differences between prior studies (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2007: 31–37). Whichever path is chosen, the connections between the literature review and all that follows must be established and maintained. Hence the second methodological principle of HOS proposed here is that researchers should *embed studies in relevant literature*.

Third Principle (Analyse Rich Verifiable Historical Datasets)

A second important epistemological difference between traditional history and organization theory relates to scholarly apparatus. By convention, social scientists discuss their research design, sources, processes and analytical methods prior to presenting their findings. No such requirement is felt by traditional historians who, as with literature, subsume methodological considerations within the flow of the historical narratives they construct (Decker, 2013; Yates, 2014; Maclean et al., 2016). In this, the focal issue is the status, with respect to extent and strength, of evidence found in documents and other historical sources (Evans, 2000: 103–128). Matters relating to the provenance and reliability of sources, known as source criticism, are to the fore (Bloch, [1953] 1992: 66–113; Elton, 2002: 66–76). However, while a digest of sources may be provided, the data extracted from individual sources is rarely collated and presented as a structured dataset. Rather, individual sources are drawn on discretely to help describe and explain whatever historical phenomenon is under consideration (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Organization theorists, in contrast, favour constructed datasets amenable to quantitative or qualitative data analysis over unmediated collections of primary sources. In HOS, as in economic history and historical sociology, the need is to conform to established social scientific standards with respect to the construction, analysis and documentation of historical datasets (Ventresca and Mohr, 2002; Yates, 2014). The implications are fourfold. First, it is necessary, as in all forms of historical research, to determine the provenance of sources and the reliability of the data extracted from them (Kipping et al., 2014; Lipartito, 2014). Second, data should be extracted from sources (rarely one and most often many) on a consistent and principled basis to ensure that constructed historical datasets are coherent and as representative as possible of the population of origin, with any systematic biases acknowledged (Harvey and Press, 1996; Ventresca and Mohr, 2002). Third, full justice should be done to the historical record. Documents and other sources, as precious survivals from the past, often contain an abundance of rich data. Detailed source analysis is often needed prior to the construction of a mediated dataset to avoid loss of valuable data, especially relating to outliers and exceptions (Ventresca and Mohr, 2002; Lipartito, 2014). Fourth, all sources and procedures used in the construction of a dataset should be documented, and data ‘triangulated’ whenever possible (Kipping et al., 2014; Yates, 2014). The ideal is to make datasets available to other researchers for verification and future use (Maclean et al., 2020b, 2022b, 2022c). It follows that the third methodological

principle of HOS is that studies should be squarely *founded on the analysis of rich verifiable historical datasets*.

Fourth Principle (Express Theoretical Ambition)

The status of theory in history is contested (Hall, 1992). Traditional empiricist historians view the use of pre-formed theoretical ideas in historical interpretation as anathema, riding roughshod over ‘the very essence of the discipline’ (Tosh, 2010: 219). Such fierce hostility to abstraction and generalization stems from the conviction that historical change can only properly be understood in context, from the ground upward, free from the implicit determinism of top-down theorization (Carr, 1990: 56–86). Objectors to this viewpoint rightly point out that the past is about far more than uniqueness; it is also, and arguably predominantly, about regularities, commonalities and permanence (Braudel, 1980; Hobsbawm, 1998). Systemic change, therefore, including so-called revolutions, can only be measured and explained in relation to what remains the same. Historians, in explaining continuity and change, routinely identify, assess, and connect causal factors when interpreting any aspect of the past (Carr, 1990: 87–108). It follows that relevant social scientific theories, when evaluated in relation to well-constructed datasets, might both aid historical interpretation and suggest refinements to theory (Burke, 2005).

Situated at the conjunction of history and organization theory, HOS promises to animate theory through engagement with historical data (Wadhvani et al., 2018). Maclean et al. (2016: 611–615) propose that this may be done in four main ways: in testing and refining theory (evaluating mode); in generating new theoretical constructs (conceptualizing mode); in applying and developing theory to reveal the operation of transformative social processes (explaining mode); and in explaining the form and origins of significant contemporary phenomena (narrating mode). In each case, the form and function of the relationship between theory and history differs, creating an array of possibilities pertaining to the application and development of theoretical ideas in the form of constructs, propositions, hypotheses and statements of causal relationships (Bacharach, 1989; Suddaby, 2010). Gathering and reading historical sources created in real world settings can serve as a ‘theorizing trigger’, as the researcher ‘moves back and forth between the empirical evidence and the literature ... to build a theoretical story’ (Shepherd and Suddaby, 2017: 70). This involves creating explanations by inferring causal relations consistent with available data, through what Weick (1989) calls ‘disciplined imagination’ and historians call ‘historical imagination’ (White, 1973; Collingwood, 1994; Elton, 2002). *Expressing theoretical ambition* is thus the fourth methodological principle of HOS.

Fifth Principle (Intend a Meaningful Theoretical Contribution)

Elton argues (2002: 44) that ‘historical knowledge gives solidity to the understanding of the present and may suggest guiding lines for the future’, but that this should never be the primary purpose of historical research. History, he insists (2002: 42), ‘is legitimate in itself, and any use of it for another purpose is secondary.’ It is against the standard of ‘good in its own right’ that traditionalists assess the contribution to knowledge made by works of history. Landmark publications like Anderson’s history of the origin and spread of nationalism, in which he famously defines a nation as ‘an imagined political community’ (2016: 6), exceptionally have sparked conversations around the world about important historical phenomena. Most historical

research is far less impactful, but this matters little because sound historical research ‘contributes to the improvement of man ... by seeking the truth within the confines of its particular province’. Historians are thus granted license to research whatever topics motivate them, provided that they satisfy ‘the conditions of professional competence and integrity [that] fulfils the historian’s very important social duty’ (Elton, 2002: 44).

HOS, in bringing together two disciplines, is subject to more exacting standards with respect to expected contribution. Writing veracious histories alone is not enough. Beyond this, practitioners are expected to demonstrate a material contribution to theoretical knowledge within the field; every top-tier organizational, business or management journal requiring ‘a “theoretical contribution” before a manuscript will be considered for publication’ (Corley and Gioia, 2011: 12). This requirement is not as daunting as it might first seem. It is commonly understood that few researchers develop fully formed theories *ab initio*; the vast majority contributing to theory development incrementally through critique, modification, extension or refinement (Whetten, 1989). In engaging with extant literature, HOS researchers have the opportunity by demonstrating incompleteness, inadequacy or incommensurability to expose deficiencies in existing theory and authoritatively put forward their own theorized storylines (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2007: 36–60). Research based on rich historical datasets has the in-built advantage of supporting critiques and suggesting additions and reformulations to existing (often static or comparative static) organizational theories (Suddaby and Foster, 2017; Suddaby et al., 2020; Durepos et al., 2021). Accordingly, the fifth methodological principle of HOS proposed here is that researchers should *intend a meaningful theoretical contribution*.

ILLUSTRATIVE PROJECTS

The intellectual journey of the present authors leading to HOS began when collaborating on an extensive cross-national study of business elites in France and the United Kingdom (Maclean et al., 2006). As business historians working in business schools, we had responded positively to institutional pressure to contribute more directly to conversations within mainstream management research. The book and related articles stemming from the project were thus hybrids, historically contextualized but founded on two contemporary datasets, one quantitative (multi-table prosopographical database; Carnegie and McBride, 2023), the other qualitative (interviews with top executives). However, what was decisive in making the project a success was the deep dive we took prior to writing into the sociological theories of Pierre Bourdieu, as elucidated and applied in *Distinction* (1986), *The Logic of Practice* (1990), and *The State Nobility* (1996). Armed with Bourdieu’s theories of capital, field, habitus and the field of power, we were thus able to conduct far more incisive analyses than would otherwise have been possible, adding to the quality, originality and generalizability of our research. We have since extended our theoretical ‘repertoire’, but what we took from Bourdieu remains fundamental; the idea that the value of critical social theory lies in ‘making the hidden visible’, unmasking the social processes that maintain elite domination (Maclean and Harvey, 2019).

Following the elites project, the next step was to utilize Bourdieusian theory in our historical research and to draw conclusions relevant to the present, as well as the past. In a study of the career of Andrew Carnegie, we articulated the theory of entrepreneurial philanthropy as a transactional process of capital conversion and accumulation (Harvey et al., 2011), and, extending Bourdieu’s ideas in *Distinction* (1986), we put forward a process model of taste

Table 2.1 *Methodological principles of historical organization studies exemplified*

Project	Global hotel industry	Executive remuneration	Entrepreneurial philanthropy
Principle			
Engage with a contemporary issue of substance and import	Dominance of multi-brand, multi-segment global hotel groups	Escalating levels of top executive remuneration	Re-emergence of elite philanthropy as powerful force in society
Embed studies in relevant literature	Internationalization and growth of multinationals	Corporate governance	Elite philanthropy
Analyse rich verifiable historical datasets	Linked datasets based on original sources on the growth of Hilton International	Set of oral history interviews with members/advisors of Greenbury committee	Database of donors and sites of philanthropy and archivally based case studies
Express theoretical ambition	Institutional theory allied to Bourdieu's construct of the field of power	Agency theory, elites and institutional change	Elites, social movements and entrepreneurial philanthropy
Intend a significant theoretical contribution	Shows how an individual's institutional biography can play a pivotal role in institutional entrepreneurship	Exposes disclosure as an ineffectual institutional fix contrived by elites to preserve the institutional status quo	Demonstrates how social innovation arises at the conjunction of social activism and entrepreneurial philanthropy

formation, transmission and institutionalization, introducing the novel concepts of 'lesser emblems of distinction' and 'sentimentally evocative goods' (Harvey et al., 2011). These pioneering articles satisfied several of the methodological principles of HOS enumerated above, especially with respect to theoretical ambition and contribution. However, they remained resolutely old school business history in not offering a formal, conventional literature review nor an explicit account of our methodology and methods. It was only when our research on history and strategic change at Procter & Gamble came to fruition that we convincingly satisfied all five criteria (Maclean et al., 2014, 2018a, 2020a; Golant et al., 2015). While these exemplars of HOS are published in mainstream organizational research journals, signalling acceptance of methodological legitimacy within the field, we have made sure never to lose sight of our 'home base', the business history journals where much of our work is published and to which we have contributed variously over many years.

Our overall experience is one of growing interest in HOS among editors, publishers and business school colleagues. In the remainder of this section, we illustrate the five methodological principles of HOS through a discussion of three recent and ongoing projects. A summary is provided in Table 2.1 for ease of reference. Our purpose in doing so is to offer general guidelines for scholars interested in HOS as a methodological template for their own research.

First Project (Global Hotel Industry)

In our experience, HOS projects typically progress through three main stages, which in shorthand we refer to as scoping, executing, and delivering. In the scoping stage we answer three fundamental questions corresponding to principles one to three above: what problem, what literature, and what data? It is premature to think too hard about theorization and intended contribution. In the case of the global hotel industry, we were drawn to the topic by pre-existing research interests in internationalization and the growth of multinational enterprises. What struck us was the domination of the industry by a relatively small number of multinationals

with multiple brands, active in multiple market segments. We were interested to know how this situation had come about, and how it might be explained. No ready-made answer was found on reviewing the extensive literature on the internationalization of firms and the growth of multinational enterprises. What we observed, however, is that the literature is dominated by cross-sectional economic studies with relatively few significant historical contributions. Herein we perceived an opportunity to contribute. But how? Following the lead of Jones and Khanna (2006: 453), we reasoned that the best approach was to conduct longitudinal research applying ‘rigorous methods for analysing small-sample and qualitative data’. After a search for archival sources, we selected Hilton Hotels as the most promising case study, since its extensive archive could be readily accessed at the Hospitality Industry Archives of the University of Houston.

The executing stage of our research involved discovering, gathering and organizing sufficient historical data to shed light on how the global hotel industry came to be configured as it is today. We soon discovered that the Hilton Archive consists of thousands of files, each with numerous documents, assembled through a succession of deposits of personal and business papers. Like many archives, it is imperfectly catalogued with few finding aids (Decker, 2013). Our first choice, therefore, given the impossibility of even skim-reading all the material was to limit our documentary search to the period 1946–1969, from the incorporation of the Hilton Hotels Corporation to the retirement of its founder, Conrad Hilton, and to concentrate on the growth of its international business (Lipartito, 2014). Our second choice was to focus on creating digital copies of three main types of documents: annual reports and accounts and other policy documents; documents relating to the building, opening and operation of hotels in the chain; and transcripts of 62 major speeches delivered by Conrad Hilton to external audiences between 1950 and 1965. Given the systemic coherence of these documents, each type created to fulfil a regular public or private purpose, it was possible to extract or order data contained within them, enabling the construction of datasets amenable to systematic analysis.

Delivering is the most intellectually demanding stage of any HOS project and may extend over many years. At this stage, methodological principles four and five come to the fore. However, it is only by reading and analysing the project data, locating them in their cultural, social and temporal context, engaging in hermeneutic interpretation (Wadhwani, 2023), that you can determine the realms of possibility with respect to theorization and contribution (Kipping et al., 2014). In the global hotel industry case, we have come to view Hilton Hotels as a pioneer striving to insinuate a new business model – domestically owned hotels managed by multinational companies – in countries with disparate business cultures, political regimes and legal systems. In our writing to date (Maclean et al., 2018b, 2021b), we have drawn on institutional theory allied to Bourdieusian theory to explain the international diffusion of the currently predominant business model. In particular, we have shown how Hilton’s project was discursively and practically allied to the reconstitution of the post-war international order under US leadership. Our main theoretical contribution is to show how an individual’s institutional biography can play a pivotal role in their development as an institutional entrepreneur and the institutionalization of a new organizational template (Maclean et al., 2022a). What this project has exemplified for us as authors is how each avenue taken may lead to others, progressing and deepening preceding paths in the process.

Second Project (Executive Remuneration)

The constitution and functioning of business elites is core to our overall academic project, and perhaps the most controversial topic within this domain is the escalation in top executive pay over recent decades, contributing significantly to pronounced increases in inequalities of income and wealth in many countries around the world (Piketty, 2014). Rising levels of executive pay have not been matched and cannot be justified by improvements in corporate productivity and financial performance (Li and Young, 2016). How can this situation be explained? How has it been allowed to happen by shareholders and governments who know that there is no economic or moral justification for what has occurred? These are the questions animating our research on corporate governance and executive remuneration in the UK (Price et al., 2018; Harvey et al., 2020).

The focus of our research is on the attempts made to address the problem through corporate governance reforms, and in particular those introduced following the recommendations of the Greenbury study group on directors' remuneration published in 1995. The Greenbury Report determined that executive pay should be linked to performance through long-term incentive plans, and that full details of executive remuneration should be disclosed to shareholders. Greenbury assumed that if shareholders had knowledge of pay arrangements, they could exercise control, prevent abuse, and curb the escalation in executive rewards. To discover how and why Greenbury came up with this formulation, which econometric studies have proved counter-productive (Li and Young, 2016), we decided, since no documentary sources existed other than the study group report, to collect oral history testimonies from surviving members of the Greenbury study group and their advisors. Ten interviews were conducted, including one of more than two hours with its chairman, Sir Richard Greenbury.

Decker et al. (2021: 1137–1140) describe oral history research of this kind as 'retrospective organizational history', the Greenbury study group being in effect a temporary organization established to perform a one-off service: to restore faith in a system of corporate governance perceived to be failing. By comparing accounts, and notwithstanding differences in recollection and emphases, we were able to reconstruct how the study group was set up, the evidence it considered, the discussions that took place, the variety of opinions expressed, and how the final recommendations emerged and were written up. We examined the data through the lens of elite theory, recognizing that study group members were representative members of the ruling elite, closely connected to the political establishment and operating within the national field of power. Thus, while the group may have failed to halt the escalation in executive pay, it succeeded in its primary purpose of restoring the moral authority of the UK system of corporate governance (Harvey et al., 2020). In this case, valuable insights into how elites maintain systemic order would have been lost without the evidence provided in oral histories, supporting the case for more extensive deployment of oral history in organizational research (Keulen and Kroeze, 2012; Maclean et al., 2017; Decker et al., 2021).

Third Project (Entrepreneurial Philanthropy)

Specification of the theory of entrepreneurial philanthropy, as already mentioned, was the first contribution to organization theory we made through the medium of HOS (Harvey et al., 2011). It sparked a passion to understand more about how elite philanthropy functions within complex social systems to consolidate and perpetuate elite power, legitimating inequalities in

social, cultural and symbolic capital as well as in the economic sphere (Harvey et al., 2021; Maclean et al., 2021d). In conceiving a HOS project that might progress this agenda, we were struck on reviewing the literature by the marginalization of philanthropy within the mainstream of social scientific research. There is popular interest in philanthropic giving by the wealthy, but this is not matched by comparable academic endeavours, neither contemporary nor historical. As the editors of a recent journal special issue observe, philanthropy research has only recently begun to shake off its designation as a ‘supplementary subset of non-profit or third-sector scholarship’ outside the mainstream of organizational and management research (Harrow et al., 2021: 304).

Recognizing that so little is known about the changing nature, scale, impact and *modus operandi* of philanthropy led us to undertake HOS research on North East England, which to date has led to publications on entrepreneurial philanthropy (Harvey et al., 2019) and the diffusion of philanthropic models (Harvey et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). The first article is based on *longue durée* research into philanthropy and social innovation, revealing the deeply historical nature of the language and practices of philanthropy (Braudel, 1980). In this case, as in others, immersion in rich historical data, observing regularities and continuities as well as changes and discontinuities, triggered theorization and led us to make a series of propositions about philanthropy and institutional change (Harvey et al., 2019). It also brought us to conceive an original ‘systemic model of elite philanthropy’ whose value lies in understanding relations between philanthropic capital stocks and financial flows (Maclean et al., 2021d: 335).

However, we believe that we have so far only just scratched the surface of what is knowable about the origins, nature and consequences of elite philanthropy. In taking forward our North East project, we have created and are populating a relational database of donors, gifts and sites of philanthropy, in which each datum is traceable to a source document and repository. The goal is to quantify philanthropy diachronically and synchronically by cause, site, donor and donor type between 1830 and 1939, when the region was in its industrial heyday, and philanthropy funded many thousands of social organizations. To complement the database findings, and add depth to the enquiry, we intend to conduct case study research on a sample of 60 representative donors and 60 representative sites of philanthropy spread across eight philanthropic domains. This is a high-risk venture, comparable in scale, scope and method to our earlier project on business elites and corporate governance (Maclean et al., 2006). It is a daunting prospect, but one that holds much promise, empirical and theoretical.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Establishing HOS as a distinctive approach to management and organizational research has been the work of many minds over many years, including those of Kieser (1994), Clark and Rowlinson (2004), Üsdiken and Kieser (2004), Suddaby et al. (2010), Rowlinson et al. (2014), Üsdiken and Kipping (2014), Wadhwani and Bucheli (2014), Maclean et al. (2016), Vaara and Lamberg (2016), Suddaby and Foster (2017), Decker et al. (2021), and Maclean et al. (2021c). The collective achievement of these and other likeminded authors has proved decisive in three main ways. First, they have won the argument for history playing a more central role in organizational research, re-establishing the connection with the historical sociological approach to organizations and organizing taken by Max Weber (Clegg et al., 2021: 232–233). Secondly, they have identified obstacles to progress and shown how these might be overcome, thereby

delineating the conditions for future success (Rowlinson et al., 2014; Maclean et al., 2016). Thirdly, they have shown how theory and history working together can generate both new theoretical constructs and compelling reconstructions of past events, structures and phenomena (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Ravasi et al., 2019).

However, not all contributors to the emergence of HOS will necessarily agree with all of the methodological guidance offered in this chapter, which might seem overly prescriptive, potentially inhibiting creativity because the template for empirical studies suggested by our five methodological principles reflects an overtly mainstream social scientific bias. In other words, the principles, if adopted *in toto*, might serve to constrain rather than liberate the historical imagination. We do not share this critique. In our experience, as we hope to have shown by means of our three illustrations, the historical imagination is often liberated by the necessity to address present day issues, critical reading of extant literature, analysis of carefully constructed datasets, engagement with theory, and the demand made by editors and reviewers to demonstrate a meaningful theoretical contribution. We hold that the academic legitimacy of HOS stands or falls by respecting the methodological norms prevailing in the broad field of business, management and organization studies. It is entirely reasonable that we should press for ‘acceptance of more heterogeneous forms of history, and reflexive accounts of the social construction of historicized narratives’ (Durepos et al., 2021: 449), but it would be misguided to propose that HOS research should be judged by radically different methodological precepts than those valued by our peers in the wider organization studies community. To do so might incur charges of special pleading and would not serve the up-and-coming scholars who choose to build their academic publishing careers in this area.

In our own research, we have sought consistently to apply the five principles of HOS as we progress through the three stages of scoping, executing and delivering described above. *Scoping* requires openness to possibility. Our interest in a topic is often sparked by contemporary debates in which elites are implicated, such as those surrounding the escalation in executive pay or philanthropic giving by the mega-wealthy (principle 1). We begin by reading widely around the topic from popular books and so-called grey literature (media reports, publications by think tanks, governments, non-governmental organizations and social media) to more disciplined academic publications (principle 2). Our approach to the literature – popular and academic – is to subject it to critical review to establish what is known and what is not known about the subject, leading to a provisional list of research questions. *Execution* requires the development of viable research design. This involves making critical choices with respect to time period, scope and data sources. Our main concern is to access the primary sources needed to create a rich and well-organized dataset amenable to systematic analysis (principle 3). *Delivery* demands intensive engagement with theory (principle 4) and the pursuit of empirical and theoretical novelty (principle 5). Our method is abductive, moving back and forth between data and theory, searching for systemic continuities, discontinuities and situational logics while refining constructs in pursuit of strong explanations of organizational and institutional change.

HOS, as a research methodology that explicitly embraces theory and the theorization, proceeds from the standpoint that method and theory development are closely aligned, frequently intertwined processes, as articulated by Andrew Abbott in his discussion of time, events and causality in *Time Matters* (2001). In this (pp.288–290), Abbott argues in favour of ‘a narrative program of research’ wherein the narrative is ‘inherent in the social process itself’ and intertwined with other narratives in ‘interactional fields ... governed by complex contextuality in

time and space'. Defining and understanding sequences of events, plots and periodization in effect become 'the central task of conceptualization'. There are two main implications. First, theorizing is inherent within HOS because complex, interrelated events and plotlines cannot be identified and interpreted by means of empirical enquiry alone. Second, it is in reflexively breaking from the orthodoxies of linear hypothesis testing social science research methods that HOS opens up the intellectual space needed to ask new questions and identify previously overlooked issues (Decker et al., 2021). In other words, HOS, as one of many competing organizational research methodologies, gains strength from simultaneously embracing historical veracity and theoretical rigor.

Adherence to the methodological principles outlined in this chapter has opened up a wealth of fresh possibilities for historically oriented organizational researchers, the realization of the 'historical turn' being marked by the recent spate of special issues of top tier management and organization journals, including the *Academy of Management Review* (41(4), 2016), *Organization Studies* (39(12), 2018), and the *Strategic Management Journal* (41(3), 2020). The first of these special issues is devoted to conceptual papers, the other two, editorial essays apart, are given over predominantly to empirical papers, six in *Organization Studies* (Basque and Langley, 2018; Blagoev et al., 2018; Cailluet et al., 2018; Lubinski, 2018; Maclean et al., 2018a; Oertel and Thommes, 2018), and seven in the *Strategic Management Journal* (Agarwal et al., 2020; Arikan et al., 2020; Lamberg and Peltoniemi, 2020; Lubinski and Wadhvani, 2020; Pillai et al., 2020; Sasaki et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2020). Three things stand out from reviewing the content and composition of this 'collection' of 13 exemplary articles. First, each of the articles fully conforms to five methodological principles of HOS, confirming the commonality of expectations of authors, reviewers and editors. Secondly, that HOS is a 'broad church' with respect to sources, methods and empirical domain. Of the 13 studies, nine are qualitative, three use mixed methods, and one is quantitative; ten make extensive use of archival sources, four analyse quantitative datasets, three use material from organizational websites, and one incorporates field observations; six are rooted in Europe, four in Asia-Pacific, and three in North America; just one study covers a period of less than 20 years, four of up to 50 years and eight of more than 50 years. Thirdly, that HOS research exhibits a high degree of flair and originality with respect to theory, history offering fresh perspectives to ongoing conversations within field. Contributions are made to the theorization of rhetorical history, intertextuality and the management of change (four papers), organizational identity (two papers), nationalism and nonmarket strategy (two papers), industry evolution (two papers), history as a strategic resource, organizational memory, and strategic pivots and economic experimentation as antecedents of firm strategy.

We conclude that HOS, as an academic venture motivated by the desire to bring history back into the mainstream of management and organizational research, has already delivered much and promises to deliver far more. Embracing the five methodological principles championed here will contribute significantly to the realization of dual integrity, the defining quality of HOS.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

For readers new to historical organization studies and wishing to learn more about this burgeoning field of research, we strongly recommend beginning by reading four landmark publications, two excellent edited collections and two foundational theoretical articles.

- (1) Bucheli M and Wadhvani RD (eds) (2014) *Organizations in time: History, theory, methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The editors and contributors to this volume lay the groundwork for historical organization studies by outlining the limitations of cross-sectional organizational and institutional research, and by making the case for more historically grounded studies. The requirements for transdisciplinary convergence are outlined, and the value and use of historical sources in organizational research are demonstrated.

- (2) Rowlinson M, Hassard J and Decker S (2014). Strategies for organizational history: A dialogue between historical theory and organization theory. *Academy of Management Review* 39(3): 250–274.

Like item (1), this article is foundational to the emergence of historical organization studies as a distinctive mode of organizational and institutional enquiry. It calls for ‘greater reflexivity regarding the epistemological problem of representing the past’ and highlights three epistemological dualisms that might if left unrecognized impede conversations between historians and organization theorists. Recognition of the three dualisms has paved the way for improved strategies for more fruitful engagement between history and organization theory.

- (3) Maclean M, Harvey C and Clegg SR (2016) Conceptualizing historical organization studies. *Academy of Management Review* 41 (4): 609–632.

Building on items (1) and (2), the authors define and elaborate the idea of historical organization studies as ‘organizational research that draws extensively on historical data, methods, and knowledge to promote historically informed theoretical narratives attentive to both disciplines’. They demonstrate four main ways in which this might be accomplished in practice by advancing a typology of four conceptions of history in organizational research. Five enabling principles are identified – dual integrity, pluralistic understanding, representational truth, context sensitivity, and theoretical fluency. Dual integrity is foremost among these.

- (4) Maclean M, Clegg SR, Suddaby R and Harvey C (2021) *Historical organization studies: Theory and applications*. London: Routledge.

Since the publication of items (1), (2) and (3), historical organization studies has emerged as a distinctive methodological paradigm within the broad field of business, management and organizational studies. The editors review what has been achieved and restate and reflect on foundational principles. The substantive chapters together demonstrate how by historicizing organizational research, the contexts and forces bearing upon organizations can be more fully recognized and analyses improved. Taken individually,

the chapters demonstrate variety in the selection of sources, theories and methods, providing models to inspire and potentially adapt.

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3. Rhetorical history: giving meaning to the past in past and present

Christina Lubinski

INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion through speech or text. However, it should not be reduced to a mere form of representation because it often includes processes of dividing, ordering, classifying, evaluating, and recombining, thus making rhetoric, in a larger sense, a fundamental “craft of thought” (Carruthers, 1998) and an “unfolding rationality” (Quattrone, 2015). Rhetorical history has been discussed as both a theory and a method. It explores the different ways in which historical representations (narratives, analogies, images, to name but a few) can be constructed and employed to persuade audiences and create knowledge. This chapter reviews the scholarship on rhetorical history, defined as the “strategic use of the past as a persuasive strategy for managing key stakeholders” (Suddaby et al., 2010: 157) and stresses methodological debates related to doing rhetorical history research.

Rhetorical history is a vibrant stream of research that asks how stakeholders interpret the past and considers the resulting historical narratives a potential strategic resource (Foster et al., 2017; Suddaby et al., 2010, 2023; Wadhwani et al., 2018). After a brief introduction of the concept, this chapter first explores different *mechanisms* for how the past can be infused with meaning based on the burgeoning literature. This scholarship stands out for being an arena of interdisciplinary engagement, to which both historians and organisation scholars contribute regularly. Yet, there is also concern that both sides revert to strawmen when evaluating contributions across the disciplinary divide and that mutual awareness and collaboration could be further improved (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Decker et al., 2021; Üsdiken and Kieser, 2004).

One of the areas in which methodological debate arose is the varying *contexts* that shape the impact and development of rhetorical histories. In reviewing how scholars have approached these contexts so far, I stress the differences between studying rhetorical history in the present and exploring its evolving constructions historically, that is, in the past or over time. Finally, I argue that our understanding of both mechanisms and contexts will benefit from a stronger theoretical and methodological integration of history and organisation studies. A deeper engagement with the relationship between organisational memory or identity on the one hand, and historical theory on the other (Decker et al., 2021), promises, in particular, richer exchange about the benefits and drawbacks of different research methods.

As Decker et al. (2021) have shown, research on rhetorical history implicitly takes a stance on the scholars’ approach to history and memory. The relationship between history and memory has been a subject of much debate in the historical profession. “Only careless historians confuse memory and history”, argues White (1998: 4). “The two stalk each other across the field of the past, claiming the same terrain.” Contributions to rhetorical history may focus on our present and explore how the past is memorised and mobilised in it; or explore rhetoric in the past and the process of continuously negotiating and renegotiating it as socially shaped

and validated collective understandings. Neither history nor memory is an inherently superior way of conceptualising the past. Yet, for rhetorical history scholars, the difference between them deserves explicit methodological attention as well as an active engagement with theory and historiography on this issue.

RHETORICAL HISTORY MECHANISMS

Rhetorical history is rooted in the understanding that the past can never be fully reconstructed and that, therefore, by necessity, history takes an interpretive stance towards facts and endows them with meaning (Carr, 1961). Rhetorical history does not strive for universal laws or objectivity but rather takes a social-constructivist approach, focusing on the perspective of the narrators (and possibly audiences that validate) and their interpretation of the past. One of the central methodological problems of rhetorical history is the relationship between historical understanding and the historicity of human existence itself. Or, as Wilhelm Dilthey (1965: 278) explicated:

I am a historical being down to the depths of myself that cannot be explored any more. So now the first significant moment for the solution of the problem of knowledge of history occurs: the first condition for the possibility of the science of history lies in the fact that I myself am a historical being, that the one who studies history is the same who makes history.¹

As human beings, we create history through our interpretations of the past and this process is not confined to professional historians but a meaningful engagement with the past for all actors. In the context of organisations and organising, these facts translate into the ambition to study different groups of stakeholders and their approaches to making sense of the past in their present.

This process of interpreting the past is furthermore shaped by genres and conventions of narrating. In the 1970s and 1980s, the so-called “linguistic turn” (White, 1973) in the historical profession sharpened scholars’ view of history as a literary form. Such history “would be flexible and open to the sort of literary approach which seeks to deconstruct and historicise the very categories of social history itself” (Vernon, 1994: 95). The way narrators, including historians, recount past events was unveiled as following narrative conventions and as fashioning the narrators and their readers in their present. Inspired by White (1973), Vernon (1994) and others, history was analysed as a linguistic artifact that is both rhetorical and literary. This set the stage for the idea of “rhetorical history” (Suddaby et al., 2010) and “uses of the past” (Wadhvani et al., 2018) in the context of organisations and organising.

Prior scholarship in rhetorical history has identified many different rhetorical devices, or *mechanisms*. These give meaning to the past in the narrator’s unfolding present and rhetorical history scholars may look for them in their research design. One commonly used mechanism for making the past meaningful to the present is by using analogy, a comparison between one set of facts and another. As narrators highlight similarities between the patterns of the past and those of the present, they suggest an interpretation or re-interpretation of the present, which provides organisations with legitimacy (Cornelissen et al., 2011). Based on the example

¹ Written in the years 1907 to 1910. Author’s translation from German.

of Swiss watchmaking and the revival of mechanical watches, Raffaelli (2019) shows how analogies and metaphors serve as conceptual bridges in a process of technology re-emergence, which requires a thoughtful and selective reinterpretation of the past. In their historical analysis, Maclean et al. (2014, 2018) show how constructed and sometimes false analogies served the multinational company Proctor & Gamble as a justification for strategic change.

Rhetorical history scholars have also shown the importance of strategic ambiguity for creating a historical narrative that stakeholders can buy into but also for making historical narratives more resistant to contestation. Cappelen and Strandgaard Pedersen (2021: 16) highlight the importance of such “strategic historical ambiguity,” defined as “the intentional selection of past events and use of historical ambiguity to craft legitimate historical narratives.” Ambiguous narratives, they argue, award organisational actors more freedom to innovate and modernise, thus making them more resistant to external challenges.

Ambiguous historical narratives can also more easily be appropriated by various and diverse audiences (Cailluet et al., 2018: 1828; Ybema, 2014). As these audiences relate to the sensemaking offer in different ways, the narrative becomes more resilient to changing environments. One specific and frequently used form of leveraging strategic ambiguity is the process of “outpasting” (Lubinski, 2018), that is, the rhetorical reference to unspecific or little-known origins. As Lowenthal (1985, 2015: 111) specifies, antiquity comprises four notions that can generate value for audiences: precedence (being first), remoteness (being far back in time), primordiality (being the source), and primitiveness (being unspoiled by modern “progress”). Rhetorical history scholars have pointed to mythologised references to a legendary founder (Basque and Langley, 2018; Cailluet et al., 2018) or the purposeful reference to a particularly distant past (Cappelen and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2021; Lubinski, 2018), which grant historical narratives authenticity through either charisma or antiquity.

Rhetorical histories are not only shaped by processes of invoking but also, importantly, by processes of forgetting. This fact raises the methodological question how to study things that no longer are. So far, rhetorical history scholars have done so by looking at groups of sources that capture some development over time or in which selected individuals address processes of forgetting within groups. They rely on company magazines (Anteby and Molnár, 2012), annual reports (Raffaelli, 2019), industry magazines (Crawford et al., 2022), publicly available descriptions of corporate history (Booth et al., 2007), interviews (Raffaelli, 2019) and oral history collections (Crawford et al., 2022).

Forgetting can serve strategic purposes; for example, when groups of people omit elements of the past that are deemed to be unfitting to an individual or collective identity. Forgetting also helps distancing organisations from elements of their past that appear less valuable to their present, instead reclaiming more desirable histories (Booth et al., 2007; Mena et al., 2016; Raffaelli, 2019), including reinterpreting aspects of materiality (Macdonald, 2006). But not all painful and inconvenient memories are simply casted aside. Crawford et al. (2022) show that dark pasts can also serve as a resource, helping audiences to connect in a more meaningful way with the past and generating emotional bonds and group cohesion.

Finally, scholarship has significantly advanced our understanding of symbols and material objects in the process of authenticating and legitimating historical narratives, while simultaneously keeping them open for re-interpretations. Material memory has been shown to be particularly relevant for organisational identity projects (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Ravasi et al., 2019; Schultz and Hernes, 2013; Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012). Artefacts initiate and perpet-

uate recollection; yet their ambiguity generates flexibility in the interpretation, thus creating a resilient and malleable resource.

Most of these investigations at the intersection of materiality and rhetorical history have focused on memory rather than history (Mengis et al., 2023). We know relatively less about how these narratives evolve over time or how actors use them in their own time, when it is not the present. These questions point to the contexts of rhetorical history that I will discuss in the next section.

The different mechanisms shape the form and content of rhetorical histories. Scholars interested in rhetorical history mechanisms often rely on interpretive approaches and analyse their sources or data with the goal to understand how narratives are made persuasive and meaningful. Importantly, however, narratives' authenticity and influence also depend on their context. Rhetorical history mechanisms, such as analogy, strategic ambiguity, outpasting, and forgetting, can be internal to organisations or link the historical narratives of organisations to their external environment and imagined communities. Thus, rhetorical histories do not emerge in a vacuum and scholars are increasingly exploring how specific contexts shape their development and impact.

RHETORICAL HISTORY CONTEXTS

Rhetorical history, like all rhetoric, happens in a context in which that rhetoric can be said to matter. A number of methodological questions and choices arise from the ambition to understand rhetorical history mechanisms in context; specifically as narratives adapted to specific audiences, as "stories told in the context of other stories" (Gartner, 2007: 614), and as narratives made authentic and meaningful in social practices (Hobsbawm, 1983).

In my own work on German companies in colonial India, I foreground the evolution of rhetorical histories in context and over time (Lubinski, 2018). I have shown how German businesspeople in the 1920s constructed a history that highlights joint plight and joint victimhood with Indians, in an attempt to become more desirable business partners to Indian stakeholders than their British rivals. The historical analysis of such narratives gives evidence of their original impact but also shows how the legitimacy of this narrative dwindled over subsequent decades, not least due to changing political contexts and, specifically, the racialised rhetoric of Nazi Germany's political leaders in the 1930s.

This research interest links rhetorical history to a dynamic view of social legitimacy. As many historical narratives aim at increasing the legitimacy of an organisation or a form of organising within society, they struggle with the *expectations* of their audiences of what is considered legitimate at any moment in time. Suchman (1995: 574) defines legitimacy as "a generalized 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." In competitive business situations, organisations connect their own history to legitimate historical narratives, such as stories about commons (i.e., cultural, social, or natural resources) (Illia and Zamparini, 2016) or national origins or communities (Foster et al., 2011; Hansen, 2018; Lubinski and Wadhwani, 2020; Mordhorst, 2014). The fact that organisations frequently engage with existing historical narratives and collectively held myths has proven to be relevant to organisational identity (Anteby and Molnár, 2012; Foster et al., 2011; Oertel and Thommes,

2018), legitimacy (Mordhorst, 2014), and strategic positioning (Lubinski and Wadhvani, 2020).

Yet, the alignment of organisational actions and strategies (which evolve) and the socially constructed system of norms and values in a political and economic environment (which also change) is a constant struggle for organisational actors. Indeed, historical narratives have been shown to become challenged and contested over time, for example when other actors appropriate the narrative toward their own critical ends (Cailluet et al., 2018; Mordhorst, 2014) or when contexts and expectations change in a significant way (Bucheli and Salvaj, 2013; Lubinski, 2018; Smith and Simeone, 2017).

Rhetorical histories are not only socially shaped but also socially validated narratives. There is thus space for analysing both the way that people make sense and give meaning to their past in the present, but also the way that social validations for specific historical narratives wax and wane. The persuasiveness of historical narratives changes with time and with different audiences (Wadhvani et al., 2018), which opens the field up for more and different research on the dialogical nature of rhetorical history.

In my own work, I explore these processes by using archival sources (Decker, 2013; Stoler, 2009), in particular narrative sources, to reconstruct how historical actors infused their past with meaning to pursue a goal in their unfolding present. My method is historical narrative because it allows me to see the connections between audiences, existing stories, and social practices. Moreover, a narrative presentation foregrounds evolution over time, which is my main research interest. Similarly, many of the seminal works on which the field of rhetorical history was based, most notably Hobsbawm's (1983) *The Inventing of Traditions* and Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities*, embraced historical narrative as their method of explanation to explore continuity and change. I conceptualise the memory of the historical actors as evolving and changing within a specific historical context. Specifically, three elements of context stand out for their relevance to evolving rhetorical history: the role of audiences, existing landscapes of narratives, and social practices (Lubinski, 2018). Yet, others may emerge as equally or more important depending on research design and objectives.

METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS WHEN STUDYING CONTEXT

While context is frequently stressed as important for understanding rhetorical history, the question how such context may be studied remains underexplored. Based on my previous empirical work, I focus here on the three aspects of context previously mentioned: the role of audiences, existing landscapes of narratives, and social practices.

Because history is dialogical, the role of audiences in the production or confirmation of rhetorical histories deserves the growing attention it has received in recent years. Scholars have highlighted that rhetorical histories can be used by organisations to speak to internal organisational audiences as well as to external stakeholders (Zundel et al., 2016). Yet, so far, the spotlight has clearly been on narrators and speakers, potentially undervaluing the importance of hearers and readers, not least because of the methodological challenges of capturing their experiences.

Projects that focus primarily on finished printed texts – in house magazines, on websites, or in PR and marketing publications – have a hard time capturing the reception of narratives or the dialogue between speaker/writer and audience. Seeking out complementary evidence on

the reception of historical claims can advance the field in this respect. Some historical archives provide evidence for audiences' reactions in the form of letters, descriptions of events during which historical narratives were presented, and opposing counter-narratives. More importantly, scholars have the option of triangulating different types of sources to actively look for support or dissent (Kipping et al., 2014). In this context, it can be particularly relevant to broaden the scope of data collection. Rather than focusing on one company archive, scholars may explore different perspectives on historical narrative by including archives from business collaborators and competitors, government sources, press coverage, and associations, such as chambers of commerce. Such triangulation uncovers dissenting voices thus painting a fuller picture of the reception of historical claims.

Archival sources also occasionally come with notes on documents, so called marginalia, which can be interpreted as a form of engagement with the text (Jackson, 2001: 2). For example, in my own work, speeches by actors making historical claims often survived in several versions and with margin notes that give evidence for the evolution (and sometimes the intention) of using the past and constructing rhetorical history. Historical scholars pay attention to such notes in both printed texts (Fajkovic and Björneborn, 2014; Jackson, 2001) and archival documents (McKinlay, 2013) because they provide insights into identity work, historical actors' evolving thoughts, and the (expected or actual) reception of specific narratives. Rhetorical history scholars may find them useful to trace the thought processes of the actors.

These historical methods can mitigate the challenge of capturing audiences to some extent. Yet many scholars also rightly worry about the survival bias of archival material and the focus on collecting written documents over other forms of evidence (Decker, 2013; Popp and Fellman, 2019; Schwarzkopf, 2013; Tennent and Gillett, 2023). Practices of archiving impact the creation and survival of collections, and pose the question which remnants and traces are and are not likely to be left behind (Lipartito, 2014).

A second way of exploring history perceptions in detail is paying closer attention to prior narratives and asking how rhetorical histories play on, confirm, contest, or ignore historical narratives of their time. Rhetorical history scholars have pointed to the importance of prior narratives and conventions that provide the background for new interpretations of the past. Entrepreneurs, for example, tell their stories "in the context of other stories" (Gartner, 2007: 614) and manage their stakeholders' view of future uncertainties by "embedding their visions in stories that evoke a familiar, shared past" (Suddaby et al., 2023). Both the purposeful repetition of existing narratives (Maclean et al., 2018) and the introduction of new narratives that explicitly contrast with prior narratives (Lubinski, 2018) advance our understanding of uses of the past in context. This context is central to the process of turning past processes and events into a socially accepted historical narrative. Prior research has shown that rhetorical histories appear more authentic if they connect to existing myths or meta-narratives (Foster et al., 2011); stories that are deeply embedded in the collective memory of a community (White, 1973).

Methodologically, this challenges rhetorical history scholars to think of rhetorical history not just as an act of storytelling but as a form of dialogue with prior or contemporaneous narratives. While it is certainly possible to isolate any one historical uttering, the more meaningful way to analyse rhetorical history is as a process of dialoguing, thus asking the question: which narratives were the historical actors familiar with? What did their narrative landscape look like when this story was told? In my own research on the way that German companies pushed a specific narrative to foster connections with Indian stakeholders, it would have been possible

to analyse these narratives in isolation. Yet, they were more meaningful to the historical actors because of the way they rhetorically and purposefully contrasted with existing narratives focused on the British “civilising mission”, which became increasingly illegitimate in the context of anti-colonialism (Lubinski, 2023; Mann, 2004). Close reading reveals how new narratives engage with and criticise the historical narratives that came before them.

Third and less studied so far are the ways that rhetorical histories can also become confirmed and strengthened in everyday social practices. Already in his famous exploration of “invented traditions”, Hobsbawm highlighted explicitly that changes in practices are often more meaningful than narratives or statements. To him, “the study of invented traditions cannot be separated from the wider study of the history of society” (Hobsbawm, 1983: 12).

Most rhetorical history focuses on written or, less frequently, spoken narratives, not least because information on social practices is harder to discover with established methods in management and organisation studies (Anteby and Molnár, 2012: 517). Yet, there are good reasons for moving the attention from finished documented texts to the rhetorical performance *in situ*, for example by reconstructing the process of actors narrating and perceiving history through archival sources (Lubinski, 2018). Rarely have rhetorical history scholars engaged in such an analysis so far, and many methodological questions this raises remain to be discussed. For example, it may be relevant to explore which type of sources are closest to the process of dialogue and thus best suited for understanding *in situ* rhetorical practices. Would digital sources open new opportunities given their immediacy? Can video archives, such as the 3,000-hour newsreel archive of Pathe (<https://www.britishpathe.com/>) offer more detailed insights into the relationship between narrators and audiences by showing them visually, and thus shift the interest from story to storytelling? As with print archives, it will be methodologically important that the construction of such archives, which are becoming increasingly more common, is documented to allow scholars to trace the logic of the archivists (Blake, 2005).

The focus on social and everyday practices that underpin uses of the past may also reframe how we approach questions of materiality. One particular interest in material objects representing historical narratives could be how they serve actors as an ordering scheme for knowledge or even as inspiration for new inventions (Carruthers, 2008 [1990]; De Massis et al., 2016). Moving beyond the idea of persuasion, one may approach historical sources with an eye towards understanding the long-term agency of material objects (Quattrone, 2015: 416).

Paying closer attention to the reception of historical narratives would broaden the research agenda of rhetorical history scholarship from persuasion (the “rhetoric” in rhetorical history) to the social experience of actors and how they give meaning to narratives also in their social practices and actions (the “history” in rhetorical history).

DISCUSSION

Rhetorical history approaches have often been described as using a “future-perfect” (Gioia et al., 2002) rhetoric, focusing on how storytellers connect past, present, and future to achieve their desired ends (Suddaby and Foster, 2017; Suddaby and Jaskiewicz, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2023). Methodologically, this is an ambitious agenda. When it is focused on the researcher’s own present, exploring the use of historical narratives in the here and now allows scholars to show how facts of the past are being interpreted and reinterpreted to pursue desirable goals in the present. It foregrounds the question which elements make historical narratives effective

and persuasive and asks for ways of interpreting the past towards a convincing rhetoric. What the long-term outcomes of such efforts may be, only time will tell. The unit of analysis is the historical narrative itself, including the ways it plays on conventions and socially acceptable forms of narrating, thus relating in many ways to the linguistic turn in history.

A second, equally relevant but methodologically different approach is studying rhetorical histories in the past. It provides insights into the evolution of narratives over time, including the continuities with or contrasts to previously legitimate narratives. The process of socially validating the historical narrative is its primary unit of analysis. It also allows a grasping together of intentions and outcomes, thus shifting the attention from telling a persuasive story to the impact such stories have on their narrators and audiences. Rhetorical history scholars pursuing this approach may find it useful to engage not just with the mechanisms of rhetorical history but also with their contexts, specifically with the dialogue between narrators and audiences, the relevance of the existing narrative landscape for confirming or contrasting with stories, and the social practices that underpin historical narratives.

Rhetorical history as a method certainly focuses on “rhetoric” as the art of persuasive speaking or writing. It has importantly channelled the attention to questions of narrative genre, narrative structure, and the opportunities and boundaries of storytelling. It incorporates “history” in the sense that it sees rhetorical history as the interpretation of selected past events with the goal of persuasion and knowledge composition. Rhetorical history can also be understood as a process to be studied historically in the past. By seeing the intentions of narrators together with the consequences of their speech acts, rhetorical history can further explore the importance of contexts for persuasion and the changing approaches to being persuasive over time, with potentially important consequences for rhetorical history in our own time, in which we often fail to see relevant contexts and their impact on storytelling. It opens the field to historical questions by connecting rhetoric (with its focus on persuasion) to historical practices (with a focus on doing and understanding). While potentially requiring an expansion of the set of methods, it would allow a link between rhetoric and social practices and could fruitfully connect the work of organisation scholars with that of historians of organisations and organising.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Decker S, Hassard J and Rowlinson M (2021) Rethinking History and Memory in Organisation Studies: The Case for Historiographical Reflexivity. *Human Relations* 74(8): 1123–1155.

Decker, Hassard and Rowlinson make a compelling case for a greater engagement with existing historiography as a way to advance approaches to rhetorical history and point in particular to the scholarly distinction between memory and history and the methodological choice of engaging with the past through either archival or retrospective methods.

- (2) Suddaby R, Israelsen T, Mitchell JR and Lim DSK (2023) Entrepreneurial Visions as Rhetorical History: A Diegetic Narrative Model of Stakeholder Enrollment. *Academy of Management Review*.

Driven by the understanding of rhetorical history as persuasion, Suddaby, Israelsen, Mitchell and Lim explore how entrepreneurs connect their vision of the future with a coherent and collectively held narrative of the past to gain legitimacy for their ventures.

- (3) Ravasi D, Rindova VP and Stigliani I (2019) The Stuff of Legend: History, Memory, and the Temporality of Organisational Identity Construction. *Academy of Management Journal* 62(5): 1523–1555.

Focusing on organisational identity research, Ravasi, Rindova and Stigliani explore how organisational members interact with material memory objects collected in corporate museums and identify identity stewardship (innovation within tradition), identity evangelising (valorising the past through commemoration) and heritage mining (using historical symbolism to add value) as distinct modes of engagement.

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4. ANTi-History: let's get critical ... critical, I want to get critical!¹

Gabrielle Durepos

INTRODUCTION

ANTi-History is an approach to doing history, best characterised as a type of critical organisational history (Durepos et al., 2021). It is multi-disciplinary in that it draws on insights from the sociology of knowledge (Marx and Engels, 1846/1971; Mannheim, 1968/1985), postmodern historiography (Foucault, 1972, 1997, 2007; White, 1973, 1985; Jenkins, 1991, 2009; Munslow, 2010, 2012; Ermarth, 2011) and actor-network theory (ANT; Latour, 1990).

ANTi-History, as conceptualised by Durepos and Mills, took shape over 2006 to 2009 as an outcome of Durepos' doctoral research (Durepos, 2009; Durepos and Mills, 2012a, 2012b). The authors felt that history was understated in ANT and wondered how ANT could be used to problematise objectivity in Business History. The authors felt the need for an approach in Organisation Studies that could unpack the past of management theory (Durepos, 2006, 2009; Durepos et al., 2008). The academic context was ripe for the emergence of an alternative approach to organisational history. Expressions for the need for Organisation Studies, as an academic field, to re-acquaint with the humanities (Zald, 1991, 1993, 1996; Kieser, 1994) had begun to re-surge around 2006 and assumed traction (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Üsdiken and Kieser, 2004; Booth and Rowlinson, 2006). Several special issues with a historical focus were published (Cooke et al., 2006; van Baalen and Bogenrieder, 2009; O'Sullivan et al., 2010), the *Journal of Management History* was re-launched as a stand-alone venue dedicated to publishing management history scholarship (Lamond, 2006) and a new journal, *Management & Organizational History*, was established with prospects outlined as a ten-point agenda (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006). Though the ten points were intended to guide the direction of the new journal, many adopted the agenda as that of the field. In particular, the call for "alternative methods and diverse styles of writing appropriate for studying organisations historically" and a recognition of the need for organisational history to emerge as "a distinctive field of research" gave momentum to the idea of ANTi-History (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006: 5).

I begin this chapter by explaining eight facets of ANTi-History. Three exemplar ANTi-History articles that show the approach in use are then described. I then show how to do ANTi-History using an example of constructing an organisational history of the Nova Scotia Museums (henceforth NSM). To illustrate the value of ANTi-History, I focus on the theoretical insight it can offer as well as why I feel the approach is needed now more than ever. In the conclusion, I summarise key insights and advice on research methods for ANTi-History.

¹ The title is inspired by the song, *Physical*, by Olivia Newton John.

ANTI-HISTORY DESCRIPTION

To explain ANTi-History, I draw on eight of its constitutive facets (Durepos and Mills, 2012a, 2012b, 2018a; Durepos, 2015).

Amodern

ANTi-History resides in an amodern philosophical condition. The condition called amodern draws on Latour (1990, 1993). However, the idea has been extended to the context of historiography. Elsewhere, I explained amodern historiography by contrasting it with modern and postmodern historiography (Durepos, 2015). Latour (1990) has problematised the philosophical divide created by post-enlightenment (which informs the modern condition), whereby natural phenomena became the intellectual purview of the natural sciences and social phenomena that of the social sciences. Latour (1990, 1993) dispelled this dichotomy by tracing the composition of society to reveal the intersections of social (human) and natural (nonhuman) actors. Amodernism is based on the idea that “we have never been modern” (Latour, 1993), and to the extent that postmodernism is a reaction to a condition called modern, we perhaps could never aspire to be postmodern. Inspired by Latour (1990, 1993), ANTi-History is amodern because it views the past, its history (the content), as well as those who write and perform it (the process of composing the history) as made of intersecting social (human) and natural (nonhuman) actors (Durepos, 2015; Deal et al., 2018). Neither the ontological realism of histories in the modern condition nor the epistemological social constructionism of histories in the postmodern condition are appropriate frameworks to explain the composition of these actor-networks.

The Past-as-History

The question, *what is history?*, has featured centrally in historiography. Whereas realist or modern historians aspire to history which accurately represents the past, as it happened, post-modern historians have offered that history is our knowledge of the past, mediated by historians (Jenkins, 1991). ANTi-History draws on these ideas but shifts the focus from the past, or history per se, to what happens at their intersection. The hyphen between the past-as-history is deliberate and intended to attune us to how the past gets translated as history and how histories become powerful actors that anchor a specific sensemaking of our pasts. Instead of starting off by assuming as given a particular composition of a past (i.e., the past happened) or history (we know something of it), the point of departure and interest for ANTi-History is actor practices. By focusing on actor practices, ANTi-History sets as its task to trace the various enactments of the past that become plausible histories within, and by virtue of, those actor practices (Corrigan, 2016). On top of asking *what is history?* (e.g., what is the composition of history?), ANTi-History pushes us to probe the how, the process in which pasts get translated as history.

The Past-as-History as Actor-Networks

Drawing on ANT, ANTi-History suggests that the past-as-history is made of actors and networks who oscillate from a condition of actors to networks and vice versa. The past-as-history as actor-networks is the unit of analysis in ANTi-History – specifically, the focus on which

and how actors form networks to translate the past into history. In ANTi-History, human (historians, archivists) and nonhuman (documents, artefacts, oral history recordings) actors are the building blocks of the past. What this means is that actors write and perform (enact) history, but importantly, they also feature as the content of history. Drawing on Callon and Law (1982), actors frame narratives of the past by capturing the interests of other actors, translating those interests, and finally enrolling actors into a particular view of the past. When all the actors in a network have formed a stabilised view of the past-as-history, the history assumes a uniform status, it becomes an actor. By virtue of being an actor, it conceals its socio-politics of construction (Durepos et al., 2008; Durepos, 2009; Durepos and Mills, 2012a, 2012b; Myrick et al., 2013; Foster et al., 2014; Mills et al., 2015; Secord and Corrigan, 2017; Deal et al., 2019; Moura and Bispo, 2020). We know a history assumes a status of actor when it hides all the actors that make up its composition.

Non-Corporeal Actant

Hartt (2013) developed the concept of the non-corporeal actant (NCA), which is fruitful when used in conjunction with ANTi-History. Adding another element to the heterogeneity of actors (human and nonhuman), Hartt describes the NCA as that which leaves a trace, however, is not easily seen in a four-dimension world. The NCA is beyond the sensory, it persists “in the unseen dimensions of the network” (Hartt 2013: 22). As Hartt (2013: 22) explains, the NCA includes “those values, beliefs, concepts and ideas with which human and nonhuman actants share relations in an Actor-Network”. In many ways, the NCA is both an actor but also the glue that binds actors as they form relationships (Hartt et al., 2014, 2020; Novicevic and Mills, 2019). ANTi-History assumes the past-as-history is made of human, nonhuman and non-corporeal actors who congeal as networks with strong, interest-driven ideas of the past.

Relationalism

Relationalism in ANTi-History is intended to attune our focus to connections, relations, or the site of in-between, thus the hyphens in “actor-network” and “past-as-history”. Instead of looking at stable states, like what may be done using ontological realism, which assumes that phenomena exist in hard, tangible form, and are independent of the historians’ gaze (Jenkins, 1991; Munslow, 2006), a relational focus reveals the process through which an actor assumes its composition by virtue of its position in a network. This means that, for example, the relation of the historian to artefacts (for example, texts, recordings, and archival documents) is where history, as a network, takes its shape (Durepos and Mills 2018b; Durepos et al., 2012). Relationalism is further contrasted with relativism, a position often associated with postmodern social constructionism which suggests that historians of varying ideological positions form different perspectives on the past by virtue of their ideology. Assumed in ANTi-History is a persistent need to look at *how* actors are connected, thus how the past becomes translated as history, by virtue of respective actors and their configuration.

Performativity

To explore the past using ANTi-History, one must focus on practice. Practice, here, means the day-to-day activities in which actors engage to perform some version of the past-as-history

(I use day-to-day activities and practice synonymously). To explain this point, I draw on the previously noted historiography triad. Modern histories ascribe to ontological realism where historians believe that it is both possible and desirable to accurately capture what happened in the past, such that history is a replica of the past. Postmodern historians have long contested this view, arguing that the past is ontologically absent, and that history could only aspire to be a representation of the past or a historians' ideologically and culturally mediated knowledge of it (White, 1973; Jenkins, 1991; Munslow, 2006). A focus on practice in ANTi-History suggests that actors, for example historians, know the past, but their knowledge of it is shaped by how they enact it in their day-to-day activities and, in this case, their craft of creating knowledge of the past. The idea is that history takes its shape, or comes into being, by virtue of actor practices and in those actor practices (Corrigan, 2016). To say history is what actors perform is an ontological claim (Mol, 1999, 2002) and pushes history beyond the postmodern epistemological realm, where it is a form of knowledge of the past (Jenkins, 1991; Munslow, 2006).

Multiplicity

Following actors across the multitude of places whereby they enact a version of history reveals that history is not singular (one version of the past) or plural (different ways of knowing the past based on the perspective of the historian) but instead, multiple. Multiplicity suggests that actors, who are varyingly situated in practices (at a particular place and time), enact different versions of history as informed by the actor practices (situation) in which they find themselves. Multiplicity concerns the different compositions an actor or a history assumes by virtue of the set of practices in which actors are located. Corrigan (2016) demonstrates this best with his study of municipal budget practices and the resultant historic versions of the displaced community of Africville, a small community in Halifax situated on the Eastern coast of Canada. Africville was a Black African community that, despite being part of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), suffered decades of neglect, including no municipal services like running water, sewage, and hospital facilities. Corrigan (2016) describes how HRM makes sense of Africville at three points in time. He shows that HRM enacts three versions of Africville which are not three different histories, but rather different versions of the past of Africville. In the 1960s, the story told of Africville in HRM government deliberations was one of neglect. However, over subsequent years as the Africville land was industrialised and residents were forcefully relocated using garbage trucks, the story changed to one of aggression. After 2010, a new narrative of romance emerged and now exists alongside the other two. The new narrative is told by past residents who now work at the Africville heritage museum. The history of Africville performed in the HRM government has multiplied over time and location. Each of the three narratives emerged because of the way the actors, at different points in time, made sense of the circumstances.

Ontological Politics

If we agree that different enactments of the past-as-history exist, the question becomes: How do they exist in relation to one another? What ties exist between these actors (histories), are they independent, interdependent or in concert? Using ANTi-History allows us to shed light on the different enactments of the past-as-history as well as how they influence, shape, and compete with one another. The idea of ontological politics in ANTi-History draws on Mol

(1999, 2002) to suggest that if the past is performed as history in different sets of practices, then there is potential for politics between enactments. For example, which version is plausible, for whom, and when? Which actor-networks are engaged in struggles over how to see the past and in those struggles, who gains, who loses, and who is adversely affected? ANTi-History offers a framework for mapping actor politics, to trace the influence of one way of seeing the past-as-history on another and outline which assumes plausibility, and why (Corrigan, 2016).

In summary, ANTi-History is described as amodern. In using it, we view the past, history (the content), as well as those who write and perform history (the process of composing history), as made of intersecting social (human), natural (nonhuman) and noncorporeal actors. The NCA includes all the ideas, beliefs and values that bind human and nonhuman actors. Drawing on ANT, ANTi-History suggests that the past-as-history is made of actors and networks who oscillate from a condition of actors to network and vice versa. ANTi-History proffers a relational lens, our focus is on connections, relations, or the site of in-between. The hyphens between the past-as-history are deliberate and intended to attune us to how the past gets translated as history and how histories become powerful actors that anchor a specific sense-making of our pasts. Instead of looking at stable states, a relational focus reveals the process through which an actor assumes its composition by virtue of its position in a network. One way to begin an ANTi-History study is to look at actor practices, meaning the day-to-day activities of actors in which they perform some version of the past-as-history. In day-to-day activities, actors may convey a different version of their past depending on their audience and/or the situation. Multiplicity suggests that actors, who are situated in varying practices, enact different versions of history by virtue of those actor practices. If we agree that different enactments of the past-as-history exist, then asking questions about ontological politics become important. For example, which version of the past-as-history is most plausible? How do versions exist in relation to one another? Are there versions that are dominant and disenfranchise as well as marginalise persons? Some of these questions have been taken up by the ANTi-History articles I discuss below.

ANTI-HISTORY RESEARCH IN HISTORICAL ORGANISATION STUDIES

ANTi-History can be used to write the past of management thought, management education, management theory and histories of organisations, including businesses, archives, governments and beyond. ANTi-History is increasingly used and accepted as an approach in the intellectual toolkit of the field of Historical Organisation Studies (Suddaby, 2016; Cummings et al., 2017). Suddaby (2016: 46), for example, has commented on the promise of ANTi-History in suggesting that it holds “high potential for bridging business history and management theory”. Cummings et al. (2017: 35) have described ANTi-History as “distinctive”. Marshall and Novicevic (2016: 99) have called it “innovative”, Muldoon (2020: 98) has characterised it as “interesting” and “useful” while Bowden (2021: 18) has commented on its “originality”. Sá and Costa (2019: 496) have celebrated the “emancipatory capacity” of the approach. Coraiola et al. (2015: 218) have found ANTi-History useful to “uncover and expose the different ontological positions of professional history producers”. Muldoon (2020, 2021) has commented on the usefulness of ANTi-History to interrogate corporate archives, with a focus on outlining how corporations save records. Bowden (2019: 484), offers that ANTi-History is the most

significant attempt “to address the internal failings of postmodernist thought in management and organizational studies”. I discuss three examples of ANTi-History below, chosen because they demonstrate how to use it and offer methodological innovations of the approach.

Tureta et al. (2021) outline the process through which a labour contract is negotiated between a labour services company and a university hospital. In studying this case, the authors map the socio-politics of actor-networks as they enact the past into their day-to-day activities. The authors develop the notion of controversy, a methodological innovation of ANTi-History. They set as their task to present an explicit method for ANTi-History researchers. They suggest for those who use ANTi-History to organise their fieldwork and analysis around five key points: identify the controversy; map the actor-network (list all the players and how they are connected); draw the translation processes (write the direction of the influence between actors); draw the politics (outline all the places where influence leads to change); and draw the sites where there are struggles over how to see a situation (map all the locations where there are different versions of the story/controversy being enacted thus, map where multiple realities are surfacing). What makes this study novel is the way the authors leverage controversy as a point of entry to do empirical work using ANTi-History. Tureta et al. (2021) generate their data through fieldwork, including non-participant observation, document collection, and informal interviews. The authors demonstrate how to create a cartography (map) of a controversy while giving clues about how to assemble and make sense of the data. Fieldwork can create a lot of data and with so many actors to follow, it can be overwhelming to know who to follow and when. Tureta et al. (2021) explain how they translate their complex fieldwork into insightful empirical contributions that illustrate how actors, over time, engage in socio-politics that get concealed into a present condition.

Sá and Costa (2019) map the complex emergence of the Memorial of Resistance of São Paulo (MRSP). The authors start with a phenomenon as it exists in the present, the MRSP, as the point of entry into their research. Opening the MRSP black box, the authors trace the political tactics of multiple actor-networks implicated in the formation of the site of memory. Their study, rich in Brazilian context, maps actors over the 1980s and 1990s; a time of social unrest, transitional justice, and re-democratisation. They successfully give voice to actors forgotten and silenced by dominant histories. To do this, Sá and Costa (2019) begin their data collection with an in-depth reading of the MRSP website to understand how the organisation is conventionally viewed. Noticing that only a few actors are mentioned on the website, the authors visit the MRSP, collect archival documents, take part in educational initiatives, conduct interviews, and examine the museology construction plan. In doing so, they surface many human and nonhuman actors who were crucial to the museum's path of constitution (but are not mentioned in conventional accounts). In particular, the role of the building as a nonhuman actor is highlighted including all the actor trials involved in its bequest to the museum. The authors use the notion of “turning points” to map the emergence of the MRSP and to signal that histories are nonchronological. Turning points are sites where significant shifts appear in the narrative because of actors' capacity to mobilise others. This study offers an example of how to follow the movement of actors who were involved in the constitution of the MRSP across multiple sources of data.

Myrick et al. (2013) trace the history of the Academy of Management (AOM). They explore the role of history (as an actor) in what management scholars now take for granted as the AOM. In their alternative history of the AOM, the authors highlight the powerful impact that history plays in how actors make sense of their day-to-day activities. What is insightful in

this piece is the way the authors present their narrative vis-à-vis the history that AOM tells of itself, as posted on their website and referenced by an AOM president during her presidential address at the conference. The authors draw on archival research from the AOM archives as well as early AOM conference proceedings. They also use field notes which they collected while attending the AOM conference as academic participants. Early histories of management thought are consulted to gain deeper insight into AOM's early actors as well as act as context for the emergence of AOM. From these materials, the authors create a list of influential actors including humans and nonhumans (AOM name, meetings and structure, membership, and paper presentations), that, through association, shaped an early sense of AOM. The authors describe how these actors were enrolled in the sense of AOM and show how their interests became aligned to eventually punctuate (become black boxed) as a version of AOM that conceals all its constituent actors. Aside from problematising dominant histories, Myrick et al. (2013) effectively demonstrate the powerful role of history in the process in which organisations achieve legitimacy.

DOING ANTi-HISTORY

I now share how I have used ANTi-History in my own research. In 2011, I visited Sherbrooke Village, a living heritage site that depicts daily life in an 1860s Nova Scotian (an Eastern Canadian province) village. I spent a day following various heritage interpreters dressed in period costumes. Along the village streets, I chatted with women busy with daily chores and listened as they told me about village life. They wandered in and out of their homes and ran errands at the post office, print shop, tearoom and beyond. I watched the wood turner, blacksmith, potter, weaver, and printer perform their craft while describing stories of the provincial past.

The interpreters fascinated me because of the ease with which they shared their knowledge of the past (what postmodern historians like Jenkins (1991) call history). Their insights were enhanced by their use and familiarity with material artefacts (nonhuman actors), which transformed mere knowledge into an actual performance of history. This, for me, demonstrated that histories are performative in that actors perform some version of the past-as-history in their day-to-day practices. Curious about how the performance impacted other visitors, I found myself continually shifting my focus from the interpreters to the audience. I became the audience of the audiences. I was stuck in and struck by being in-between these actors. I watched the interpreters curate and narrate stories of Nova Scotian pasts with visitors, including parents, young couples, children, game fishermen, tall ship enthusiasts, Nova Scotians, Americans, aspiring gold panners and more. In real-time, the interpreters transformed the past into histories; however, they curated a different version of it, depending on the audience. The interpreters did not tell different histories, but enacted different accounts of it. They enacted multiple (more than one but less than many) stories. As I followed the actors, my wonder about their interpretive performance intensified. Realising none would break from character to tell me how it became that their daily job is to transform the past into histories, I waited to return home to begin my research on the organisation.

While my research revealed some details of the museum, it felt increasingly like a black box that I was unable to open. I learned that Sherbrooke Village is one of 28 museums that make up a decentralised provincial museum complex in Nova Scotia. Known as the Nova Scotia

Museums, the sites commemorate the natural, cultural, and/or historic past of the province. Despite the short organisational history posted on the website, I was unable to see past the present-day version of the organisation to examine the configuration of the actors that make up its history. I wanted to observe the organisation beyond what exists today to view how it came to be. I wanted to learn about the set of circumstances, individuals, and motivations involved in developing the museum. I was curious about how each of the 28 historic properties came about. I asked, why these properties, why these stories and not others? Further, how were these sites transformed into a museum, what were the acquisition processes, what items were kept and what artefacts were lost in these processes? I became curious about curation and realised the importance of developing interpretation. For example, the stories that NSM tells are more durable, in that they survive generations, shape our collective consciousness and provincial identity. It occurred to me that NSM participates in our cultural and collective processes of remembering and, consequently, forgetting.

At my first meeting with museum administrators, it was confirmed that the museum, created one year after the Canadian Confederation (1868), has no organisational history. Writing an organisational history of NSM sounded like a fruitful way to develop ANTi-History and give examples of its facets, including amodern history, the past-as-history, the past-as-history as actor-networks, non-corporeal actant, relationalism, performativity, multiplicity, and ontological politics.

Years later, I justified my choice to study NSM by offering three reasons that make it an ideal site to develop ANTi-History. First, NSM has a long history dating to 1868. Second, NSM has no documented organisational history despite expressing a desire for this as early as 1986. Finally, NSM commemorates the past of Nova Scotia. The organisation develops and performs history. By following its human (heritage interpreters, site managers, etc.), non-human (heritage sites, archival records, etc.) and noncorporeal actors (the idea of the golden industrial years of Nova Scotia, or the comfort of a simpler time past, etc.), I was able to trace both the process (how heritage interpreters do history) and the content (what is the history that heritage interpreters deliver) of history. Most important for ANTi-History, I was able to look in-between. This means I could look at the relationship between the how and the what. I asked, how does the method impact the content? How did the actors who made NSM impact the performance of provincial history? How does the past get translated into history (and vice versa) at NSM? After all, the translation of the past into history by actor-networks is the unit of analysis of ANTi-History. On a reflexive note, I also asked how I would translate the past of NSM into histories.

Using insights from actor-network theory, I adopted as my research objective to follow the actors (Latour, 1987). From 2011 to 2015, I followed many actors. I conducted 33 long semi-structured interviews with three groups of participants, including current administrators, heritage interpreters, and past NSM employees. When I could not find the inaugural documents on many of the historic properties, a past NSM employee informed me that they are stored in orange filing cabinets located in the museum mezzanine, a large storage area that runs the periphery of the building. At my next visit, I was granted access to the mezzanine where I collected internal and external newsletters, NSM Board of Governors reports, promotional brochures, correspondences, memos, Provincial Museum Acts, curatorial reports, photos, official opening invitations, obituaries, site maintenance reports, museum attendance reports, letters from the public to the museum, newspaper clippings, personal diaries and beyond, amounting to 5,149 documents varying in page lengths. In an interview with past

NSM employees, I learned that the museum produced Annual Reports which were stored at the Nova Scotia Archives. I eventually found the museum's Annual Reports in the House of Assembly papers, spread across two archives. In total, I spent about 70 days across three archives following actors. I also followed actors at eight heritage sites and took field notes as I undertook non-participant observation. I was nearing my last day of archival data collection when a past NSM employee asked me what I'd thought of the scrapbook collection. My look of surprise gave away my ignorance. The scrapbooks, apparently, were a past employee's efforts to maintain the history of the museum. The scrapbook pages contain news clippings related to NSM dating to the 1930s. I returned to the museum and collected 1,228 scrapbook pages.

I followed actors until there were few new actors. In doing so, I realised that these actors are the building blocks of the history of NSM. I traced their inter-connections, their motivations and activities and learned through these actors how to translate the organisational past of the museum into history. However, many questions arose. How would I analyse this copious amount of data and write the results? Which stories would I tell? Whose version of events would I share? I started by listing the stories the museum told. Picking one story at a time, I then outlined all the sites where that story was performed (i.e., the different versions found in day-to-day actor practices). For example, NSM commemorates the industrial past of Nova Scotia; therefore, I traced all the different versions of the Nova Scotian industrial past told by the museum. One such story features inshore fishing told at the Fisherman's Life Museum (henceforth FLM). In sharing this example, I hope to illustrate the museum as an outcome of ontological politics.

As noted, ontological politics refers to the idea that actors play an active role in the process of shaping reality through engaging in acts of resistance and influencing one another in how to see the world (Law and Benschop, 1997; Law and Urry, 2004). In turn, they help to make and remake the realities they live (Alcadipani and Hassard, 2010). Struggles (politics) over how to see (ontology) the past happen between actors, thus in their relations. Actor performances of their past into history are never neutral. Instead, it reflects actors' interests and politics. It is an outcome of these politics. I will show in the paragraphs below that performing the past, of the FLM for example, is an outcome of struggles between actors to define the reality of the past as it exists today.

To many at NSM, the story of transforming the little white Myers' house into a museum (what became the FLM) is one of both large and small 'p' politics (NSM employee, July 2012; Martin, 1987, 1991). Some would even say that developing museums generally is always a case of politics, in the usual sense of the term. For example, an NSM employee (July 2012) revealed that a former museum director confided that once he "saw where the political decision was going [to acquire a museum] he would write up the rationale to make it work".

To illustrate the politics in the process of transforming the past (as history), I focus on actors and their struggles in developing the FLM. Meet Helen Jennex, a prominent actor in the development of the museum. As a local teacher, Jennex, since the 1960s, encouraged her students to bring in artefacts resonant of local history and add them to a growing collection at the school. Jennex, according to a former NSM Director, "was extremely active and interested historically, [but] she was just as active and interested politically ... and worked ... with the Liberal [provincial government] candidates" (Martin, 1987).

In 1972, the Myers' house was purchased by the province for use by the Marine Highway Museum Society (of which Jennex was an active member), with the help of "Garnet Brown,

a freewheeling, free-spending Liberal Minister of highways who had helped the Marine Highway Museum Society get provincial funding" (*Maclean's Magazine*, 1979). The Myers' home was opened as a local museum in 1973 for the purpose of housing the school's overflowing collection (Frame, 1987). As a local museum, Jennex would receive limited financial assistance and the museum would not garner the recognition accorded to provincial sites. In 1977, the NSM Board of Governors (Minutes, 1977a) received a request from Brown calling on NSM staff to "prepare a development plan for the Oyster Pond site [what became FLM] and to bring it up to the standards of a provincially operated site". In November of 1977, the NSM Board (Minutes, 1977b) approved the report that detailed transformations of the FLM into a provincial museum. At her request, Jennex was to become the museums' curator (*Maclean's Magazine*, 1979). In 1978, responsibility for the FLM property was transferred to NSM at the request of the Marine Highway Museum Society (Frame, 1987) and became a branch of the provincial museums (The Latest Word, 1978; NSM Annual Report, 1978). The plan was to redevelop the property to portray the life of an inshore fisherman's family (Frame, 1987). Meantime, an election on the Eastern Shore resulted in a change of government in which the incumbent Liberal, Brown, was defeated. Continuing the plan to redevelop the property, an NSM employee was sent to the museum to begin the process. She explains that upon arrival at the site:

there was two TV film crews and the new MLA sitting in his car yelling and screaming, and the entire community there, this old lady is crying and stuff was coming out of the house in people's arms and she had phoned all these people and said they're coming from the museum, the governments changed, I'm not in charge anymore, therefore, come get your stuff. (NSM employee, July 2012)

Later, *Maclean's Magazine* (1979: 18), reported that the:

20 local residents arrived in pickup trucks to cart away prized family heirlooms that they had donated to the museum. They stripped the place of nearly everything of historical value ... to protest the Nova Scotia government's decision not to retain the museum's curator and virtual creator, retired public-school teacher Helen Jennex. Although the official word was that Mrs. Jennex, 66, was let go because she had passed mandatory retirement age, the former curator and many of her local supporters believe she was a victim of another old Nova Scotia tradition, the political firing.

Maclean's Magazine (1979: 19) captured the scene and emotion of the day with a telling photo of Helen Jennex, the former curator of NSM's FLM. The caption beneath the photo read: *Helen Jennex on the outside at the Jeddore museum: stripping it nearly bare*. Apparently, in a political shuffle due to a change in government, Jennex was demoted from her curatorial position, though there is doubt as to whether the position had ever been hers (NSM Board of Governors Minutes, 1976). Shortly thereafter, NSM employees were advised by their Director that the museum would open "on time and you've got two weeks to furnish that place" (NSM employee, July 2012). After spending \$500 at antique shops, the museum opened as planned. With the significant alterations to its collection, the interpretation at the site shifted substantially. As an NSM employee (July 2012) explained, "in dealing with collections there needed to be that balance between what there was [i.e., artefacts] and what stories could be told from that".

Interpretation at FLM today is the outcome of the struggles of the actors detailed above over who should tell the provinces' stories of the past. FLM is the outcome of actors struggles over which stories should be told, and how they should be told. It is a case of *ontological politics*,

where actors' struggles come to define *how to see the past* and how to deliver history (Law and Mol, 1995). In visiting the site and talking to the interpreters about its emergence, it becomes obvious that the actors' politics involved in creating the museum have been forgotten. In essence, they are hidden from view. The museum has become black boxed (Bennett, 2004).

NSM's performance of a Nova Scotian industrial past (McKay, 1993) is enactive (Mol, 1999, 2002) of the provinces' heritage as we know it today. Thus, it is by virtue of NSM's performance of commemorations that particular stories of the province's past are caused to come into being. Beyond this, NSM's performance of the past is relational (as opposed to realist or relativist, see Durepos et al., 2012) such that it is an outcome of a complex set of relationships established between actors. Telling the history of NSM relationally means situating the interpretation of history offered at the sites as an outcome of the struggles of and between actors as they developed and came to define reality of the past (as it exists today). As a result, the relations established between actors are sites of politics. They are highly contested terrain in which actors engage in ontological politics (Law and Mol, 1995; Law and Benschop, 1997; Mol, 1999; Law and Urry, 2004; Alcadipani and Hassard, 2010).

WHY IS ANTi-HISTORY NEEDED AND WHY NOW?

The value of ANTi-History is its capacity to mobilise history to leverage critique (Durepos et al., 2021). Critical organisational histories, like ANTi-History, are timely. I highlight three contemporary situations that point to this need.

Beyoncé, Gender Equity and COVID-19

In 2014, Beyoncé released the hit song *Flawless*, featuring Nigerian feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Beyoncé and Adichie drew attention to feminism as a movement dedicated to social, political, and economic equality among the sexes and highlighted that "we should all be feminists" (Adichie, 2012: 5). The fruitfulness of using ANTi-History resides in its ability to trace the connections between seemingly disconnected actors. For example, it allows us to open the black box of *Flawless*, and map its historic composition as made of Beyoncé, Adichie, inequity, but also gender as a social, political, and sexual category that is an outcome of a complex movement which has taken shape over time. Adichie (2012: 48) teaches us that "there's a problem with gender as it is today". Applying ANTi-History to gender means looking at it beyond today to how it came to be historically. Thus, when we continue to explore gender as an actor-network, we learn that the problem has become graver during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The full impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are not yet known; however, anecdotal evidence, popular press, and news reports attest that the pandemic has caused extreme gender equity setbacks. For example, a July 2020 report published by the McKinsey Global Institute attests that "the pandemic and its economic fallout are having a regressive effect on gender equality". The report explains that women, who make up a minority of the labour force, have accounted for more than half of job losses over the course of the pandemic. With the work from home measures, inequities in domestic labour have become apparent, with impacts on the amount of focused attention women can spend on work. Theories of gender and how gender is enacted at work are complex societal configurations that are outcomes of social and

cultural processes over time. ANTi-History can open the black box of gender to reveal the cast of actors that make it up as well as how they are configured (Corrigan and Mills, 2012; Hartt et al., 2012, 2017; Bettin and Mills, 2018; Mills and Helms Mills, 2018a). We can open black boxes by following actors and outlining the various locations where gender inequity is enacted.

Black Lives Matter

On May 25, 2020, white-skinned police officer Derek Chauvin arrested black-skinned George Floyd due to suspicions of using counterfeit money at a store. Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for approximately 9½ minutes, ending Floyd's life. The scene was captured on a smartphone and went viral in many parts of the world within days. Many reported Floyd's death as a racially induced murder, inciting a considerable wave of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Some may wonder how Floyd's death, one Black man in the United States, could cause this magnitude of attention and interest surrounding race relations in North America and beyond. ANTi-History can help view Floyd's murder as a punctuated actor that stands on behalf of centuries of racial injustices in public policy, politics, economics, judicial law and beyond. For many, the above murder acted as a prompt to open the black box of race relations in their own communities.

Opening the black box of race relations would imply looking at the various manifestations of racism in everyday acts and, most importantly, understanding these as outcomes of complex histories. Methodologically, we could do non-participant observation on a construction site where all the industrial waste collectors are Black and the contractors are White (males). We could interview the Black Africans who work at the Africville heritage museum to ask about their experiences as they endured years of neglect by the HRM. We could also listen to stories from local Black minority groups and perhaps hear, as I once did, about how these individuals are often asked where they are "originally from". Applying ANTi-History, we would highlight the relationship between these stories and demonstrate their persistence because these practices support one another. We would not illustrate these as plural stories of racism but highlight their interconnectedness by suggesting they are multiple. This means that they are not different instances of racism but different enactments of the same thing, each rooted in day-to-day actor practices. Using ANTi-History would allow for tracing how racism has been performed historically and showing how various enactments, each rooted at points in time, are connected.

Indigenous Relations in Canada and Archival Silences

Canadians celebrate several annual holidays, like "Canada Day" on 1 July, and the more recently introduced "National Day for Truth and Reconciliation" on 30 September. These days of commemoration are rooted in Canadian history but, more important for our purposes, they come to act as black boxes that stand on behalf of a complex national history. Over time, the details of the past-as-history can become blurred and even contested. ANTi-History can open the black box of statutory days and unpack the socio-politics of commemoration.

The Canadian government introduced the "National Day for Truth and Reconciliation" in July of 2021, intended as an opportunity for Canadians to pause, become educated on and reflect on the traumatic history of the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. As reported by the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a federally supported investigation

into the IRS, between the 1870s and 1990s, the Canadian government, in concert with the Catholic church, displaced thousands of school-aged indigenous children into residential schools as a deliberate act of cultural genocide. The 2015 TRC demonstrated that children in the IRS were physically, psychologically, and sexually abused, malnourished, experimented on, and even murdered. Over the summer of 2021, unmarked graves of hundreds of children were uncovered outside of what were once residential schools across Canada. Aside from the documents produced by the TRC, there are few archival documents that can attest to this tragic Canadian past. This is in part due to the reliance of indigenous persons on oral traditions, but also due to colonial archival practices (Durepos and Barros, 2021). Regan (2010) has long argued that the Canadian National identity and history, which are celebrated on Canada Day with fireworks and festivals, are built on a myth of peaceful settler relations. ANTi-History has been used in other contexts to problematise colonial history (Hartt et al., 2012; Secord and Corrigan, 2017; Kivijärvi et al., 2019). It has the potential to open the black box of indigenous relations in Canada, trace the actors involved in the IRS and debunk the myth that Canada's national identity is founded on peaceful settler relations. ANTi-History is useful for surfacing the politics of what is said, but also what is not said or sayable due to the cultural logic of the past. Silences in history can be surfaced by probing the archive as a politicised epistemic site that impacts what knowledge is produced and why. Thus, ANTi-History can be used to give voice to those who have been silenced in the archives (Mills and Helms Mills, 2018b; Durepos and Barros, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explained ANTi-History through eight of its constitutive facets including amodern history, the past-as-history, the past-as-history as actor-networks, non-corporeal actant, relationalism, performativity, multiplicity, and ontological politics. To illustrate the application of these concepts, I described the example of constructing an organisational history of NSM. The value of ANTi-History lies in its capacity to use history to leverage critique. The approach is most timely today, given it can be used to open the black box of gender, race relations, and indigenous inequities to reveal complex configurations that took shape over time but that inform the composition of heterogeneous actors today.

Researchers have highlighted the theoretical potential of ANTi-History and continue to develop the approach. For example, ANTi-History has been fruitfully combined with micro-history (Mills, 2017). The notion of controversy, for example, holds promise for mapping which actors should be followed and how to do so (Secord and Corrigan, 2017; Novicevic and Mills, 2019; Tureta et al., 2021).

There are methodological considerations for researchers who use ANTi-History. For example, those who use the approach may have to draw on multiple research methods like non-participant observation, archival research (Barros, 2023; Tennent and Gillett, 2023), interviews (Rintamäki et al., 2023), and secondary data collection, depending on which actors they follow and where they are led. The research process can be tedious and take extended periods of time. During the research process, it can be difficult to know which actors to follow, how many to follow and when to end data collection. The large volume of data that can be generated while using ANTi-History can make it difficult to craft a coherent story. As opposed to starting analysis by asking what we as researchers know of our research site, it's important to

shift our focus to the actors followed. Using ANTi-History means telling stories of how actors are connected and the meaning they assume through those connections. In the analysis phase of ANTi-History, we must focus on the day-to-day practices of actors and surface the stories enacted in those practices.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

For readers wishing to learn more about ANTi-History, I recommend consulting the following articles.

- (1) Durepos G and Mills A (2012) Actor network theory, ANTi-History, and critical organizational historiography. *Organization* 19(6): 703–721.

This paper offers a description of ANTi-History and outlines the potential of the approach to contribute to critical management studies.

- (2) Durepos G (2015) ANTi-History: toward amodern histories. In: McLaren PG, Mills A and Weatherbee TG (eds) *The Routledge companion to management and organizational history*. London: Routledge, pp.153–180.

In this book chapter, the modern-postmodern-amodern classification is explained and ANTi-History is described as situated in an amodern condition.

- (3) Corrigan L (2016) Accounting practice and the historic turn performing budget histories. *Management & Organization History* 11(2): 77–98.

Corrigan describes three narratives of Africville, a black African community on the Eastern coast of Canada who endured years of racial abuse and neglect. The author illustrates three enactments of Africville that today exist alongside one another as an example of multiplicity, a facet of ANTi-History.

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5. A narrative of the historic turn in organization studies

Michael Rowlinson, Stephanie Decker and John Hassard

INTRODUCTION

The status of historical narratives remains a central concern for the historic turn in organization studies (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004). In fact, a preoccupation with narrative distinguishes the historic turn from previous calls for history to be taken more seriously in organization studies. The ‘historic turn’ is a label that has been applied to describe the convergence of several tendencies concerned with the status of historical research strategies, including narrative strategies, within organization studies (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Referring to a historic turn may give the impression that the whole of organization studies was expected to become more historical, whereas it has been more concerned with securing legitimacy for historical research, and narrative history in particular, within organization studies.

The term ‘historical consciousness’, which implies ‘a sensitivity and awareness of the degree to which history is both a product and a source of human reflexivity’ (Suddaby, 2016: 57), captures the importance of reflexivity in the historic turn, especially in relation to narrative. The idea of a historical consciousness also emphasizes the shared nature of the historic turn, for researchers who are engaged in an ongoing conversation not merely disparate historical contributions in organization studies. Referring to a ‘historical consciousness’ does not mean to say that there is a unifying consensus, but rather a series of debates that includes a range of opinions about the status of narrative in organization studies and ‘related areas of strategy’ (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004: 332; Vaara and Lamberg, 2016).

The historic turn refers to a change over time, and this chapter offers a brief historical narrative of the ebb and flow of tendencies towards narrativity in historical research (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Rowlinson et al., 2014), and then away from narrativity in favor of more analytical approaches to historical organization studies (e.g. Maclean et al., 2020). The aim is to demonstrate how a historical narrative presents an account of events and ideas in contrast to the standard literature review or methodology template in management and organization studies. Several key texts in the historic turn are introduced, including exemplars of narrative history such as Hassard’s (2012) re-evaluation of the Hawthorne studies. To provide some context, the broader relationship between history and narrative is discussed, highlighting the positions derived from theorists such as Michel Foucault and Hayden White who have been influential in organization studies. This follows the informative guide to narrative in historical theory set out by Rigney (2013), who distinguishes historians’ concerns with narrative from the concerns of literary theorists. Whereas historians are interested in the difficulties of composing narratives from historical sources, literary theorists are more interested in what constitutes narrative and the differences between fictional and historical narratives. This is reflected in the historic turn where the interest in narrative is often more concerned with examining pre-existing historical narratives – *narrative analysis* – rather than the practical concern

of whether and how to construct a narrative from archival research – *narrative composition* (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Rigney (2013: 185) also emphasizes the ‘semantic elasticity’ of the term ‘narrative’, which has entered common usage, often with the implication that a prevailing historical narrative is false and misleading (Hansen, 2014; Wallison, 2013). Nevertheless, it is worth quoting the working definition of narrative in history from Stone’s influential article on ‘The Revival of Narrative’:

Narrative is taken to mean the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with subplots. The two essential ways in which narrative history differs from structural history is that its arrangement is descriptive rather than analytical and that its central focus is on man not circumstances. It therefore deals with the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical. Narrative is a mode of historical writing, but it is a mode which also affects and is affected by the content and the method. (Stone, 1979: 3)

Stone’s awkward reference to ‘man’ rather than individuals makes the article sound dated. But even if the definition of narrative can be contested, it makes the point that not all history is narrative, or at least that history differs in the degree of narrativity (Rigney, 2013: 188). It also implies a distinction but also a relationship between the methods, and the content.

From the outset the historic turn was predicated upon reflections of how to compose historical narratives from archival research. Similarly, this chapter is informed by retrospective reflection on narrativity in previous research associated with the historic turn (Decker, 2010; Hassard, 2012; Rowlinson and Hassard, 1993). To make the point about narrative construction, the reflection on narrative is presented in the form of a worked example of a narrative. The conclusion offers a brief reflection on the composition of the chapter as a narrative account of the historic turn.

HISTORY AND NARRATIVE

There have been longstanding extensive debates about the status of narrative in history. These debates originate from the challenge to conventional narrative history from theoretically informed approaches to history. In one form or another these can be seen as a challenge to the ‘Great Man’ theory of history, which attributes historical change to the ideas and actions of a few outstanding individuals (Fulbrook, 2002: 122; Møller, 2017). These individuals are often, but not always, in a Western context, white men who occupy leadership positions such as prominent politicians, army generals, or chief executives in business. The nature of the conventional ‘historical narrative of leadership’ is captured in business history by Møller’s (2017) intriguing critique of the compelling accounts of symphony orchestras. The male conductor is almost always portrayed as ‘a heroic individual dressed in tails who, despite difficult circumstances, achieves the sublime by controlling his surroundings with a wave of his baton’ (Møller, 2017: 1280). Narratives with a clear structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end seem to lend themselves to over-emphasizing the agency of individual actors, or the ‘hero myth’ (Møller, 2017: 1280).

The conventional ‘historical narrative of leadership’, with its focus on events and individuals, has been countered by an appreciation of the importance of structures that influence and constrain actors. The importance of context is emphasized, which facilitates the actions of

leading individuals, as well as the role of actors who are less visible in the records but whose shifting attitudes and collective action can also affect historical change. Rather than try to summarize these extensive debates about agency and structure, the responses to the great man theory of history can be characterized as being concerned with either *form*, how to represent the past, or with *content*, what to represent from the past (Rigney, 2013: 185). Challenging the great man theory of history in terms of content, in the context of the United States say, means displacing the exclusive focus on prominent ‘white Anglo-Saxon Protestant’ males, or WASPS, in order to examine issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality, albeit at the same time emphasizing that these are relational rather than historically fixed categories (Fulbrook, 2002: 64).

In relation to form, the question is whether narrative is inextricably linked to a version of history that uncritically attributes agency to a few leading individuals, or whether history can still take a narrative form but question the agency of prominent individuals. There is a widespread skepticism towards history in general and narrative history in particular from social science and literary theory, and this is informed by what historians have described as the ‘impositionalist’ objection to narrative history. According to the impositionalist view, ‘recounting the past in the form of a story inevitably imposes a false narrative structure upon it’. Historical theorists defending narrative history believe this leads to ‘the unhappy (and contrary to experience) skeptical conclusion that narratives cannot be true’ (Norman, 1998: 156, 167). There is a difference in terminology, but a deconstructionist historian (Munslow, 2012) could be characterized as a proponent of the impositionalist objection to history. From a deconstructionist perspective *all* history needs to be seen as ‘the construction of *a* narrative’, because:

we cannot find out, through documents or through direct experience (memory studies), any history beyond that which we create. What this means, succinctly, is that a deconstructionist historian rejects any notion of ‘the knowable story back there’. (Munslow, 2012: 43)

Succinct as this may be, it is still difficult to discern from this statement whether and how historians should construct their narratives, other than indulge in narrative ‘experimentalism’ (Munslow, 2012: 5). If it is largely a matter of style then the historian should presumably self-consciously make the reader aware that the narrative presented has been constructed according to particular criteria, avoiding any impression ‘that there is an omniscient narrator presenting the past “as it really was”’ (Fulbrook, 2002: 155). This narrative style might go down well with some peer-reviewed academic journals, but it is difficult to imagine it sustaining the popularity of history with general readers. One wonders what kind of history deconstructionist historians read on holiday.

From the outset, the historic turn in organization studies has been informed by reflection on how best to respond to the impositionalist objection to narrative history (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004: 345; Kipping et al., 2014: 323; Rowlinson and Hassard, 1993: 302; Rowlinson et al., 2014: 262). This is largely because a version of the impositionalist objection to narrative history appears to be prevalent in organization studies (Martin et al., 1985: 103; Strati, 2000: 158–159), or at least it was during the time when the historic turn got underway. The impositionalist view that narrative is inevitably imposed would suggest that narrative should therefore be avoided. This corresponds strongly with the approach to history derived from

Foucault's (2002) strictures on writing intellectual history, which, to put it mildly, cautions against exaggerating the role of individuals in changing ideas.

The avoidance of narrative has been countered by philosophers of history such as David Carr (1986, 1998, 2008), who contends that history has a narrative form because human actors shape events as narratives, and we think of our lives in narrative terms. These narratives from historical actors can then be recovered by historians and reproduced in their writing. This view supposedly serves as a license for historians to produce predominantly narrative history. An alternative license for the self-conscious imposition of narrative derives from Hayden White's (1973, 1987a) recognition of the literary character of historical writing, and the application of literary theory to the analysis of classic historical texts. But statements from White such as, 'history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is form of historical representation' (White, 1987b: 122; quoted in Cobley, 2001), predictably antagonized self-appointed professional historians (Marwick, 1995), who seemed to resent the suggestion that historical writing can be analyzed as literature. As was fashionable in the culture wars of the 1990s, any perceived threat from theory could be dismissed as toxic post-modernism. While these debates are illuminating, they have been dominated by theorists and philosophers of history and the practical implications for historians are not always clear (Ankersmit, 1988; Rusen, 1987).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage with the ongoing debates about the epistemological and ontological status of narrative, which are outlined with relevance to business history in an excellent review by Mordhorst and Schwarzkopf (2017). Instead, the themes of agency and structure, or the imposition of narrative can be identified in the fields of business history and the historic turn in organization studies. The conventional 'historical narrative of leadership' (Møller, 2017) can be found in the founder-centered narratives that are a mainstay of business history, which was buttressed by and provided a source for the popular corporate culture literature (Keulen and Kroeze, 2012; Rowlinson and Procter, 1999). A working hypothesis would be that historians who write founder-centered narratives are less inclined to be reflexive about the narratives they produce, and more likely to be aligned by default with a theoretical stance which maintains that narratives are found rather than imposed. Any attempt to construct an alternative to the conventional founder-centered historical narrative of an organization would therefore seem to require a degree of reflexivity since it is less likely to be 'found' in the pre-existing narratives produced by organizations or their members. This is more likely to lead to an acceptance that to some extent narratives must be imposed.

All of the above is probably more relevant to the decisions by historical researchers regarding how to position their work in order to gain approval or avoid disapproval from various entrenched theoretical camps, rather than the actual writing up of their research. Richard Evans' (1997) celebrated book, *In Defence of History*, provides a useful assessment of the influence of theory in history that sets the scene for the historic turn in organization studies. Evans side-stepped the theoretical arguments raised by the likes of Hayden White (Fulbrook, 2002: 171), but offers a wonderfully evocative account of how historians actually work with narrative:

Most historical narratives consist of a mixture of revealed, reworked, constructed and deconstructed narratives from the historical past and from the historian's own mind. We start with a rough-hewn block of stone, and chisel away at it until we have a statue. The statue was not waiting there to be discovered, we made it ourselves, and it would have been perfectly possible for us to have made a different statue from the one we finally created. On the other hand, we are constrained not only by the size and shape of the original stone, but also by the kind of stone it is; an incompetent sculptor

not only runs the risk of producing an unconvincing statue that does not resemble anything, but also of hammering or chiselling too hard, or the wrong way, and shattering the stone altogether. (Evans, 1997: 147)

Evans' neat analogy with sculpture avoids confronting the sensitive issues of fictionalization. But the process Evans describes can be translated back into the terminology familiar in narratology, where narrative is distinguished from 'story' and 'plot':

'story' consists of all the events which are to be depicted. 'Plot' is the chain of causation which dictates that these events are somehow linked and that they are therefore to be depicted in relation to each other. 'Narrative' is the showing or telling of these events and mode selected for that to take place. (Cobley, 2001: 5–6)

The obvious difference between history and fiction is that the historian is constrained in the selection of events to be depicted by what is available in the sources, whereas the novelist, say, can construct a story from scratch (Rigney, 2013: 191). As a practicing historian Evans appears to give considerable license for the selection of stories from sources – or 'the original stone' in his sculptural analogy – probably more than others (Toms and Wilson, 2010). As Mollan (2019; see also Deal et al., 2020) notes in his perceptive review, the self-appointed guardians of empirical research in management history remain vehemently resistant to the historic turn, which they perceive as poisonous postmodernism.

COMPOSING A NARRATIVE OF THE HISTORIC TURN, c2000 TO THE PRESENT DAY

Despite some shared reference points, such as Chandler's work, business historians were mostly based in history departments, and only moved into business schools in the 1990s and 2000s, particularly in the UK. This led to the emergence of a new community of scholars in management and organization history, comprised of management scholars with historical interests and historians working in business schools. The historic turn brought together scholars with very different conceptions of the role of narrative. Understanding how this process unfolded over time is best served by narrative – an argument often made, but this chapter seeks to not just tell, but to actually show how narrative can be composed. Narrative composition requires a story – this could be people, or events, but in the context of the evolution of an academic field, our story is that of key references as these present the ideas that are the landmarks in the journey of an academic community. Narratives also have a plot – in this case, the reception of historical narratives in management and organization studies.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Chandler's *Strategy and Structure* (1962), both as a common reference point for business historians and organization studies, as well as a blockage to more culturalist orientations from historical theory. Whereas Chandler's (1977, 1990) later works provide an overarching synthesis of the managerial revolution from a vast range of secondary sources, well over half of *Strategy and Structure* is devoted to the four case studies of divisionalization at DuPont, General Motors, Standard Oil, and Sears, Roebuck. The book stands as the exemplar par excellence of an analytically structured narrative because each case study runs over the same highly focused process of the shift from a functional to a divisional structure (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 263–264).

Whittington and Mayer illustrate that the historic turn in organization studies was by no means exclusively a turn to narrative history. Child (1972) has been claimed for both the strategic choice perspective and for contingency theory (Donaldson, 2001: 78). Whittington and Mayer surveyed 'the domestically owned members of the Top 100 industrial companies by sales' in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (2000: 31). They boldly characterize their analytic approach as 'history with purpose' (p.3), and their purpose is to defend the large multidivisional industrial corporation against anti-corporate critics, including radical organization theorists. Nevertheless, a contingency theory interpretation of Chandler renders redundant the hundreds of pages of detailed historical narrative in *Strategy and Structure*. An indication of this is that Whittington and Mayer (e.g. pp.6, 216) mainly cite Chandler's conclusion (Rowlinson, 2003). It as if Chandler's case studies were provided merely for illustration, much as Whittington and Mayer's own case studies are, which are based mostly on publicly available sources such as newspapers and annual reports.

As business historians moved from history departments into expanding business schools there was an expectation that they should engage with theory. But as a leading business historian, Coleman (1987: 151) posed a legitimate question: 'what theory?'. It was by no means obvious which body of theory business historians should relate to. Coleman identified two books as possible theoretical reference points for business historians: Oliver Williamson's *Markets and Hierarchies* (1975) and Andrew Pettigrew's (1985) *The Awakening Giant*. This was a prophetic choice as these texts epitomized the alternative theoretical paths that business historians subsequently chose to take (Rowlinson, 2001).

Business historians were entranced with organizational or transaction costs economics, but economists warned that if business historians wanted to engage with organizational economics, then they would have to refrain from 'writing largely unrelated case studies' (Lamoreaux et al., 1997: 61). Economists were only ever interested in the narratives produced by business historians, if they were interested at all, as illustrations for their theoretical concepts.

By contrast with organizational economics, in *The Awakening Giant* Pettigrew (1985) applied the concept of organizational culture (Pettigrew, 1979) to understand the experience of implementing organizational development (OD) techniques in ICI. This opened up a far more fruitful line of research than organizational economics, and Coleman (1987: 152) was gratified that as well as using interviews and documentary sources Pettigrew also drew on the findings from a commissioned history of ICI for an earlier period (Reader, 1975).

The broader 'potential of non-economical theoretical perspectives' in business history were explored by Yates (1997: 159), who identified the potential for using the sociological concept of structuration (Giddens, 1984). Yates' (1989) groundbreaking work on the history of communication in organizations had already laid the foundations for her contributions to organization studies (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). Drawing on structuration Yates set out the enduring themes in the historic turn, the duality of agency and structure and the shift of emphasis in business history from 'great individuals' – entrepreneurs, founders, and inventors – 'to institutions and organizations' (Yates, 1997: 162). This repositioned business history in a way which opened up the possibilities for dialogue with organization studies.

In terms of content, the cultural or culturalist turn in business history (Rowlinson and Delahaye, 2009) was advanced in an impressive, edited collection of essays (Lipartito and Sicilia, 2004), which recognizes the modern corporation as a socially constructed, historically contingent institution, rather than an economic imperative (Lipartito, 2004). There are inter-

esting chapters on gender (Fisher, 2004), and ethnicity (Dellheim, 2004), but Walker's (2004) chapter on 'White Corporate America' stands out.

Walker (2004) 'proposes that at least some' of the dramatic inequalities faced by African Americans in business and employment at the start of the 21st century 'can be attributed to the decisions of white owned-and-managed enterprise'. Walker refers to the continuation of 'plantation-type' attitudes at companies where qualified black employees have little chance of advancement. She notes that '[i]ronically there were significantly more black managers on plantations during the age of American slavery than there has been in the era of the New Economy'. Walker (2009: xiv) refers to the age of slavery lasting 250 years from the 'racist consensus' of colonial America, rather than an aberration in the history of the United States as a nation (McCraw, 1997: 313). Interestingly Walker (2009: xxiv) argues that the persistence of racism in the 21st century not only prevents any significant advance of black business activity, but also holds back the 'reconstruction of black business history'. The challenge for business historians would be to compose narratives of white racism, as well as black resistance and black empowerment from the sources in business archives (Delton, 2007, 2009; Roediger and Esch, 2012; Walker, 1986).

A shared consciousness of a historic turn coalesced from the realization of common interests between a subset of researchers in the fields of business history, critical management studies, management history, and organization studies. These shared interests included the explication of qualitative historical methods and alternative modes of historical writing, as well as the relevance of historical theorists such as Foucault and White, and culminated in the launch of a new journal, *Management & Organizational History* (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006). There was by no means a shared commitment to any particular kind of history, certainly not to narrative history, and as the historic turn gathered momentum it became gratifyingly more difficult to identify trends within it (Godfrey et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2016). Even so, in the more prominent tendencies in the historic turn there is a discernable shift from considering narrative as a form of composition, to considering narrative as an object for analysis. This does not preclude narrative composition, but it can become conflated with the strategic use of historical narratives by organizations (Foster et al., 2017). An account of narrative composition by an organization does not need be a narrative account.

At this point, the final element of narrative composition becomes evident – that of emplotment (White, 1973). White proposed four primary modes of emplotment based on 19th century historiography: romantic, tragic, comic, and ironic. The mode of emplotment in this chapter is ironic: the historic turn in management and organization studies has been most successful where it turns both history and narrative into the objects of research, rather than ways of doing research.

The findings of new institutionalists that history is an important component in 'rhetorical strategies of legitimacy' (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) culminated in the concept of 'rhetorical history', which recognizes that the past can be used by organizations 'as a persuasive strategy to manage key stakeholders of the firm' (Suddaby et al., 2010: 157; Lubinski, 2023). The seemingly paradoxical use of history to legitimate change (Ybema, 2014) gelled with the increasing interest in agency and institutional work (Suddaby et al., 2023a). As part of this there was a critique of path dependence and the idea that studying history was simply the key to understanding the limits imposed on organizations by the trajectory of their past. The critique highlights how any understanding of the past is itself a narrative construction, but the

focus is on narrative construction by actors in organizations rather than the composition of narratives by researchers themselves (Decker et al., 2021: 1127).

The concept of rhetorical history has reinforced the engagement with the humanities promoted by the historic turn with a generalized explanation for using the historical concepts of invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992) and imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) in organization studies (Suddaby et al., 2010). An early illustration of rhetorical history was the entertaining account of how Tim Hortons, a chain of coffee shops, skillfully used history to appropriate ‘Canadian national culture and identity’ (Foster et al., 2011: 104). Rhetorical history has become a research program in its own right, with a series of case studies (Anteby and Molnar, 2012; Maclean et al., 2018; Poor et al., 2016) and further theorization (Suddaby et al., 2023b). There is more scope for composing narrative histories of how historical narratives came to be constructed in specific historical contexts. A good example would be Smith and Simeone’s (2017) account of how the Hudson Bay Company, founded in 1670, gradually came to realize that its heritage could be a useful resource.

There is considerable commonality between the concept of rhetorical history and ANTi-history (Durepos, 2015), which is an acronym for Actor Network Theory applied to the deconstruction of previously published historical accounts (Durepos, 2023). The foundations for the ANTi-history approach were set out in the introduction to a detailed historical narrative that deconstructs the published commissioned histories of the airline Pan-Am (Durepos et al., 2008). This ‘careful study of the documentation leading to the actual publication of the book in 1980 by Robert Daley reveals the politicized process by which the book was produced’, starting with the compilation of material in the archive and culminating in finding a suitable author (Durepos et al., 2008: 74). The implication is that there must be a similar political process behind the production of almost every commissioned corporate history.

THE NARRATIVE DILEMMA IN HISTORICAL ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Management and organizational history can be said to refer to the historical study of management and organizational phenomena from a wide range of approaches, whereas historical organization studies (Harvey and Maclean, 2023) refers to the application of theories and concepts from organization studies to historical phenomena. Nevertheless, many business and management historians will carry on composing historical narratives indifferent to the offerings from organization theory.

There is a tension around the definition of historical organization studies. If the historical aspect is emphasized then there is an assumption that the study of historical phenomena is evidenced by some sort of archival research, with conceptualization through narrative permitted as theory (Decker et al., 2021: 1126). Nevertheless, the organizational aspect is to the forefront in the ambitious project to build ‘a unified, principled historical organization studies integrating organization theory and historical analysis’ (Maclean et al., 2016: 611). The project of building a ‘creative synthesis’ is predicated upon the ideal of ‘dual integrity’, in which ‘historical organization studies should be deemed authentic within the realms of both organization studies and history’ (Maclean et al., 2016: 615). However, while historical organization studies of a ‘*narrative type*’ are deemed legitimate, ‘the acid test for authenticity is *theory*

development – making an explicit contribution to advancing generalizable knowledge within the field’ (Maclean et al., 2016: 615).

In practice, dual integrity tends to mean that, on the one hand, historians are required to make explicit theoretical and methodological statements, which they may see as superfluous, in order to be published in organization studies journals. On the other hand, the requirement for ‘*historical veracity*’ (Maclean et al., 2016: 615), in terms of detailed citations to sources, tends to be relaxed by authors, editors, and reviewers in organization studies who are unfamiliar with the tenets of source criticism in history.

Historical researchers in organization studies, like all researchers, face a series of dilemmas about how to conduct their research and compose an account of it. The choice between analysis and narration is not merely about taking an intellectual position in a social scientific debate (Abbott, 2004: 43). It also has implications for where to publish and the prospects of publication. The advocates of dual integrity acknowledge that:

History at its purest is written from the sources and the prodigious work required to digest and detail these sources, composing a narrative. (Clegg et al., 2020: 230)

But the implication is that the purest form of narrative history is unlikely to be published in an organization studies journal. A recent edited collection that showcases historical organization studies (Maclean et al., 2020) is both eclectic and impressive but narrative history is noticeably lacking.

Nevertheless, there have been several contributions in leading management journals that have developed the theoretical potential of historical narrative. Hassard’s (2012) award-winning re-evaluation of the Hawthorne studies, stands out as an example of how much an alternative historical perspective can lead to the composition of a novel historical narrative (Kipping et al., 2014: 322). Hassard’s fascinating account of the Western Electric plant in Cicero, Illinois, highlights the importance of the specific historical context that shaped the Hawthorne Works, in particular the tragedy of July 1915 when the *SS Eastland* capsized on the Chicago River. The ship was carrying 2,752 passengers, mainly employees and their families attending the Hawthorne Works Employees’ Annual Picnic. As Hassard (2012: 1443) recounts, ‘841 passengers (mainly women and children) and four crew members perished, the death toll including 22 whole families’ – a greater loss of life than on the Titanic. This represented the greatest loss of life in Chicago’s history, America’s worst maritime disaster, and for Western Electric ‘the greatest tragedy that has ever befallen organized industry’. But this is never mentioned in classic accounts of the Hawthorne experiments where the company context is largely ignored. Hassard’s article challenges the hegemonic account of ‘great men’ that have dominated textbook narratives of the Hawthorne experiments, idolizing them as bringing about a shift towards more ‘enlightened’ management.

A different use of narrative is Lubinski and Wadhvani’s (2020) article about how German firms in India negotiated economic nationalism and anti-imperialism. They develop the concept of ‘geopolitical jockeying’ through an analytically structured narrative that draws out how firms developed political strategies over time. They do not develop a mechanistic model, instead they offer a rich account of how the historical context in India, Germany, and internationally, directly interacted with companies’ decision-making. Strategies are presented not as plans but as interwoven with opportunities and constraints which firms navigate dynamically.

More clearly aligned to organization theory is Perchard and MacKenzie's (2021) historical analysis of British Aluminium Company (BAC), which in some ways provides a classic corporate history account from the foundation of the firm through to its demise. However, by embedding theoretical perspectives such as corporate political activities, path dependence and strategic homophily, they employ the corporate history as a case of well-known dynamics (strategic homophily) leading to unanticipated and undertheorized outcomes (strategic lock-in and failure). All three examples use narrative in nuanced ways, mixing the organizational theorizing with the historical sensibility in strikingly different ways (Decker, 2022).

The actual process of composing a historical narrative remains elusive, largely because narratives are flexible and not as template driven as other modes of presentation (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). Rowlinson, Hassard and Decker (2014) outline four narrative strategies for organizational history. At the extremes are serial history, drawing on reproducible methods and data with a strong focus on analysis and only limited narrative elements (Croidieu and Kim, 2018), and corporate history, a rich yet atheoretical narrative of a company from beginning up to the present (Cabras and Bamforth, 2016). In practice, many current examples of corporate histories are no longer atheoretical, but draw on theory in ways that are different from management studies (Iwashita, 2022; Lamberg et al., 2014).

It is between those extreme examples that management and organizational history has seen creative experiments with narrative and theory. Ethnographic histories draw on cultural and social contexts to problematize our historical and theoretical understanding of both the past and organizational dynamics (Decker, 2014; Giovannoni & Quattrone, 2018; McKinlay, 2002). Analytically structured histories have been developed to reflect the notion of dual integrity, but they balance the empirical veracity of a detailed historical narrative with the need for theoretical development in different ways, as discussed above. The practical challenge of fitting a rich and contextual historical narrative into social science templates of inductive qualitative research (Gehman et al., 2018; Langley & Abdallah, 2011) continues if skepticism towards narrative construction as a method remains an issue, despite exhortations of dual integrity.

REFLECTIONS ON NARRATIVE COMPOSITION

As highlighted in the introduction, this chapter has been composed as a historical narrative of the historic turn. It may be worth briefly reflecting on how and why this was done. In the first place, there is the motto 'show don't tell', and writing a narrative seemed the best way to show readers what a narrative looks like. Second, a narrative seems an appropriate way to reflect on the place of narrative in the historic turn.

In relation to the terminology of narratology referred to above (Cobley, 2001), the 'story' consists of all the references cited, or at least those which are landmarks or exemplars in relation to narrative history in organization studies, rather than those cited for commentary. The 'plot' is the reception to historical narratives in organization studies and it is ironic insofar as it is argued that even as the historic turn has advanced, narrative has been sidelined. And yet narrative history reappears, as in Hassard's (2012) account of the Hawthorne studies, because it is 'the royal way to understand how events occur the way they do' (Rigney, 2013: 190).

The narrative is broadly chronological, but not strictly so. Each of the following sections have an analytical focus and are not divided into discrete periods, they overlap. This captures

the sense that the historic turn, or historical consciousness, is not a unified entity but a set of tendencies. It is not difficult to imagine how the chapter could have been constructed differently either as a historical narrative, or a more analytical literature review. It could have been written in the first person from direct experience, along the lines of a story about when Mick met Peter – and John, and Stephie, and Bill (Smith and Thompson, 1992). Or else a literature search could have been conducted for a selected set of journals using terms such as: narrative; historic turn; rhetorical history; ANTi-history; and historical organization studies. Neither of these would necessarily have been any better or worse. A memoir celebrating individuals in the know would have been incestuous and contradicts the supposed aversion to founder-centered narratives. And an analytical account of the literature on narrative history in organization studies might not be the most convincing way to persuade readers to consider composing a narrative for themselves.

Bringing narrative into management and organization studies presents an opportunity to go beyond just introducing a different way of presenting data (Gill et al., 2018). It also entails a different approach towards the notion of theorizing, one that does not solely identify theory as a property of management studies (Decker et al., 2021). The role of narrative is to make sense and explain the interaction of people and events over time. Mink (1966: 36), a historical theorist, even considered historical understanding as fundamentally different from other forms of knowing, an ‘interpretative narrative’ that is distinct from both chronology and scientific analysis. Reflective narrative composition challenges both the purpose and usefulness of organizational theorizing in its current form. Rather than focusing on generating theories that seek to predict organizational outcomes based on carefully selected data, it provides insights into the interaction of people and processes *in* time and *over* time, embedded in a wider context that cannot be abstracted away if any meaningful conclusions are to be drawn.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Mordhorst M and Schwarzkopf S (2017) Theorising narrative in business history. *Business History* 59(8): 1155–1175.

Providing an excellent summary of debates surrounding narrative, this article introduces a special issue with some engaging examples of how business historical research can employ narrative reflexively. Its strength lies in the analysis of narrative construction by practicing historians, as well as its discussion of the role of narrative for both business historians and management scholars.

- (2) Clark P and Rowlinson M (2004) The treatment of history in organisation studies: Towards an ‘Historic turn’? *Business History* 46(3): 331–352.

This article proposed the historic turn in a semi-ironic way as a criticism of the treatment of history in organization studies. Narrative and historical forms of understanding subsequently became more influential in management with the creation of the journal *Management & Organizational History*, and the growth of history tracks at major management conferences such as the European Group of Organization Studies, Academy of Management, British Academy of Management, and others.

- (3) Rowlinson M, Hassard J and Decker S (2014) Research strategies for organizational history: A dialogue between historical theory and organization theory. *Academy of Management Review* 39(3): 250–274.

By drawing out, in a stylized form, the differences between historical and organizational research as three dualisms (narrative vs. analysis, sources vs. data, and chronology vs. periodization), this piece provided the epistemological and theoretical grounding for more historical research in management. Importantly, it explains and justifies the different forms that narrative can take and proposes narrative composition as a viable mode of representation for organizational research.

- (4) Maclean M, Harvey C and Clegg SR (2016) Conceptualizing historical organization studies. *Academy of Management Review* 41(4): 609–632.

This influential piece argues for an integration of historical research practices with organizational theorizing. They propose ‘dual integrity’ as a way to balance the different disciplinary requirements involved, and four different purposes for historical organization studies: evaluating, explicating, conceptualizing and narrating. Alternatively, Harvey and Maclean (2023) provide an accessible introduction to the approach.

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6. Researching with records in management and organisation studies: archives, data corpus, and reflexivity

Amon Barros

INTRODUCTION

Authors in management have emphasised the importance of taking archives seriously when writing history (Barros et al., 2019; Decker, 2013; Durepos et al., 2017; Nix & Decker, 2021). “Historiographical reflexivity is defined as an engagement with history as a source of theorising as well as a repertoire of methods for researching the past” (Decker et al., 2020, p. 2). Reflections about archives and their consequences are relatively new in management. Other social sciences have also overlooked the richness and relevance of archival studies to enhance research (Caswell, 2016; Hamilton et al., 2002; Mckinlay, 2006, 2013). Paraphrasing Rowlinson, Hassard, and Decker’s (2014) discussion on history: since archives matter, more reflexivity is necessary to deal with the significance and meaning of its traces. “The archive is ... not a piece of data, but a status” (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20), many decisions must take place allowing something to be kept and work as “evidence for other things”.

In this sense, claiming to use archival sources is not enough. Researchers should interact with their data developing studies that are coherent and transparent about the connections between sources, claims, and evidence (Mayrl & Hoover Wilson, 2020). Investigations in management and organisation studies must engage with archival studies to better understand the sources they are using. Historical reflexivity in management and organisation studies (Decker et al., 2020) welcomes “archival reflexivity”, or understanding what that *corpus* the researcher engages with means and how it impacts claims about theory and reality. It can also foster new pathways to explore specific questions in a data corpus as a by-product of the research.

This chapter advances the notion that some data *corpora* could be considered *quasi-archives*. It would mean that researchers should interrogate these collections about the uses and intentions behind documents, putting them into context. These collections with shared characteristics can look, for instance, at the function they performed to group them (Cook, 2011). They would not immediately turn into archives, but it would allow knowledge developed in the archival studies to illuminate research and improve the questions one might ask and the answers they will develop from the sources.

The growing interest in archival data and the increasing availability of digitised and born-digital sources make engaging with archival studies’ insights a critical topic. Understanding how archives and records and their interpretations change is vital for research using these sources. For instance, various elements of everyday life in organisations leave digital traces, with many organisations having a “digital nature” (Nix and Decker, 2021). Therefore, management research must position itself around those sources and how they influ-

ence investigations. As Decker (2013) explores, the lack of space to reflect upon archives and their meanings is even more striking in a field where methodology overshadows several other discussions. Management demands that methods and methodological choices be visible as exposed pipes in a theoretical building, and the same remains true for archives. Additionally, the role of archivists as plumbers who keep the information flowing towards the user and the effects of going without them should also be acknowledged (Taylor, 1987). Amidst researchers often obsessing with “rigorous methods”, ignoring the nature of the archive seems almost ironic if not somewhat convenient.

Tennent and Gillet (2023) provide practical guidance on how to frame archival research for management studies, including potential repositories for research. In this chapter, I explore different possibilities for research using documents, and I approach archives from a conceptual angle. Firstly, understanding them as organised collections of documents (archives), within narrative frames (the archive). Secondly, some records and documents are accessible as a somewhat unorganised collection, which invites researchers to navigate through sources unrelated to previously established frames. Inspired by propositions from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I will call these collections a data corpus. They depend on the researcher organising them. They can include leaked files or other records uploaded online with intentionality but little historicity, like the entire history of someone’s social network or a data leak from a whistle-blower. Finally, a data set is established using a sample or all the records in a data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both data sets and data corpora can be understood as quasi-archives. They share some characteristics with archives without fulfilling all core definitions. For instance, they may not have long-term historical value, were created to be used as a source, or are not yet estranged from their original usage (International Council on Archives, 2016).

This chapter will revisit the literature on archival studies to position my understanding of the topic. Then I will introduce the idea that certain data *corpora* could be considered *quasi-archives*, such as someone’s social network history, records in a data leak, or even the documents gathered and organised to answer a question. I will then present my conclusions and engage with current trends in archival studies.

HISTORICAL MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES, ARCHIVAL STUDIES AND DATA CORPUS

Scholars in historical management and organisation studies (HMOS) are striving to explore the implications of archival research. Often, archives (as institutions or collections) convey a single narrative while encapsulating multiple storylines. Not every collection of documents is an archive; just accessing a place or a website storing documents does not mean that someone is doing archival research. Archives are not just windows to the past or a huddle of records. They are sources for writing histories for the present and of the present. Archives are shaped by discourses that suggest specific interpretations of their records, while documents are also produced under often opaque discursive rules. The archive is also associated with surreptitious discourses and things that appear out of place but still shape present-day practices.

Management research has increasingly opened itself to historical approaches (Decker et al., 2020; Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014). However, before discussions pertaining to the “historic turn”, the past in management received a superficial examination and how it is constructed

and reproduced (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004). Currently, researchers in management studies highlight that the past is not fully retrievable and malleable (Lubinski, 2018). Historical research became more reflexive, fostering a productive bridging with management studies overall (Decker et al., 2020; Durepos et al., 2019; Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Nevertheless, most research that analyses past events in management does it without recursively drawing on historiographical debates (Üsdiken and Kipping, 2020). Also, neither the past nor complex processes behind sources' production and preservation are questioned, reproducing an old-fashioned "realist" approach toward documents (Cook, 2013).

Archives can be of use to investigate the role of organisations in society, including interrogating memory (Coraiola et al., 2021; Greene, 2004) and forgetting (Anteby and Molnár, 2012), an increasingly relevant topic in management and organisation studies (Foroughi et al., 2020; Mena et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2010). For instance, Cutcher, Dale, and Tyler (2019) have highlighted how remembering and forgetting are entangled and influenced by material representations. Also, forgetting is connected to the loss of shared meanings about memories in the present (Foroughi and Al-Amoudi, 2020). Forgetting can also affect how records are appraised following the present interests. However, since archived records have permanence, even if now they are not used and have no meaning attributed to them, they are available and could be retrieved.

Archives are not just a prime source of data for historians but also for scholars writing within the management boundaries. Scholars might use corporate archives to conduct longitudinal studies over time to test theories (Üsdiken & Kipping, 2020). Although somewhat rare, especially in the Global South, corporate archives can help interrogate the critical aspects of socio-economic developments, even beyond the organisation itself, asking how social structures are reproduced in and by organisations (Ray, 2019; Romani et al., 2021; Smith & Johns, 2020). On the other hand, public archives tend to be more abundant in developed countries.

Additionally, the relevance and availability of digital sources is increasing and changing how researchers relate to data (Nix and Decker, 2021; Nix et al., 2023). Questions about the nature of archives and its transformations are already established (Cook, 2001, 2013). Therefore, it is growingly relevant for management studies to embrace developments in archival studies and the complexities of dealing with traces of a lost past. Management research drawing on archival data mainly deals with the past without reflexivity (for exceptions, see e.g. Barros et al., 2019; Decker, 2013, 2014). Many researchers disregard the complexity of relying on data from the past, taking it for granted, as if it represented that things are the real thing. With few exceptions (e.g., Coller et al., 2016; Decker, 2014; Durepos et al., 2017; Popp & Fellman, 2020), archival data is mostly analysed as straightforward and transparent observations of what occurred in the past (Schwarzkopf, 2012).

Archives are the object of an academic discipline, archival studies (Caswell, 2016), even beyond other philosophical and methodological interrogations about their use in MOS (Barros, 2016; Decker, 2013). Early archival studies were highly normative and embraced realism as if records were an unbiased trace to lead the historian to understand the past (Cook, 2001; Schwartz & Cook, 2002). Archives were understood more as a group of given mechanics and practices than objects for philosophical reflection (Caswell, 2016). The discipline worried mainly about public documents that should be kept and establishing adequate guidance for archivists curating the collections. Modern archival studies developed especially from the work of Hilary Jenkinson (1892–1962) and Theodore Schellenberg (1903–1970) (Tschan, 2002). The modernist paradigm has long been the target of multiple criticisms about its

assumptions on the development of archives (Cook, 2013). Concomitantly, archival research has always been connected with accessing, recordkeeping, and reproduction technologies, for instance (Cook, 2007).

The word archive has multiple meanings (Barros, 2016; Hamilton et al., 2002) that are permanently revisited (Stoler, 2002), including metaphorical evocation, corpus, and collection of sources. The word may describe a location, a group of documents, or, more broadly, a data collection that is still disorganised but has components that are somehow related to one another. According to Stoler (2009), an “archive” might be an organisation or a collection of papers that it holds. Additionally, archival studies have experienced a paradigmatic shift (Cook, 1996) from understanding “records as static physical objects, and towards understanding them as dynamic virtual concepts ... within fluid horizontal networks of work-flow functionality” (Cook, 2001, p. 4).

For some time now, archival studies have abandoned the notion that archives are natural by-products formed by sediments of organisational and people’s activities (Ilerbaig, 2021). The contemporary archive implies the combination of groups, places, and various practices that establish networks of meanings (De Certeau, 1988). All archives are shaped within power networks (Schwartz & Cook, 2002) and around “politics of memory” (Cook, 1996). Documents are created and maintained within these plots, acting as objects that change depending on their use. Documents are given values throughout the process of gathering them (data clustering), organising them (archiving), and reproducing them in ways that will include them in new semantic networks.

Amidst this ongoing change, an essential element is a growing capacity of storage keeping and the increased accessibility offered by cheaper means of reproducing records and offering online access (Gill & Elder, 2012). Decisions about recordkeeping persist (Featherstone, 2000). Archives are produced not only by presences but also by absences (Caswell et al., 2017; Durepos et al., 2017). “The archive is the production of the heirs” (Fritzschke, 2005, p. 16) who need to find meaning in offered narratives and against the fixed nature of documents kept for posterity (Mbembe, 2002).

Archives are full of tacit narratives that need to be acknowledged in the quest for meaning (Ketelaar, 2001). They are not passive sources but are actively engaged in knowledge production (Stoler, 2002). Archives represent multiple and hidden meanings about society, shaped by the sentiments of those producing and storing documents (Stoler, 2009). Meanings are produced in context and the interaction between the documents, the questioner, and the institution (Skarpelis, 2020). Archives are always figured, and their meaning and potential are attributed by the researcher (Hamilton et al., 2002).

Many people do not devise a clear understanding of archives (Schwarzkopf, 2012). Not everything that holds a record, not every data set, is an archive, although all collections might benefit from a suspicious inquirer who questions its integrity and reasons. In fact, increasingly, archives are not seen only as buildings storing physical documents because born-digital sources are becoming more relevant (Nix & Decker, 2021). Even if what is being named as an archive is just a mass of records, researchers would do well to think about intentionalities in producing, gathering, and preserving those sources before using them as evidence of something.

When someone mentions an archive, they are not necessarily thinking about an institution or a curated set of documents. So, we also need to consider the ambiguity within the word, which should prompt social scientists to engage with concepts carefully (Bourdieu, 1991). An archive (institution) is not reducible to the records it keeps as its archival holdings (Barros,

2016; Caswell, 2016). It is also framed by institutional logic, practices, and values that shape the actors that plan the organisation and execute its routines. “The archive” can also be understood as a discursive place where tropes still exist and influence ongoing discursive practices (Derrida, 1995).

Also, archives are dynamically organised through changing orders of values (Cook, 2001). Additionally, the concept expands with some researchers suggesting that cities could be read as archives (Rao, 2009; Sheringham & Wentworth, 2016), as well as circus performances (Miley and Read, 2021). Here, archives are not necessarily what is written but what is inscribed as possible supports establishing narratives about a place. In this sense, buildings, statues, records, streets, other landmarks, and documents would come together to impress a narrative about the city in people’s minds.

In everyday language, most collections are considered archives even if they do not answer to principles of selection and archiving. The ability to maintain registers has become more pervasive and ubiquitous since we produce, record and access stored information all the time (Caswell, 2009; Pötzsch, 2018). A register might be a document, but also a digital photo, a web post or information about a daily route on a map app.

In this sense, Cook’s (2001) notion that records gain relative autonomy also talks to the growing use of data named “an archive” in management research. New datasets are developed, new relationships between users and records are established, and the archivist profession faces ongoing changes (Cook, 2013; Cook & Schwartz, 2002). This adds to the confusion since people increasingly access data without metadata – information on how they were organised. Therefore, researchers engaging with records should acknowledge archival studies and could also organise the data they engage with through transparent logic that would turn complex conjuncts of registers into readable collections.

What I call data corpus is, then, a broad term that includes the records considered as potential sources to answer a research question. One can establish a data corpus from a segment of data retrieved in an archive, an individual collection, or from a collection of sources that hold the potential to answer be valuable for research. For instance, one can establish a corpus gathering documents from archives, added with other documents collected in websites and newspaper archives. Departing from Braun and Clarke (2006), I call the assemblage of documents that are actually consulted a “data set”. Therefore, every researcher using documents and archives will have a corpus comprising all registers that could potentially be of use, and a data set, which encompasses what has been used for answering a research question. Although this differencing might not make much sense for historians, it can offer a path for showing up pipes and plumbers (Decker, 2013; Taylor, 1987).

Writing historical management and organisation studies demands “dual integrity” (Harvey and Maclean, 2023; Maclean et al., 2016), meaning that both fields of knowledge must legitimate the research. In this sense, not only producing new theories or testing old ones from the data might be demanded from management scholars, but also high methodological transparency, which leads to questioning the nature of the evidence used to develop arguments.

Therefore, the research might benefit from adopting tenets from archival studies when faced with a collection of registers that is not an archive. The same goes for organising a data corpus into a data set. If a data corpus is to be considered a *quasi*-archive, it will usually be concerned with matters that hold historical value, even if it deals with the history of the present. In any case, they will also be influenced by some rules around appraisal, meaning, and representation.

For instance, Wikileaks, a non-profit organisation that publishes document leaks and classified media, is an uncensored archive (Snickars, 2014; Upward et al., 2011). Initially, Wikileaks aimed to establish an interface similar to Wikipedia, allowing users to post new documents anonymously and discuss their contents on the same platform (Snickars, 2014). Although Wikileaks did not keep that format, it became an enormous database for miscellaneous documents that were little explored in general. Additionally, the lack of mediation between producers and users of the data made it difficult to navigate and establish meaning (Roberts, 2012). Therefore, Wikileaks data is neither journalism nor precisely an archive, although Snickars (2014) considers it an example of the advancement brought to archives in the digital age.

Wikileaks works mainly with disorganised “hot data” instead of curated historical records, usually guarded in archives of heritage institutions. Nevertheless, the information is curated. Leaked documents are selected for some reason or other and editorialised (Findlay, 2013). The unmediated and massive distribution of files makes it a case to be understood, together with other data dumps. Wikileaks operates with digitalised documents on the internet and does not need to bother with the number of documents amassed (Michael, 2015). It flirts with new politics of accountability and truthfulness to organisations (Munro, 2016, 2018; Nayar, 2010). Researching leaked documents might also bring ethical implications of using leaked documents not vetted by competent authorities (Michael, 2015) or using data revealed by a whistle-blower whose intentions might not be straightforward.

Traditionally in archives, an archivist facilitates the interaction with documents, and the researcher uses categorisations previously established by the institution, which binds registers together. When dealing with unorganised troves of data, the researcher must establish their own rationale, which must be made transparent to readers. At the same time, it is almost impossible to investigate such a platform without using computers to help in the search, bringing additional attention to the unmediated relationship between researchers and the data (Bail, 2014).

ENTERING THE ARCHIVES WITH PREPARATION

Before entering or accessing an archive for research, it is crucial to understand what awaits. Archives are produced under a particular hierarchy that arranges documents and generates silences (Decker, 2013). In this sense, archives are not merely a by-product of everyday organisational activities but are shaped by various choices, from when the text or object is created to when someone decides to file it, store it, and digitise it.

Therefore, it is crucial to look at the records as pieces in a jigsaw, constituting a monument to something, like a colonial state (Stoler, 2002). It is also necessary to pay tribute to the field, advancing our understanding of what it means to enter an archive. No one would think about doing quantitative research in management without knowing at least the basics of statistics. Why, then, does it seem acceptable to “do archival research” without even bothering to know what an archive is in the first place?

I suggest two levels of questions relevant to researchers using archives or quasi-archives, like data leaks. One is about how those registers were organised before the investigation. The other is about how the registers answer to specific rules of text production that push them to reveal some elements while obfuscating others. While the latter does not necessarily interest

every researcher since it might force interrogations about language and representation, the former is unavoidable. How and why something was archived and kept framing indirectly what someone can ask a corpus and the resulting answers. “Like all human activities archiving is culturally bound ... all archival records, as a result, have their own story” (Cook, 2011, p. 178).

Therefore, claiming to do archival research comes with some costs. Tilly (2002) highlights that empirical social sciences need to base their claims on two different theories: first, about the phenomena under analysis; and secondly, about the evidence-sustaining claims about the evidence of that phenomenon. Following Tilly, Skarpelis asks: how can we make claims about the social world based on archival records (2020, p. 386)? The question does not hold any obvious answers, and the researcher will need to convince themselves and their colleagues about it. The question invites the researcher to establish what their sources are “talking about”, to consider which questions they might offer answer to.

Some researchers in management have recognised the importance of reflexively engaging with archives (Barros et al., 2019) to write histories of things’ past. They also invite researchers to write critically about experiences within archives (Decker, 2014), their multiple meanings (Barros, 2016), their silences (Adorisio, 2014; Durepos et al., 2017; Pfefferman, 2016), and the framing of narratives (Paludi et al., 2021). Business archives are also organised under even more specific logics, usually privileging managers and their decisions (Mckinlay, 2013).

Therefore, every archive will have its logic and narratives, but public and private organisations will also follow different appraisal rules. Reflexivity may contribute to denaturalising documents and further question their capacity to reproduce reality, even in the moment of its creation. It also opens space to look for multiple voices that may appear in a single document or to inquire who are the ones being silenced (Barros et al., 2019). Therefore, a researcher can question why was something archived and survived? What was the original function of this record? Why are records organised under this rationale? What traces are missing from the records? What topics do not appear? How am I implied in this research? How does my background influence how I read these files? Does cultural bias influence my interpretations? How were the people who produced the registers influenced by their context?

Mckinlay (2013) brings up three clues to the management scholar who wants to enter the archives (with Michel Foucault). First, he suggests that business archives are only one source that can be used to understand the logics of managing in a giving firm at a specific moment. Second, he suggests looking for ruptures and discontinuities that emerge from the records to highlight unravelling threads. Finally, Mckinlay (2013: 151) suggests we “search for administrative, analytical innovations that shift the ways in which the organisation, its clients or staff are imagined and managed”.

For the foreseeable future, archival institutions will remain relevant because not everything can and will be digitised, and they also guard sources in formats other than written papers (Szekely, 2017). Nevertheless, all essential functions of archiving will experience significant changes with the exponential growth of sources that were born digital, but also with growing pressure to make documents available for the broader public at a cheaper cost (Moss & Gollins, 2017). Also, new models are possible. For instance, post-custodial archives allow community-based organisations to amass records without holding possession (Caswell, 2014). Also, increasingly user-generated metadata is incorporated into archival sources, although much is yet to develop in this approach (Gorzalski, 2013). Finally, self-tracking is a means to

expand the understanding of people's lives and how they share it with others through online social networks (Trace & Zhang, 2020).

That is not to say that archives are helpful only for writing historical narratives since they can hold materials that allow structuring narratives from diverse angles. The writings of Michel Foucault, an influential thinker on how people understand archives, exemplify how documents can be put to uses other than writing historical narratives (McKinlay, 2013). At the same time, sources that are part of everyday lives are still not as developed by people interested in archival research (Caswell, 2009). Research already shows that current means of producing records about what has passed are helpful for business and management historians (Nix & Decker, 2021).

I will also suggest that datasets built for specific investigations might generate interest and become quasi-archive. A quasi-archive will be a group of records that fully or partially represents a data corpus. As Cook (2001) suggests, technological changes will increasingly bring new possibilities to archival research (Moss & Gollins, 2017). Also, archival definitions include the idea that user-generated records will become an iArchive (Pötzsch, 2018) and new methods that allow for the first grasp of vast amounts of available data (Bail, 2014). In both cases, the logic of archiving, accessing, and sampling these records will determine any conclusions about them.

In this sense, records users must embrace reflexivity about their role in producing the data set they are using, even when archives and archivists mediate access. However, this does not mean advocating for rigid and repetitive data analysis methods. Qualitative research does not need boilerplate techniques to achieve originality and relevance (Pratt, 2009). Also, using various sources to triangulate information may invite a bricolage approach toward producing relevant research (Pratt et al., 2020). And every source will prompt new questions about what is good evidence (Tilly, 2002).

Often, archives in management are considered an inert deposit of words and records. This simplified view is analogue to what Rowlinson et al. (2010) discuss regarding the shortcomings of memory studies or the lack of attention to the role of imagery in understanding organisational memory (Cutcher et al., 2019). Understanding memory as storage, not a dynamic social process, is impoverishing and skewed towards presentist concerns (Rowlinson et al., 2010). The same is true for archives. Even if someone understands archives as a collection of things, the meanings of the objects will change over time. An informed engagement with registers, documents, and archives must recognise that neither institutions nor documents are immediately transparent to its interlocutors. No one takes corporate social responsibility reports at face value because everyone understands that multiple forces and incentives shape those documents (Phillips et al., 2023). The same principles account for other documents people produce, although less obviously.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Archives do not fix time. They are also not fixed in time. What the institution means and how its documents are interpreted will vary following the context and questions posed by researchers. Numerous other nuances can be explored when researching records. Every document could be deconstructed in multiple discourses, analysed as a part of a complex network of meanings and power struggles that allow or push words into paper (or electronic files). Also, archives are full

of metadata; data about the records they keep that should contextualise them for anyone with access. Archivists are key actors organising and granting access to most archives, even if they sometimes act silently or in the background (Foster et al., 2020). Additionally, engaging with archival studies is necessary to incorporate advances in that field to avoid reinventing the well or ignoring avenues already opened to develop research.

On the other hand, quasi-archives may have little or no metadata or be curated by users in a wiki format. As I argue here, it can be developed by the researcher by attributing a rationale to how they order data and pushing for transparency on the logic behind how data was organised into something legible and useful *for the research*. Considering these and other potential changes emerging from the transformations in how societies produce and store data is a challenge for the researcher dealing with any registers. The provenance of the information they are using and its characteristics will shape their research knowingly or unknowingly. Looking at data as a corpus that can be developed into data sets could eliminate confusion around using the terminology.

Archives are promising avenues for research but also have multiple hidden traps and meanings. Data from multiple sources will be written under different rules and produced to fulfil varied expectations. A researcher can ignore that and find answers that are not necessarily wrong. However, by accounting for the multiple biases ingrained within records and the institutions that make them available, the researcher might open new avenues of inquiry. The multiple changes – conceptually, physically, and otherwise – that archives and the usage of records raise invite increased awareness of the potential of engaging with archives and data corpora more generally.

Moreover, online archives are gradually more accessible to researchers, changing how one enters an archive and how they access its documents (Nix et al., 2023). More accessibility may also generate new opportunities for investigating and breaking chains of meaning. With the idea of quasi-archives, it is possible to imagine investigators leaving their trajectory with the data as a shareable outcome of a research that might generate impact in and beyond the academic community.

Reflexivity is key for raising suspicion around what the archive holds and what discourses are presented and shaping a document. It also allows the researcher to turn a mirror into themselves to interrogate how identity, including epistemological backgrounds, can influence how one reads the data. It is a methodological attitude when generating narratives from archival research that might help develop better interpretations and theories. Even if a study is not directly connected to historical preoccupations, understanding the complexity of archives might offer new insights and prevent mistakes.

Archival studies offer ideas to analyse data, including understanding what is, what is not and what could be an archive. This chapter claims that archival studies' knowledge could enrich data analysis in management, even beyond historical research. Archival data analysis would deliver more relevant understandings if knowledge borrowed from archival studies is dealt with seriously. Both researchers examining documents deposited in archives and academics dealing with other collections of records would benefit from deeper insights.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

If readers want to further explore the discussion around archives in management and organisation studies, I suggest the following texts.

- (1) Cook, T. (2011). The archive(s) is a foreign country: Historians, archivists, and the changing archival landscape. *American Archivist*, 74(2), 600–632. <https://doi.org/10.1353/can.0.0194>

This article was the departing point to my understanding of how archives and the data they preserve have an opaque dimension to consider. It focuses on how historians and archivists approach archives from different angles and how it influences interpretations.

- (2) Decker, S. (2013). The silence of the archives: Business history, post-colonialism and archival ethnography. *Management & Organisational History*, 8(2), 1–24.

The article explains how historians build meaning from archives, challenging the idea that records hold any meaning independent of context. It also offers precious advice for archival research, bringing some fruitful strategies to deal with abundant records.

- (3) McLaren, P. G., & Durepos, G. (2021). A call to practice context in management and organization studies. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 30(1), 74–84.

The article discusses how researchers in management should take context into consideration in their research. By presenting some challenges in considering the context of research in general, the article also allows for interesting engagements to contextualise archives and records to fuller explore their meaning.

- (4) Nix, A., & Decker, S. (2021). Using digital sources: The future of business history? *Business History*, 0(0), 1–24.

The future of archival research will deal with many changes; increasing amounts of digital sources is one of them and probably most significant. This article is a welcome effort to bridge digital history and management studies.

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7. On terms: a key to methodological issues in the construction of history

Albert J. Mills and Jean Helms Mills

INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that this collection of essays has been 40 years in the making, with an etiology reaching back to the work of Mayer Zald (1989), and Alfred Kieser (1994). The case was made by Mick Rowlinson, Peter Clark, and Charles Booth (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Clark and Rowlinson, 2004), who contended that organization and management theory (OMT), as a sub-field of enquiry, lacked historical accounts. Seeking to strengthen their argument for an increased focus on history in OMT, Rowlinson and his colleagues drew on Zald and Kieser's earlier calls for an "historic turn" (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Clark and Rowlinson, 2004: 331).

The lack of historical accounts in OMT, thus, became the focus of a long, and at times fierce, debate over the potential value of history to OMT (Bowden, 2019; Goldman, 1994; Kieser, 1994; Mollan, 2019; Taylor et al., 2009; Toms and Wilson, 2010). Front and center of the emerging debate were Peter Clark, Charles Booth, and Mick Rowlinson (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Clark and Rowlinson, 2004), who, over a busy two-year period, saw the revival of the *Journal of Management History* (JMH),¹ the establishment of a new journal – *Management & Organizational History* (MOH),² and the publication of numerous compendiums of books making the case for an "historic turn" in OMT (McLaren et al., 2015). The book projects have continued at a considerable pace ever since (Bowden and Lamond, 2015; Bruce, 2020; Cummings et al., 2017; Maclean et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2017, 2022).

As we read through the various chapters of this book, we gain some sense of the influence of Rowlinson and his colleagues on the idea of a historic turn in OMT. Reference to their work is peppered throughout the various chapters, especially its influence on the development of new approaches to the study of history and the past. We have chosen to start this chapter with a focus on Michael Rowlinson and his colleagues for three reasons: first, to reveal the context in which business history was challenged and changed regarding historiographic methods;³ second, to highlight the role of the historian in the development of notions of the past and history; and third, to examine the role of actor networks in the production of history. In the first case, it has been argued, Rowlinson and his colleagues created the notion of the "historic turn" as a definitive account of an emergent narrative about what constitutes history. They did so, among other things, through reference to Zald and Keiser (Mills and Novicevic, 2020).

¹ Until 2006 JMH was a subsection of the journal *Management Decision*.

² Charles Booth was the editor of MOH, with Mick Rowlinson and Roy Jacques as Associate Editors.

³ Interestingly postmodernist scholarship has been critiqued for ignoring context (Batiz-Lazo, 2019; Muldoon, 2019; see Wilson et al., 2022).

Thus, referencing “the call” for an historic turn overexaggerated the role of Keiser and Zald’s work and their connection to debates in 2006. In the second place, the notion of a specific historic account (e.g., the call for an historic turn) is blurred in terms of the role of the historian who invents crucial events in constructing a history (White, 1987). In the third place, it has been argued elsewhere (Mills and Novicevic, 2020), that the idea of the “historic turn” was an outcome of a series of human (e.g., scholars), non-human (e.g., conference papers) and non-corporeal actants (e.g., the idea of history itself).

This discussion of the character and value of Rowlinson’s work is not aimed especially at critique but rather to raise issues about the problematic of history and the past and to reveal our own subjectivities in the process. In several ways Rowlinson and colleagues have played a critical role in contributing to debates around history and methodology – a central feature of this book. Along the way their work has encouraged new and revised approaches to the study of history, including postmodernist (Cummings et al., 2017), narrativist (Rowlinson, 2004; Rowlinson et al., 2023), rhetorical (Suddaby et al., 2010; Lubinski, 2023), microhistorical (Carnegie and McBride, 2023; Maclean et al., 2021; Mills, 2017) and ANTiHistory (Durepos, 2023; Durepos and Mills, 2012; Durepos et al., 2008). The latter reference reveals our own biases and the historiographic lens we apply to make sense of the various chapters in this book.

KEY TERMS

In asking us to provide a chapter, the editors gave us free reign to draw on our “years of experience” to comment on what insights we have gained from the book. We have used this space to make sense of the book through an exploration and application of selected key terms. In the process, we hope that this slightly unconventional approach will assist the reader in further understanding how certain approaches deal with history and the past. To that end, we have drawn up a list of key terms from each chapter, which we selectively focus on.

Methods and Madness

One of the first thing that hits the reader of this collection is the wide range of methodological approaches. As the editors of this collection have noted, historians often balk at explaining their methods of analysis, assuming that it is enough to ensure objectivity in the collection of the facts of a given situation. In the process “factualist” accounts have tended to be privileged over other methods of analysis of the past (Rowlinson, 2004). However, as Hayden White (1973) has noted, “the facts don’t speak for themselves”; rather historians influence historical accounts through the choices they make – of what to study, the rationale for what to study, what to focus on, and what narratives to utilize, to develop a particular story of events and/or periods in time and so on (White, 1973, 1984, 1987, 2014).

Two points can be discussed here: (1) the idea of the “historic turn” focussed attention on the need to introduce historical accounts to the study of management and organization theory (OMT); and (2) the process of arguing for an historic turn in OMT raised issues about the character of the method involved. It would be some time before the implications of the latter debate was yet to be experienced and revealed. In the first case one of the outcomes of the various debates had the effect of uniting a number of scholars – from Australasia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Turkey, the UK, and the USA – across the paradigmatic divides

of modernist, postmodernist and amodernist approaches (Mills and Helms Mills, 2018). However, the problem was also posed as one of historicizing OMT, which served to unify the nascent management history community, while theorizing management history, which began to open fissures within that community.

The fissures were manifest in two distinct ways. The first way, most obviously, involved scholarly debates between management/business historians (Cooke et al., 2005; Harvey and Wilson, 2007; Novecivic et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2017, 2022). This reached a point in time where the debates took a somewhat sharp tone, aimed at various actors (namely historians) as much as their theoretical perspectives (Batiz-Lazo, 2019; Bowden, 2019; Mollan, 2019; Muldoon, 2019, 2020). Categorizing the debates as “conflicting visions” Muldoon (2020: 87) expressed the view that postmodernist historic accounts were ‘conspiratorial’ rather than objective accounts (Wilson et al., 2022: 45). More recently James Reveley (2022) has joined the fray. In an otherwise well-thought-out critique of Anti-History, Reveley’s paper is peppered with jibes aimed at ANTi-History theorists, repeating Muldoon’s characterization of ANTi-History as a “conspiracist view” of documentary evidence. Reveley went on to describe ANTi-History scholars as “proselytes” (modern day dogmatists of a fixed religious type) and “philosophical dilettantes” (people who dabble with philosophical ideas with little understanding of their development and meaning). What is of particular interest here is the fact that Reveley, however intended, sub-consciously introduces the role of the influence of networked actors into the production of history. This is seen somewhat more consciously when Reveley attempts to characterize ANTi-History scholars, referring to them as “ANTians” who are part of “the ANTian bandwagon”. More clearly yet, Reveley refers to “ANTI-History’s original proponents” as Gabrielle Durepos and Albert J. Mills “and “the latter’s networked group of co-authors”.⁴

Predating Reveley’s (2022) interest in “networked groups of scholars” Bradley Bowden (2018) provided a controversial list of scholars that he felt were part of those conspiratorial historians who were a threat to the future of business/management history, namely supporters of “the deconstruction of existing ‘theories of interpretation’” (Bowden, 2018: 213). The list includes “British-based adherents such as John Hassard, Bill Cooke, Peter Clark, Charles Booth, Chris Carter, Alfred Kieser, Scott Taylor, Charles Harvey, Steve Toms, Burnard Burnes, and Stephanie Decker”.⁵ Bowden goes on to name “academics drawn from the United States (Dan Wadhwani, Marcelo Bucheli, Milorad Novicevic, Huseyin Leblebici)” and from Canada (Albert Mills, Patricia McLean, Terrance Weatherbee, Matthias Kipping, William Foster). The list, once again, was rounded off with named professors from “Australasia (Stewart Clegg, Stephen Cummings, Todd Bridgman)” and, last but not least, Turkey (Behlul Usdiken) (Bowden, 2018). Further on, Bowden (2018: 221) lists and discusses the “Rhetorical School” centered around Canadian-based academics (Roy Suddaby, Royston Greenwood, William Foster, Matthias Kipping, Diego Coraiola, Alison Minkus, Elden Wiebe). The list of other Rhetorical scholars includes “from Britain (Stephanie Decker), Scandinavia (Matts Alvesson, Dan Kärreman, Juha-Antti, Arjo Laukia), the Netherlands (Ronald Kroeze, Sjoerd Keulen), and the United States (Christine Quinn Trank, David Chandler)”.

⁴ The chosen “fraternity” members include, Jean Helms Mills, Milorad Novicevic and Nick Deal.

⁵ Stephanie Decker is a co-editor of this book as is William Foster. Charles Harvey and John Hassard are among the contributors to this book.

Certainly, there is nothing unusual in detailing and discussing academic schools of thought or trying to list the adherents involved but, as we have argued elsewhere, such labeling can and has served to influence our understanding of the past⁶ and who we deem worthy to be included, excluded, marginalized, and/or privileged; see, for example, the influence of Harold Koontz (1961, 1964) on the notion of management schools of thought (Mills et al., 2021). By pointing out the elements of conflict involved in certain debates we seek to draw attention to the role of emotionality (Boddice, 2018) or emotion rules (Hochschild, 1983) in the production of historical accounts. From our perspective, emotionality could be viewed as a non-corporeal actant (NCA) that may be of interest to those seeking to understand the various influences on history (Hartt, 2013) that are more discursive than real (Jenkins, 1994): the postmodernist historian, Keith Jenkins (1994), has argued that history should be viewed as a meta-discourse.

Critically, as we discuss below, other key terms doing service in the development of historical accounts include a slew of words that evoke interest in, or neglect of, issues of race, ethnicity, gender and other points of intersectionality (Decker, 2013; Shaffner et al., 2019). Although there have been calls for the historization of intersectionality two decades ago (Brah and Phoenix, 2004) it has only received that attention quite recently (Hendricks et al., 2021; Weigand et al., 2014).

KEY TERMS AT PLAY

There are a number of key terms that play out to produce different forms of historical knowledge (White, 1987). The most obvious and complex terms are “history” (Jenkins, 2009) “the past” (Munslow, 2015), and “the historian” (Durepos et al., 2019; Novicevic and Mills, 2019); three key terms that, when combined with other, more specific key terms, serve to create and shape a particular way of studying people and events that went before. As discussed above, this book exposes us to several such “methods”, that include factualist, post-modernist, amodernist, genealogical approaches, ANTi-History, Rhetorical History, microhistory, postcolonialist history, feminist history, and other accounts.⁷ These accounts are more of less central to current approaches to organizational and management histories and are not particularly new to discussions of history. Post-modernism, for example, can be traced back to discussions in the 1980s (Burrell, 1988, 1998; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980); discussions around microhistory (Mills, 2017) have very recently been identified as of value to understanding management

⁶ Kalela (2012), contends that the historian’s account of the past takes place in various contexts that influence what those histories look like. Those contexts include “the interplay of public, popular and scholarly histories” (ibid.). Public histories refer to official, codified accounts and artefacts (e.g., official, governmental World War II histories, monuments, etc.). Popular histories refer to historic accounts that are developed and produced through various mediums, including the newspapers, magazines, movies and so on (e.g., movies depicting certain events that occurred during World War II). Scholarly histories refer to accounts that have been produced following authenticated historical methods by certified processes (e.g., an earned doctorate; association with a scholarly institution, usually a university). In recent years, as this collection testifies, there has been sharp debate as to what constitutes authentic historical methods.

⁷ We would stress here that treatment of the notion of the past also includes various approaches that do not necessarily set out to associate their approach with the idea of history. These approaches include *tracking* (Mintzberg et al., 1986), *longitudinal study* (Delios and Ensign 2000), *evolutional analysis* (Baum et al., 2004), and *critical hermeneutics* (Bryman et al., 2011; Prasad and Mir, 2002).

and organizational histories (Maclean et al., 2015); ANTi-History and Rhetorical History have both been discussed and applied at length over the past two decades (Durepos and Mills, 2012), and so on. This is not to suggest that these approaches are “old hat” but rather that they did exist in some form or other that helped to sustain the development of further iterations.

The Method Wars and Exclusion of Alternative Approaches

At the height of debates around the need for different methodological approaches to the study of history and the past the discussions, if not conflicts, could be characterized as method wars (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006). Within the debates the idea of methodology became a central key term that served to deflect attention from marginalized communities, including, what became known as authentic theories of postcolonialism and the idea of postcoloniality (Jammulamadaka, 2016; Prasad, 2012), feminist accounts (Rose, 2010; Scott, 1986) and indigenous theories of knowledge, in the production of history (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). A recent study of race and gender in the journals of *Business History*, *Management & Organizational History* and the *Journal of Management History* found that of the 1600 articles published in the three journals between 2006 and 2018 less than 2 percent dealt with “either feminist research and/or women’s history” (Mills and Novicevic, 2020: 67). In terms of articles “that centrally dealt with race and/or postcolonial studies” only 12 (0.75 percent) could be found (Mills and Novicevic, 2020: 68). This included four articles on “African-American business and management history ... and eight on post-colonial theory” (ibid.). The inclusion of feminist, indigenous, and post-colonial chapters in this collection may not be hailed as some sort of progress but it does suggest that they are (finally) on the map of history making. Our aim here is to end the chapter with a sense, or feel, of what a historical construction is like and how that feeling adds to our understanding of certain people and events at points in time.

END OF TERM

What we set out to do in this chapter has been to provide a glimpse of the issues and problems of development of a historical account. In the process we have focussed on the subjectivities and dramas involved in the socio-construction of a history. These included insights that we drew upon to present an ANTi-History approach to the study of history and the past. Thus, we focussed on such things as discussion of some of the key actors involved in the development of historiographic approaches; the role of emotionality and conflictual debate that has been surfaced as historians contest the various versions that have arisen in recent years; the mechanisms of exclusion from selected debates; and the potential influence of key terms as the building bricks of a given methodological approach. We also wanted to draw attention to the importance of feminist and postcolonial historiographies.

Drawing on our “decades of experience” we reflect on the various insights that occurred to us as we worked our way through the construction of this chapter. To begin with, we made a decision to avoid the style of summary chapter where the author(s) of the closing chapter explain to the reader what it is that they have already read! Although this kind of chapter is quite popular as a form of clarification, it arguably serves as an NCA, which influences how we structure and produce our understanding of selected accounts. Instead, our focus draws on Latour’s (2005: 11–12) notion of “following the actors”. Here the task “is no longer to

impose some order, to limit the range of acceptable entities, to teach actors what they are, or to add some reflexivity to their blind practice” (ibid.). Thus, by following the actors we are trying “to catch up with their often-wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish” (Latour, 2005: 12). We hope that some of our musings over history and the past have found an echo in our own attempt to follow the actors associated with history to reveal the complexity involved, not least of which is the very notion of history, the past, and the historian themselves.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Booth C and Rowlinson M (2006) Management and organizational history: Prospects. *Management & Organizational History* 1(1): 5–30.

In this article, Booth and Rowlinson outline an agenda for the study of the historic turn. Their ten-point plan outlines the various ways that history can contribute to management and organizational research.

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PART II

HISTORICAL DATA AND SOURCES: ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL WAYS OF CONDUCTING HISTORICAL RESEARCH

8. How to research in an archive

Kevin D. Tennent and Alex G. Gillett

INTRODUCTION

Interest in the use of history for business or organization studies raises various questions, the main one being ‘*how do you do it?*’. Part of the answer is to use archival sources, which raises further questions, such as ‘*what are archives?*’ and ‘*why are they important?*’. In this chapter we attempt to demystify the process of archival research and, building upon Barros, Caneiro and Wanderley (2019) as well as Tennent, Gillett and Foster (2020) emphasize something we deem important for researchers wishing to bridge the humanities and social science divide: *reflexivity*, firstly in terms of using archival sources, and secondly in terms of the broader approach and behaviour of the researcher. Barros (2023) outlines the challenges in identifying and understanding the changing boundaries and definitions of the term archive as well as the potentialities for research emerging from an enhanced sense of methodological reflexivity.

For the purposes of this chapter, which is more practically focused, we define archives broadly as two things – they are the repositories where documents are stored, and an umbrella term for the [documentary] traces that historical actors leave behind. These resources may comprise records that an organization has accumulated over time. The International Council on Archives (2022) defines archives as ‘the documentary by-product of human activity retained for their long-term value’; they are records that were contemporary to business (in a broad sense) at the time of their creation to the individuals and organizations that created them, therefore providing a route to interpret past events. This definition opens considerable research horizons for organizational researchers, as a research project might draw on various records created in the process of transacting business or fulfilling legal obligations, such as annual reports, board minutes, correspondence, financial or management accounts, organization charts, planning documents, technical drawings, legal documents, contracts, returns to regulators, architectural drawings, advertising, publicity material, staff magazines, articles about the firm in contemporary publications and stock market data, and so on. This is not an exhaustive list of the possibilities, and frequently not all of these types of documents survive in a single archival collection about an organization.

Most documents are created for immediate use and consumption, and are often discarded, despite an increasing realization of the value of ‘historic memory assets’ (Foster et al., 2011). The records that are known to survive will condition the forms of historical research that can be undertaken. This may affect those interested in the different functional activities of an organization. For instance, accounting historians could find it challenging to investigate a firm if all that remains available are marketing materials. Conversely, if all that remains are accounting journals, it will be difficult for marketing historians to contribute historical debates about the development of marketing practice. Archives can be a powerful source of data, but it is also possible to travel a long way and not find what you were hoping to see. It is, therefore, important to approach archives with a clear idea of what you might hope to find, but also flexibility to shift the research focus should you not find as much as you were expecting.

In this chapter we explain how to choose which archival repositories to access and how to undertake research in these facilities. To assist in identifying which type of repository to work with we will present a framework based on the mnemonic CLUMOP (corporate archives, local authorities, universities, museums and libraries, others, public).

Having defined our meaning of the archive and of archival sources, we next discuss the usefulness of archival research to bridge humanities and social science approaches to studying organizations.

CONSIDERING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHIVAL RESEARCH, HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

There has been increasing scholarly interest in applying history as a method of organizational research (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Kieser, 1994; Zald, 1993) using a variety of potential research strategies (Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014; Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Van Lent and Durepos (2019) have highlighted that the pace of methodological development has lagged behind the theoretical. This is possibly due to the relative lack of familiarity amongst researchers nurtured through the social research methods tradition, which often assumes the primacy of thematic rather than temporal approaches to data collection, and often teaches that documentary evidence is inferior to other methods of data collection because of source bias (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Thus, epistemological assumptions about the creation of data by the researcher may create mental barriers for researchers taught in social science research methods, if attempting to engage with archival research methods. Further, because of such assumptions, researchers using archives may be concerned that when writing up they will be unable to avoid un-reflexively recreating power structures embedded in the sources they collect (Taylor et al., 2009).

We posit that these assumptions overlook the true potential of archivally based research, which offers an opportunity for researchers to engage directly with the documentary evidence about the formation of power structures thus enhancing reflexivity by encouraging historical consciousness (Tennent et al., 2020). Researchers trained in historical research methods (as distinct from social research methods) contribute to an understanding of context, chronology, continuity, and change (Tennent, 2020). Historians will often interpret a document to seek and understand its biases, to understand the state of mind and motivations of its writer or collator for recording an event (Tosh, 2015, pp. 106–108). For instance, using the archives of a company promoter we might find a business plan written by a promoter which exaggerates the prospects of the venture to influence the prospective shareholders to invest. A business historian can critically interpret the ‘bias’ of the promoter to better understand how they persuaded people to invest in the scheme. A rigorous understanding of the context of the document amassed from a reading of the historiography and other primary sources, can help the historian diagnose and capture this ‘bias’. In so doing, this rigorous approach offers a richer understanding of the topic, by revealing, explicating and even deconstructing power structures. Further, archivally based research is highly compatible with social science research methods which stress the importance of understanding the conditions under which a document was produced when assessing the sincerity and validity of documentary sources (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011; Scott, 1990). Schaefer and Alvesson (2020, pp. 41–42) suggest the analysis of complimentary documents to better assess the sincerity and validity of interview data, which similarly can be

impacted by the conditions under which an interview takes place. A reconnection with historiography and the purposes for which primary sources were authored can also help us to answer Decker's (2015) call for a reconnection with the academic discipline of history, in which the conceptual study of historical institutional forms could serve as a proxy for theory building. One of the difficulties in mobilizing the synthesis of history and organization studies (broadly conceived) is how to ensure historical integrity in the work of management scholars (Abbott, 1991; Greenwood and Bernardi, 2013).

Thus, an important threshold concept for anyone undertaking historical study is the differentiation between primary and secondary sources as understood by historians. Though Tosh (2015, pp. 74–75) identifies that these sit on a continuum, *primary sources* for historians are broadly considered to be documents that date from the time being studied. Therefore, the word 'contemporary' when used by historians means *contemporary to the events that you are studying*. This is different to the way that it is often used in the social sciences to mean 'of today' or 'up-to-date'. In contrast, *secondary sources* are broadly those created or published from someone else's research. In practice, for an historian, these are usually published research papers authored by somebody else, who based their work on primary (often archival) sources. The body of historical secondary literature about a topic is its *historiography*.

Typically, though, while the methodology of primary archival source analysis has been partially demonstrated in textbook form (see, for instance, Dobson and Ziemann, 2009; Howell & Prevenier, 2001), the 'craft' of the historian is at times more implicit than explicit. While actively taught in university history and law departments, often with the aid of university archivists, because of their complexity and unpredictability historical research methods are often *learned through doing* as a form of situated practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Archival research has a serendipitous character (Decker, 2013) involving processes of familiarization, flexibility, and adjustment. This has implications for research design, which can take the form of an interactive, inductive and 'messy' process that outsiders may metaphorize as a form of bricolage. In a similar fashion to qualitative social science researchers (Saunders et al., 2018) historians eschew a linear process of phased literature review, methodological selection, fieldwork and writing up to keep their research question quite loose and adaptable. This often means starting with an empirical problem inspired by a phenomenon in the past from or around which theoretical approaches or refinements can be later defined or moulded. The interrogation of primary sources might lead the researcher in a different direction because, as we elaborate below, the contents of an archive and their suitability for the enquiry cannot entirely be known until they are seen, and therefore may lead the researcher to refine, develop, or even change their research question. Historical research is typically based not just on one closed body of sources resembling a neat sample, but requires the triangulation of multiple primary sources, in multiple forms (e.g. minutes of meetings, memos and letters, business plans, promotional literature, financial data, and so on). This plethora of sources is often found in multiple repositories, rather than in just one archive. Doing so takes time and experience. The researcher may not be fully conscious of their method and might not make note of each step and every decision or selection made. This would, however, reduce the transparency and replicability of their research; values upon which social science places more emphasis.

Sometimes research may be almost entirely grounded or inductive in the way described above, starting with the identification of an archive because it appears relevant to the research of a broad theme, and then leading to an evaluation of the historiography to understand what questions that research can answer. The researcher might then identify different archi-

val sources, held in different locations, useful to building the fuller picture. To illustrate, a researcher examining one firm as the focus of their study may later discover the archived documents of an important supplier or customer that are held by another archive in another city. Similarly, a visit to public sector archives might be necessary if trying to find a firm's returns made to the government or to a regulatory agency, or to uncover government policy documents about its industry. Finding reports about the firm in industry journals or trade magazines might require a specialist newspaper or print media archive, unless the sources have been made available online.

Amid all this, the researcher might continue to engage with diverse secondary sources too, as this enables a redefinition of the potential contribution in terms of what 'new' knowledge is being uncovered, how it helps to understand the wider world or period of time, or an area of abstract social science theory. For example, the identification of key events, people and processes which contributed to historical continuity and change, usually requires understanding the chronological interaction of these factors. When writing, these emergent themes can be bound with interpretation reported in the form of structured analysis or narrative. As Carr (1961, p. 120) illustrates, historical knowledge can be considered interpretive, with meaning assigned by the historian, and therefore can be revisited and challenged when new source opportunities emerge. Writing up is often a matter of satisfying deadlines, whether for thesis submission, a publisher, tenure, or government research audits, and so the collection of data is paused to author a text based on the collected material.

The bricolage, opportunistic, or jumble approach to data collection might appear to lack a discrete identifiable process and might suggest the work of historians is somehow unreflexive. We argue that this is a matter of epistemological and ontological misunderstanding. Hypothesizing about history is impossible without an engagement with the primary sources. For example, no one knows if a research project to, for example, investigate the working lives of fishermen in 19th-century Italy is feasible until some attempt is made to actually do it. Only establishing the existence of relevant sources existence will make the aforementioned project workable. Publishing historical work requires the meticulous and rigorous citation of archival sources, *and so the selection of archival materials is fully transparent for others to reconstruct if they wish*. This infers the archival research of the historian can have value to the social scientist (Rowlinson, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Yates, 2014).

The process of archival research is one in which the investment of time and persistence are important. Archival research usually does not require explicit approval from university ethics committees¹ because it often involves the collection of data featuring people that are dead. Indeed, historians usually retain data collected over many years, and may extend, use or re-use it in later studies. There are, however, ethical risks such as codes of behavior inherent in using archives that are usually learned through the process of situated learning. We unpack these codes of behavior below. Another is the paradoxical nature of the archives (Farge, 2013, pp. 53–78). Archival materials are both incomplete, yet abundant, and patience is required to triage and navigate them, often against the clock. Quick decisions are required about what is (and is not) important to record and it is easy to underestimate the effort and commitment required. Repositories may also require preparation by researchers about the materials they

¹ This is not to say that historians are outside of research ethics considerations, but rather that the nature of archival work usually does not involve working with live subjects and therefore avoids the ethical issues that university research committees usually deal with.

want to see. Historians also rarely discuss their approaches to these challenges or commit their struggles with archives to paper, except perhaps in acknowledgments sections where archives and archivists are often thanked (Decker, 2013). An explicated guide is useful to help researchers mitigate such risks, chief among them naivety about what archival research entails, and of the behaviour expected within the space of the archive.

The remainder of this chapter thus draws upon published good practice and methodology, and unpublished but nevertheless real experiences and observations of researchers. This is our attempt to explicate a process which can be underestimated while leading the researcher to feel swamped, despite epistemological approach, with an abundance of information which may feel over-specific and difficult to utilize (Mills and Mills, 2011). Fellman and Popp (2013) and later Popp and Fellman (2017, 2019) demonstrate that historians have often had to learn by experience to find processes that help them to filter the complexities of the archive, often developing tactics to ‘ride the flood’ (Fellman and Popp, 2013, p. 242) and build narratives out of the findings. This can often be a reflexive process, but one less well recorded. Thus, to open the process we aim to induct new researchers and to encourage a more explicitly reflexive approach among experienced scholars. The authors have experience of using multiple repositories including those of corporations, local and national government, universities, museums, and other holders across three continents (Europe, Australia, and North America). While we did not consciously collect data for this chapter, we hope that a retrospective auto reflexive approach (Ellis et al., 2011), drawing on our past experiences and epiphanies which we think could usefully inform the self-discovery of others, is sufficient to provide insight of the field-based process of archival research.

CONSIDER YOUR PURPOSE

Before identifying an archive, you should conceptualize your topic. Ideally, compose an empirical question(s) that you intend to answer – it can be broad in scope at this stage, or alternatively you can start with something very specific and ‘grow’ the scope of your project as you build your knowledge. It just needs to aid your direction and motivation, and to help identify a suitable repository of archival sources. It may or may not be the same as the actual research question of publications that come later, but some guiding concept is useful. You should also engage with as many secondary sources as possible before you go to an archive, to give you a stronger sense of what is novel. This review of secondary sources will help to identify documents to look at in the repository. If you intend to achieve empirical originality, then ideally a review of historiography will also help you to ascertain archival sources not used previously, either missed or not considered by previous researchers, or that were not available to previous authors.

For instance, the authors visited the archive held by the Olympic Study Centre, in Lausanne, Switzerland, for an enquiry into the organization and administration of the Olympic Games. We knew of several specific documents worth examining because we had seen them footnoted in other work. We wanted to view the records ourselves to judge the accuracy of what had been cited as well as looking for additional content within them that could be useful *to our own inquiry*. We also understood that other documents existed, but their exact content and utility we didn’t know, and for practical reasons we were limited to one day’s access. Thus, we had to decide on the day about which documents to research and which to discard from our ‘sample’

of data. It helped that we had already researched and defined the timeframe of documents and were able to request correspondence from those years and the years on either side. We could then pinpoint documents within an even more specific timeframe as being directly relevant, so the remainder of our access was focused on working closely with those. But even documents which initially seemed to be less relevant became useful later: discovering that they were not reported in extant historiography, we incorporated them to develop our case, thereby achieving additional empirical novelty.

It helps that many publicly accessible archives have a searchable online catalogue. To understand which type of archive you might visit, a brief introduction to the archival process is necessary. Archivists play an important curatorial role in making documents available. Repositories of all forms often have limited resources, and a specific process is usually followed around the activities of acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, and description of records, which may be acquired in all sorts of conditions. Limitations of available space can make it impossible to keep everything. Many archives have a collection policy fitting within a stated broad remit (e.g., a repository specializing in banking might choose not to take on records relating to pig farming) and on acquisition will assess the scope and likely significance through an appraisal process. For instance, Cook (2004) discusses the appraisal process used by the National Archives of Canada in the 1990s as it attempted to capture the citizen–state interface. Time-poor archivists may have to use functional or sampling approaches to large collections rather than examining them file by file (Wiltshire, 2017). Here the subjectivity of appraisal is often problematic. The archivist’s own perceptions of relative importance may differ from those of the researcher. Also, from the perspective of archivists, assessing the value of documentation, sometimes generated by historical actors from a range of professional fields, such as from lawyers and accountants to engineers, can be very challenging. Cook (2001) argued that archivists should as far as possible record their appraisal decisions for the purpose of transparency to stakeholders, including donors and users. The catalogue seen by the researcher is therefore the culmination of a process in which acquisitions are often classified by functional areas of a business and organized and described according to the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) established by the International Council on Archives (2022). In pinpointing which type of archive you need to visit, you should consider what type of institution generated the records you want to see, and who might have collected it.

PRACTICALITIES

Identify an Archive: Introducing CLUMOP

Having conceptualized your topic and identified potentially useful repositories, you may find some holdings by searching the archive catalogues, or through existing literature. Sometimes, though, finding archival sources is not easy, and you will need to think carefully about where else records might be found – the online catalogue of the national archives of the country you are interested in might be useful, and in some countries a national level catalogue tool exists to help you find materials in archives around the country.² You may find it useful to speak

² Examples of such tools include Discovery, run by the UK National Archives (<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>), and Archivportal-d.de in Germany.

to other historians or archivists who might have worked (or know people who have worked) with useful archives. To assist in identifying which type of repository to work with we present a framework based on the mnemonic CLUMOP.

Corporate
Local Authorities
Universities
Museums and Libraries
Others
Public

Our categories are based upon ownership of the repository because the institution that owns the repository governs access, as well as the types of records collected and curated. For each category we also add a 'planning ahead factor' to assist the researcher in planning their research visits.

'C' is for Corporate. These repositories are usually the records of a private or otherwise not government-owned organization, held by that same organization. They often include records of other organizations that were acquired or merged. These archives are likely to be useful for research questions about the development of specific firms or industries. Usually constructed by a company, they are understood to hold 'corporate memory assets' primarily for the owner's own reference, for information needs about things such as property maintenance, legal protection, or marketing. This will condition the types of archives that are kept and that are accessible. Their use by external researchers is secondary and at the discretion of the archivist, who is usually an employee of the firm and has a gatekeeping function. They might be surprised at an inquiry from an academic researcher, and experience anxiety about reputational risk. For instance, the authors once used the archive of a big bank in which the archivist was very helpful but insisted on supervising the viewing of records at all times. In another case, following a takeover, a firm blocked access halfway through a research project, forcing a change of research strategy.

Some corporations do have repositories accessible to outside researchers, sometimes with publicly viewable catalogues. Examples include the Anglo-American pharmaceutical firm Walgreens Boots Alliance, the Anglo-Dutch consumer chemicals and food group Unilever and the International Olympic Committee. Some, such as British Telecom, which was previously government owned but later privatized, maintain archives open to researchers because their records are considered part of the national collection of archives for that country. Such companies tend to be the exception, especially if you are interested in small and medium-sized firms. It is likely you will need to make an appointment with the archivist and to communicate with them about materials you want to see. Cataloguing may be ad hoc or inaccessible to the researcher, who has to suggest to the archivist what they want, leaving selection to the archivist's discretion.

It is helpful to put yourself in the shoes of the archivist because they are not as familiar with your research topic as you are. Although an experienced archivist might intuitively know what to select for your attention, they can only work with the information that you provide. They are also limited within the time and space of their working day, which has to be shared with other duties and other researchers. This could be true of public sector archives too, but in our experience is more of an issue in private archives without a professional archivist or where

the archivist's main job is in a legal department. Effective rapport building with corporate archivists who often play a mediative role in research is very important; Hatch and Schultz (2017) acknowledged the input of the Carlsberg archivist in their paper on the company's use of history in their strategy. A way around the limitations of corporate archives can be to look for collections generated by companies that have been donated to another repository type, either because the company did not wish to maintain the archive itself or following liquidation (see below). Corporate archives require careful forward planning; *thus, we consider them to have a high planning ahead factor.*

'L' is for Local Authority. These repositories are usually the records of a municipal organization, usually useful for research questions about public administration, or local government interfaces with capitalism. Municipal organizations in many countries maintain records as a statutory duty for compliance and transparency, often employing professional archivists. Some jurisdictions extend this to the curation of archives relating to local history, including the donated or collected records of business, third sector organizations or prominent local individuals, in which case operation of the archives is sometimes outsourced to an independent trust or community interest company. Because local authorities are public bodies, access is usually very good, requiring no prior permission and with good quality and easily accessible cataloguing, although the extent to which catalogues are available online may be variable. In some jurisdictions very recent information may also be available under freedom of information rules. However, local authority archives are often operated with very limited resources and in smaller towns and cities this can mean that opening times for researchers are highly restricted, perhaps to only one or two days a week, limiting the amount of data that can be collected. *Local authority archives have a medium-high planning-ahead factor.*

'U' is for University. As with local authorities, universities often hold their own records for the purpose of governance, but this activity is often expanded to encompass holdings from related bodies, such as local healthcare and religious organizations. In many universities, archives have a role in contributing methods teaching to the history department. In many cases, this role is expanded to accept donated or acquired records of a business, third sector, or political organizations, or individuals, in many cases with a specific connection to that university. Because of their educational and research facilitating role, university archives are often reasonably well resourced and have good opening hours, often operating five days a week, and are easily accessible to researchers already within university networks; indeed, using the archive of your home university may be as easy as turning up with your staff or student ID card. The size of the reading room may be limited, so appointment systems are sometimes operated. Cataloguing is usually of a very high standard, and usually externally searchable, sometimes with an outline guide to collections held. The diversity of university archive holdings means a wide range of research topics can be pursued, from the hosting of the 1994 FIFA World Cup at Stanford (Gillett and Tennent, 2020) to research into Rowntree & Co. of York as a business (Fitzgerald, 1995) and as contributors to the development of the management profession (Maclean et al., 2020). *University archives have a low-medium planning-ahead factor.*

'M' is for Museums and Libraries. Their primary activity is not keeping archives, but usually historical collections of artefacts or books, normally about a specific topic, although they do often have collections of archival materials. Some museums such as the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, DE, host donated or loaned corporate collections. Hagley's

collection includes those of many prominent American corporations and organizations, such as the DuPont corporation, Bethlehem Steel, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the Philadelphia public transit organization SEPTA. Some libraries that mainly focus on published works, especially national and university libraries, also host documentary collections that are useful to researchers, particularly of sources such as newspapers and periodicals, collections of reference works such as the UK's *Stock Exchange Yearbook* or *Directory of Directors* and government, parliamentary or congressional reports. Such collections are rarely held on open shelves and may require ordering beforehand, though for academic researchers access to such libraries is usually straightforward. Because museums and libraries are generally open to the public, access is, in theory, very good, though opening hours for the reading room or special collections are usually shorter than for the museum or library. Consider also that staff may be voluntary or have several roles, and an appointment system might be necessary. Some large museums, such as the affiliates of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, or the affiliates of the UK's Science Museum Group, employ professional archivists and have excellent reading rooms, although opening times can still be limited. *Museums and Libraries have a high planning-ahead factor.*

'O' is for Others. Endowed or voluntary research institutes additional to those already described. These institutes, often charitable or voluntary standalone bodies, often have specialist collections useful to management and business history researchers, such as the Feminist Archive in London, which maintains an archive of materials and periodicals relating to the campaigns of the feminist movement. Such materials might be of use to researchers interested in gender relations in businesses and organizations. Others include the Ballast Trust in Scotland which maintains a collection of business and technical archives and the UK bus archive in Walsall. Prior contact with the archivists is useful before visiting as opening hours and space on these sites can be limited. *Other categories of archives have a high planning-ahead factor.*

'P' is for Public. This category, distinguishable from local authority archives, includes the national public record offices. Most countries have some form of record office or archive, often called the national archives. These bodies first and foremost curate the records of the government, which may be subject to a 20- or 30-year privacy rule, but also sometimes accept materials from companies or individuals. Organizations that are nationalized often have their records transferred to public archives, for instance in the UK this includes many involved with the rail industry. Public record offices are excellent for researchers interested in public administration or policy-making that affects a business or the third sector; the survival rate of documents tends to be excellent, and because of their size they often become centres of archival excellence and expertise in their countries. Materials are often well catalogued, and they have capacity and processes for handling large volumes of researchers, with ordering often possible the same day without booking, and extensive opening hours. However, it is still worthwhile to research the opening times and access rules before visiting. *Public archives have a low-medium planning-ahead factor.*

Having discussed reflexivity in the sense of encouraging historical consciousness (Tennent et al., 2020) we extend our discussion of reflexivity to include the activity of the researcher when visiting a CLUMOP repository. This is because the way that a researcher approaches and behaves when visiting an archival repository (which may be shaped by their prior experience, knowledge, or naivety about archival research) affects what they get from the research,

and thus what they write and publish, and then what enters the canon of written history. Undertaking research is, therefore, a responsibility as well as a privilege, and careful planning is key to the method of producing ‘good history’. The following presents a guide to what to do before, during and after an archival visit, to help you be prepared.

Before You Visit

Once you have identified the archival repository(ies) to use, you should check about any specific access restrictions for the records you wish to consult. You do not want to travel a long way to find that what you wanted to see is unavailable. Even for public archives it can be a good idea to contact them ahead of time to ask if the documents that you want to see are publicly available. Some collections, lent to an archive but still owned by the donors, might be restricted. In many types of repositories, documents are stored on a different site to the reading room, requiring advance ordering. Always try to find out as much as you can about the archive yourself, and if its website and online catalogue does not answer your questions, contact their archivists. Always be polite and respect that there can be many demands on their time.

You should establish the maximum opening hours, which are often 09:30 to 16:30 or some variation. There may be an explicit or implicit rule that opening times include up to 15 minutes before the advertised closing times in which you are expected to give back documents, pack your things away and vacate the building. Some archives will allow you to store documents in the reading room overnight within a special area. During some periods, such as seasonal holidays (e.g., Christmas) or major disruptions such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic, many archives will be closed or operate a reduced, appointment-based system and this makes the right preparations even more important.

If possible, pre-order key documents to maximize the likelihood they will be available when you arrive. Do be realistic and try to avoid making archivists retrieve more documents than you will have time to view that day. Usually ordering in archives is at the level of each individual box of documents rather than a collection (or fonds) and most restrict the number of items you can order at once. When you have established the scope and usefulness of the collection in more detail, then you can often decide what else you need to order.

It may be useful to register for a reader’s ticket before arriving at the archive, but this can sometimes take time, and a form of identification (such as a driver’s license or passport) is required. You should establish, in advance of your visit, if this is necessary. Some archives even allow you to begin registration online before your visit.

Ideally, you should be looking to exploit the full opening hours of the archive. Thus, plan your overnight accommodation carefully so that it is close and you are able to arrive for opening time. This will be less challenging for archives in city centres but suburban or rural repositories may require more planning and some understanding of local conditions. The larger establishments, such as the British Library in the UK, are multi-site, so ensure you go to the correct site. Also plan where on that site you need to be – for instance, the British Library Boston Spa site in Yorkshire is a vast collection of buildings, so research the name of the building that you need to find; that way you can at least ask for directions when you arrive. Using Google Maps is a useful way to locate the repository, discover transport information, and consider where you might eat meals. Some repositories close over lunchtime and you must vacate the building, whereas others have on-site cafeterias. In North America particularly, public transport may be difficult to find, and suburban and rural sites can also reduce your

lunch options as most repositories are not big enough to have their own cafeteria. Forward plan and bring your own lunch if necessary.

During Your Visit

When arriving, you might be required to put coats, bags, food/drink and other belongings in lockers outside of the reading room, so pack lightly with a bag and coat that will fit in a locker and consider that the lockers might be coin-operated. Regarding money, most repositories are free to attend but find out in advance if there are any fees to be paid for taking photographs of documents, getting photocopies or computer printing. For this purpose, make sure that you bring cash and debit/credit cards with you.

Also bring a pencil(s) and sharpener, paper (for taking notes), good quality digital camera (ideally two, with spare memory cards and batteries/chargers), and an extension cable for your convenience because the room's power point, if it even has one, might be difficult to access. We also bring laptop computers when we are able, though be warned that there might be restrictions on your ability to use plugs in the reading room. Some researchers have also tried using smartphones or tablets with a scanning app which can transfer pictures to PDF quickly, though the limitations of phone memory may be a restriction. Some repositories, such as the UK National Archives, now provide camera stands that make the use of conventional digital cameras much easier.

Each archive will have its own rules about what you can and cannot do in its reading room, including items you may bring. Some typical rules and expected behaviours are:

- Have your pass/membership card or ID ready to show upon arrival.
- Only pencils (not pens, erasers, or sharpeners) can be taken into the actual reading room.
- Have dry clean hands.
- Switch phones and other electronic devices to 'silent' mode or leave outside.
- Do not bring coats or bags into the reading room.
- No sharp implements (scissors, knives, etc. – so that people don't cut pages out of records or destroy them).
- No food or drink.

Although we recommend you bring a camera, photography might be challenging if records are held on microfilm or microfiche. You should ask if you are permitted to use one and be prepared to pay an extra fee for the privilege. You may then be asked to complete paperwork logging the items that you photographed and your purpose. This is usually straightforward and explains that if you wish to use the information or photographs for commercial purposes then you will have to negotiate that separately. In some archives, particularly corporate or in cases where corporate rights holders have donated collections, you might need to sign a declaration around the usage of the archives themselves, perhaps requiring permission from the rights holder prior to publication.

When viewing documents, first take a picture of the box or folder they are contained in with the catalogue number visible. This will make it easier to reference and manage your digital files later. Handle any documents with care, they are old and can be damaged easily. Take your time. This careful methodical approach is time-consuming, and we have already mentioned the limitations of opening times. So, consider the volume of records that you will photograph or read from. Patience is needed to work through large sets of records or in cases where you are

not finding what you thought you would. You might feel slightly overwhelmed with the challenge of deciding what to use. This is all part of the process. Time estimation and management comes with practice. If you are new to archival research, then be generous about the amount of time that you have planned.

Research is tiring and requires stamina. Be conscious of the effect of dehydration and hunger on your concentration. Water and food may not be allowed in the room, but research involves long stints of mental (and to an extent physical) activity, so plan rehydration and comfort breaks at regular intervals.

Finally, if visiting for multiple days you will be faced with long evenings after the archive has closed for the day. We suggest that you use some of this time to backup files. But also find out about where you can get a good evening meal. Archive or hotel staff with local knowledge are a good source of information.

After Your Visit – Using Your Data

You will need to engage a process of analysis to try to make sense of your data and its relationship to your original research question. Following the earlier point about reflexive historical consciousness (Rüsen, 2004, 2017; Tennent et al., 2020) you should think in terms of first- and second-order critical reflexivity. In terms of first-order reflexivity, consider who originally authored or created these sources and the context within which they were created. Then, consider who the important actors are in your documents – and the nature of the relationships between them. How did these actors construct their own identity within a historical context? To achieve second-order critical reflexivity, and to avoid simply repeating and replicating the narrative created by the documents, you can follow the lead of Farge (2013) in distancing yourself from what at first sight appear to be the most important documents, reappraising them in the light of the relationships between the actors.

By then you should feel familiar with your data and it will be possible to understand what information you can derive. Also think about what is *not* in your data. What else do you need to know to build a solid body of evidence for your theory or narrative? What other questions remain or emerge? Considering your data in this way will help you decide whether triangulation with other types of records is required, what is simply unknowable, and what is an artefact of your own perception or conjecture.

Having considered your sources, their authors, and actors, you should also pay attention to the way that the archive has been constructed. Does the potential for knowledge construction emerge only because it has been embodied in an archive and is accessible to you? Who has compiled or constructed this archive? For what purpose (academic research, legal reference, advertising)? Do you think that the purpose shaped decisions about what is included and what isn't? Consider your own original motives for pursuing this research and your perceptions of what you might find in the archive. Were your expectations fulfilled? Regarding the latter point, while researching football clubs and the FIFA World Cup, we discovered related narratives that were not central to our starting point, but were nevertheless relevant and improved our critical understanding of what happened and why it happened. For example, the involvement of breweries and a regional turf war between rivals that had implications for football club investment and sponsorship beyond what we had originally considered (Gillett et al., 2016) and a soccer World Cup considered as a successful event in its host country actually had

a previously under-reported contradictory narrative abroad, due to reasons such as the tourist experiences of travelling fans (Gillett and Tennent, 2019).

Having now thought critically about your archival data from multiple perspectives, it is possible to conduct a more robust or critical process of writing up, or, to use a phrase popular amongst historians, craft your *narrative*. We can consider historical narratives broadly in two ways – in terms of chronology – such as through the sequencing of organizational events and decisions (Popp and Fellman, 2017), and in terms of theoretical or functional themes. Can these things be easily adduced from your documents or is your data too fragmented, too limited, or too contradictory? Consider what knowledge was difficult to glean and why. What was your role in creating these narratives? Did your own preconceptions, or those of your academic discipline direct you, or did you let the data lead? It is common for students or early career researchers to bring a theory from their discipline to their analysis then selectively choose data that supports it, whilst rejecting or even ignoring data that does not fit. On the contrary, it is when historical data does not readily fit with received wisdom that true novelty and contribution to knowledge is found.

Analyzing archival data can be done so that it is consistent with social science methods. See, for example, the methodology sections within several of our own published papers in social science (e.g. Gillett and Tennent, 2017, 2020) or history journals (e.g. Gillett and Tennent, 2018; Tennent and Gillett, 2018). We began by building a thick description (Geertz, 1973) initially by summarizing in tables information gathered from our archival documents to produce a quick chronology of *what* happened (events, decision-making) and *who* was involved. This enabled a succinct overview beneficial to our readers but also to our analysis – we could more readily identify distinct eras or phases within the chronology of our cases, which became our first framework. We could then also select and apply a theoretical framework, such as project sublimates and levels of decision-making (Gillett and Tennent, 2017) or institutional logics and organizational hybridity (Gillett and Tennent, 2018, 2020) to achieve dual integrity (Maclean et al. 2016; Harvey and Maclean, 2023) of historical and sociological contribution. Thus, we exceeded descriptive case history to produce a case study, by observing patterns within the data (Pettigrew, 1997) and provide an opportunity for a context-based contribution to knowledge of the type advocated by Welch et al. (2022).

Much of our own research involves the public sector, which is a fertile area because of the availability of archival sources. Indeed, Wond and Macaulay (2011) argued that the research and evaluation of public management and policy is too often short-term in nature. They champion the use of longitudinal research and consideration of extended temporality, and we propose that to do so researchers should consider using archival sources beyond just newspaper articles, and that a knowledge of history within the project team is important.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the relationship between historic or archival research, and social science. We made the case that archival research is suited to the study of business, organizations and management in both disciplines, and that crossover exists. A key feature has been to introduce the importance of reflexivity in two ways: firstly, in relation to historical consciousness, and secondly, in relation to planning and conducting research. The former is most relevant to data analysis and interpretation; the latter is formative to that – the way in which

you do the research affects the data you gather, and thus your potential contribution. We also proposed an acronym CLUMOP to classify the types of repositories in which archival data might be located and give helpful practical advice about how to prepare to visit an archive, what to do when you are there, and what to think about afterwards. We have also considered the two orders of reflexivity to go through to do this. This advice is based upon the authors' experiences of undertaking archival research internationally in all manner of CLUMOP types, the findings of which have been published in books and academic journals within sub-disciplines of history and social science.

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ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

For readers looking for further guidance around navigating the challenges of archivally based research we suggest the following three publications which will prove useful:

- (1) Farge, A. (2013). *The Allure of the Archives*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

This concise volume is an experiential discussion by a leading French social historian of the challenges of using a large public repository for archival research. It discusses the intellectual challenges of doing research in archives mixed with the practical, including the oscillation between paucity and plenty of sources, the decisions about what to record and what to leave, and the general experiential learning process involved. It is extremely readable and provides a relatable commentary for researchers learning how to use archives.

- (2) Fellman, S. and Popp, A. (2013). Lost in the archive: The business historian in distress. In B. Czarniawska & O. Löfgren (Eds.), *Coping with Excess: How Organizations, Communities and Individuals Manage Overflows*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Corporate archives are often very plentiful and provide many dilemmas for the historian as to how best utilize their limited archive time. This chapter by two leading business historians provides a reflective discussion of how researchers navigate the complexity of organizational archives. Fellman and Popp's work is useful for scholars new to archival work as it explores the emotional context of using records and shines light on the coping mechanisms used by even quite experienced practitioners.

- (3) Turton, A. (Ed.) (2017). *The International Business Archives Handbook: Understanding and Managing the Historical Records of Business*. New York: Routledge.

This handbook includes chapters contributed by both archivists and historians, and provides an insight into the current practices of business archivists from around the world, as well as how historians have made use of archives for a range of organizational topics. This guide is a useful reference for the historian to understand the processes underlying the creation of organizational archives, their acquisition by repositories, and also the policies and practices around preservation and access.

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9. Perspectives on oral history for historical research

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INTRODUCTION

Oral history deals with individual accounts in the form of interviews. It involves a conversation about the past between two people, the interviewer (often the historian) and the subject (or interviewee). Following Okiihiro's definition, oral history is "the recollection of a single individual who participated or was an observer in the events to which she/he testifies" (1981, p. 34). The conversation must be recorded and transcribed for later historical analysis. In its more formal definition, oral history refers not just to the collection but also to the transcription and recording of memories and voices directly from participants of past events (in video or tape interviews) and their preservation and interpretation as historical sources (Ritchie, 2012). This makes oral history different from other types of interviewing that management scholars may be familiar with. The next sections introduce the approach and outlines how it developed over time. After considering the key epistemological and methodological concerns, the chapter introduces a major oral history project in business history which developed important new insights in under-researched contexts.

WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?

Compared to written sources, especially archival material, whose authors are generally no longer alive, oral histories involve communication with living people (Okiihiro, 1981) and present several distinctive features in form and nature (Abrams, 2016; Portelli, 2017). These represent crucial elements in the analysis and interpretation of interviews and include: (i) orality, namely the rhythm, structure, and shape of the speech, which help convey emotional and personal content; (ii) narrative, or how subjects make sense and interpret the world; (iii) performance, that is, how the subject tells the story using a style appropriate to the situation; (iv) subjectivity, or the fact that the story reflects the subject's point of view and the channel to attach individual or collective meaning to past events; (v) memory, which refers to the interplay between past and present in shaping the recollection during the interview. Finally, oral histories, being conversational in nature, are the outcome of (vi) collaboration between the interviewer and the subject; and present an element of (vii) mutability, as the historian can interact with the subject, contextualize, and change the course of the conversation until the interview is transcribed (Portelli, 2009). As a result, the shape of the document is up for negotiation. It depends on interaction much more than traditional written sources, which generally work as "screenshots" of a particular past moment. As long as the interviewee is alive, the historian can update and expand the oral testimony through multiple encounters.

Oral histories present both similarities and differences from interviews in other social sciences in terms of content, purpose, form and final use (Quinlan, 2012). How interviews are conducted, their structure and outcome are often very similar to standard longitudinal interviews in qualitative methods. It is indeed very common that oral histories are used as longitudinal interviews in management or sociology research (Giovannoni et al., 2011) or as “retrospective accounts” in organization studies or memory studies (Decker et al., 2021). However, to be considered oral histories interviews, they need to include a few distinctive elements that are not strictly required in qualitative methods. First, interviews are stored, used, and conceptualized as source material that can be suitable for historical research; second, as the interviews’ goal is to provide an accurate reconstruction of the past, their content must be longitudinal; finally, oral histories are generally not anonymous, as they need to be transcribed and publicly available.

The immediate result of an oral history interview is the creation of a historical “source” comparable to a traditional written record found in archives. This is a record that is “kept for posterity” and can be used multiple times unlike social sciences interviews, which generally are not used beyond the study they are collected for (Decker et al., 2021, p. 1137). Thus, the most important outcome of the oral history interview is always an in-depth verbatim transcript that can be added and stored in an archival collection for long-term use. The first oral histories were recorded through tape and transcribed. Transcription legitimized the “historicity” of the source: it ensured the preservation of the dialogue and allowed indexation for later use. While in the past the original tape or video was often erased, more recently it has become standard to keep the original recorded source to reduce potential bias (Mazé, 2007; Yow, 2016).

In terms of content and purpose, unlike interviews in most social sciences, oral history researchers select interviewees and design questions specifically to generate narrations of events that happened in the past (Decker, 2022) and to record longitudinal patterns like life stories. As in other social sciences, the interview content is inherently subjective; it reflects individual perspectives, which can be studied in aggregate with other similar accounts to understand a complex reality and specific contexts (Sharpless, 2007). This has become increasingly important in recent times, leading historians to start questioning oral histories as objective accounts (Fielding, 2004) and to treat them as subjective, partial, and fragmented recollections of the past, just like other historical sources (Durepos et al., 2021; Yates, 2014).

As a significant difference with qualitative methods, this type of interview is seldom anonymous. In other social sciences research has traditionally focused on confidentiality, as anonymity ensures reliability, objectivity, and comparability across individual accounts and interviews are conceived as “data” to interpret and understand the past. In contrast, and following the historical approach, personal testimonies are seen as “sources” (Decker et al., 2021, p. 1127). Thus, they are evaluated in their specificity and uniqueness and used to promote particular facets of the past. As a result, interviewees are not supposed to conceal their identity but rather expose it to better contextualize their point of view and enhance their subjectivity. This, in turn, explains why the “ethical standards for oral historians [...] require using real names and identities of those they interview” (Quinlan, 2012, p. 26).

As for their structure, oral histories typically resemble semi-structured interviews as they allow for the interviewee’s digressions within pre-set questions, which are framed using external sources or may even contain elements of triangulation (Yates, 2014, p. 277). However, because of the focus on recording individual perspectives and life histories, interviewees’ rights and preferences govern how the interview is conducted, processed, and stored. As

a rule, after the interview, the transcript is given back to the interviewee for final editing and approval. This has been traditionally done for both courtesy and ethical reasons as these transcripts are always expected to be publicly available. At present, several major archives include important oral history collections. For example, the British Library has oral histories of professionals in the energy and financial sector; the World Bank features a vast collection of interviews since its early years; Harvard Business School (HBS) is building a database of oral history interviews with entrepreneurs and influential business leaders from emerging markets.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ORAL HISTORY

During the 20th century, oral history has developed as a method and a subfield in the historical discipline. Since the 1960s, the debate about the uses and the epistemology of oral histories has evolved thanks to the US-based Oral History Association and its major publication, *The Oral History Review*. The scholarly discussion formally incorporated international perspectives after 1980, with the establishment of the *International Journal of Oral History*. While the scholarly works applying oral history as source material are countless in many history subfields, several seminal contributions, volumes, and taxonomies have been instrumental in tracing and advancing the methodological and epistemological discussion within the oral history discipline.

Although the historical recording of facts in an oral form has been practiced for millennia, oral testimonies fell out of favor once the scientific method came to dominate social sciences, including history. However, the introduction of technology that enabled recording people's conversations and personal accounts facilitated a return of the oral form in historical research in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Sharpless, 2007; Thompson, 1978, pp. 55–57). Oral accounts enrich traditional sources and capture voices often silenced in traditional government or business archives.

In the United States, interest in individual testimonies started growing since the mid-19th century. The first systematic oral history collections were introduced through private and public initiatives aimed at portraying the country's diversity. Several of them are still available in archives across the country. Examples include the 1860s Bancroft collection of biographies from the US West stored in the Bancroft archive at the University of California Berkley (Sharpless, 2007, p. 10); hundreds of oral histories originated in the 1930s through the Federal Writers Project as part of the New Deal, which are now a permanent collection in the Library of Congress; and the extensive "Oral History Project," launched at Columbia University in 1948, counting more than 10,000 interviews, and still ongoing. Allan Nevins, often recognized as one of the "fathers of oral history," was behind this massive initiative, which focused primarily on the testimonies of the American business and political élites (Ritchie, 2014; Thomson, 1998).

In the post-war period, oral history became increasingly popular thanks to "presidential projects" collecting oral accounts about current administrations among public officials and ordinary citizens to be stored in presidential libraries (Ritchie, 2014, pp. 4–7). The introduction of the portable cassette recorder in 1963 further expanded the oral history approach (Starr, 1977). In 1965 there were about 89 projects across the US, and in less than ten years, these had already grown to over 700 (Sharpless, 2007, p. 21). In 1968 the Oral History Association was founded and started producing joint objectives and guidelines about collecting and retaining interviews, recording and categorization, and transcription strategies.

This increasing popularity of oral history also meant a multiplication of views about the nature of the discipline and the development of debates among scholars and practitioners. The main questions emerging between the 1960s and 1970s concerned the use of oral histories as evidence to conduct historical research. Between the 1960s and the 1970s, oral history transformed from a source of historical information gathered by independent, objective observers to an interpretative practice where historians became active participants in the process of text creation. Two leading “schools of thought” can be identified in this period: oral history as “archival practice” and oral history as an interpretative framework for social research, or “new social history” (Crawford & Bailey, 2019; Grele, 2007).

The first approach reflected the American tradition of the Oral History Association, which considered oral history interviews as another type of primary or archival material and additional evidence to integrate traditional historical sources (Thomson, 1998; Barros, 2023). The central assumption in this perspective was that oral histories could provide the basis of historical work and publication if used in connection with other primary material. As a result, academic debates and research focused on the methods and practices to collect, record, process, and catalog interviews. A further feature in archival oral history was the centrality of the interviewees, whose perspectives had to be protected and curated while still abiding by the mainstream standards of publishing. This resulted in editing and reviewing transcripts with interviewees to ensure their perspectives would clearly emerge.

Some critics expressed skepticism towards this editorial work, arguing that it transformed oral histories into “fabricated material” hardly comparable with traditional written sources and thus unable to contribute with more than color and anecdotal evidence (Reingold, 1969). Another main concern was that most oral history projects in the 1960s remained elitist, reflecting the perspective of prestigious institutions and the establishment. The practice spread through interview projects primarily located in archives in Europe, Israel, New Zealand, and emerging countries like Malaysia, Brazil, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Sharpless, 2007). Jan Vansina (1985) shaped the subfield of African history by showing how to use oral history documentation and non-textual records in the study African societies since pre-colonial times.

By the mid-1970s, oral history had globalized (Grele, 2007; Thomson, 1998). The flourishing of the discipline within and outside the United States resulted in the emergence of new perspectives and conceptualizations about oral history as a practice. European social historians revamped the tradition of using oral testimonies and interviews to research the past. Unlike the mainstream American approach concentrating on the mechanics of interview collection, new social historians focused on their purpose. Oral history had the precise goal of capturing historical evidence and retrospective accounts of everyday experiences of individuals, who seldom appeared in traditional archival sources and historical research. This represented an opportunity to investigate new social realms, such as the condition of the working-class, women, and ethnic minorities like African and Native Americans (Bornat, 1994; Perks & Thomson, 2016).

The emerging movement of the New Left Historians in the 1970s, represented among others by Paul Thompson, aimed to create a “history from below” using oral evidence to compile micro-level ordinary accounts of everyday lives (Crawford & Bailey, 2019; Perks, 2019). Importantly, oral histories had the political goal of uncovering new interpretations of agency and power, defying the status quo and the mainstream “hegemonic” narratives created by the élites (Thomson, 2007). Unlike the archival approach to oral history, new social historians did not overly preoccupy themselves with how to record, process, and store the interviews, as these represented the necessary outcome of the historical work. However, this approach

was much stricter as far as the roles of the interviewer and interviewee were concerned. The interviewee should belong to an underrepresented group. At the same time, historians represented an integral part of the final interpretation and the historical outcome as they conducted, and thus co-created, the interview. As a result, oral histories were not supposed to be used as primary material available to other researchers but to serve the main objective of the historian's inquiry (Grele, 2007, p. 38).

As for the relationship between oral history and other subfields, such as business, economic history or organizational research, the crossover has been limited and hardly a structured and systematic one (Kroeze & Keulen, 2013). Although, business historians made ample use of oral history to portray different elements of corporate life, contexts, and business issues that were difficult to investigate exclusively through written records (Crawford & Bailey, 2019; Perks, 2012), interviews have primarily been used to integrate traditional archival material. In fact, business history traditionally adopted the positivist approach and considered interviews complementary sources to fill gaps in written archival records (Crawford, 2019). Only recently did the business history discipline start engaging in debates concerning the oral history methodology and epistemology (Jones & Comunale, 2019; Maclean et al., 2017).

Crawford (2019) argues, however, that potential for fruitful cross-fertilization is vast, citing Perks and Thomson's (2016) observation that oral histories enable unique connections among three essential spheres in the study of organizations: the personal, the public, and the corporate. In this light, similarly to the early "new social history" approach, interviews provide business history with the opportunity to move beyond the traditional Chandlerian paradigm of the firm and explore more intimate interactions between individuals and organizations. Corporate archives generally reflect the perspective of shareholders and executives, and for this reason are often criticized outside the history field for portraying partial and biased views (Decker et al., 2021). Although this skepticism extends to oral history (Rowlinson et al., 2014), these interviews offer the opportunity to mitigate this difference with organization and management studies in terms of empirical data. Similar to the standard application of interviews and retrospective accounts in these disciplines, oral histories allow to uncover testimonies across all levels of the organization, including middle- and lower-rank employees and external stakeholders (Crawford, 2019).

A 2019 special section of *Enterprise and Society* assembled several pieces on the interaction between business history and oral histories and the potential exchange between the two (Popp, 2019). Unlike previous business history work, this collection addressed the most salient epistemological and methodological debates in oral history, such as the role of memory and narrative (Kroeze & Vervloet, 2019; Thiessen, 2019), and provided historical reconstructions based almost exclusively on oral histories (Bailey, 2019).

KEY ISSUES IN ORAL HISTORY

Oral history as an approach has been shaped by some key methodological questions: What are the roles of interviewers and interviewees in creating the source? How should the resulting text be interpreted? As the brief history of the practice above highlighted, we can broadly distinguish between a positivist and a social history approach in terms of epistemology.

Intersubjectivity

The positivist approach generally considered the interviewer an objective observer who used the traditional historiography toolkit to describe the “true” facts that occurred in the past (Grele, 2007). The historian’s role should be to neutralize the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and focus on gathering the correct information and an unbiased interpretation. This perspective resulted from the professionalization of oral history carried out by the Oral History Association and aimed at providing oral interviews with the rigor and legitimacy of written archival sources (Crawford & Bailey, 2019; Tennent & Gillett, 2023). Here, oral histories amounted to material to analyze and process and presented the same challenges as written historical sources. Therefore, the interview had to be realized in a strict way to ensure to deliver “objective” source material that could be tested for accuracy, validity, and reliability.

In contrast, the primary trend among the new social history movement, influenced by the work of Clifford Geertz (1973) and local “community” historians, predicated a constructivist and interpretative view of interviews as “cultural artifacts” (Murphy, 1986). In this perspective, oral histories were great candidates to challenge the traditional problems and methods of historical work through new creative approaches. Since oral histories were predicated on the temporal distance between the events narrated and the present time, they were unique among archival sources in relying on memory and consciousness (Beard, 2017). However, rather than exploring these epistemological questions in-depth, new social historians remained initially anchored to the political use of interviews. The underlying idea was that community history, through the recollection of ordinary and oppressed people, could be sufficient to deliver a more authentic and purer perspective on the past (Frisch, 1979).

Between the 1970s and the 1980s, this constructivist approach evolved further as a result of the “cultural turn” in historical research (LaCapra, 2018). Oral history interviews were increasingly considered as containing two layers of analysis: (i) the content and nature of the story which motivated the interview, and (ii) a meta-level comprising the background of the conversation between interviewee and interviewer. This second level, in turn, exposed several linked tensions, for example the issue of intersubjectivity, referring here to the relationship between the interviewer (historian) and interviewee (subject), and their interaction as cultural actors with unique backgrounds, consciousness, and filtered interpretations of history and time (Abrams, 2016; Frisch, 1990). In the 1980s and 1990s, intersubjectivity became an increasingly dominant theme in the oral history debate, leading to a shift of the discipline from “archival documents to narrative constructions” (Crawford & Bailey, 2019, p. 13) and to a transformation of the interview process from “transactional to intersubjective” (Grele, 2007, p. 56).

Following the concept of intersubjectivity, the two individuals convening to discuss a specific topic (life, family, event, etc.) co-create the interview. However, the analysis of the interviews’ intersubjectivity adds further layers of complication to the interpretation of the final text. First, interviewees are no longer mere repositories of “objective” historical facts, but they contribute to shaping their own history. Therefore, the information they decide to share is as important as their silences and the elements left out or just touched upon briefly (Freund, 2016; Passerini, 2002). Their recollection represents a mix of their past memories and present motivations and goals. The way subjects tell their stories informs the audience about their consciousness and current desires, which need to be part of the final interpretation. Second, the historian’s motive and final purpose also inform how the interview develops through the

questions and the later interpretation of the answers. Historians do not come to the interview as “blank canvasses.” Still, they bring their own perspective, which is a function of their background, assumptions, and preconceptions about the history and the past.

Finally, the current relationship between the historian and the subject also concurs in the compilation of the text. This relationship is mediated by the language chosen by both individuals, the content/topic of the interview, and the subjectivity of the two people involved (Grele, 2007; Okihiro, 1981). In this light, the interview works as a “hermeneutic exercise” because it requires contextualization of the multiplicity of perspectives and positions towards the core topic of the oral history (McMahan, 2015; Wadhwani, 2023). Therefore, whether there is a shared understanding of the concepts used is a key issue, particularly when historians and subjects belong to different cultures (Burton, 2016; Bastien & Coraiola, 2023). Another element that may interact with the oral history process is the physical setting of the interview. The specific spatial context where the interview takes place might interfere with the process of recollection, by influencing the attitude of the participants or triggering memories of past experiences (Mengis et al., 2023). Finally, in terms of the relationship between the parties involved, the interview can also look like an “experiment in equality” because it entails a cooperative effort and negotiation between the parties, who need to “enter each other’s world” (Frisch, 1990; Portelli, 2009). The interview involves a “reflexive process” in which two people engaged in the conversation shape each other’s understanding of history through answers and questions (Okihiro, 1981, p. 39). As a result, there needs to be a set of rules and procedures ensuring that the interviewer acknowledges the autonomy of the subject’s point of view in the story and the reasons for their participation. At the same time, the interviewee understands and approves the purpose and objective of the interview (Yow, 2016).

Memory and Narrative

Oral histories are different from traditional sources in their unique and more marked reliance on memory and the – often broad – lags between the time of the interview and the facts narrated. Oral histories should indeed uncover the past while also addressing how the past is maintained and preserved in the present (Thomson, 2012). The present participates in the interviewee’s narration and the historian’s interpretation of the text (Rintamäki et al., 2023). The question is how individual memories transform into history in the context of oral history. No memory can be considered as purely primary data, as they result from the merging of the lived experience and the interference from the external environment. Memories always reflect the tension between collective (public) vision and the individual historical consciousness; the interplay between present and past events; and provide emotional nuance often unavailable in other sources (Smith, 2012; Rintamäki et al., 2023). Decker et al. (2021) reviewed the literature on the difference between memory and history and provided a rare synthesis and systematic framework that integrates oral history into the historical approaches to management and organizational research.

According to Olick (1999), memories can be conceived as “collected,” namely as socially framed but subjective recollections of the individual mind; or “collective,” that is choral and commemorative patterns of representations that are externally formed but publicly available for individuals to tap into. Oral history interviews might engage with both these approaches to memories. Collected memories might emerge from individual testimonies, while collective ones can be present both in individual interviews and aggregate analyses of oral history

collections. The connection with the present makes memories different from history, which instead reaches us through historical records and no longer presents an “organic” and direct relationship with the present (Olick, 1999, p. 335). History in this sense can be conceptualized as accumulation of memories crystallized in the past. As “memory is the site of struggle for competing meanings,” there are no rules to test for truth in the exposed recollection (Abrams, 2016, p. 80). Each recollection is different and packages memories in the form of stories or narratives. The assumption is that the same story can be narrated multiple times, and each time the present and the external culture might interfere with the way it is told. Narration represents an act of the mind which allows the subject to construct meaning and recall life experiences (Hansen, 2012). While narratives allow subjects to make sense of their past and construct a storyline with their memories, for the historian, the way the story is told is not necessarily straightforward (Abrams, 2016, p. 107; Rowlinson, 2023).

The way the narration is organized may provide some, albeit partial, insights on the process of recollection: what elements are recurring, what is explained at length, and what remains silenced, how specific memories come to the surface, and how the present and external culture contribute to the reconstruction of the past (Portelli, 2010). Historians ought to consider different narrative elements in terms of structure and style, which may become necessary in the later interpretation of the historical account. These could be, among others, pauses, silences, the tone of the voice, sounds, anecdotes, repetitions, digressions, the velocity in recollecting and reporting on different events, and the chosen chronology and order in which facts are reported (Coraiola et al., 2021; Tonkin, 1995). Appreciating the organization of the narrative provides insights into how the narrator positions him or herself within a set of external conventions and cultural models, contributing to historical interpretation (Abrams, 2016). This way narratives allow researchers to consider not just the reconstruction of the past, but also to reflect on historical consciousness (the collective assumptions on what constitutes history) (Suddaby, 2016; Suddaby & Foster, 2017).

Ego-Documents and Digital History

While oral history is fundamentally a type of interview practice, documents and other historical sources are still used in a contextual manner. But oral historians have shown a particular interest in ego-documents. Ego-documents are defined as: “sources or documents providing an account of, or revealing privileged information about, the ‘self’ who produced it” (Fulbrook & Rublack, 2010, p. 263), similar to what is usually recognized in micro-historical practice (Carnegie & McBride, 2023; Decker, 2015). These sources encompass various genres, from autobiography to memoirs, diaries, personal narratives, and life histories. They share indeed almost all the distinctive features of oral history interviews minus the “collaboration” (Abrams, 2016, p. 19). In the case of ego-documents, the subjective element is even more powerful, as the author creates a sense of their “self” that might never be fully reached through an oral interview, where historians might “force” contextualization upon subjects and intersubjectivity misaligns incentives (Abrams, 2016). Although no “self” account can be produced without being framed and constructed within a social and cultural environment (Fulbrook & Rublack, 2010; Von Greyerz, 2010), the implicit assumption is that ego-documents may nonetheless provide privileged access to the individual’s consciousness and deeper understanding of the inner workings of the subjective experience (Baggerman & Dekker, 2018; Bornat, 1994).

This explains why ego-documents have been increasingly used in business history to understand entrepreneurs' motives, creative processes, and strategies in the past (Ram et al., 2022; Tinning & Lubinski, 2022). This is even more relevant with online sources. As individuals might have continued a diverse online presence for extended periods (years and sometimes decades), it is now possible to reconstruct the evolution of their "self" over time and across different contexts and cultural settings. New technologies have blurred the distinction between ego-documents and oral histories and multiplied the opportunities to expose subjectivity and memory. The internet allows for different ways to narrate the self, which are difficult to box in as either "one-" or "two-way" interactions. For example, in the case of social media, people might spontaneously initiate a thread or a post but then answer questions and address comments transforming an individual account into a conversation.

The digital revolution made information more fluid and allowed historians to access it instantly and from anywhere (Nix et al., 2023). The result was the democratization of history, as more voices emerged: historical material could be immediately "crowd-sourced" through the online recruitment of participants or a simple search of people's accounts on personal websites or social media (Frisch, 2006). Since the 2000s, the internet has increased the chance of divulging personal details through social media and other platforms. As a result of new technologies and platforms, new types of testimonies emerged, for example, emails, blog posts, chat conversations, YouTube videos (TedTalks, interviews, monologues, etc.), podcasts, and social media posts.

DISCUSSION: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR ORAL HISTORY IN BUSINESS HISTORY AND BEYOND HISTORY

Oral History of Emerging Markets

The study of business history in alternative contexts and specifically in emerging markets has so far represented the most promising area for the expansion and systematization of the use of oral interviews in the business history field (Austin et al., 2017; Jones & Comunale, 2019; Sheth, 2019). Emerging markets have offered business historians the opportunity to enrich their traditional methodology and translate their historical approach outside of the archive and "into the field" by integrating oral testimonies as "historical fieldwork" similar to ethnographies.

In *Organization in Time* (Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014), JoAnne Yates discussed the possibility of cross-fertilization between historical methods and qualitative organizational research, suggesting that oral histories (as any interview) should never be trusted at "face value," but instead, they should be "grounded" and analyzed in relation to the contemporary context (pp. 275–277). This meant that potential biases in oral recollections could be reduced through explicit triangulation and integration with contemporaneous written records while framing questions, designing the interview, and in the following interpretative phase.

As Jones and Comunale (2019) illustrated, a primary reason for the increasing use of oral histories in studying business environments in the developing world is the need for alternative data sources because well-organized archives may be absent or inaccessible, as shown in the case of African history (Vansina, 1985). This is particularly important in the corporate sector. Few companies keep archives, and if they do, they rarely allow external access.

Published corporate accounts may be opaque and made even harder to use by the existence of cross-shareholdings and diversified business groups. In this context, semi-structured interviews with business practitioners may be one of the few viable means of accessing information about the business sector (Austin et al., 2017; Jones & Comunale, 2019).

A second reason concerns the nature of existing archives and the perspective they channel. Most written records in developing economies are located in government and national archives and primarily date back to the colonial or decolonization period. This, of course, allows only for a biased historical recollection of the government's perspective, leaving especially local actors' testimonies in the dark (Decker, 2013). For example, plentiful colonial sources are available about the plantation economy in British Malaya (today's Malaysia and Singapore) and Dutch East Indies between the mid-19th and the mid-20th centuries (Huff, 1994; Tate, 1996; White, 1996). However, they primarily reflect the point of view of European colonial administrations and Western companies investing in these frontier economies (Barros, 2023; Bastien & Coraiola, 2023). Local testimonies, such as small entrepreneurs belonging to ethnic minorities (e.g., Chinese, Indian, and Arab), who contributed to the creation of regional markets and the early industrialization of these countries, are limited, when available, to scant interviews on local newspapers, a few letters, diaries, or written memoirs. The voices of most ordinary citizens and oppressed plantation workers remain silenced (Barros et al., 2018). Oral history represents a tool to capture the diversity of these contexts, correct some of the existing distortions in the historiography and fill significant voids in the history of the non-Western world. In some cases, local authorities in emerging economies are actively trying to balance the bias in their archives by building oral history collections, as in the case of the National Archives in Singapore and the Programa de Historia Oral in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In 2008, Geoffrey Jones and Tarun Khanna at HBS launched the "Creating Emerging Markets Oral History Project" (CEM), which builds an oral history database of business leaders from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America with the aim to expand the historical knowledge and collective understanding of these business environments. The CEM project is ongoing, and to this day it represents the largest oral history archive of high-profile business leaders from emerging markets, counting more than 150 interviews across 28 countries (as of 2022). The transcripts are publicly available online through the CEM website held at the HBS, which allows for using the same sources for multiple projects and for result and study verification (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Each oral history in the project consists of a lengthy semi-structured life-history interview with local business leaders. Interviewees are chosen after consultation with relevant regional and industry experts, with Harvard's regional research centers, and through the snowballing technique (Bailey, 2019). Working through the database, it became clear that as people grew older, they went through a process of "life review," prioritizing older memories over recent ones, and they were more comfortable giving reflective accounts towards the end of their career (Bornat, 2012; Ritchie, 2012, p. 11). Thus, as a key selection criterion, interviewees must possess three decades of senior business leadership to ensure a longitudinal and multi-generational perspective and have acted as highly impactful figures in their country (Giacomin et al., 2021).

The interviews present a homogeneous but loose format, including a set of prepared questions. These should capture the most salient times of their life retrospective and business journey, and contextualize the narration (Gao et al., 2017). For example, questions tend to trace the chronological development of the business leaders' life milestones, and often

follow-up questions are used to deepen their memory of the historical context and explore specific themes, like internationalization, philanthropy, and so on.

The CEM database has so far been the basis of several publications contributing to strategy (Bucheli et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2017; Jones & Khanna, 2022), business history (Giacomin et al., 2021; Jones & Comunale, 2018) and business ethics (Colpan & Jones, 2020; Giacomin & Jones, 2022). The systematic use of these oral histories has allowed the development of the study of several unresearched areas of entrepreneurship and business in emerging markets, such as the relationships between corporations and government, the professionalization of business groups, and the contribution of firms to fill institutional voids. Most importantly, the CEM interviews helped debunk traditional theories and offered a fresh view on established ideas about business activity in these geographies (Jones & Comunale, 2019), which traditionally had been described through the eyes of multinationals and foreign agencies. For example, they provided insights on the execution of government policies and on why some policies were preferred over others or did not happen at all (Jones & Comunale, 2018). They illustrated the motivations and concerns of entrepreneurs in approaching their business environment by showing alternative ways to conceptualize typical activities such as philanthropic and charitable projects (Giacomin & Jones, 2022; Giacomin et al., 2021). Finally, the oral history format shed new light on delicate topics such as corruption, which require trust between the interviewer and the interviewee and a familiar environment when discussed in public (Jones & Comunale, 2019).

Practical Guide to the Use of Oral History in the Social Science

The CEM database represents a good example to illustrate some practical techniques to use rich oral history databases for multidisciplinary research. Of course, the collection presents several distortions and biases, which need to be recognized before starting to carry out both qualitative and historical research. This involves a deep reflection on the nature of the source material and its shortcomings. Some biases are unique to the collection and may be fixed through a calibrated database expansion and an accurate scrutiny of interviewees and participants. The CEM database includes both selection and idiosyncratic biases due to the countries' specific industrial structures, the size of their economy, and their contribution to the global markets. For example, interviews are unequally distributed across regions, with some macro-areas, like South Asia and Latin America, being represented more than others. Similarly, within regions, some countries are more present than others, for example, India in South Asia and Turkey in the Middle East. Further bias concerns gender, the type of business, or other elements, like business leaders' religious orientation (i.e., most secular leaders in predominantly Muslim countries). This mirrors country-specific features, such as the widespread underrepresentation of women in business or the preponderance of family-owned diversified business groups. Finally, in its current form, the CEM database still reminds us of the early oral history projects (Nevins, 1962; Perks, 2019): it is a publicly available collection that, however, focuses primarily on business élites, wealthy and successful individuals, who are thought as "impactful" in the development of their country's economy. The interview design process also follows a positivist approach. While the subjectivity of the interviewee is central, interviews strive for a homogenous structure to allow for comparison across the database.

Then, the CEM project shares some of the challenges typical of the oral history format that can be addressed in a more systematic way. In practice, researchers interested in approaching oral history and using these interviews for scholarly work in the social sciences, can consider adopting a four-step process for "grounding" oral histories in their historical context, reduce

biases and ensure internal and external validity and reliability. In doing so, we followed Yates's suggestion of grounding our research through triangulation while still engaging explicitly with the other elements of Wadhvani and Bucheli's "historical method triad": source criticism and hermeneutic approach (Kipping et al., 2014) (see Table 9.1 for a summary of the process).

First, before the interview, the historian should clearly state and share materials and information about the purposes, assumptions, and concepts with the subject. As part of the CEM guidelines, before the interview participants are thoroughly informed about the project's main goals through a standard interview information sheet. Authors should also perform a sort of "background check" about the interviewee to uncover potential biases in their perspective and collect materials that might help reach the aim of the interview. Potential biases coming from the interviewer should be acknowledged too. These precautions will allow setting the playing field, create trust, and clarify the relationship between interviewer and subject. During our research on philanthropic foundations (Giacomin & Jones, 2022), we created "interviewees' profiles" for each interview, that is individual memos comprising all relevant information on the interviewee. This analytical tool allowed us to triangulate the interview with external sources (primarily on their personal and corporate life) and provide a critical perspective by adding elements that might not be mentioned. Although all interviews channel subjective reconstructions, the lack of anonymity might add an additional layer of bias. The fact that people are recorded, and their testimony becomes part of the archive in a prestigious institution might bias their accounts, inducing interviewees to omit embarrassing details or elements that expose them to criticism.

As a second step, during the interview, the historian should ensure that potential biases are openly recognized and eventually addressed using external sources. There is often a significant time span between the time of the interview and the facts narrated. This begets how people remembered and what shaped their memory of the past. As a tentative and partial correction, some recent interviews have been triangulated by incorporating external elements in the questions, like printed sources, articles, and pictures, and having interviewees comment on them.

As a third step, after the interview and once the transcript is available, the researcher can engage in a more comprehensive process of "source preparation" that allows to further reduce bias and address the interpretative process. This phase needs to include a grounding and contextualization plan as well as a narrative analysis that can unveil insights about memory, identity, and other concepts relevant to the project. For example, in our research we developed a triangulation framework to contextualize each interview. Therefore, we built a database on the top of the CEM oral history collection introducing an additional analytical tool, "historical context cards," for each oral history to combine with the "interviewees' profiles." Context cards represented more general historical overviews of the vital facts about the company, the business environment, and the country's development in the period under scrutiny, which facilitated the hermeneutic analysis. These tools enabled us to systematically combine and integrate the information provided by the business leaders with different forms of publicly available qualitative data, such as corporate and foundation websites; industry reports; newspaper articles; press releases; secondary literature like books and academic publications; and other interviews or statements by former employees, business partners, politicians, and consumers. The result was an extended database where the oral history interviews represented only one, albeit central, piece of a vast mosaic of information to consider in our analysis.

In terms of intersubjectivity and meta-analysis, this specific project that used the CEM interviews did not aim at lingering on issues such as the memory and identity, but it focused

Table 9.1 *A practical guide to the use of oral history interviews*

Process	Actions	Tools
Step 1: Before the interview	1. Inform interviewees about the project's main assumptions and aims. Set up a line of communication and organize introductory meetings to get the participants know each other and get acquainted and comfortable. 2. Research participants' background, including relevant information on their history and potential conflicts of interest. 3. Create a similar form for the interviewer including his/her background; major theoretical and methodological influences; and potential bias approaching the interview.	1. Standard interview sheet stating the aims of the interview; and specific concepts or theories relevant to set a common ground. 2. Interviewee and, if needed, interviewer profile cards.
Step 2: During the interview	1. The interviewee and the interviewer should be clearly introduced. 2. Questions should openly recognize potential biases, eventually addressed using external sources.	i.e. During one of my recorded PhD interviews with members of the palm oil industry, I provided a brief introduction of myself and presented the interviewee's bio. I also mentioned that we have known each other for several years and the circumstances in which we met prior to the interview. 1. Context cards: these can be organized through dedicated sections on triangulation, hermeneutic approach, and source criticism. 2. Reflections on intersubjectivity. This can be a table or a memo integrating the participants' profiles on step 1 and including comments and observations on the interview process. 3. Narrative and meta-analysis can be included in a table, in memo in the appendix or integrated in the research discussion.
Step 3: After the interview transcript has been produced	1. Historical accuracy: the information in the transcript needs to be integrated with external information. This includes triangulation with other sources; a section on hermeneutic approach, providing historical context to the interviewee's historical recollection (i.e. adding notes on historical events, important personalities etc.); and any potential criticism to the statements or references made in the interview (i.e. explicitly acknowledging contrasting views or conflicting theories). 2. Intersubjectivity bias: Reflection and comments on how the interview was conducted; the relationship between interviewer and interviewees; potential biases or misunderstandings in the use of language or definition of concepts; comments on the physical settings and how participants reacted to it. 3. Narrative and meta-analysis: Analysis of the structure of the narrative, length, and attitude towards different topics; observations on non-textual elements such as silences, pauses, facial expressions etc. Further reflections regarding memory, identity and other interpretative frameworks that might be relevant for the study.	1. Example: text analysis (open coding; axial coding; and Gioia method). 2. We acknowledged different biases and used the results of step 3 to add nuance and granularity to the findings of the text analysis.
Step 4: Empirical analysis	1. The researcher selects the methodology to analyze the data. 2. The researcher acknowledges the idiosyncratic biases involving the database (i.e. gender bias in the interviewees pool).	

on the firms' strategies and the evolution of industries and business environment in emerging economies. Intersubjectivity tended to change across interviews, as both interviewers and subjects changed across the project database. As the main outcome, we summarized the key points ensuing from the interpretative reading of the interviews. In most cases, the atmosphere emerging from the recordings was one of familiarity and trust, which might be because many interviewees had a previous relationship with HBS (e.g., parents of students, alumni, or donors). Thus, we explicitly acknowledged the bias involved in the privileged position of these business leaders as part of local and global élites. We also recognized that the conversation between members of the "global élite" and representatives of an equally elitist institution helped reduce potential distortions due to perceived social distances. Finally, we defined their impact (and their families' and firms') in their respective context.

The process of creating oral histories, and analyzing them, clearly requires researchers to reflect on the purpose of their study and their epistemological assumptions. In our case, the final goal was to create a comprehensive empirical dataset that allowed empirical analysis for comparison and generalization, while addressing the subjectivity of each interview to ensure nuance, critical reflection, and historical depth. As this introduction to oral history traditions has shown, different groups and different times have conceived of the role of oral histories in different ways.

CONCLUSIONS

Oral histories represent a hybrid form between archival material and memories: they are retrospective accounts that, however, are kept for posterity and provide information about the past. Oral history interviews differ from other social sciences as they are non-anonymous, longitudinal in content and they are treated as "sources" about the past, rather than data; they are thus collected and stored for multiple future uses. Since its inception, oral history has shifted from being a tool to gather historical material into a more interpretative discipline. The focus on the content of interviews through a positivist approach gradually shifted towards the recollection of memories and the analysis of subjectivity, following a constructivist perspective (Abrams, 2016, p. 63). Oral history has contributed to historical scholarship by expanding the scope of traditional practice capturing perspectives and angles often neglected in archival material.

This chapter identified and discussed the main issues when using interviews in historical research. Researchers should attempt to openly recognize potential elements of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that might influence their historical interpretation, while contextualizing and grounding the content of the interview with contemporary sources. This chapter introduced some techniques to integrate oral history as a method for multidisciplinary research. This involved a four-step process modeled on the CEM database from HBS, which focused specifically on contextualization. Oral history represents an extraordinary opportunity for historical researchers in management to access new perspectives and challenge established ideas and theories in the field.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

For readers new to the oral history method and wishing to learn more about this growing sub-field and resource of historical research, I suggest some landmark publications including one book, two articles, one edited volume and a special issue.

- (1) Abrams, L. (2016). *Oral History Theory*. Routledge.

This book provides a comprehensive and integrated discussion of oral history theory. It includes examples from oral history literature in combination with theories drawn from disciplines ranging from linguistics to psychoanalysis. It addresses key themes such as the peculiarities of oral history, the study of the self, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, memory, narrative, performance, power, and trauma. Each chapter offers a clear and practice-oriented explanation of the different theoretical approaches and contextualizes them within the oral history literature.

- (2) Thomson, A. (1998). Fifty years on: An international perspective on oral history. *The Journal of American History*, 85(2), 581–595.
- (3) Thomson, A. (2007). Four paradigm transformations in oral history. *The Oral History Review*, 34(1), 49–70.

These two articles are foundational to the understanding of the development of oral history as a field and its transition from research methodology to interpretative tool. In (2) Alistair Thomson presents the long-term evolution of oral history as technique and as a subfield of the historical discipline. It concentrates on four main developments: it acknowledges the multiplicity of views on the nature of “oral history”; it introduces the debate on the role of memory in oral history; it provides reflections on the contribution of oral history beyond its value as methodology; and it presents some of the limitations of working with retrospective accounts. In the latter (3), more recent piece, the author deepens his discussion on the four points in (2), focusing especially on the growing relevance of memory and post-positivist approaches, and on the centrality of political and legal practices for oral history. It also highlights the increasing interdisciplinarity, internationalization and significance of digital technologies.

- (4) Perks, R., & Thomson, A. (2016). *The Oral History Reader*. Routledge.

The editors and contributors to this volume lay the groundwork for the application of oral history as a historical methodology. The edited volume traces the advancement of the oral history discipline towards “dual integrity” by combining major “classic” pieces with chapters reflecting new discussions on the theory, method, and use of interviews. It reviews key debates in the development of oral history since its formal inception after WWII. It includes first-hand examples and analyses on the interview practice, on the nature of memory and its significance in oral history. It identifies the practical and ethical issues involved in the interpretation, presentation, and public use of oral recollections. Finally, it outlines the challenges and limitations of oral history by making the case for more projects committed to advocacy and empowerment.

- (5) Special Section on Oral History in *Enterprise & Society*, 2019, 20(1).

This special section in a recent issue of *Enterprise and Society* represents a milestone for the theoretical, thematic, and methodological integration between oral and business history. It comprises six articles exploring various conceptual, methodological, and empirical dimensions to employing oral history in business history research. Some of these papers discuss theoretical themes, such as the relationship between oral and business history, the role of sense-making. Others engage with methodological issues and use different oral history collections to study entrepreneurship in emerging markets and corporate strategies and internal dynamics in different industrial and geographical settings.

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10. Using accounting records as historical data sources

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INTRODUCTION

It would be highly unusual for an organisation *not* to maintain accounting records. In a narrower sense, accounts will show the organisation's transactions and its economic resources (assets) and the claims on those economic resources (liabilities and the interests of the organisation's owners) recorded in terms of monetary amounts. In a wider sense, accounts can extend to statistical records of the organisation's activities, not necessarily measured in terms of money. Accounts do not just act as a historical record of what the organisation has done. They also provide information that can be used within the organisation to help in planning and control of the organisation's activities, and that forms the basis of reports to stakeholders outside the organisation. Stakeholders include the owners of the organisation (in the case of companies, the shareholders) as well as customers and suppliers, employees, lenders, the government, and the public.

However, historians of business, management and organisations may find it difficult to make sense of the information that can be found in accounting records. Some guides to the historical study of organisations (for example, Bucheli and Wadhvani, 2014) do not specifically mention accounting records as a source of historical data, while others (for example, Tennent & Gillett, 2023) mention accounts only in passing as a specific form of organisational record found in archives. Business historians have in the past had an ambivalent view of accounting records: for example, Marriner (1980: 226) warned that 'historians should not expect too much from accounting records or try to use them in too sophisticated a manner'. Marriner recommended, as did other business historians (for example, Mathias, 1993, and Fridenson, 2007), that business historians (and by implication historians more generally) should seek advice from accounting scholars on how to read old accounting records.

Historians may regard accounting as a tool largely used in profit-seeking enterprises, but accounting is found in many types of organisation. The ways in which accounts are prepared and used may help to reinforce a specific internal 'rationality' that encourages certain organisational practices and deters others. For example, Quattrone (2004, 2015), in his study of the use of accounting by the Jesuit order in Italy in the 16th and 17th centuries, shows how administrative accounting practices drew on ideas of 'spiritual self-accountability' to God to shape internal systems of accountability to religious superiors. What is accounted for, who is liable to render an account, to whom, where and when accounts are provided all give evidence of how organisations operate on a day-to-day basis and across longer time periods. Another study that uses surviving accounting records, not just as a source of data but also as evidence of governance structures, is the examination of the Church of Scotland in the 18th century undertaken by Mutch (2017), with presbyterian ministers employing the form and content of 'merchants' accounts' as analogies for how church members should monitor the conduct of their own lives

and how the Church of Scotland should manage itself. Furthermore, Giovannoni and Napier (2023) draw on an analysis of the accounting records of Royal Holloway College in the early years after its foundation (1874–1897) to illuminate how numerical modes of communication about the main building of the College were combined with other (spatial, aural, sensual and visual) modes in the crafting of a multimodal rhetoric about the building. They show how accounting and non-accounting records can be drawn upon in the historical examination of the materiality of a building, and the related rhetoric.

The aim of this chapter is to provide some general guidance on how historians of management and organisation can use accounting records as sources of data. In the next section, a brief outline is provided of the underlying structure of accounting record systems and the various documents that may be available in organisational archives. This is followed by a discussion of how an organisation's financial statements may be useful for the management historian. An example of using accounting records to study both the financial position and the organisational working of a large company is provided, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the main challenges involved in trying to use accounting records.

ACCOUNTING RECORD SYSTEMS

The word 'accounts' can refer to both the internal accounting records of an organisation and the periodic statements of financial position and performance – the 'financial statements' – of the organisation. When most accounting records were maintained on paper, the expression 'books of account' was often used to refer to the accounting records, as the accounting information was recorded in bound books such as day books and ledgers (Yamey, 1949). More recently, the use of the term 'accounting records' recognises that accounting information is increasingly maintained electronically. This term appears in the legal requirement for UK companies to keep 'adequate accounting records' (Companies Act 2006, s. 386), which are sufficient:

- (a) to show and explain the company's transactions,
- (b) to disclose with reasonable accuracy, at any time, the financial position of the company at that time, and
- (c) to enable the directors to ensure that any accounts required to be prepared comply with the requirements of [the Companies Act].

Similar requirements exist in other countries, and they are usually supplemented (and extended to non-corporate entities) by fiscal regulations for both taxes on profits and sales taxes, which require organisations to keep records of their transactions (Hussey and Hussey, 1999).

Double-entry Bookkeeping

The paradigmatic approach to structuring books of account is the *double-entry* system. This system emerged in 13th-century Italy, and it reflected the way in which businesses often acted as intermediaries in transactions involving other parties. For example, a merchant would be instructed by customer A to use some of the money that the merchant owed that customer to pay customer B. The merchant would make a dual entry in the books of account, showing a *debit* of the amount transferred in the account of customer A (thus reducing the liability of the merchant to this customer) and a *credit* of the same amount in the account of customer

B (thus increasing the liability of the merchant to customer B). As the double-entry system developed, the books of account began to include not just ‘personal’ accounts relating to customers but also ‘real’ accounts of assets such as cash and property, and ‘nominal’ accounts of income and expenses (Sangster, 2016; Dobie and Oldroyd, 2020).

Double-entry accounting systems might consist of several ‘books’. An initial and detailed record of the transaction might be noted in a memorandum book. The transaction would be recorded with less detail in a second book, the journal, which would specify the accounts to be debited and credited, and the transaction would then be entered, possibly in summary form, in the ledger. The ledger entries would include cross-references back to the page of the journal where the transaction was recorded and to the other account(s) debited or credited. This system was set out in early bookkeeping textbooks, beginning with Luca Pacioli’s *Summa de Arithmetica* of 1494 (Jackson, 1956; Taylor, 1956), and structurally it still underpins modern manual and electronic accounting systems.

Sophisticated Accounting Systems

In practice, as the volume of business transactions grew, the single ledger might be subdivided into separate books (or series of books) for different parts of the business. How the accounting system was arranged and who had access to different elements of the system can reveal information about how an organisation was structured and how information flowed inside the organisation. Among other benefits, a subdivided accounting system facilitated segregation of duties, specialisation and internal secrecy. Different clerks would be responsible for dealing with sales and accounts with customers (the ‘sales ledger’), purchases of goods and services and accounts with suppliers (the ‘purchases ledger’), payments to workers (the ‘payroll’) and receipts and payments (the ‘cash book’). The effect of this was that clerks, particularly those dealing with the recording and procession of routine transactions, developed expertise in specific parts of the organisation’s activities but could not form an overall view of the full range of the organisation’s operations. This would be reserved for the organisation’s owners and the most senior managers. The study by Hopwood (1987) of the accounting records of the 18th-century potter Josiah Wedgwood shows how control over the accounting records by a single chief clerk could provide opportunities for fraud, while a system of segregation of responsibilities (and access to information) reduced the danger that a single powerful employee would be able to abuse their position.

Information about the overall financial position and performance of the organisation was often recorded in a ‘secret ledger’ restricted to senior clerks and owners, which could include detailed information about the organisation’s properties and investments. Specialised account books might be used for certain types of transaction: for example, a landed estate would be likely to use a ‘rental’ to record amounts due from and transactions with tenants (for an illustration, see Napier, 1991a).

Management and organisational researchers can use the segmentation of records in a double-entry system to develop organisational charts, as the records provide evidence of how different pressures for control and accountability can lead to innovations in an organisation’s accounting system. Changes in the accounting system may therefore be signs of broader changes in the operation of an organisation. Riccaboni et al. (2006) discuss how the introduction of new accounting record systems in the 13th and 14th centuries reflected an increasingly complex set of organisational structures around the building of the cathedral in Siena. They

use the contents of different records and information about how the records were prepared and audited to identify changing relationships of power involving the local municipality and the cathedral Chapter.

Double-entry and Production Processes

The double-entry system was also found to be useful in recording the flow of inputs in a production process. A separate account could be prepared for each stage of manufacturing, with input costs being debited and outputs being credited (and debited to the account for the next stage of manufacturing or for ‘finished goods’). This allowed the cost of producing goods sold by the organisation to be measured. The structure of the costing system will reveal how the production process was organised, as it shows how costs were allocated to different stages. For example, Stone (1973) shows how a 19th-century Manchester cotton mill used internal accounting entries to reflect the flow of production through as many as 14 ‘cost centres’ (separate sections of the mill where different production processes were undertaken). The use of internal transfer pricing for determining the amounts at which intermediate products and finished cotton were transferred from one part of the mill to another provided evidence of how managers were being monitored through the accounting records.

However, the measurement of cost often involved some degree of intervention, as different cost measurement approaches developed, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries (see Boyns, 2007, for a discussion of different costing approaches). Although the cost of materials and labour used in producing specific goods could usually be measured with reasonable accuracy, the increasing ‘burden’ of overhead costs, such as costs relating to property, plant and equipment and the general administration of the production process, meant that how these costs were allocated to specific production items became a challenge for businesses (Johnson and Kaplan, 1987). The impact of overheads could affect the internal management of an organisation: for example, Labardin (2014) shows how internal accounting records reporting a dramatic increase in overheads in the Pont-à-Mousson iron company in France in the early 1920s led management to seek cost savings by, among other approaches, reducing the internal floor space available to the company’s accounting clerks.

Limitations of Accounting Records

Accounting records may be used to provide information about specific transactions, but the amount of detail available may be limited. For example, the cash book may record all amounts received and paid, but it may identify only the name of the counterparty from whom the cash was received or to whom the payment was made, rather than the purpose of the payment. A receipt from a customer or a payment to a supplier may cover several transactions, and it would be necessary to examine the customer’s or the supplier’s individual account for information about individual transactions. Even then, the account may simply mention the number of an invoice. The details of goods or services received or provided may be traceable by finding the original documentation, but many organisations do not retain original sales and purchase invoices for longer than they are required to by law (which may be as short a period as three years). Even the survival of original books of account such as ledgers and cash books may be of only limited help if they do not provide sufficient details of transactions (see Barros, 2023).

Help in understanding a specific organisation's accounting records can often come from other internal documents. A 'chart of accounts' may show how the accounting record system is constructed and which account(s) may be debited or credited for specific transactions. The chart of accounts may also show how information flows from one part of the system to another. Minutes of the board of directors and internal committees may refer to accounts and to information derived from the accounting records and may provide evidence of how frequently important information (such as sales in a specific period) is measured and reported internally. In a large organisation, it will be necessary to aggregate accounting information (such as sales achieved in a period) from different units or divisions, and the underlying calculations can provide information on the levels and mix of sales across the whole organisation. In some organisations, the accounting information may be embedded in broader statistical analyses. For example, Boyns (1993) describes how coal-mining companies in south Wales in the late 19th century used fortnightly cost statements that reported not just on the costs involved in extracting coal but also the amounts of coal mined. This information allows subsequent historians to assess the relative efficiency of different companies and different mines during the period. A complication, though, is that the cost statements were not standardised across the industry, so the historian needs to be aware that inconsistencies in measurement may distort comparisons.

Accounting Information Systems

The accounting records in an organisation are sometimes referred to as an 'accounting information system' (AIS), and historians of organisation can often gain insights into how organisations operate by examining how the AIS works. Is information centralised or diffused within the organisation? In a multi-unit organisation, detailed accounting records are likely to exist within each separate unit but only aggregated information, in the form of periodic summary reports, communicated to higher levels of the organisation. Who receives these reports and how detailed they are can indicate the significance of specific managers within the organisation. Chandler (1977, 1990) noted the important role of accounts in the management of the modern business enterprise and how control of divisionalised firms was achieved through the provision of limited but highly structured accounting and statistical information to the head office. The periodic internal management accounts of units can not only provide data on how each unit has performed but can help the historian to identify and delineate the way in which the organisation is divided up and the internal lines of communication. There is often a reflexive relationship between organisational structure and the AIS, especially if the structure is imposed by external regulation, as the accounting system needs to reflect rather than challenge the system, but practical accounting exigencies may work to reshape the structure of the organisation (for an example in the context of an Italian girls' school, see Sibilio and Vannini, 2020).

Past accounting systems may be used to provide mappings of organisational structures, both internally and in terms of how the organisation relates to other parties, at different points in time. Riccaboni et al. (2006), for example, derive a series of increasingly complex organisational and accountability structures that are evidenced by changing accounting systems. Information in historical accounting records can also locate a specific organisation within the network formed by its business contacts, including customers and suppliers. The number and value of transactions with different customers and suppliers can be used to identify the key business counterparts, and the availability of account books for several organisations in

an industry or location can allow for the mapping of extensive and interlocking networks. For example, McWatters and Lemarchand (2013) used accounting records of a French 18th-century merchant, supplemented by other sources, to construct a network of 89 business contacts in 11 locations. The analysis allowed the authors to identify the ‘central’ actors, with most extensive contacts, and to examine how far different sub-networks of merchants and other business actors were linked with each other.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The detailed accounting records of many organisations may not have survived or may not be accessible to the historian. However, the organisation’s periodic financial statements may have survived, and these may be accessible through public registries or depositories, such as the UK’s Companies House. Companies listed on stock exchanges are also likely to be required to file their financial statements with the exchanges and with security market regulators. The statements may be available physically in the exchanges’ or regulators’ archives, and increasingly it is possible to access the financial statements of listed companies via online portals (an example of such a portal is the US Securities and Exchange Commission’s Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis, and Retrieval – EDGAR – system: see <https://www.sec.gov/edgar/about>).

The Principal Financial Statements

The principal financial statements are the balance sheet, which is a statement providing information on the financial position of the organisation on a given date, and the profit and loss account (or income statement), giving information on the financial performance of the organisation for the period up to the balance sheet date. Originally, these statements played a largely technical role in the double-entry system. The profit and loss account was used to ‘close off’ trading, income and expense accounts, with a trading account, which would include the expenses related to a self-contained trading venture and the receipts generated by the venture, not being closed off until the venture was complete (which could take several years). Hence the net profit shown in the profit and loss account was only a rough guide to how well the organisation had performed. The balance sheet was simply a list of all the balances on accounts that were not closed off (Yamey, 1970). With the emergence of the corporate form in the 17th century, large organisations gradually moved to a system of periodic (typically annual) reporting, with a profit and loss account prepared to show how much could be distributed to shareholders as dividends (Edwards, 2019: chapter 4).

As the corporate form became increasingly common for business (and not-for-profit) organisations, legislation was often introduced to require companies to provide shareholders with financial statements, to specify the contents and layout of such statements, and increasingly to regulate how the numbers in the financial statements should be arrived at – the company’s accounting policies. However, this was a slow process, taking nearly two centuries in more developed economies such as the UK (Edwards, 2019). Annual financial statements are of value to the historian by providing at least partial information about how an organisation has performed and about its assets and liabilities, but they need to be interpreted with care.

Accounting Policies and Accounting Standards

Until the 1960s, companies provided little information on their accounting policies, so it would be difficult to know how a particular number (for example, the amount shown for property, plant and equipment) had been arrived at. Companies might state that property, plant and equipment was recorded at ‘cost less depreciation’, but show only the net amount, rather than reporting the original cost of the assets and specifying the accounting policy for depreciation. This meant that managerial manipulations of the numbers (for example, providing additional undisclosed depreciation in highly profitable years, which would lead to a lower reported net profit) would not be obvious to uninformed external stakeholders. Company directors believed that shareholders preferred steady (even gradually increasing) annual dividends, and they would engage in ‘income smoothing’ (a more recent term is ‘earnings management’ – see Healy and Wahlen, 1999) to justify the desired pattern of dividends. For many years, the dominant principle for preparing the financial statements was that of ‘prudence’. This meant that organisations should not include gains in their financial statements unless those gains were ‘realised’ through selling goods or providing services but should reflect losses whether realised or just expected. Assets should not be included in the balance sheet at more than cost, but liabilities should be measured on a conservative basis. It was accepted that the balance sheet should not overstate the financial position of the organisation but could (and for sound management reasons should) understate the position. Hence measurements of total owners’ equity and periodic profit would typically be biased downwards (see, for example, Arnold and McCartney, 2010, on the use of ‘secret reserves’ to understate reported profits).

Since the early 1970s, the preparation and interpretation of financial statements has been made more complex through the development of *accounting standards*. The two main entities responsible for accounting standards at present are the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) in the USA and the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB), whose standards have been adopted, sometimes in modified form, by over 140 countries around the world (for histories of the IASB and its predecessor body the International Accounting Standards Committee, see Camfferman and Zeff, 2007, 2015). Although the accounting standards are written for entities with stock market listings and other public-interest entities, such as banks and insurance companies, there are simplified accounting standards for small and medium-sized entities. The accounting standards for large companies often influence the accounting rules and practices of other organisations, such as governments and not-for-profit concerns.

It is therefore important, when interpreting time-series data collected from several years’ financial statements of an organisation, to ensure that the numbers have been prepared using consistent accounting methods, or to try to make appropriate adjustments to ensure consistency. This may be virtually impossible to do in practice, as there may be insufficient disclosure in the financial statements to allow for restating earlier years’ numbers. Changes in accounting standards may have a disproportionate impact on a few entities. For example, changes in 2018 to the US and international standards on the measurement of revenues led to significant restatements of the revenue figure for a few companies in specific industries (Napier and Stadler, 2020). Companies rarely go back more than two or three years to restate past years’ accounting numbers, so longer-term time series of revenues for a particular entity may reflect different measurement bases and therefore be difficult to analyse.

Researchers wishing to use the financial statements of an organisation need to tread carefully but should not be put off by the comments of Marriner (1980) quoted earlier. Many large organisations published detailed and clearly structured financial statements in the same form for long periods, and some organisations were subject to specific accounting rules set out in legislation. For example, railway companies in the UK prepared their financial statements in accordance with the Regulation of Railways Act 1868 (Glynn, 1984), allowing for comparison of numbers both through time and across different companies. In the USA, federal regulators such as the Interstate Commerce Commission not only specified the form of railroad accounts but also developed uniform systems for determining costs (which could then be used to control rail passenger and freight charges – Flesher and Previts, 2020). To use older financial statements effectively, it is worth investigating the accounting conventions of the time, and these are often summarised in comparative accounting history studies such as the four-volume *A Global History of Accounting, Financial Reporting and Public Policy* (Previts et al., 2011) or single country histories such as *A History of Corporate Financial Reporting in Britain* (Edwards, 2019).

However, researchers wishing to develop time series of accounting numbers such as total assets, capital employed, revenues and profits, perhaps with the aim of investigating how these time series may be associated with changes in an organisation's overall strategy and internal structure, are likely to need to use internal accounting records to gain a clearer understanding of the choices made by management in producing published financial statements. A good example of the challenges faced by historical researchers in reconstructing older financial statements is offered by Boyns (2021), who used internal records of two British vehicle manufacturers in the early 20th century to refine a study of depreciation practices largely based on published financial statements. Another example is provided in the next section of this chapter.

USING ACCOUNTING RECORDS – AN EXAMPLE

Background to the Research

The Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) was founded in 1837 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1840. It grew to be the largest shipping combine in the world by 1914, and the company played a crucial role in the development and administration of the British Empire. In 1987, I was contacted by Freda Harcourt, a historian of the British Empire, who wanted to study the relationship between P&O and the British Government. She had found that P&O had deposited their archives at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (NMM) in the early 1980s, and had observed that there were extensive accounting records available in the archive. She approached me for advice on how to interpret the financial and statistical information in the archive. Her work was ultimately to be published as a monograph *Flagships of Imperialism* (Harcourt, 2006). The information in the accounts about receipts from the British Government allowed her to assess the extent to which P&O was subsidised by the government to provide mail services to India. She was also able to examine how the strategy of P&O's management during the early years of the company's existence, which was to grow passenger and freight services, was compromised by the dependence on mail contracts to maintain profitability. Ultimately, P&O became financially reliant on government income, which provided managers with inadequate incentives to restructure the company's operations

as the shipping market developed in the mid-19th century. When restructuring finally took place in 1875, this was marked by extensive changes to how P&O presented itself through its financial statements.

Disentangling the Accounts – 1875–1914

I had access to a complete series of the P&O annual reports from its first financial period (1841) to the 1930s, which was held by the British Library of Political and Economic Sciences, and I prepared various comparative analyses showing how the financial performance of the company fluctuated significantly and noting that the company used various depreciation practices in its early years. To begin with, P&O did not actually provide depreciation on its fleet of ships, but by 1848 it had created a ‘depreciation fund’, using profits from good years, and by 1856 the amount of the depreciation fund was beginning to be calculated systematically. From 1876, depreciation was determined, at least in principle, by allocating the cost of each ship evenly over the normal 20-year life of the ship (in technical accounting terms, the depreciation method was straight-line depreciation at an annual rate of 5%).

This much could be deduced from the published annual reports, but the availability of more detailed accounting records in the P&O archive made it possible, at least in principle, to go behind the published statements and examine the underlying accounting calculations and entries. Immediately, a barrier arose because P&O’s records had been reduced, by both internal archivists over the years and the NMM (a problem that Tennent and Gillett (2023) note affects many archival collections). The original ledgers were retained only for the first ten years of the company’s existence and then only for every tenth year subsequently. The surviving ledgers were not particularly informative, as entries were often described with little detail. However, a series of ‘Cost of Ships’ books provided information on an annual basis that showed how the most significant asset in P&O’s balance sheet, described as ‘Stock in Ships’, was determined. Each year, the individual costs of all the ships in the fleet were listed and totalled, while the deduction from cost representing depreciation was set out as a detailed calculation. The Cost of Ships book was invaluable in showing how the P&O directors manipulated the depreciation calculation so that additional depreciation was provided in highly profitable years and other adjustments were made to help P&O smooth out the dividends that it paid each year. The information in the Cost of Ships book was enough to allow me to calculate the ‘correct’ depreciation for each year between 1840 and 1914, and showed that, by 1914, P&O had provided, on a fleet whose total cost was then £10 million, about £1.2 million of depreciation above what would have been required under a consistent 5% straight-line accounting policy. This would be enough to cover four years of dividends (Napier, 1990).

The surviving accounting records provide evidence of the ‘conservative’ nature of P&O’s management strategy over the period 1875–1914. New ships were financed out of internal resources rather than through raising additional capital. Shareholders were encouraged to hold their investments in P&O for the long term, as a steady dividend meant that P&O’s shares could be presented as effectively ‘trustee investments’, with yields not significantly different from government stocks. Maintaining and improving the fleet was central to P&O’s operations, and the Cost of Ships book recorded the amounts invested in the fleet. However, as the 20th century developed, and the First World War began, a ‘conservative’ strategy was no longer the most appropriate for P&O, as can be seen from the ways in which the form and content of the financial statements changed.

Opaque Accounts and Secret Reserves – 1914–1931

In terms of debates in the accounting history literature, the study just discussed (Napier, 1990) contributed to controversies about how consistently companies accounted for property, plant and equipment in the 19th century and how companies used ‘secret reserves’ – profits not reported in the profit and loss account but rather hidden through accounting devices such as overstating depreciation, prematurely writing off assets, and over-providing for liabilities. Accounting historians were aware that the British shipping industry was an extensive user of secret reserves (Arnold, 1991), so identifying and analysing P&O’s practices would either reinforce or challenge existing views about the use of secret reserves.

The use of secret reserves was both encouraged and disliked by investors, who considered ‘prudent’ accounting to be desirable in reducing the risk of business collapse, while at the same time were concerned about the undervaluation of securities because of the opaque nature of information in corporate financial statements (Edwards, 2019: 224–225). In more modern terms, managerial use of secret reserves to manipulate reported profits reduced the ability of shareholders to hold management accountable for the assets, liabilities, revenues and expenses of a company, allowing management more discretion over the choice of corporate activities, possibly involving greater risk than investors would have tolerated if in possession of more transparent information (Maltby, 2000).

Although the original ledgers in the P&O archives were of only limited use, the minutes of the board of directors contained much detail that put the surviving records into context. This became increasingly important once the company was faced with the First World War. Up to 1914, P&O’s published annual accounts included a ‘General Working Account’ setting out income and expenses in some detail (although numbers such as depreciation were usually affected by secret reserve adjustments), and the balance sheet showed the amounts relating to a wide range of assets and liabilities. From 1915, the general working account disappeared and was replaced by a minimal profit and loss account that began with the net profit after tax (again, heavily manipulated by secret reserves and special charges for potential tax liabilities). The balance sheet became virtually meaningless, as it provided a single total figure combining all assets, from ships to inventories to accounts receivable to cash balances. However, fuller accounts were prepared for internal use by the directors, including a highly restricted accounting record called the ‘Unappropriated Balances Book’, and these accounts allowed me to assess how far P&O had manipulated its financial statements during the War and the 1920s. I estimated that P&O’s profits during the War were substantially greater than those reported, while by the late 1920s P&O was making operating losses, with the reported profits largely made up of special credits from the use of previous secret reserves (Napier, 1991b).

The accounting manipulations allowed the P&O management, dominated by the company chairman, Lord Inchcape, to de-emphasise or even conceal important changes in strategy. Inchcape himself became chairman of P&O when that company merged with a large shipping company controlled by Inchcape, and over the years of the War, Inchcape continued a strategy of growth through acquisition of other shipping companies. Later, in the 1920s, the use of existing secret reserves hid the extent to which P&O was increasingly reliant on cash remittances and dividends from the ‘allied’ shipping companies. Accounting choices therefore facilitated the continuation of strategies that were less fit for purpose in the late 1920s than in the pre-War period, as maintenance of P&O’s dividend became the paramount managerial target.

My restatement of the P&O results involved a range of judgements and estimates. I could, however, triangulate my calculations by referring to a substantial report commissioned by the P&O board in 1932 from the leading accountancy firm Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths & Co. This report was written against a background of near financial collapse and the failure to pay a dividend, and it dissected the accounts of P&O and its principal subsidiaries over the period 1922–31. Because the Deloitte report had been included in the minutes of the board of directors, it had survived in the P&O archives.

The Importance of Corporate Structure

An important feature brought out by the report was that P&O was really a *group* of several companies. Information in reports appended to the board minutes, as well as separate correspondence, provided insights into how information about the companies in the P&O group was limited to a small circle of managers. The chairman of the P&O board, Lord Inchcape, regarded the companies controlled by P&O as ‘allies’, managed at a distance through his personal relationships with each ally’s managing director. So long as dividends kept flowing from the allies, Inchcape did not intervene, claiming that he never visited the offices of the allied companies. The P&O board did not receive detailed information about the allies, and there is evidence that Inchcape did not share any accounts that he received from the allies with the P&O board. Understanding how financial information was controlled within the top echelons of P&O’s management gives insight into the role of individual personalities in providing good (or bad) leadership. Inchcape jealously guarded information, so that even the joint managing directors (Inchcape’s son and son-in-law) were ignorant of the full activities of P&O.

One of the main recommendations of the Deloitte report, which was prepared after Inchcape had died in early 1932, was that P&O should regard itself in both accounting and administrative terms as a corporate group. Instead of treating the other companies as autonomous allies, they should be regarded as subsidiaries, ultimately under the control of the P&O parent company. Deloitte recommended that P&O should publish a consolidated balance sheet, including the underlying assets and liabilities of the subsidiaries together with those of P&O as a single company. Including the large financial surpluses of several of the subsidiaries in the consolidated balance sheet would show that the P&O group as a whole was financially secure even though the P&O company was not able to pay dividends. P&O accordingly presented a consolidated balance sheet to shareholders from 1932. Examination of the accounting records, with associated board papers, allowed me to reflect on the significance of different attitudes to corporate groups, with Inchcape’s allies becoming P&O’s subsidiaries by the early 1930s, and loose personal control being replaced by more formal financial control (Napier, 1997).

In the 1920s, P&O relied on dividends from the allies to generate enough profits to pay a dividend. In the crisis situation of the early 1930s, the company could rationalise not paying a dividend as a way of maintaining resources during a period of grave financial pressure. However, P&O wanted to boost its own reserves, and make a return to dividends more likely, by obtaining the reserves of the allies. P&O already had much of the spare cash of the allies in its own control, but this was represented on P&O’s own balance sheet by large liabilities due to the allies. During the 1930s, P&O developed various secret schemes to transfer the reserves. The simplest way of doing this would be for the allies to pay exceptional dividends, but these would be taxed at about 25% when received in the UK. Using the P&O accounting

records, supplemented by a fortuitously surviving file of documents relating to the Finance Committee, a sub-committee of the P&O board, I discovered a plan to extract the reserves of one of the allies, the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand, through a complex capital restructuring scheme.

According to Deloitte, between 1922 and 1931, Union had reported total profits of about £1.4 million, but their own estimate of the total profits was £3.8 million. This meant that Union had substantial secret reserves. The Union archives had been deposited in the Wellington Maritime Museum, New Zealand (WMM) in the 1980s. I visited the WMM and found that Union had preserved complete correspondence files for the 1920s and 1930s (most of P&O's correspondence for this period had not survived). There was also a 'special ledger' secured by a lock, which the curator of the WMM was able to open for me. This provided full accounting information on the special capital restructuring scheme, and also helped me to document how the Union/P&O relationship developed over the period 1917 to 1936 from the 'ally' to the 'subsidiary' (Napier, 1995).

My study of P&O benefited from the previous work of several business historians, most notably Stephanie Jones (1986, 1989), who had studied the life and business activities of P&O's chairman Lord Inchcape. The detailed study of the accounting records revealed how P&O was able to survive the depressed world shipping market of the inter-war years and how an unintegrated organisation of allies managed personally by Inchcape evolved into a more centralised corporate group managed through more sophisticated flows of accounting and other statistical information.

DISCUSSION – CHALLENGES WITH USING ACCOUNTS AS SOURCES FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

This chapter outlines various ways in which management and organisation historians can use accounting records. First, the numbers in published financial statements and in more detailed accounts may provide data that can be used in analyses of how an organisation, and management and control within the organisation, develop and change over time (for example, Riccaboni et al., 2006), and how an organisation relates to external individuals and other entities at a specific point in time (for example, McWatters and Lemarchand, 2013). Second, the way in which an accounting system is structured may provide insights into the flow of information within an organisation and hence into the knowledge that different managers may have about what is happening in and to the organisation (for example, Napier, 1995). Third, changes in the ways in which accounting information is presented, particularly to outsiders such as investors, may be associated with changes in organisational strategy – indeed, decisions about what to report to outsiders and in what form are themselves important strategic choices (for example, Napier, 1991b). Finally, the role of accounting and accountants in an organisation has the potential to reveal important aspects of the organisation's overall culture and philosophy (for example, Quattrone, 2004, 2015; Mutch, 2017), and how it communicates that culture and philosophy to outsiders (for example, Giovannoni and Napier, 2023).

For a non-accountant, the main challenge of using accounts in historical business, management and organisational research is making sense of what the various numbers signify. It is crucial to understand the purposes for which the accounts were maintained. For most businesses before the emergence of the corporate economy in the 19th century, accounting

records provided a ‘memory’ of what the organisation had done, which could be used as evidence in the case of disputes with counterparties. By the time of the Industrial Revolution, manufacturers were beginning to use accounting information about the cost of production not just for monitoring the activities of workers and agents but also to help in setting prices. For example, in the 1770s, the pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood experimented with cost calculations to identify fraud and inefficiency in the factory and to determine whether there was scope for increasing sales volumes and revenue by reducing selling prices while still making profits (Hopwood, 1987). Accounting information was beginning to influence economic decision-making.

With the growth in stock markets and the corporate economy, most companies with securities traded on capital markets began to publish regular financial statements, although the quality and quantity of the information provided took a long time to improve. For companies that did not set out deliberately to mislead investors and other users through their financial statements, conservative accounting meant that the balance sheet would often understate the value of the company while income smoothing to facilitate the payment of a regular dividend means that the assessment of long-term performance of an organisation may be more reliable if dividends rather than reported profits are the main source of data. As accounting policies and methods have changed dramatically through time, it is useful to research into the likely methods used by companies in the periods under review.

If material has survived in the archives that allows the researcher to observe any adjustments made by management in going from the internal accounting records to the published financial statements, then it may be possible for the researcher to reverse these adjustments and to apply different accounting methods to develop alternative time series of corporate data. However, organisations’ policies for document retention, coupled with pressure on archival space, mean that the more informative documents about transactions, assets and liabilities (particularly those relating to employees, customers and suppliers) are less likely to survive, thus exacerbating ‘silences’ in the archives (see, for example, Decker, 2013; Barros et al., 2019). This phenomenon has been made worse with the move to mechanised and ultimately to computer-based accounting systems (see Nix et al., 2023). From the late 19th century, businesses were beginning to use mechanical accounting machines that could record only minimal details about each transaction. For example, the sequential number and value of an invoice, together with a code number for the customer, might be recorded on a punch card that would be used to list the transaction on a printout and then scrapped. The invoice itself would be destroyed after a few years. At best, the mechanically produced printout would be retained, but many businesses would dispose of such underlying records on a regular basis.

The development of computers has accelerated this process, as it is less likely that paper invoice copies will be prepared in the first place. With some businesses experiencing millions of transactions a day, researchers wanting to use accounting records to investigate the activities of an organisation at a very detailed level will find this difficult. Until recently, paper copies of accounting reports generated within the organisation, including sales summaries, cost calculations and unit balance sheets and profit and loss accounts, would provide some intermediate-level information, and might be preserved in organisational archives as separate series of documents or as annexes to committee papers. However, such documents may remain as ‘soft copies’ on computers and be very difficult for a researcher to access.

This suggests a kind of paradox in the usefulness of accounting records for the business, management and organisational historian. The quality and volume of information provided

in corporate annual reports (of which financial statements and accompanying notes represent about half of the overall contents) continue to improve, and the accounting policies used are disclosed in detail. This allows the historian to use information in financial statements with reasonable confidence (though the continued occurrence of financial scandals involving accounts is evidence that absolute confidence is never possible). However, the underlying accounting details may be inaccessible. The further back in time the researcher goes, the less information is provided in financial statements, and the more likely it is that conservative accounting practices and management's tendency to want to portray the organisation in the best light from the point of view of the main stakeholders in the organisation reduce the reliability of information in financial statements. However, there is a greater chance of useful internal accounting reports and actual accounts surviving, which may allow the researcher to triangulate and analyse critically the information in financial statements. In any event, the best advice to a historian who does not have specific knowledge of how accounts were prepared and what they can tell us today is to consult an accounting historian.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Hopwood, A. G. (1987) The archeology of accounting systems. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 12(3): 207–234.

This article discusses how accounting systems can play a role in organisational change. Three diverse case study illustrations are provided, one from the 18th century and two from the mid-20th century. Hopwood shows how changes in the structure of accounting systems and in the use of accounting information are often responses to new economic challenges but themselves have a constitutive effect in both shaping and constraining the ways in which organisations are managed.

- (2) Napier, C. J. (1991b) Secret accounting: The P&O Group in the inter-war years. *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, 1(3): 303–333.

This article demonstrates the challenges of attempting to restate the published financial statements of a large organisation to gain a more reliable insight into its performance and financial position over a period of nearly two decades. The process of restatement helped to clarify the organisation's shifting strategy over this period, as the organisation gradually moved from a regime of 'personal' management by a secretive chief executive to a more collective form of management, but one that still valued secrecy.

- (3) Edwards, J. R. (2019) *A History of Corporate Financial Reporting in Britain*. London: Routledge.

This book discusses how financial reporting methods and practices in the UK have changed over time, providing insight into how financial statements from a particular period are likely to have been prepared. It includes a useful timeline that would help researchers to identify the nature of accounting and financial reporting in Britain at any specific point in time.

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11. Archival research in the digital era

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INTRODUCTION

History-oriented researchers are increasingly engaging with data that is in some way digital. In the case of pre-digital periods, this has been made possible by the widespread digitization of physical collections by archives over the past 20 years. By contrast, digital sources are now a necessity for those researching the relatively recent past, as many records and correspondence from the mid-1990s and onwards were created, transmitted, and stored using digital technologies such as email, instant messaging (IM), and the World Wide Web. Of course, the realization that historians would one day need to engage with a past that was partially (or even predominantly) digital is not a new one (Harvey & Jones, 1990; Rosenzweig, 2003), but it has often been one that carries a certain amount of future orientation. As such, digital sources are rarely highlighted as a consideration for present historical research, which still, by and large, relies on the analogue material upon which historical research practice has been built. However, management scholars, particularly those interested in using historical approaches, are becoming increasingly interested in periods when records are captured in born-digital artefacts (Nix & Decker, 2021). In such cases, focal organizations will likely have maintained a significant digital presence using the digital technologies of the day, in turn generating a wide range of possible digital traces. Indeed, not only are important historical events captured in the traces these technologies leave behind, but they also play a critical role in shaping the events they illuminate.

While the need to consider digital sources when researching contemporary historical settings is clear enough to many, the reasons for paying such sources particular attention may not be readily apparent. After all, if historical sources represent traces of an ontologically inaccessible past (Lipartito, 2014; Mills et al., 2014; Trouillot, 1995), what difference does it make if those traces exist as material objects like letters and minute ledgers or digital files made up of bytes of computer data? The answer partly lies in digital documents' differing characteristics and affordances compared to their analogue equivalents (Gibson, 1977). For instance, it is entirely feasible for a researcher to search the contents of many thousands of digital files simultaneously without fully reading a single one (Milligan, 2019). Similarly, digital files carry their own identifying information (or metadata), which provides a relatively standardizable basis for organizing and interacting with large multiple-source databases without the direct intervention of an archivist (Harvey & Press, 1995). While these features may sound advantageous, digital sources – particularly those that are *born*-digital – also present challenges of scale and inter-connectivity seldom seen with traditional sources (Decker et al., 2022; Milligan, 2019). In particular, it can be very difficult to read and interpret modern forms of correspondence, like email, as their immediacy and brevity are often such that the background context is largely

tacit. Indeed, as co-investigators on a recent project, we have spent much of the past few years seeking to develop tools and methods for searching organizational email more effectively.¹

Within this chapter, we seek to highlight digital archival sources as a present methodological consideration, highlighting implications for researchers of today, as well as those of the future. To do this, we first provide an overview of the literature on digital sources, defining digital archives and highlighting the different forms of sources they contain. We then go on to discuss some of the key methodological considerations for using these digital sources, looking first at how they can be accessed before turning our attention to their use in the generation of new empirical and theoretical insight. Following this, we use our own research on the dotcom economy to illustrate how such factors have changed our own research practice before concluding with a discussion of future research considerations and some suggestions for further reading on this topic.

WHAT IS A DIGITAL ARCHIVE?

Digital traces of the past can come in many forms, much like archival records before the digital era. Until relatively recently, archives were synonymous with physical locations, requiring space, specialized furniture, and climate control (Tennent & Gillett, 2023). Access to where the actual collection was stored was normally limited to archivists, with researchers confined to a reading room where they consulted the material they ordered from the archivist. In many respects, the digital archival environment is very different, and in this section, we discuss the characteristics of digital archives and the sources they preserve.

While they may not always be recognized as archives *per se*, we are increasingly surrounded by collections of digital data of various types (Barros, 2023). The term digital archive could refer to a transformed file format that saves content for access by future users. A digital archive could be a website with a picture of a building on the homepage but no physical instantiation beyond a cloud-based server. Or a digital archive could describe collections of scanned images or weblinks or compressed email messages preserved within a traditional archive for eventual access by researchers and other interested stakeholders. Moreover, useful research collections may come from locations that do not have the title ‘archive’ associated with them at all. This was the case with Nix et al. (2021), which made extensive use of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s e-library (FERC) to research on the failed US company, Enron. Ultimately, if such digital materials can be accessed and used by scholars in ways that are practically equivalent to the way we use digital archives, then the absence of the word ‘archive’ in the title means little. With the proliferation of the concept of the digital archive, we now encounter potential inputs to research in multiple settings and formats. Thus, a ‘digital archive’ describes any discrete, defined collection of digital materials that scholars can use to generate novel insights, accounts and explanations of observed social phenomena. Whilst it is impossible to give an exhaustive list of every type of digital archive that is covered by this

¹ Contextualising Email Archives (CEA) was a project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK between February 2020 and February 2022. It used organizational email to historicize the dotcom economy and developed a prototype tool (EMCODIST) to search email qualitatively for historical analysis. The wider project continues under funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation via the Email Archives: Building Capacity and Community (EA:BCC) re-grant programme.

Table 11.1 Differing forms of digital archives and databases

Digital archive	Dominant format	Nature of access	Examples
Digital extensions to physical archives	Digitized, with (re)born-digital sources opened up over time.	Online and public. Part of overall archive	The National Archives (UK) Online collections
Online Databases	Primarily reborn-digital versions of news media, with some digitization of older records	Online and public, sometimes behind a paywall	Nexis (by LexisNexis) or FERC e-library
Combined database and archive	No dominant format	Online and public. Part of overall archive	The World Bank
Born-digital content archives	Born- or reborn-digital materials only	Online and public, often free to access	The Wayback Machine

definition, even a cursory survey highlights significant diversity. We introduce four different examples here (see Table 11.1).

First, there are collections made available online by ‘physical’ archives. Such collections primarily contain digitized versions of analogue materials, often with the aim of diverting pressure on certain ‘high circulation’ files that many researchers want to see. These could be the files of famous historical individuals or the type of genealogical records that are employed to create family trees. In these cases, researchers’ engagement with archival resources is likely to be highly transactional and covering well-known historical facts or details of only antiquarian relevance. Such collections are often made available online by national archives, for example, the web guides and resources by The National Archives, UK (TNA).² This has opened up archival collections to increased and more diverse usage, including from those who lack the means to visit physically. However, given the cost of digitization, this type of digital source also runs the risk of over-emphasizing collections held by only the wealthiest (often western) archival institutions.

Second, various forms of online databases provide access to resources such as serial collections (e.g., magazines and newspapers), annual reports and accounts of major corporations, and public records. In many cases, these are accessible online via individual or institutional subscriptions, meaning that, while public, they exist behind a paywall. This is most common for media collections, and examples here include the Economist Historical Archive, Proquest Historical NewspapersTM, and Nexis by LexisNexis.³ Within such collections, older material is often digitized from print originals, whilst newer material may be added in a different digital format from the original publication, as part of a website with a companion print run. Other collections are free to access, as seen with the FERC’s e-library, which contains documents created and submitted in the course of the FERC executive role (e.g., orders, exhibits, testimonies and decisions). Databases differ from traditional archives in at least two important areas. Firstly, they are not curated. Instead, they preserve and make accessible all documents that meet pre-defined inclusion criteria. Secondly, these databases contain little about the organizations themselves, as would be assumed with a business or organizational archive. For

² For a current link at the time of publication, see <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/?letter=&search=&research-category=online>.

³ The Economist Historical Archive: <https://www.gale.com/intl/c/the-economist-historical-archive>; ProQuest Historical NewspapersTM: <https://about.proquest.com/en/products-services/pq-hist-news/>; Nexis by LexisNexis <https://bis.lexisnexis.co.uk/research-and-insights/nexis>.

instance, researchers approaching the FERC's e-library are unlikely to find correspondence of past Commissioners or the minutes of internal meetings.

Somewhere in between the previous two options lie archival collections that combine both serial records and more organizational process documents. Hence our third option is perhaps easiest to illustrate with an existing digital archive, maintained by the World Bank. The World Bank has a physical archive with a reading room in the basement of its head office in Washington, DC. The organization also maintains an extensive website, which releases annual reports (e.g., World Development Reports). In addition, the Bank creates reports, which are often released to the public after a set embargo period (e.g., five years) and which are available digitally. The physical archive itself is measured in shelf-miles, and documents are stored in a converted mine outside Washington, DC. The physical archive contains both social documents, such as internal correspondence and memos, as well as narrative sources (Howell & Prevenier, 2001), such as economic or project reports created for member countries. A small proportion of high-demand material is also available digitally, for example, papers of past president Robert McNamara. Additionally, files associated with an oral history project are also available online. So digital archives can contain a range of types of historical sources, and access to them can be managed through one system and website, or through several.

Our fourth category relates to born-digital records collected by third parties for commercial and educational purposes and made available to scholars. For instance, large portions of the historical Web have been archived by projects like the Wayback Machine or the Twitter API.⁴ The most well-known of these, the Wayback Machine, includes snapshots of major websites at intervals, which allows users to 'travel back in time' to see what the Web (and its key domains) used to look like. The regular archiving of born-digital artefacts like websites is essential, as, unlike analogue equivalents, websites and their content are routinely updated over time. In this sense, even when a historically relevant website address remains active today (e.g., Amazon.com), it will represent a materially different object from what one would see one, five, or even 20 years previously. To some extent, this is where attention has been directed within the digital humanities, as websites represent a whole new format in terms of historical and cultural sources. As an increasingly important 'shop front' of organizations, websites developed certain conventions and became key vehicles in public communication, often with different landing pages for different audiences (e.g., investors, customers, job seekers). In this sense, websites and similar born-digital sources present valuable sources to those interested in businesses and organizations, not only in terms of the information they contain but also as objects of empirical study in and of themselves.

In addition to managed collections, digital sources are also increasingly being made available as individual datasets, released for general public interest but often contain historically relevant material. A notable example is the Enron Email Dataset, which was published by the FERC alongside other documents relating to the notorious energy company's practices. Here, court exhibits in the form of a batch of over 0.5M company emails were released as a single freely available bulk download, and have since been rendered and made available by several third parties. This contrasts with most other court exhibits, which were made available on an individual basis via e-library (see above). Another example that also raises significant ethical questions is the bulk publication of obtained data, such as Wikileaks and the Panama Papers.

⁴ See <https://archive.org/web/> and <https://developer.twitter.com/en/use-cases/do-research>.

Again, these do not represent curated collections, but rather data dumps that must be organized and processed by the researcher.

In general, accessing digital archives is less costly in terms of time and money than when a scholar needs to travel to an archive and present themselves in person at a physical research site. For decades, access was a privilege reserved for those able to travel to locations where traditional archives were secured – scholars with travel grants or others with means. Although such collections still exist and many researchers continue to rely upon them, access today means something quite different. Indeed, many non-historians coming to a field assume that access to ‘archival’ materials means that such materials are available online. But even when materials are digital, access may be limited in various ways, and researchers may be required to appear in person, provide relevant credentials or otherwise demonstrate their purpose for accessing certain digital collections. For instance, as the home of the United States Copyright Office, the Library of Congress maintains many digital-only resources that cannot be accessed remotely because doing so would violate the terms under which the Library acquired access to the collection.

The diversity of digital archives, what they contain, and who manages them (if anyone) can make them difficult to find. National resources to identify public and private archives exist (in the UK this is provided through the JISC Archives Hub;⁵ for the US see Harvard Libraries guide⁶). As we discussed above, these facilities rarely cover the entirety of private non-profit and for-profit providers of digital archives. But even where researchers successfully identify relevant archives, they may still struggle to find and effectively evaluate relevant material within them. Because digital archives are not constrained in space in the same way as physical archives, they can be very large and also quite disorganized. While progress is being made on preservation of digital archives, access and discovery of these often-disparate collections pose another challenge to researchers. Indeed, each type of digital or born-digital archive described above poses a different set of challenges for scholars. As we will see below, some relevant issues and trade-offs include authenticity, integrity versus selection, and context and interpretability.

EVALUATING DIGITAL SOURCES

Digital archives and sources are clearly different, as they exist in the more ephemeral space of information systems. With this comes a range of new preservation problems, which have challenged the archival profession for the last few decades: databases and programmes within which the archival information exists are subject to format obsolescence, ‘bit rot’,⁷ and concerns about tampering with originals. While many of these specific issues ostensibly concern archivists, any researchers making use of such files need to understand some of the underlying mechanisms of digital creation and preservation to be adequately equipped to conduct source analysis (Kipping et al., 2014). In particular, the distinction between analogue and digital is

⁵ See <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/archives-hub>.

⁶ See <https://guides.library.harvard.edu/archives/us#ArchiveGrid>.

⁷ Bit rot is another term for data degradation. It refers to the gradual corruption of computer data due to an accumulation of non-critical failures in a data storage device. The phenomenon is also known as data decay, or data rot.

becoming more complex as the world has moved from pages to bits as its core standard of information transfer. Documents and objects that started off as analogue can be digitized and thus take on new a new form. Born-digital material may also require changes in format as old software and standards become obsolete.

To this end, Nix and Decker (2021) highlight that whether something is or is not digital can change, and that format authenticity – the extent to which something exists in its original form – is not necessarily a good proxy for identifying the reliability of a historical source anymore (see Figure 11.1). Analogue material may be digitized in a variety of different forms – as a simple image, rich text, or with metadata and technical information on the underlying material – which affords different types of uses of digitized materials from the original. Equally, intrinsically digital material may not remain in its original format, as most of these are based on proprietary software standards that obsolesce rapidly (e.g., LotusNotes).⁸ Digital archiving solutions offer services to monitor obsolescing file formats and automatically convert them to a current standard, but this may reduce fidelity. The alternative, to render everything in open standard formats like TXT or CSV files, removes formatting and only retains information – and is certainly not very suitable for more visual business communications like Powerpoint

		Digitality	
		Optionally digital	Intrinsically digital
Format Authenticity	Unedited	Analogue (non-digital)	Born-digital
	Edited	Digitized	Reborn-digital

Source: Reproduced from Nix and Decker (2021).

Figure 11.1 *The digital characteristics of historical sources*

⁸ Some proprietary formats like PDF have persisted and entered the accepted domain of archival preservation as PDF/A (though still based upon the standards of a private company, Adobe), while others, like LotusNotes, are no longer in common use and pose considerable preservation and access challenges.

Presentations and similar. This does not even touch on the difficulty of archiving audio-visual material, software code, or games (Wood & Carter, 2018).

However, among the key tenets of critical source analysis is that the validity and credibility of a source should also be scrutinized (Lipartito, 2014). A key consideration here is whether a source can be verified as authentic, which not only concerns whether it is real, but also whether it has been doctored. In the digital space, the authenticity of historical sources also becomes more difficult to ascertain, as tampering with digital material is easier to hide. Additionally, absolute format authenticity can cause problems for long-term preservation, as the technologies and standards they rely on become obsolete. This may require researchers to be more circumspect about the veracity of digital sources (Schwarzkopf, 2013), but to some extent, this may be a more fundamental concern for archivists. Research is currently underway on how digital archival collections can ensure that they are not tampered with by using block-chain technology.⁹ Assuming that these concerns have technological solutions that are already currently in use in financial technology, the issue of authenticity and reliability will likely be resolved effectively in public archives and professionally managed collections. However, in terms of data obtained from the internet or other unmanaged sources, the usefulness of such records for research may be limited as a result. Authenticity in the archival sense is produced through the joint efforts of technical and institutional factors that reassure audiences that such records have not been tampered with.¹⁰ When dealing with collections that do not benefit from this co-constructed means of authentication, scholars may need to rely upon other mechanisms of authentication.

For digital collections hosted by existing repositories, scholars can usually rely upon the institutional authority of the host to authenticate the collection in question. A researcher finding the digitized materials of a historic figure – like Robert McNamara’s correspondence at the World Bank or the personal papers of scientists available through the National Library of Medicine’s Profiles in Science portal¹¹ – can be confident that what’s available is authentic. However, because professional archivists will have vetted the collections prior to their release, what is available to the online public may not include the entire collection, and sensitive materials – for instance, relating to important strategic decisions of evident interest to the scholarly community – may be deliberately excluded from public access. When accessing such collections, researchers are encouraged to contact the professional archivists responsible for maintaining them. Often access to additional materials can be negotiated when a scholar can demonstrate their legitimate interest and purpose.

For large-scale digitized collections such as those maintained by national or public libraries or by commercial firms such as LexisNexis or newspapers.com (a subsidiary of genealogy site Ancestry.com), such collections are likely to be relatively complete, notwithstanding constraints arising from copyright and other rules that might necessarily limit expansive, in-depth access (do not try to download all of Nexis, for example). Rather, challenges here arise from the intersection of the problem of search or discovery with the issue of interpretation. Searching the entire 150+-year run of the *Lancet* or the *New York Times* will yield interesting and *potentially* meaningful results, but interpretation across long periods of time requires

⁹ ‘Trusted Archives of Digital Public Records (ARCHANGEL)’ project: <https://www.archangel.ac.uk/>.

¹⁰ For other approaches to authenticity, see Lamertz (2023).

¹¹ See <https://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/>.

contextual knowledge that only exists outside the archive. The extreme version of this problem can be seen in context-blind use of something like Google's n-gram viewer where a word like 'piracy' has multiple usage peaks across the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but each peak is describing a different social phenomenon. Scholars may miss less obvious cases of shifting contexts, and researchers should not assume that access grants understanding.

Accessing web or Twitter archives presents problems of both sorts. On the one hand, the Wayback Machine has proved invaluable for researchers looking to answer specific questions about, say, changes in firm strategic posture over time or to establish priority claims in patent disputes (see review in Samuels, 2021), and remote, public access is excellent. US courts have repeatedly upheld the use of the Wayback Machine to document what a website looked like on a particular date in the past. Similarly, Twitter allows broad-based searching in its backfile for unique collections of tweets (though it is nominally harder to access than the Wayback Machine because as of this writing in early 2022, scholars need to submit an academic application in order to establish a research account). However, these archives suffer from issues of both selection and context-blindness. Even with its 750 billion stored web pages, the Wayback Machine does not archive the entire internet; it takes a sample of its contents and, as a result, any search results returned by the Wayback Machine will necessarily be incomplete. Also, unbeknownst to many, websites can and do opt out of the Wayback Machine, just as Twitter users can and do delete tweets. In both cases, what is missing from the collections is non-random and may matter, depending upon the question at hand. These factors – which will arise in any large-scale, technology-based archival collection – underscore the necessity of context-sensitive reasoning. Although Elon Musk and Tesla paid \$40 million in fines for a single tweet – 'Am considering taking Tesla private at \$420. Funding secured' (Goldstein, 2018) – most tweets, like many historic web pages, cannot be interpreted on their own without a firm understanding of the context within which the tweet was issued.

Emails will likely be significant historical sources due to their ubiquity in private and organizational communications. But with this comes explosive potential – as seen in a range of scandals, from the 'ClimateGate' emails from the University of East Anglia in 2009¹² to the 2016 Democratic National Committee emails leaked through Wikileaks in the run-up to the US election.¹³ Clearly, such leaked emails pose serious concerns in terms of completeness, authenticity, and indeed ethics, which make them more difficult to use as a source in the traditional historical sense. While these files may provide unique insight into organizations, their credibility can be questionable for a number of reasons. First, where emails have been leaked, these leaks have selectively published only the most damaging emails out of context to smear particular individuals and to further political objectives. Second, faked emails can be inserted into such email corpora, and existing emails could be edited to include or remove material. An example of the former was the so-called ClimateGate email hack; the latter is a regular occurrence on social media, especially in the context of political propaganda and misinformation campaigns during US elections, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Russia–Ukraine war.

¹² BBC, 'The Hack that Changed the World', November 1–5, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/series/m00114bd>.

¹³ *The Washington Post*, How the Russians hacked the DNC and passed its emails to WikiLeaks, July 13, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-the-russians-hacked-the-dnc-and-passed-its-emails-to-wikileaks/2018/07/13/af19a828-86c3-11e8-8553-a3ce89036c78_story.html.

In less controversial circumstances, email archives are either available in an uncured form, such as the Enron Email Dataset,¹⁴ or more meaningfully curated, such as the Email Archives of Carcanet Press¹⁵ at the University of Manchester. Similarly, there has been a trend for big data analysis of Twitter feeds, which has also raised the question of how new internal architecture built on SharePoint and Teams may be archived in the long run. With this comes a blending of private and professional communications that also raises issues in terms of data protection and personal information. This is further complicated by different national legislation as to what is considered private, even though digital sources are in and of themselves easier to transfer internationally.

Even if we look past the privacy challenges and assume that the records we encounter are what providers say they are, our access to these collections arises from specific organizational circumstances. Enron failed spectacularly, resulting in multiple lawsuits, leading the FERC, a part of the US Federal regulatory apparatus, to release a subset of the company's email. Sony Corporation and Hilary Clinton's home server were hacked, resulting in the release of a subset of their emails. Collections obtained and released by groups like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), such as the Pandora Papers or the Paradise Papers, pose serious interpretive challenges for anything resembling social science. Even if we gloss over the ethical questions arising from the dubious provenance of these sources, these 'convenience samples' force the scholar who would use such a collection to be exquisitely aware of both selection and context. The careful researcher must always ask why they are seeing these emails and not a different set belonging to a different actor, law firm, or political party (Decker, 2013).

RESEARCH EXAMPLE: ORGANIZATIONAL EMAIL AND THE DOTCOM ECONOMY

Within this section, we present an example of ongoing research that makes use of digital sources. In early 2020, just weeks before the UK entered what would become its first COVID-19 lockdown, the four of us met together to begin work on a new research project, Contextualising Email Archives. This UK–US collaboration sought to address the gap between current efforts to preserve organizational email and its accessibility for the purposes of historical learning and research. In part, this involved the development of a new search and discovery prototype that mitigated the highly de-contextualized nature of email. This is because a lack of context often presents a challenge to those wishing to interpret the contents of historical emails and can present a barrier to engagement for both trained historians and general interest users (Jaillant, 2019). While our motivation for exploring dotcom era organizational email was, therefore, partly to test our email search tool, we also wanted to create a history of the dotcom economy, as told through organizational email. However, this would not be a normal history, in part because of some of the issues discussed above.

¹⁴ At time of writing available here: <https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~enron/>.

¹⁵ For information see <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/carcanet-press-email-preservation-project/>.

Data Collection and Analysis

Through one of the co-investigators, we already had access to a dataset of organizational emails from a dotcom start-up called AuroraTec (a pseudonym). As such, our first step was to render this data in a form where we could search, read and analyse it. Email corpora are generally made public with an assumption that researchers want to perform statistical analysis on the content, language or communication patterns captured within them (what is known as non-consumptive research). This means they are generally reduced to a compressed folder structure of .TXT files, as was the case for us. This altered format notwithstanding, it was completely infeasible for us to manually read the whole corpus, which consisted of close to 1 million emails. Of course, such issues of scale are not uncommon in physical archives, but generally, a level of archival curation and the availability of finding aids allows at least some basis for a targeted search. By contrast, we were presented with a large uncurated dataset of a single type of source, for a company we (at this stage) knew little about.

Accordingly, we needed to find a way of searching the emails so that we could find relevant correspondence and, importantly, read those emails identified in full, with all available internal context, such as email trains and attachments. It was at this point that our prototype software was used to search the collection using an advanced search that was built on machine-learning and semantic technologies (Decker et al., 2022). These allowed us to go beyond a basic keyword search across the whole dataset, instead limiting our search to certain individuals and levels of seniority within the organization. Additionally, search in this way provided results that linked similar words together so that emails on similar topics (but using differing language) were also returned. Of course, not everyone has access to such software, but more mainstream alternatives are available, using Computer-aid Qualitative Analysis Software (Nix & Decker, 2021) or even importing the email back into an email client to search and read in situ (see Benke, 2018). In both cases, these alternatives require a researcher to have at least some sense of what they are looking for within the data and – perhaps more importantly – where they should be looking for it.

At one level, born-digital records offer an unprecedentedly close view into organizations of the past, showing in minute detail the everyday movements of historical actors. However, some external context (that which is available outside the emails themselves) is vital in placing these sources within a larger picture. This is particularly important for digital correspondence like email, which often does away with much of the preamble and traditions of long-hand letter writing. It was, therefore, vital to triangulate the emails, something we did with media databases (Digital Source Type 2), Nexis and BusinessSource Complete, searching for the company name and collating press releases, magazine articles and other forms of media that reported on its activities. While this represents accepted practice in historical and case-based research, it is rarer in the more quantitative studies that have historically made use of large datasets of textual data. In addition to giving us a better understanding of the firm itself, triangulation also gave insight into the broader industry in which AuroraTec was situated, as well as the general business environment of the time. This was very useful, as social documents often tacitly assume an understanding of these factors and are not always straightforward to interpret. So, while some level of triangulation is good practice in most forms of historical and qualitative research, it can become absolutely vital to building a coherent picture from the information contained within some born-digital social documents.

In this sense, our priority was to showcase the sorts of glimpses that are available through a specific email collection, which itself represented only a relatively small sample of those sent in the organization's existence. This highlights another consideration when using digital information that has been 'rescued' rather than consciously preserved (Kirsch, 2009). In our case (and with the Enron Emails), the collection is comprised of emails that happen to have been left on organizational servers at the time when the companies were wound up. In practice, this meant that they did not capture every employee, nor did they cover the whole time period in which the company operated. This affected our analysis in two ways. First, the email we had stopped in 2002, sometime before the company's liquidation. As such, apart from some early warning signs, we were unable to effectively answer research questions about how the firm had actually failed. We simply did not have access to this period in its past. The second issue this created was that, as employees entered and left job roles, their workload transferred to others whose accounts were not necessarily captured in our data. Moreover, the precarity of employment within the latter dotcom economy meant that such moves were comparatively common, meaning we often found gaps in the emails.

Presenting Our Findings

Our first output from this project also highlights a difference between traditional and digital histories in that the product of such research can itself be digital. The idea that digital history is more than just digitization or the preservation of born-digital sources is a core part of the early digital history movement of the 2000s (Ayers, 2001; Cohen et al., 2008; Cohen & Rosenzweig, 2006). With widespread personal computer and Web usage, some historians believed digital technologies offered a democratizing opportunity for historical scholarship, breaking out of limited access volumes and into online and publicly available digital spaces (Bolick, 2006; Gregory, 2014). While access to digital and internet technologies was (and remains today) a relative privilege, they provide pathways to engaging new audiences: presenting research in ways that deviate from academic publishing norms and using more interactive and graphical mediums. Hence, instead of creating a traditional academic output (an article or a monograph), we chose to present our history in the form of a website (see Figure 11.2), which could be used by academics, students, and others outside academia.

The history itself consisted of four vignettes – rather than the more chronological narrative – each covering a different business and management theme: firstly, 'Did the Internet kill strategy?' contextualizes the strategic focus of dotcom start-ups like AuroraTec, who were navigating an ever-changing industry driven by known and anticipated technological advancement. Secondly, 'It's all about the burn rate' tackles the increasing prioritization of operational cost (or burn rate) reduction following the dotcom bust, which was primarily achieved by aggressively reducing the firm's headcount. Thirdly, 'Are you ready for the wireless web?' charts the company's attempt to create a new wireless internet platform. Finally, 'AuroraTec goes international' explores the early internationalization strategy of the company and the multiple fronts from which new markets were sought. Given our intended audiences (primarily students, practitioners and the public), we were conscious of representing these vignettes in a visual and engaging format and commissioned bespoke web and graphic designs. The result was a 'retro-styled' website that reproduces selected emails along with nods to the 1990s desktop experience, such as an interactive assistant that emulated Microsoft's well-known 'Mr Clippy'.



Figure 11.2 Screenshot of Dotcom Archive webpage

Another significant departure from more traditional historical writing was our decision to anonymize and pseudonymize the individual and organizational identities found within the collection. While the emails we use are already available publicly under license, the relative recency of these historical events is unusual and has implications for historical actors that are often not present when using pre-digital materials. Our decision to hide individual and organizational identities was also in recognition that our motivations were to showcase email as a historical source and not to create new historical knowledge of a specific organization. As such, we did not feel it was necessary to include personal information. Thus, while we conducted our actual research using real identities (media search would have been impossible otherwise), we then obscured this identifying information prior to publishing our history. Additionally, in order to maintain the fidelity of our anonymization, we limited the sources quoted alongside our historical narrative to just organizational email. As such, the insights we provide are more partial than many histories, presenting a snapshot of the organization as seen through its collective inboxes.

DISCUSSION

For historians, access to digital sources is often (though not always) substantially different than for other archival sources. Where digital material is not held and made accessible by archives, such as national or organizational archives, it raises questions of whether researchers can legitimately access it. These issues are often unique to digital. For example, the documents released by WikiLeaks may be a treasure trove of confidential and secret data that may not be released for decades to come through any public archives, if ever. However, the provenance and authenticity of such files are not assured. Indeed, such releases may be highly selective in a way that directly reflects political interests (e.g., the ClimateGate emails, DEC email release) which are immediately salient to the public. While it can be argued that national and organizational archival selections are also biased and reflect specific world views at the time

of collection, their release two or three decades after they were current usually reduces the opportunities to employ them as political weapons. Because such sources may be available to researchers much sooner than the average archival document, this also raises issues of personal data protection that conflict directly with historical research standards of naming individuals and organizations, as opposed to social scientific standards of anonymization. We discuss in our example above why this may still be necessary in the digital era.

Yet in social scientific approaches to data collection, researchers seek express consent by data subjects or work from databases where the risks and liabilities are managed by the companies providing the database, much like archivists manage this for historical sources in their collections. Not all digital sources are handled in this way, and their route into the public domain, where researchers might encounter them, can be murky. Social media presents a large body of potential sources, as do websites, which are essentially self-published and thus accessible. Access to researchers may in some cases be governed by the terms and conditions of the site they are on, but as the scandal surrounding Cambridge Analytica demonstrated, how such research is used can be problematic and suggests that research on social media data may also raise ethical issues. Other releases may come with a degree of journalistic legitimacy, such as the Panama Papers, but establishing how to legitimately and ethically use such digital sources remains very much a responsibility of the researcher.

Given these issues of legitimacy in using some digital sources, it may be simplest to only draw on those released by organizations managing digital collections. There are certainly options, and some of these resources are surprisingly underused by organizational researchers, such as the oral history collection of the British Library.¹⁶ But due to data protection issues, many digital collections are not available to researchers or only in heavily redacted form. Whilst historical uses are explicitly considered as an exception to the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), many digital collections remain ‘dark’ and inaccessible to researchers as archives, and other organizations seek to understand the implications of this legal framework for research (Decker et al., 2022).

While historians are used to traditional physical archives, management and organizational scholars more commonly access what they call ‘archival’ records from organizations themselves or online media libraries like BusinessSource Complete. In these cases, the data found is often given a secondary status and treated as a point of triangulation for other data sources, like interviews (Rowlinson et al., 2014). However, there have been several important contributions that do draw significantly on digital organizational records in either a qualitative or quantitative form. In particular, digital sources have been used to conduct network analysis, with Aven (2015) using the Enron Email Dataset to analyse the communication patterns of corrupt and non-corrupt organizational teams.

For some, the digital technologies themselves are just as important as the traces they leave behind. For instance, Yates and colleagues have extensively studied the impact of communication technologies such as email on organizational life (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Yates, 1993, 2005). Similarly, the socio-materiality of digitalization trends has also been explored. For instance, Scott & Orlikowski (2021) plot the challenges faced by publishers as the growing e-book market threatened the ‘IBAN’ as an industry standard. Clearly then, digital sources, like traditional ones, do not have to be explored using historical methods in order to be useful

¹⁶ See <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history>.

to management scholars, even if doing so can offer enhanced critical interpretation (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). What is important, is that we include the use of such sources within the methodological toolbox of historical research. History provides a unique way of looking at organizational pasts, allowing for alternative and novel interpretations that social scientific approaches are less able to provide. As we start looking at the histories of the 1990s, it is important that we include digital technologies and the traces they leave behind, as without them, we will increasingly experience a more impoverished view of the past.

CONCLUSION

The growth of digital archives is a current methodological issue not fully acknowledged by historians, despite the value seen in them by other disciplines. For management scholars wishing to use historical methods – particularly on the post-analogue past – an awareness of affordances and challenges that come with digital are vital. Within this chapter, we have shown that digital archives come in many different forms, which influence the choice of research approach and the types of research questions that can be effectively answered. Moreover, traditional archival context, selection, and interpretation are not always available to facilitate access, and researchers are often left to navigate the scale and complexities of digital collections as part of their own research design. We have mapped out some of the relevant considerations here and also point to ethical concerns that may come with some digital materials. Nonetheless, archives that capture and take advantage of the digital era hold huge potential to democratize access to historical materials and provide unique viewpoints into the past.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

The topics covered in this chapter primarily build on work around digital history and the use and archiving of digital sources. For readers wishing to know more about the issues we introduce, the following four publications provide useful and interdisciplinary extensions to our discussion.

- (1) Nix, A., & Decker, S. (2021). Using digital sources: The future of business history? *Business History* (ahead of print), 1–23.

This article introduces some techniques for digital research to business historians and highlights both their relevance, but also some of the issues with using these approaches in qualitative, in-depth, historical research. It also engages with digital history concepts that are relevant to understanding the unique characteristics of digital sources, and how this relates to historical authenticity. The examples presented in the article are of relevance to management research (digital company records and media archives), as are the research approaches outlined.

- (2) Kirsch, D. (2009). The record of business and the future of business history: Establishing a public interest in private business records. *Library Trends*, 57(3), 352–370.

This paper introduces the idea of the ‘record of business’ as a necessary input to scholarly understanding of business and management research and practice. As digital business records become more valuable, firms will invest more in the maintenance and exploitation of the record of business, but this may come with a trade-off: the almost default, informal preservation of paper records that characterized the pre-digital era may give way to a regime under which the new default is to destroy rather than preserve the Record of Business once their value to the firm has been exhausted. Implications for research and policy are considered.

- (3) Jaillant, L. (2019). After the digital revolution: Working with emails and born-digital records in literary and publishers’ archives. *Archives and Manuscripts*, 47(3), 285–304.

This provides an archival perspective on the difficulties of making accessible email and other born-digital records in publicly available archives. She reflects on using email as a historical source, the ethical considerations for researchers, and the implications of GDPR and copyright legislation on limiting researchers’ access to some of the most useful materials. Importantly, it provides a useful primer on how digital materials came to be considered worthy of preservation, and how this has shaped what is accessible and in which form.

- (4) Milligan, I. (2019) *History in the Age of Abundance? How the Web is Transforming Historical Research*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

In many respects, *History in the Age of Abundance?* is a call to action, urging the humanities and social sciences to react to an increasingly digital past. In particular, understanding the recent past requires scholars to engage with sources derived from the World Wide Web. This ‘web history’ is Milligan’s focus, as he provides an overview of the considerations likely to guide future research practice when using web archives. Set out over six main chapters, the book deals predominantly with the overarching issue of abundance, which affects both the creation of web-based content and the web archives that seek to preserve it. Milligan’s central thesis here is that, while web-based sources offer advantages, we are not ready to deal with the practical, philosophical and ethical dimensions of managing and using them.

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12. Multisensory approaches to researching the past: insights from history and archaeology

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INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have seen increasing interest in the study of all the bodily senses and their roles in shaping responses to the world around us and our situation within it (e.g. Classen, 1993; Howes, 2005; Jütte, 2005). This agenda of investigating experience has also proved a fruitful area for academic research, with disciplines from healthcare to history, and philosophy to architecture studying sensory experiences from a variety of empirical and theoretical standpoints (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Lefebvre, 1991; Pallasmaa, 2012; Hamilakis, 2013).

This chapter explores the role of multisensory research and methods in history by drawing on my own research experience as an academic in the fields of history and archaeology. Whilst this perspective may be different from those employed in business history and management, it is useful to explore methodological insights from across multiple disciplines that investigate the study of past organizations and organizing through multisensory research methods, with the aim of providing understanding of the potential value of comparative approaches for multisensory research.

This chapter starts by examining the early pioneers in sensory studies of the past and moves on to consider some current examples of research first in history in general, and then focuses more specifically on recent studies in the interdisciplinary fields of ancient history and archaeology. The final part of this chapter draws on a case study from ancient Rome from my own research experience, applying multisensory research techniques to exploring the Roman house. The fragmentary nature of these buildings, together with the sometimes contradictory, and often partial, accounts in written sources, highlight the problems faced by historians and archaeologists when trying to understand these spaces, as well as the activities within them, and the organizational and control processes used by residence owners over other inhabitants and visitors. Illuminating these problems is likely to provide valuable methodological guidance to management and organization scholars willing to undertake multisensory research in history.

By looking at evidence not just of the visual aspects of Roman houses, but also at the sounds, smells, touch and tastes experienced within them, historians and archaeologists gain insight into how bodily sensations were employed to articulate both the relationship between the house and its inhabitants to the world outside, and to parade control over events and spaces in the domestic sphere. Given its complex, multifaceted and multi-structured nature, the Roman house can be understood to resemble an “organization”. As such, my research experience in this area provides an interesting example of using multisensory historical research methods within an “organized” context. This in turn might prove valuable for applying these methods in business, management and organization studies.

MULTISENSORY APPROACHES TO THE PAST AND PAST APPROACHES TO THE MULTISENSORY

Evidence for the historical past varies widely. Ranging from texts such as letters, diaries, wills, legislative and diplomatic papers, to archaeological and pictorial remains, including inscriptions, coins, graffiti, buildings and monuments, textiles, photographs and paintings, these media require diverse approaches for interpretation. For example, engagement with literary materials varies significantly from examining tangible artefacts. Scholars must balance specific challenges posed by the evidence with the discrepancies between the depictions of the past they present.

A significant issue when undertaking historical research is the overriding role played by vision when engaging with the evidence, and the difficulties this poses have been effectively highlighted by Lefebvre:

It is very important from the outset to stress the destructive (because reductive) effects of the predominance of the readable and the visible, of the absolute priority accorded to the visual realm, which in turn implies the priority of reading and writing (Lefebvre, 1991: 143–147).

Of the traditionally recognized five senses in the Western sensorium, sight has been considered by many as the most important. As early as the fourth century BCE, Aristotle ordered the bodily senses in terms of importance. For him, sight, hearing and smell were “human” senses, whilst taste and touch were “animal” senses and as such were perceived less important (see, Aristotle, *De Anima*, 429a). More recently the spread of written cultures, encouraged by the birth of print, has been understood to have bolstered societal emphasis on visual cognition, whilst the development of instruments, such as cameras, telescopes and microscopes, that enable knowledge of, and access to, sights and locales too small or far away to see otherwise, ensured “sight became the gateway to new worlds” thereby increasing the “intellectualization of vision” (Day, 2013: 4).

The voyages of exploration that brought Europeans into contact with civilizations afield further emphasized the dominance of sight in the West, since those with whom Europeans made contact were regarded as “primitive” peoples whose connections with the world revolved around the “lesser” senses of taste, touch and smell (Howes, 2003: 5; c.f. Day, 2013: 4). This culminated in the combination of sensory and racial hierarchies determined by the natural historian Lorenz Oken who categorized races according to the senses they were perceived to prefer. At the top of the cultural ladder were Europeans who were said to favour vision, and at the lowest level were Africans for whom touch was perceived to be most vital (Oken, 1847: 651; cf. Classen, 1997: 405; Tullett, 2021: 819–820).

In 2007, the social and cultural historian Mark Smith commented on the growth in sensory history. “It is a good moment to be a sensory historian. Sensory history ... is booming among historians” (Smith, 2007: 841). Crucially, as Smith has more recently explained, “We tend, wrongly, to think of sensory history as terribly new” (Smith, 2021: 7). However, interest in multisensory pasts is not new (*ibid.*). Rather the foundations can be traced at least to the nineteenth century when ground-breaking work in this field provided the “origins of historical work on the senses” (Smith, 2021: 1–2). Whilst it is not possible to detail in full the preliminary background of sensory history within the parameters of this chapter, it is, however, important to understand some of the early proponents of this field of research.

Early consideration of historic multisensory experiences comes from the influential Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga. Writing in the early twentieth century and drawing on his background in linguistics, he sought “to convey not merely the historical experience but the historical sensation” of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance by bringing to life the auditory as well as the visual worlds of the Medieval town in Europe (Howes, 2021: 2, cf. Huizinga 2009). His approach to studying sensory pasts was not without issue. Although he highlighted the importance of engaging with historical context and emphasized the difficulties of reconstructing, in the present, the past “as it was lived” (Huizinga, 1984), his writing about historical sensations seemingly removed “spatial and temporal demarcations” (Ankersmit, 2021: 24). Yet as problematic as Huizinga’s methods for writing sensory history were, his realization that historic bodily experience is an important field for investigation presents a crucial starting point in the realm of sensory historical research (Smith, 2021: 13).

Arguably the most important early pioneer for sensory history was the prominent historian, Lucien Febvre. In his seminal work of 1942, Febvre explored the multisensory world of the sixteenth century. Drawing on sources ranging from poetry to letters, Febvre characterized inhabitants of the sixteenth century as being more sensorily literate than later generations and highlighted differences in perception in the sixteenth century compared with that of the twentieth century, arguing that in the sixteenth century people placed more importance on olfactory and auditory sensations to comprehend their surroundings and less on sight than did their counterparts of twentieth-century Europe (Febvre, 1982: 427). As with Huizinga, challenges to Febvre’s approaches to sensory history are possible, not least his supposition that the past was more readily perceived via the multiple senses than contemporary times and that sensory experience was identical for all, regardless of gender and social status (Smith, 2021: 15). Likewise, whilst Febvre’s belief that over time sight became increasingly important to the detriment of other sensory experiences has garnered support from some sensory scholars (e.g. McLuhan, 1962; Ong, 1967), it too has faced criticism. Whilst vision has increasingly been perceived as the most important sensory experience of the Early Modern period onwards, ignoring the other bodily sensations from history, in particular the lesser explored senses of touch and taste, risks simplifying and even distorting how the past is comprehended and researched (Tullett, 2021: 809).

Crucially there have been important attempts to re-engage with the full array of human senses through which the world is perceived in order to dislodge vision’s dominance over the rest of sensory realm in historical and humanities research. An important proponent in this field was the mid twentieth-century French philosopher Merleau-Ponty who, at the same time as Febvre was examining the sensory historical world of sixteenth-century Europe, was also developing interest in sensory studies. In 1945, his *Phenomenology of Perception*, sought to undermine the traditional separation of mind from body and sight from the other corporeal sensations that had been propounded by Descartes (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 219–220; cf. Synnott, 1991:70; Hamilakis, 2013: 28 on Merleau-Ponty as a response to Descartes). For him, all the bodily senses played a role in perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 234). Yet whilst Merleau-Ponty’s attempt to re-engage with the corporeal realm has proved influential for scholars across a range of disciplines, it continues to struggle to dislodge the perceived pre-eminence of the sense of sight. At the heart of his attempts to interpret the physical, visual, literary and dramatic experiences of human life, was an emphasis placed upon the ability to “read” all types of evidence. For him the study of music, dance, religious ritual or the visual and dramatic arts required a relatively standardized approach similar to that used to study the

written word (Howes, 2005: 1: other proponents of the linguistic turn include Ricoeur, 1970; Barthes, 1982). The problem of this methodology was that “reading” evidence inherently emphasized vision whilst other sensory responses – touch, sound, smell and taste – faded into insignificance. This logocentric bias resulted in scholars questioning whether such examination of human action based on linguistic study of human experience should be considered reductive. Can we really “read” all examples of human endeavour like a text? As Serres, one of Merleau-Ponty’s severest critic explains:

I laughed a lot at Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*. He opens with the words: “At the outset of the study of perception, we find in language the notion of sensation....” Isn’t this an exemplary introduction? ... Lots of phenomenology and no sensation – everything via language. (Serres with Latour 1995/1990: 131–132)

For Serres, Merleau-Ponty’s insistence on considering all human experience as verbal expression and language reduced human engagement with the world to an inflexible, one-dimensional interpretation that left its audience’s comprehension incomplete (Day, 2013: 5; cf. Evans and Lawlor, 2000: 15). Thus, although Merleau-Ponty attempted to rehabilitate the full human sensorium, it was only ensuing criticism and developments in exploring the wide range of corporeal experience from scholars such as Serres, that caused considerations of the olfactory, auditory, haptic, gustatory as well as the ocular to feature within numerous academic disciplines (e.g. Howes, 2005; Day, 2013 and Hamilakis, 2013 for general bibliographies into sensory studies).

Whilst the early scholars outlined above, together with others, have helped forge the foundations of sensory history, the French historian Alain Corbin has done more than any other scholar to secure sensory history’s position as a vibrant and relevant field of research. As Smith comments, “perhaps his most important (and continuing) legacy was his insistence on the need to properly situate and contextualize the senses of the past so that their meaning was understood through the noses, eyes, ears, skins, and tongues of the participants” (Smith 2021: 33). In his essay “A History and Anthropology of the Senses”, Corbin posits a methodology for, as well as outlining the challenges faced by, historians approaching the study of sensory history and argues for the link between emotions and the senses as well as the need to consider an individual’s context, or *habitus*, when investigating past sensory experiences (Corbin, 1995, reprinted in Howes, 2005: 128–139). Whilst highlighting that historians must “guard against pessimism”, Corbin emphasizes the problems posed by both the transience of evidence for sensory history and the comprehending of how and why society’s perception and understanding of bodily experience alters over time (Corbin, 1995, in Howes, 2005: 137).

Crucial to his research has been his foregrounding of the role played by the senses in constructing and/or reinforcing class stereotypes and the issue of assigning specific sensory habits to certain individuals in order to reflect status. Citing his work on the olfactory realm of France from 1750 to the late nineteenth century, and drawing on sources ranging from the histories of etiquette, science, hygiene and public health manuals, literature, and sources documenting urban and architectural history, Corbin has examined the “lesser” corporeal experiences of sailors who were considered inferior compared with the middle-class naval doctors who treated them.

In this inferior being, taste and smell were corrupted by the use of tobacco, delicacy of touch was destroyed by the handling of the ropes, that of hearing by the proximity of the artillery, that of sight

by the salinity of the environment. In a word, the sailor had essentially lost the sharpness of his senses; he had become an insensitive being ... In this particular example, the author, usually a naval doctor, had to mark the distance that separated him from his subject and, even more, include his reader, to whom he was linked by a subtle connivance, in this desire to distinguish. The deprecatory picture also helped to justify the conditions which the unfortunate sailor was compelled to endure. (Corbin, 1995, reprinted in Howes, 2005: 130)

Corbin's later work, focused on the auditory realm, has likewise explored how social perceptions, this time of sound, have shifted over time. Drawing on evidence regarding the removal of bells from the French countryside after the Revolution and their relocation elsewhere, as well as changes to their size and sound levels, Corbin examined how meanings connected with bells, including their role in the creation of communities, altered over time particularly as new sounds entered the sonic landscape (Corbin, 1998). Continuing on with investigations into the auditory realm, more recently Corbin has suggested a considerable transformation between the soundscapes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arguing that as environs have become noisier and with increasing media pressure, access to silence is harder to achieve. According to Corbin the consequence of decline of silence is that "the very structure of the individual is modified" (Corbin, 2018: 2).

INTERDISCIPLINARY SENSORY RESEARCH: USING TEXTS AND MATERIAL CULTURE TO STUDY THE SENSORY REALM OF ANTIQUITY

Much of the discussion above highlights research into the multisensory experiences of relatively recent historical periods, where evidence is often plentiful and wide-ranging in terms of the types of remains that are available. The further back into the past one goes, the greater impact this has upon the variety and amount of extant evidence. Given the highly fragmentary remains of most buildings, artefacts and texts from antiquity, this ensures the virtual impossibility of reconstructing the corporeal experiences of this bygone era. How can we hope to understand the sounds of the Roman gladiatorial arena, for example, or the smells of the Roman baths without extensive, and complete, examples of physical and textual evidence?

Yet within the disciplines of ancient history and archaeology, attempts to take advantage of increasing interest in sensory approaches across numerous scholarly disciplines have started to encourage the development of new questions, methodological approaches, and frameworks for studying tangible remains of ancient societies. As with other periods of historical research, when interrogating the ancient past, understanding the relationship between the images portrayed in text and what emerges from material culture can be complex. Texts verbally and visually guide the reader as to how the author wishes words to be understood and, whilst archaeological remains are also visually perceived and interpreted, they offer individuals the immediacy of physically "experiencing" rather than merely "viewing" them. It is, according to Hamilakis, the very materiality of archaeology, which allows us to explore the sensory realm of the past.

Archaeology relates to materiality and time. It explores the material presence and the concrete and specific formal qualities of beings and things (including space), and their social and cultural lives and meanings in diverse temporalities. These formal and physical qualities of the world are the properties that our sensorial engagements rely upon: the smoothness or roughness of surfaces,

the sound-amplifying qualities of houses and other spaces, the odorous effects of plants and other substances. The archaeology of the senses is therefore feasible in very tangible terms. (Hamilakis, 2013: 4)

That obtaining information from physical remains requires unearthing, and thus touching, artefacts or buildings emphasizes the tactile nature of excavation, and thus the importance of multisensory engagement with material evidence. Consequently, the discipline of archaeology has become a vital tool for investigating the multisensory lived experience of ancient pasts.

Yet archaeology and ancient history pose challenges for multisensory research, not least the fact that they, like other forms of historical research, remain dominated by vision (Day, 2013: 5–6; cf. Betts, 2011). In recent years there have been increasing attempts to modify ocularcentric approaches. Efforts have been made, for example, to combine visual aspects of archaeology with other sensory experiences to highlight the complex linking of the senses. Thus, investigations have been made into relationships between visual aspects of rock art and human auditory and tactile senses (e.g. Goldhahn, 2002; Rainbird, 2002; Boivin, 2004). There have also been wide-ranging studies into non-visual aspects of archaeology and archaeological sites that have encouraged scholars to think beyond a sight-based approach to past cultures. Important work has helped provide foundations for future studies in archaeoacoustics (Lawson and Scarre, 2006), and although the archaeology of smell is not common, Insoll (2007) presents a discussion of a possible methodology for understanding scents of the past. Also crucial in developing further an understanding of smell in ancient cultures is the article of Hamilton and Whitehouse on measuring olfactory senses in Neolithic villages of Italy and Bradley's edited volume on smell in antiquity, which examines olfaction in various different environments in the ancient world. Both of these works pose questions on the cultural role and societal responses to smell in antiquity (Hamilton and Whitehouse, 2006; Bradley, 2014). Taste is closely connected with smell and, like smell, has received relatively little attention, although there have been attempts to bridge this gap by Hamilakis, Fox and Hopwood who have started to explore, amongst other topics, multisensory responses to the feast in the Aegean Bronze Age (Hamilakis, 1998; Fox, 2008; Hopwood, 2013). Moreover, there have been recent examinations of archaeological sites that have investigated a combination of senses in an attempt to develop understanding of possible multiple sensory interactions within ancient cityscapes and the way in which these might have impacted social interaction (e.g. Houston and Taube, 2000; Skeates, 2010; Hamilakis, 2013). As recent works from Betts and Hamilakis demonstrate, Greece and Rome have proved fruitful areas for exploration into the role of multiple senses in the past (Hamilakis, 2013; Betts, 2017). Ancient Rome, for example, has been examined in terms of mapping possible journeys through its streets, taking into consideration the constantly changing views of the environs, whilst analysis of the city's interconnecting street networks and their urban surroundings has enabled consideration of how sight and movement during these journeys might combine with other sensory experiences of sound, smell and taste to affect an individual's interpretation of location (e.g. Betts, 2011; Hartnett, 2017). A final, developing area for multisensory studies has been in understanding the corporeal sensations of specific building types from antiquity. Where, in general, interpretation of the built environment has often revolved around interpreting it in terms of sight, movement within them and their architectural structure, research into the sound and smells of Mayan and Greek palaces (Mongelluzzo, 2013), the *fullonica* (laundry) (Flohr, 2017), and amphitheatres (Day, 2017) and the full bodily experiences in Roman houses (Platts, 2016, 2019, 2022) has enabled

scholars to explore further the multi-dimensional nature and messy complexities of these spaces.

CASE STUDY: READING BUILT SPACE THROUGH MULTISENSORY RESEARCH

Having examined both the foundations of multisensory research in history and the more recent areas of development in history, ancient history and archaeology, the last part of this chapter moves on to explore the case study of multisensory research into the ancient Roman house, by drawing on my own research (Platts, 2016, 2019, 2022). As places of numerous activities of work, play and ritual, often occurring across multiple rooms and generally housing individuals of varying ages and hierarchies, both slave and free, inhabitants and visitors, these buildings required careful organizing. The complex nature of the Roman house indicates that it perhaps can be understood to resemble an “organization”, given it was a highly multifaceted and multi-structured domain. As such, they present an interesting example of the process of multisensory historical research, which in turn might prove valuable for applying to historical methods in management studies.

Over the last 40 years, domestic space, and the role it plays in communicating social and cultural information in various eras, has been a fruitful area of research in history. Studies have proliferated, ranging from those on the earliest Neolithic settlements to exploring present day housing theories and policy and anthropological approaches to the domestic sphere (e.g. Souvatzi, 2008; Clapham et al., 2012).

Recently historians have placed growing attention on understanding the spatial arrangements of settlements through the use of “space syntax” (Hillier & Hanson 1984: 82–142). Developed in the 1980s, “space syntax” focused on movement between buildings, or spaces within buildings, and the questions these raised about how and why societies employ certain spatial forms (Hillier and Hanson 1984: 143–197). Such modes of “decoding” dwellings have proved popular across disciplines, paving the way for scholars to attempt to “read” different spaces (e.g. Kent, 1993; Wallace-Hadrill, 1994; Grahame, 2000; Robertson et al., 2006). This emphasis on “reading” houses and mapping visually their spatial relationships, however, is problematic as it considers only the visual aspects of the dwelling, which in turn, risks presenting a one-dimensional interpretation of domains which play complex, often numerous, roles in society.

Let us briefly outline what is meant by the Roman house. In ancient Rome there were numerous different types of accommodation, ranging from palaces and country houses to multi-apartment blocks, called *insulae*, similar to apartment blocks today. The *domus* was a dwelling that housed a single-family unit, including slaves. They ranged from the small and unpretentious to the ostentatious and extravagant mansions of Rome’s aristocracy, and their size could vary considerably. Likewise, their decoration could differ – and it cannot be assumed that only the larger houses boasted opulent décor (Mayer, 2012: 172–174 and n.22). It is the latter type of residence, the *domus*, that is my focus for the rest of this chapter.

When it comes to researching multisensory experiences in the Roman domestic sphere, as with other physical settings there are numerous sources we can employ, ranging from physical spaces, material objects, decorations, imprints and examination of substance composition, to written texts and manuals. All of these can be all drawn upon to reconstruct past bodily

experience. Below I provide examples that draw on research on the Roman domestic sphere. Through these I demonstrate how multisensory methods can help gain insight into power and control structures of the Roman house thus, I suggest, enabling us to perceive its similarities to other types of “organizations”.

To start with, most obviously, the buildings themselves provide important information for understanding bodily experiences within them and, whilst many are fragmentary, sites like Pompeii and Herculaneum on the Bay of Naples, Ostia Antica near Rome, or Vindolanda in Northern Britain provide historians with substantial information on types of house structure, building materials and furniture. Examination of the architectural remains can help scholars map aspects such as room size and situation, the presence and height of ceilings, doorways and multiple storeys, kitchen and bathing suites – including ovens and furnaces, location of storage, stabling, door and window location, size and architecture, and internal water features. As well as these features impacting bodily experience, plotting their location gives historians insight into the dwelling’s organization. For example, identifying kitchens from the remnants of ovens and cookware enables not only understanding of the activities that took place in these spaces but, in households with slaves, they can also provide insight into the status of individuals who would predominantly occupy these parts of the dwelling, since slaves were regularly involved in meal production. Furniture too presents an important means by which scholars can explore the multisensory experiences of the ancient Roman house. Stone and marble shrines or dining couches within houses can help us discern how spaces were organized and used, for example as areas for dining or perhaps ritual and religious activity.

In addition to studying the houses and their architectural features, it is important to combine this with research into the objects found within residences so as to consider how domestic artefacts might nuance our insight into a dwelling’s organization and its room use by inhabitants of varying status throughout the day and night. Let us consider the spaces of the *atrium* and the garden to explore this further. The *atrium* was the front reception space of the Roman house. It is generally understood to have been an important place for the daily business ritual called the *salutatio* where wealthy and prominent male residence owners (“patrons”) received guests (“clients”). Through this ritual, patrons offered favours (such as money, food, advice) in return for client support (for example during elections) (Goldbeck, 2010). Likewise, another important space for entertaining guests was the garden, where often visitors would be wined and dined by the residence owners. Finds of loom weights in numerous *atria* and gardens from houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum emphasize, however, a rather more complicated picture of these spaces in terms of their organization and use, since they suggest that as well as being important spaces for status display by the elite male owner, *atria* and gardens were also used for the purposes of domestic productivity (Berry, 1997; Allison, 2004). Thus, we can see how certain parts of the elite Roman house had numerous roles and were frequently employed for several purposes by different inhabitants across the day and night. Moreover, these spaces would have encouraged diverse bodily experiences according to the activity and persons involved. So, for example, the assorted activities of these spaces would have given household members of varying social status diverse sonic experiences. Taking the instance of the *atrium* as a case in point, for slaves and/or female inhabitants of the dwelling, the soundscape of the *atrium* often probably revolved around the quiet clacking of the weights and the muted chatting of voices as they wove (Platts, 2019: 106–107). For an elite male residence owner, however, it is perhaps more likely that their overwhelming auditory experience of the same

space revolved around its association with the ritual of the *saluatio*, and the voices of male clients talking and perhaps jostling as they queued to visit their patron.

This point can be developed to help us understand further the spatial organization of the Roman house from an embodied perspective, and why such important status-building spaces were also regularly used for more commonplace tasks such as weaving. Many architectural examples of *atria* in Roman houses had a hole in the roof, called a *compluvium*, which was open to the sky above. As well as letting in rainfall, which fell into a basin in the floor directly below and which could then be reused in the dwelling, the *compluvium* also let in substantial amounts of natural light. So too the garden, as an open-air part of the house, would also have ensured access to large amounts of daylight. In a society without electricity that relied on candlelight to provide light both to night-time and dark spaces, we can understand more clearly why the reception spaces of the *atrium* and the garden were also utilized throughout the day for tasks, like weaving. Given the intricate nature of such an activity, it necessitated access to as much light as possible, and thus explains why these spaces were used both for status-enhancing activities as well as rather more mundane domestic chores.

Discoveries of dice, counters, and musical instruments likewise have helped us comprehend the complex and multifaceted nature of the Roman house, its organization and structure, as being both a place for work and one for entertainment and leisure. Findspots of dice/gaming-counters/instruments are useful for allowing us to reconstruct how a residence, and its various spaces, might have been utilized on different occasions and for various purposes by its inhabitants. If, for example, dice and gaming counters are discovered in a dwelling's room, this might allow us to reconstruct the activities that occurred there, thus giving us some idea of how the space was used by residence owners. Moreover, such finds help us envisage how these possibly affected an inhabitant's bodily, in particular their auditory, experiences as players would shout, laugh and sing as they relaxed and were entertained. Indeed, numerous wall-paintings from Pompeii and Herculaneum support such a depiction via representations of people playing dice, dancing and drunkenly singing whilst at dinner parties (Platts, 2019: 174–175).

Not only do the finds of lamps and candelabra help us understand lighting and visibility throughout a dwelling but, since they burned fuel, they also exuded heat and often impacted the odours in proximate surroundings. The same can be said of braziers, which not only would impact olfactory and haptic experience but also, given they were used both to heat rooms and often finish off cooking food, their findspots can provide insight into how the certain parts of the house might have been used – perhaps as dining rooms. Discoveries of incense burners with the remnants of soot likewise demonstrate a desire to influence the smells within houses. According to our ancient literary sources, incense played an important role in numerous rituals in the home, from the annual celebration of birthdays (Ovid, *Tristia*, 3.13.13–15) to the rituals of the funeral (Festus 17L). As such, discoveries of incense burners together with their findspots can denote where in the Roman house domestic religious rites occurred. Moreover, whilst the actual scents experienced will depend on what is burned, recent technological advances into the biomolecules of residues in burners have helped scholars start to understand and reconstruct some of the olfactory experiences of the ancient past (e.g. Huber et al., 2022). This, in turn, can perhaps help us to understand what olfactory experiences were considered important by family members as they sought to commune with all-powerful deities and ask for their blessings as different events in the household's lifecycle were celebrated.

It is not just material culture that enables us to reconstruct the multisensory environments of the Roman house; written sources of various types are equally valuable. One of the most important texts is Vitruvius's *De Architectura*, an architectural treatise written around 30BCE. Comprised of ten books delineating different aspects of architectural practice such as the building of roads and temples, it is book six which considers the ideal Roman house. Here Vitruvius set out the required house and room size, depending on the status of its owner and outlined where livestock should be located and the materials to be used in the building process (Vitruvius, *De Architectura*: VI.6). In terms of Vitruvius's concerns for the full body experience of the dwelling, this is demonstrated in various ways. First, he considered the impact of location on building styles, outlining the importance of building according to climate and temperature, and highlighting that regions in the north of the Empire need enclosed buildings, whilst those in the south require shelter from the sun and its heat (ibid.: VI.1). Second, and most importantly was his concern both for mapping the flow of rooms from a dwelling's entrance to its garden (ibid.: VI.5.3), and also the aspects of certain rooms depending on the seasons in order to retain warmth and light, and to avoid damp (ibid.: VI.4).

As well as Vitruvius's text, we can look to the agricultural advice manuals from Cato, Varro and Columella who provide guidance on crops – including what to plant, where, and when to harvest; and on animals – outlining the different types of animals to farm and where to site them (Cato, *De Re Rustica*; Varro, *Rerum Rusticarum*; Columella, *Rerum Rusticarum*). Additionally, they outline the roles of farm slaves, where to house them, what to feed them and how much depending on the work they are doing, and how to treat them. Although, as with the guidance in Vitruvius's treatise, we cannot assume the advice given is followed by all readers and at all times, the information given helps us understand the social hierarchies and ideals associated with agriculture and the factors that might impact the corporeal experience of the farm in the Roman world.

Beyond the realm of advice manuals, we have numerous other types of written texts we can use to help us understand the multisensory experience of the Roman house. Thus we hear, for example, about Pliny's organization of his villa to retain the warmth of the evening sun and the scent of the violets (*Letters*: II.17. 20–24), we read of the noise of clattering pots and pans in the kitchen from Plautus (*Casina*: 763–767) as slaves worked to produce dinner for their master's family, and we learn from Petronius about how bodily sensations were manipulated at the dinner table to show just how a visitor's status was viewed by his host (*Satyricon*: 26–78). Moreover, from Seneca's *Moral Letters to Lucilius* 86, we learn how manipulation of the full array of the senses in the Roman house could be employed to remind people of other dwellings, perhaps from previous times. Here Seneca rails against the immoral excesses of contemporary houses and their impact on the body compared with the physical experiences of austere Romans in the dwellings of past eras. Such comparisons likewise presented an important mode of social competition and personal display of status.

The above discussion highlights how wide-ranging archaeological and textual evidence can be used to develop our understanding of the multisensory realm of the ancient Roman house. Crucially, these remains from the ancient past are often fragmentary and thus difficult to interpret. Yet by combining research into both types of evidence, historians can start to understand not just the built space of the house, but the lived environment of the home and the organization of its activities and people – in terms of what happened, where and with whom, and how these might vary by day and night, season or year. As such, this allows us to garner insight into how a dwelling's power structures and dynamics were experienced by its residents. Such

approaches, I suggest, are not just valuable for ancient historians and archaeologists as they look to understand the highly complex nature of the Roman house, with its inhabitants of different status, age and gender, and its multifaceted role as a place of work and play, ritual and leisure. Rather they are also useful for management scholars who likewise seek to understand the organization of institutions and companies, and the impact that the embodied experience of the spaces where businesses reside might have on workers, visitors and other inhabitants.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE MULTISENSORY

Multisensory research can add valuable insights into the understanding of the past, including power structures and complex organizing processes, as shown in the example of the Roman house. Crucially, Romans saw the house as a vehicle for displaying wealth and aims for social standing. For them, the domestic realm was a space that could be employed either to support or undermine an individual's claims of power and wherewithal. Multisensory research reveals that this was achieved not only through the built environment, but also through the manipulation of the senses as part of spatial organizing. In his exploration of the word "power", anthropologist Eric Wolf identified four different types of power. It is the latter of these which shows why full bodily experience of the house was so important for Romans, and is why they focused on writing about it and indeed trying to manipulate it through how they built and organized their dwellings.

there is still a fourth mode of power, [structural power] power that not only operates within settings or domains but that also organises and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the distribution and direction of energy flows ... it forms the background of Michel Foucault's notion of power as the ability "to structure the possible field of action of others". (Wolf, 1990: 586)

What is important about this explanation of power is the recognition of power displays via the control and management of both the actions and environs of others. This is achieved not just through the erection of buildings and the construction of views but also, I suggest, with careful control of an individual's full sensory engagement with a site (Platts 2016, 2019, 2022). Indeed, that the corporeal experiences of dwellings are detailed in ancient literature and material culture demonstrates the important role that the bodily senses were perceived to play in one's experience of the world. The multisensory nature of Roman houses, particularly of Rome's elite, were emphasized in the literature with descriptions being imbued with the technicolour of positive and negative multisensory descriptions of aural, haptic, olfactory, gustatory and visual experiences. As such, this consideration further demonstrates the importance of multisensory approaches for management and organization scholars interested in spatial organization from an historical perspective. Multisensory methods open up opportunities for exploring "space" from different sensory perspectives, revealing complex connections with power structures and control particularly in past societies and organizations.

This chapter has considered both the early pioneers of sensory history and more recent research in this area in general, and has also drawn on the specific example of sensory history studies into the Roman house. Using this example, and drawing on Wolf's notion that controlling the environment and action, or movement, of others serves to play a vital role in terms of display of personal power and hierarchy, I have shown how multisensory methods and

approaches in history can possibly be used to reveal new insights into management and organizing. For instance, the example of the Roman house from a multisensory perspective shows that “controlling the environment and movement” was not just achieved via the coordination of vistas and sightlines within the domestic sphere. Rather it was also secured through the organization of the rest of the human sensory realm within the dwelling.

The multisensory techniques described above from an historian’s perspective are, I argue, of considerable value to management studies. Just as a Roman house comprised various activities, rooms/spaces, power hierarchies which required careful configuration, so too do organizations. Insights into how and why built space in the ancient past could be, and was, manipulated in terms of *all* bodily experiences that could be had within a building are useful for organization and management studies as they examine the potential for architecture to impact both beneficially and negatively individual and group dynamics, emotions and experiences.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

Multisensory historical research has seen significant growth over recent years, and there is much material to help interested readers develop their understanding of this field. Scholarship in sensory history ranges widely from innovative monographs exploring particular senses in specific centuries, and important overviews outlining past and future work in the field of sensory history and related humanities disciplines, to the publication of edited series on the senses, where individual books have either focused on a particular sense (e.g. smell or taste) across eras or have examined a particular period and their engagement with the multisensory realm. For a good starting point in multisensory historical research, the following studies and/or series are recommended for exploration.

- (1) Corbin, A. (1986). *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the Social Imagination*. Berg.

This is arguably the most important and ground-breaking work in the field of sensory history research to date. Written by Corbin, a professor in History from the Sorbonne, and drawing on wide-ranging evidence from the disciplines of history of science, medicine, urban studies, and literary criticism, this book examines the role of smell and the perception of odour and its impact in France from 1750 to the nineteenth century.

- (2) Smith, M. (2021). *A Sensory History Manifesto*. Penn State University Press.

This short monograph presents a clear and accessible overview to the field of multisensory history. Not only does it present the origins of this area of research and some of the ground-breaking work from pioneers in the field, but it also examines both the strengths and challenges of multisensory approaches to the historical past as well as highlighting new directions in this burgeoning field of research.

- (3) Howes, D. (ed.) *Sensory Formation Series*. Routledge.

This series of seven titles edited by David Howes, a leading scholar in the field of multisensory research, is an early and ground-breaking example of a book series exploring multisensory research from a multidisciplinary perspective. In this series, five of the

volumes are dedicated to a single sense, exploring its historical, cultural, aesthetic and sociological interpretations across past and contemporary periods (Bull and Back, 2005 on sound; Korsmeyer, 2005 on taste; Classen, 2005 on touch; Drobnik, 2006 on smell; Edwards and Bhaumik, 2008 on sight). The sixth book of the series focuses on the possibility and meaning of the term “sixth sense” (Howes, 2009). Finally, the seventh book of the series, *Empire of the Senses* (edited by Howes), draws together recent research across the senses to open up the worlds of the past and present in new, and revolutionary, multisensory perspectives.

- (4) Classen, C. *Cultural History of the Senses Series*. Bloomsbury.

An alternative, and equally important, edited series on sensory history is that from Constance Classen, whose *Cultural History of the Senses* focuses on specific time periods rather than individual bodily sensations in order to enable readers to develop insight into the depth and breadth of research into the sensory history. Thus, the series covers *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity* (Toner, 2014) up to *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Modern Age* (Howes, 2016) and the sources used in the volumes range from inscriptions and architecture to poetry and video games.

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13. Process-tracing historical research methods in management

Andrew Smith

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces readers to process tracing, a qualitative research method that is increasingly used by social scientists who want to use historical data to contribute to theoretical debates in a methodologically rigorous fashion. Process-tracing analysis has been used most frequently by scholars in the disciplines of political science and international relations. These scholars have had considerable success in using process-tracing methods to increase reader perceptions of the trustworthiness of findings based on qualitative research. As I suggest below, while the disciplines of political science and international relations continue to be dominated by quantitative approaches, leading scholars in those fields increasingly regard process tracing using historical data as a legitimate way of testing and refining theory. Process-tracing methods appear to have gained the respect of a large numbers of social scientists because they are perceived as rigorous forms of research (Dowding, 2020). Many of the contributions in this volume are concerned with how historical research can contribute to the development of theory (Decker et al., 2023; Harvey and Maclean, 2023; Rowlinson et al., 2023). At the same time, historical scholars do not want the pursuit of generalizable theories to cause researchers to lose sight of the specific historical contexts in which historical phenomena take place (Buchnea, 2023). Process tracing can help to resolve this tension. My contention is that the process-tracing method could also be a powerful tool for contributing to the development of management theory. Scholars in business schools should therefore consider how we can borrow the process-tracing methods developed by our colleagues in political science departments. This chapter is intended to start a conversation about how we should borrow and adapt these research methods.

Process-tracing methods were first developed by scholars who work in the field of political science, where they were used to test the competing claims made by the rival theories within that discipline. The methodology was then borrowed by scholars in the field of sociology to test claims made by competing sociological theories (Rohlfing, 2014; Barrenechea and Mahoney, 2019; Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte, 2021). It is my contention we can use the same method to test hypotheses derived from the types of theories of management and organization. In this chapter, I will draw on my own experiences using process-tracing methods in management research and on my observations about developments in political science, a field I follow and to which I occasionally contribute (Ølholm Eaton and Smith, 2020). The chapter outlines the strengths and limitations of process-tracing methods so that readers will have a better sense of which types of empirical research questions can be addressed applying process-tracing methods using historical data, and which research questions are best left to scholars who use different research methods and data.

I argue that one of the main benefits we can derive from using process-tracing methods is to help ourselves and our colleagues to think more clearly about which of the many theoretical lenses available to us are the best for understanding particular real-world phenomena. Physical scientists who use non-metaphorical lenses in their research need to decide which particular lens is most suitable for the task at hand. For instance, they will use different lenses to look inside a cell with a microscope than to gaze at a star with a telescope. As scholars in business schools, we have access to a range of different theoretical lenses we can use in our teaching and research. These lenses come to us from a wide range of disciplines and paradigms, such as economics and sociology. As a historical scholar, I have sometimes borrowed theories from economics, sometimes from sociology. I plan to continue doing so in the future, because no single discipline or paradigm has a monopoly on useful insights. As it allows us to test claims made by rival theories rooted in different paradigms, the process-tracing methodology can help us to think more clearly about which theoretical lenses are fit for which purposes.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PROCESS-TRACING METHODS

Process-tracing methods are informed by the belief that researchers have both the capacity and the obligation to pursue the truth through rigorous empirical research. The scholars who use process-tracing methods and historical data share the conviction that the pursuit of accuracy in determining patterns of causation is a task of high social importance. In this sense, their epistemological commitments are broadly similar to those that informed the writings of such historical methodologists as Fogel, Elton, and Evans (Fogel and Elton, 1983; Evans, 2012) and thus are thus radically opposed to that articulated by postmodern historical theorists such as Jenkins (2003). Unlike the approach to historical research outlined by Evans and many other scholars based in history departments, scholars who use process-tracing methods attach a high value to contributing to the development of generalizable models of how the world works.

It is appropriate to touch on the ultimate philosophical foundations of the process-tracing methodology. The approach to theorizing of scholars who use process tracing methods is informed by the ideas of Bayes (1701–1761), Hume (1711–1776), and Popper (1902–1994). From Bayes, a statistician and philosopher, process-tracing analysis takes the concept of Bayesian updating (Fairfield and Charman, 2017; Zaks, 2021). In Bayesian updating, an investigator first uses theory to formulate probability estimates for various possible hypotheses and then updates these estimates as new data is found and analysed. Researchers who engage in process-tracing analysis thus frequently refer to their “priors”, meaning their theoretically informed assumptions about how the world works. Process-tracing analysis is also informed by “Humean scepticism”, that is a pronounced tendency to doubt both the claims made by others and, crucially, one’s own ability to accurately perceive causal patterns (Poitras, 2013). A review of the publications of the leading process-tracing researchers shows that these authors typically seriously consider possible rejoinders to their own arguments so as to signal a degree of intellectual humility and the caution with which they make statements about historical causation (Beach and Pedersen, 2019; Checkel, 2021). Process-tracing scholars refrain from making dogmatic or strident statements about how the world works. They would refrain from pointing to a single data point, say a particular document in an archive, and then declaring that it refutes a whole theory. Instead, the goal is to do tests that cumulatively support or

undermine the plausibility of generalizable theories of how the world works. The outlook of process-tracing scholars is similar to that articulated by advocates of Popperian falsification, which holds that for a theory to be considered a real theory, one must be able to test empirically and, at least conceivably, prove the theory to be false (Fairfield and Charman, 2017; Zaks, 2021).

Although researchers who use process-tracing methods certainly do not dispute that econometric methods are often the best tools to answer some socially important research questions and to test certain types of theories, they stress the limitations of such methodologies (Beach and Pedersen, 2019; Checkel, 2021). The prevailing attitude among researchers who use process-tracing methods appears to be that there should be an academic division of labour between researchers who use quantitative methods to investigate causal patterns that involve the decisions of large numbers of individuals (e.g., “why do birth rates in a country generally fall as GDP per capita goes up?”) and those who use qualitative methods to investigate the high-stakes, high-impact decisions of small numbers of powerful individuals (e.g., “why did President Kennedy and his advisors decide to de-escalate the Cuban Missile Crisis?”). Process-tracing methods involve the painstaking use of evidence similar to that which we would regard as highly normative in a criminal court case. The goal is to arrive at conclusions that members of a given scholarly community will regard as a good approximation of the truth rather than just some individual’s subjective opinion of why something happened (Bennett, 2010; Beach and Pedersen, 2019).

Process-tracing often involves formulating causal explanations based on the intensive study of historical documents (Tannenwald, 1999; Collier, 2011; Mahoney, 2015; Kay and Baker, 2015). Process-tracing scholars typically focus on decisions that had significance implications for large numbers of human beings (e.g., national leaders’ choices between peace and war). For example, the studies of Nina Tannenwald, a political scientist at Brown University, on the “nuclear taboo” demonstrated the utility of such methods (Tannenwald, 2005a; Tannenwald, 2005b; Tannenwald, 2015). Her research was informed by a desire to understand why the United States has refrained from using nuclear weapons in post-1945 military conflicts even when its leaders have faced calls to use such weapons to quickly end wars. The reluctance of the US to use nuclear weapons to win wars cheaply and quickly has long been discussed by other authors and is commonly called “the nuclear taboo” (Tannenwald, 1999). The nuclear taboo is the very strong stigma that has, since the late 1940s, been attached to any individual who proposes actually using nuclear weapons.

Scholars such as the economist Thomas Schelling had previously advanced theoretically-informed explanations for why the US has avoided using tactical nuclear weapons the various wars that country has fought since the 1940s. Their accounts of why the United States have refrained from using tactical nuclear weapons were informed by realism, a very different theory of international relations than the constructivist theory that was ultimately upheld by Tannenwald’s research. We do not need to go in great detail here about realist theory beyond saying that realist scholars consider nation-states to be the principal actors in international affairs and that the behaviour of these actors is driven by their own national interests. Schelling famously used game theory, which models the superpowers as two rational agents, to understand how the US makes decisions about nuclear weapons (Schelling, 1960). Schelling’s model greatly simplifies international politics, dropping out all consideration of culture, norms, domestic political systems, and other contextual factors in favour of an elegant game-theoretical approach. Tannenwald’s research sought to test hypotheses derived

from various competing international relations theories, such as realism, against the available evidence, which are the public and declassified statements made by leading US policymakers in their discussions of whether tactical nuclear weapons should be used.

Tannenwald's process-tracing research project began by identifying what each of the various theories widely used in her field would predict a researcher would find if they examined a large number of documents relevant to the nuclear taboo, such as texts prepared by the officials who make decisions about how to fight wars. This part of her process is similar to an econometric researcher formulating hypotheses. Having established what each of the theories would predict would be in the documents, she then examined a large number of documents in which American policymakers had expressed their views about whether, why, and how nuclear weapons should be used. That part of her research involved reading and taking notes on thousands of pages of text and learning about the context in which those documents were produced. She used these data sources to understand the evolution of the nuclear taboo and to identify the main factors and mechanisms that explain this development. Tannenwald's core construct, "taboo", comes from the discipline of anthropology, a discipline in which the dominant paradigms are radically different from the rational-actor game-theory approach typified by Schelling. She presented her findings in a chronological narrative that attributed the growth of the strong norm against the use of tactical nuclear weapons to three main factors: the emergence of a grassroots anti-nuclear movement; the desire of US policymakers to preserve legitimacy in the eyes of individuals in third countries, including US allies, and the ongoing efforts of the smaller democracies that did not have nuclear weapons to delegitimize nuclear weapons (Tannenwald, 1999).

Tannenwald's account undermined the credibility of some of the explanations for the non-use of nuclear weapons made by scholars who examine interstate relations using other theories, such as realism and, in particular, the game theoretical approach that Schelling (1960) had taught to large numbers of academics and practitioners. In effect, what she found in the archive was inconsistent with the hypotheses one would derive from realism and were more consistent with hypotheses one would derive from the other main theories used in her field. The implication of her historical research findings was to undermine the overall case for using realism and game theory as an approach for understanding geopolitics in the present and to bolster the case for using other theoretical lenses, particularly those that considers cultural factors, for understanding the same and related topics. Tannenwald never claimed that her research disproved realism or proved that game theoretical models have zero predictive power, but her research findings did incrementally undermine those ways of looking at the world and to promote the use of other theoretical lenses in the field of international relations (Lantis, 2009).

As her case study research is on a clearly important topic (the non-use of nuclear weapons) and her research methods are generally considered to be rigorous, her findings considerably undermine the overall credibility of the realist theory that some international relations scholars use to understand the world. It undermines that theory because her findings are different from that what the realist theory would predict and are more in line with what the rival constructivist theory would predict. Now while scholars in management schools are unlikely to be interested in the debates raging in political sciences departments about the relative merits of these two theoretical lenses, the key thing we can take away from Tannenwald's research is she used process-tracing methods as way of testing which theory has greater explanatory power and thus deserves to be used more frequently in a given area of social science. The theories that

Tannenwald were trying to test happened to be called realism and constructivism. However, the methodology she used can be applied in testing a wide range of theories, including those that are important to scholars in management schools.

Tannenwald has used her research, which is celebrated among political scientists and non-academic research stakeholders for both its social significance and its methodological rigour (Brady et al., 2006; Rapport, 2015), to contribute to ongoing debates in the public sphere about how to further strengthen the taboo so that decision-makers in a greater number of nuclear-armed states are influenced by the taboo that has influenced US policymakers. For our immediate purposes, Tannenwald's work is significant because of what it says about the potential of process tracing to improve the quality of the theory used in a given academic field. Readers will observe that the process-tracing methodology requires the researcher to test competing causal explanations for a given *explanandum* (Bennett, 2010). For Tannenwald, the *explanandum* was the existence of the nuclear taboo that had been documented by others. The various theoretical lenses that are used in a researcher's discipline (in Tannenwald's case, realism and constructivism in political science) offer us different accounts for this *explanandum*.

When they publish their research findings, the process-tracing researchers verbally signal their own degree of certainty in their conclusions about causal relationships (Collier, 2011). While quantitative researchers express how certain they are in their research findings using *confidence intervals*, that is numbers, process-tracing scholars reveal their own degree of confidence through verbal cues such as "it is certain that" or "it is likely that". These forms of words signal different levels of self-confidence in research findings. For instance, when Tannenwald published the results of her process-tracing research she included her own candid statement of the potential flaws or limitations of her argument that signalled that while she has a high degree of confidence that her causal explanation is correct, this level of confidence cannot reach 1.

A process-tracing researcher determines his or her level of confidence after reviewing the strength of the evidence that supports whatever causal explanations they have developed. They do so using the scale of *evidence strength* shown in Table 13.1, which I have adapted from a textbook on process-tracing methods. A core goal of the process-tracing analysis community is to demonstrate to all observers, including quantitative scholars who are sceptical of qualitative research methods, that qualitative research using textual sources can be executed with a high degree of methodological rigour and that they have not simply "cherry-picked" data to support their favourite theory.

EXAMPLE OF THE USE OF PROCESS-TRACING METHODS IN MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

In this section, I discuss a paper that I co-authored using process-tracing methods and historical data to contribute to management theory.¹ Our research was informed by our interest in the

¹ We are not the only scholars to use process-tracing methods in a paper that has been published in business-school journals. However, our approach differs from that of Di Paola and Spina (2019) in that we used historical data (documents created in the nineteenth century), while their process-tracing analysis was based on interviews with elite informants.

Table 13.1 Four tests of evidence strength in process tracing

Test	Description of Test
Straw-in-the-Wind	Straw-in-the-wind is a colloquial phrase that means a sign that hints that something might happen. (In the distant past, farmers used straws in the wind to predict whether there would be change in the weather.) If a proposed causal explanation passes this test, the researcher should increase their confidence in their proposed causal explanation. If a given causal explanation survives multiple straw-in-the-wind tests, that survival gives a major boost to the credibility of causal explanation under consideration
Hoop	Circumstantial evidence is similar to a criminal defendant's lack of an alibi. It is necessary but not sufficient to support the causal explanation
Smoking Gun	A piece of evidence that confirms the proposed causal theory
Doubly Decisive	A piece of evidence that confirms the proposed theory and which also rules out all other possible causal theories

Source: Based on Beach and Pedersen (2019).

Table 13.2 Standards of evidence for statements of causal inference in process tracing research

Sufficient for Making an Assertion about Causation			
Necessary for Making an Assertion about Causation		NO	YES
	NO	Straw-in-the-Wind – If a causal theory passes this test, its passage affirms the potential relevance of that causal theory but does not conclusively prove it – If the causal theory fails the test, the causal theory is not eliminated from consideration but the case for using it is <i>slightly</i> weakened – Implications for rival causal theories for understanding the phenomenon: passing this test slightly weakens the plausibility of the rival theories, whilst failing the test slightly strengthens them	Smoking Gun – If a causal theory passes the test, passing strongly confirms the causal theory – If the causal theory fails the test, the causal theory is not eliminated by the test but the case for using it is <i>somewhat</i> weakened – Implications for rival causal theories for understanding the phenomenon: passing the test substantially weakens the rival theories, whilst failing somewhat strengthens them
	YES	Hoop – If the causal theory passes this type of test, its passing affirms the potential relevance of the causal theory but does not confirm it – If the causal theory fails this type of test, that failure requires the researcher to discard it – Implications for rival causal theories for understanding the phenomenon: passing this test somewhat weakens the rival theories, while failing the tests somewhat strengthens them	Doubly Decisive – If the causal theory passes this type of test, its passing confirms the causal theory and eliminates all other potential causal theories for explaining the phenomenon – If the causal theory fails this type of test, that failure requires the researcher to it – Implications for rival causal theories for understanding the phenomenon: if a researcher's theory passes the test, other theories must be eliminated from further consideration; if the theory fails the test, the cases for using the rival causal theories are somewhat strengthened

Source: Adapted by author from Collier (2011).

present-day problem of modern slavery in global supply chains, a topic of increasing interest to management academics, particularly in Britain (Benstead et al., 2021; Crane et al., 2021). The problem of modern slavery is complex because it involves goods that are consumed in

wealthy democracies but which were produced by workers in developing countries whose lack of freedom is so acute as to lead many Western observers to label such individuals as working in conditions of modern slavery. In an attempt to address this problem, jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom have passed laws to impose monetary and criminal sanctions on firms that wittingly or unwittingly import goods made by workers who fall within a statutory definition of “modern slavery” (United Kingdom, Modern Slavery Act, 2015).

In recent years, various certification regimes have been created to help consumers, managers, and other decision-makers in advanced economies to avoid unwittingly contributing to the problem of modern slavery (Schaper and Pollach, 2021). Participants in the debate about “modern slavery” frequently draw historical analogies with the African chattel slavery systems that many European countries created in their overseas colonies after 1500 and which were in place until the late nineteenth century. The abolition of slavery in Brazil in the 1880s is often regarded as the end of this epoch in the history of slavery (Drescher, 2009). The use of the term “modern slavery” implies that unfree labour that exist in present-day supply chains is similar to, but nevertheless qualitatively different from, the African slavery that English-speaking people generally associate with the American South before the Civil War.

We knew from previous research that for part of the long period in which Britain imported slave-produced sugar cane from the tropics, a market category called “free-grown sugar” had existed. This category, which existed from the 1790s to the 1840s, allowed consumers who were morally opposed to slavery to purchase, at a premium price, sugar that was marketed as having been grown and processed by free workers. As we showed in our paper, retailers in many parts of the United Kingdom gave consumers the option of paying extra for this type of sugar. We also knew that this market category, which had been vibrant in the 1820s and 1830s, disappeared after the 1840s, even though Britain continued to import vast quantities of slave-produced sugar up until the 1870s. A consumer in the 1830s had the option to pay extra for sugar that was compatible with their conscience and many consumers, particularly prosperous evangelical Christians, exercised that option. By the 1860s, British sugar consumers no longer had this option, although retailers continued to offer them a wide array of sugars differentiated by colour and granularity. The market category in question disappeared and we wanted to explain why on earth this market category had disappeared. We thus had a historical phenomenon similar to that of the nuclear taboo whose existence Tannenwald sought to explain.

In our paper, we explained how we went about doing the research that allowed us to formulate an explanation for the appearance and subsequent disappearance of this market category. In the data and methods section of our paper, we provided extensive information about the number and type of historical documents we consulted in the course of doing our research. We also explained, again in great detail, how we went about analysing these documents. In the paper, we outlined an explanation for why the market category of free-grown sugar disappeared from the British market after 1840 even though Britain continued to import large quantities of slave-produced sugar and British people continued to oppose, at least rhetorically, the existence of slavery elsewhere in the world. We explained that the two authors had worked together to formulate possible explanations for the puzzling disappearance of the market category and that we had drawn on various theoretical tools known to the business-ethics literature, such as the concept of “compassion fatigue”, in formulating candidate explanations for our explanandum. We also explained how we discarded those explanations when they were inconsistent with the evidence we observed. In the paper, we explicitly stated that the surviv-

ing evidence that supports the explanation we ultimately arrived at corresponds in strength to the “hoop” standard discussed in the tables above. In the paper, we stated that “we adopt an intermediate level of confidence in expressing our explanation for why the market category disappeared” (Smith and Johns, 2020, p.285).

Other management theorists have suggested that the level of consumer interest in ethical issues such as modern slavery is pretty much a function of GDP per capita: as people get richer, consumers care more about these sorts of ethical issues (Promislo et al., 2017). Our finding that the evident level of interest in Britain fell during a period of rising living standards undermines the credibility of that theory, since it is the opposite of what the theory would lead one to predict. Our paper argued that changing attitudes towards race and skin colour, which appears to have acquired greater rather than lesser subjective significance to British people in the middle of the nineteenth century, explains why the phenomenon of compassion fatigue caused the decline of the market category of free-labour sugar when compassion fatigue does not destroy other ethics-driven market categories. To put it more bluntly, we argued that racism became stronger in British culture after the 1830s that helped to kill off a market category that had been created to help people of African descent. In the discussion section of our paper we outlined the significance of our findings for different branches of management theory (market categories theory, CSR theory) and for practitioners who are interested in determining which government policies will be most efficacious in combatting modern slavery. We explained how our findings lend credence to some of the theories used by scholars who try to understand modern slavery while undermining the credibility of other theories, such as the one that implies that information asymmetries (Christ and Burritt, 2018) are the main barrier to inducing consumers in the first world to behaving in a fashion that would eliminate demand for goods produced with unfree labour.

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF PROCESS-TRACING METHODS

This section outlines the strengths and limitations of process-tracing methods so that readers who wish to engage in theory testing have a better sense of which types of research questions can be addressed applying process-tracing methods using historical data and which research questions are best left to scholars who use different research methods. As scholars in management schools, we need to give careful thought as to which management questions can be successfully addressed using process-tracing methods and historical data and which ones are best left to people who use other research methods and data. In this context, determining how well a researcher has addressed a given research question involves looking at how other management academics and non-academic research stakeholders would likely evaluate the quality of a given research question both in terms of its socio-economic significance and its methodological rigour. By non-academic research stakeholders, I mean the individuals in society who are not employed by universities but whose opinions about the relative methodological rigour of academic outputs matter to researchers in a given socio-political context. These non-academic research stakeholders include practitioner reviewers at research funding councils,² a judge

² In the United Kingdom and some other Commonwealth countries, applications for research council funding are adjudicated by panels that include a mixture of academics and practitioners. The

trying to decide how much weight to give to an academic expert witness's sworn testimony, and decision-makers in government departments and companies who are trying to decide whether to use a particular academic research finding. The non-academic research stakeholders who pass judgement on whether research methods are credible would also include a journalist who is trying to determine whether a peer-reviewed article is credible enough to be reported to the readers of their newspaper. A non-academic research stakeholder is basically anyone who might have some say about whether to allocate some sort of scarce resource (money, time, prestige, recognition) to a given researcher. Achieving and demonstrating a high degree of methodological rigour is important to maintain our legitimacy in the eyes of both or fellow academics and also the wider society. I believe that using process-tracing methods can both help to increase actual methodological rigour and the impression of methodological rigour at a time of intense pressure on researchers to demonstrate value to the taxpayer.

One promising approach would be to use process tracing to help test theories that seek to explain how senior decision-makers in firms, governments, and other organizations make decisions. Process-tracing analysis has been used extensively by political scientists and other scholars who are interested in testing and otherwise improving the theories we use to understand the choices made by the individuals who lead powerful organizations (e.g., American presidents). It seems to me that historical scholars in management schools could use this methodology to advance the theoretical tools that management academics use to understand the decision-making by individuals in top management teams (Benischke et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2019).

Historical management scholars can also use process-tracing analysis to improve our understanding of how ideational changes (that is shifts in the prevailing climate of opinion) contribute to changes in the behaviour of firms. A large part of the literature in political science that used process-tracing methods is concerned with trying to determine the behavioural effects of the advent of new ideas and ideologies, as in the seminal paper by Tannenwald. Process-tracing scholars in political science departments are interested in variation over time in the fundamental normative commitments of decision-makers and in changes over time in decision-makers' understandings of causal relationships (Jacobs, 2015). Business historians have long been interested in the impact of disseminating of new ideologies of corporate governance on decision-making in firms. For instance, Lazonick and O'Sullivan (2000) influentially argued that the dissemination in the 1980s of the doctrine of shareholder primacy, which held the firms ought to be managed so as maximize shareholder value above all else, contributed to a host of social and economic problems in the United States, for instance by encouraging ruthless outsourcing of manufacturing work to low-wage countries. The process-tracing analysis methodology above could be used to test this claim about the causal importance of ideas in rigorous fashion.

These suggestions about how scholars in management schools could use historical data and process-tracing methods to contribute to the development of management theory are not intended to be an exhaustive list. Readers may indeed have other ideas about how process-tracing methods and historical data could be used to contribute to management theory.

latter are typically employees of government departments or large companies. This system means that a research project will be funded only if all members of the panel regard it as methodologically rigorous. As historical researchers, we therefore need to think about how we can demonstrate rigour to both academics and non-academics.

In deciding whether to use process-tracing methods, management researchers need to keep the advantages and disadvantages this tool in mind. The advantages are that this tool has already been used in a large number of papers and is regarded as legitimate by academic publishers and by research funders such as research councils. Another advantage is that there are myriad methodology papers one can cite in one's methods and data section. The downsides of using this tool is that accessing and reading many documents can be time consuming. Moreover, formulating hypotheses derived from different theoretical models requires the researcher to achieve fluency in a range of different theories, some of which might be rooted in very different paradigms and worldviews. However, I remain convinced that this tool is under-utilized by management academics.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Beach D and Pedersen RB (2019) *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*. University of Michigan Press.

This book, which is the second edition of a highly practical guide of how to do process tracing, is an essential acquisition for anyone interested in process-tracing methodology. The authors are professors of political science at Aarhus University. Aarhus University runs an annual training workshop for graduate students and academics who want to receive training in this research method. Students can receive 5 ECTS credits if they take this workshop.

- (2) Collier D (2011) Understanding process tracing. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 44(4), 823–830.

This article by UC Berkeley political scientist David Collier provides readers with a very good introduction into process tracing.

- (3) Di Paola N and Spence TR (2019) What drives biopharmaceutical firms' exploratory openness? A comparative process tracing approach to the analysis of R&D microfoundations. *Journal of Business Research*, 97, 94–103.

This article is an example of process-tracing methods being used by management academics to advance management theory. Not surprisingly, the methodology section cites the works of Beech, Pedersen, and many of the other political scientists discussed above. It should be noted that these authors do not use historical data.

- (4) Smith A and Johns J (2020) Historicizing modern slavery: Free-grown sugar as an ethics-driven market category in nineteenth-century Britain. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 166(2), 271–292.

In this paper, we used process-tracing methods and historical data to address theoretical debates about modern slavery.

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14. Historical case studies: richness, rigour and ‘contextualised explanation’

Emily Buchnea

INTRODUCTION

In a 2018 study, Widdersheim (p. 149) explains that ‘historical case study is not a new term, but this use of the term is new’. The meaning behind this was that simply historical case studies have never been outlined as a clear research process with a distinct, singular methodological approach. Within the tradition of business history, case studies were, and continue to be, a dominant approach to exploring phenomena in context; so much so that often the case study approach is implicit. However, in other business and management disciplines, the use of case study is explicit, debated and at times, criticised. Case study research combines ‘naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods’ (Stake, 1995). Therefore, questions arise as to whether it is a method, a methodological approach or a framework for presenting and doing research. Perhaps a combination of all three elements, historical case studies provide contextual richness to business and management research.

Within business and management journals, historical case study is presented as a methodological approach in and of itself (for example in Preston, 2006). However, a variety of methods may be used to construct a case study and, therefore, case studies do not possess a singular methodological approach. That being said, there is structure to the case study approach in that the researcher is bounded by subject, time and purpose. Yin’s definitive guide to case study research, first published in 1984, offers in-depth recommendation for building, researching and analysing cases across disciplines (Yin, 2014). More specifically to business and management subjects, Eisenhardt (1989) provides a detailed guide for both constructing case studies and then theorising the case. From these and other works, we know that case studies tend to avoid unit of analysis sprawl and focus in on a fixed subject (for understanding unit of analysis selection and ‘bounding’ see Yin, 2014, pp. 31–34). They have boundaries which traditionally have been spatial and/or temporal (Gerring, 2007). Subjects (or units of analysis) need to be demarcated from context, they need to be distinct items of interest: a firm, an industry, a business group, a country or region. These can have a significant link to time, for example, a decision, an event, an era, and so on. Temporally, historical case studies have a start and end; these boundaries are defined with purpose (Widdersheim, 2018). In terms of purpose, case studies are a vital way of answering key questions (Vissak and Francioni, 2013), and while they may only answer the ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ with respect to one unit of analysis, this can shed light on broader trends.

This chapter builds on the call from Welch et al. (introduced in 2011 and revisited in 2022) with regards to the value of historical case studies in providing ‘contextualised explanation’. Welch’s promotion of ‘contextualised explanation’ through historical case study offers clear legitimacy to this approach within qualitative methodologies in business and management research, in particular within the scope of international business research. Given the breadth

of research that employs historical case study, this chapter will focus on the use of historical case studies in international business research, to which Welch et al.'s (2022) work speaks. On the research process of building a case, this chapter also demonstrates that the process of historical case study within business history is difficult to define because it is non-linear, diverse and complex. The chapter first takes a view of case study as a key qualitative approach within business and management studies, before examining the key contribution of historical case studies to this research. It will then outline the process of constructing a historical case study, providing an example of such a process. The chapter aims to illuminate both the value of historical case study and also an appreciation for the complexity in constructing one.

‘CONTEXTUALISED EXPLANATION’

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the case study in business and management research was seen as a flawed methodological approach because of its disconnect with scientific methods (Campbell & Stanley, 1966). In disciplines such as International Business, for example, qualitative methods on the whole were deemed lesser than quantitative approaches. Qualitative methods in themselves have a history of flux in terms of favourability as outlined by Welch & Piekari (2017). In recent years, many business and management scholars have come to the defence of qualitative methods and the case study. A champion of the case study, Welch outlines four methods for theorising from case studies to demonstrate that case studies can produce more than singular, unique views of the world; there are ways researchers can extrapolate more from the case. The four methods of theorising from case studies (Welch, et al. 2022) are outlined as: ‘Interpretive Sensemaking’; ‘Inductive Theory-Building’; ‘Natural Experiment’ and ‘*Contextualised Explanation*’.

Contextualised explanation promises that one can ‘reconcile context and theory, so that context becomes a part of explanation’. According to Welch et al. (2022), historical research is one approach to case study that would yield a ‘contextualised explanation’. Historical case studies should embody contextual significance, be temporally oriented and continually battle temporal distance. Historians conducting historical case studies are acutely aware of context, much like the historical case study, the significance of context is implicit. Actions, patterns, trends, decisions made, growth, decline – these are all conclusions drawn from a case study that are pulled in all four corners by the context. In a historical case study, this can never be dismissed. As McLaren and Durepos explain, incorporating context into research should not be something which is done simplistically because contexts are not static, they are constantly shifting.

However, while there is a deep appreciation for the significance of context, historical case studies are in a sense not scientific. As Decker (2022, p. 1) observes, historians are essentially ‘learning by doing’. They select a topic, they examine and analyse the related historical sources, piece together a coherent case and from this, form conclusions. The case is an emergent outcome of this process. However, the richness inherent in case studies as described by Dubois and Gadde (2002) finds a comfortable home in the historic tradition. This ‘naturalist paradigm’ is interpretivist, constructed through observations to provide a key understanding of the world we live(d) in (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Contextual explanation may have a downside which may explain instances of reluctance to adopt historical case studies within business and management research. Case studies that adopt

a longitudinal perspective but forego discussions on the contextual significance tend to have more generality. For example, Amdam and Benito (2022) argue that while studies make use of longitudinal data in IB research, most either avoid discussions of, or ‘control for’, the uniqueness of context to allow for broader conclusions to be inferred. Historical case studies require more interpretation because there is a distinct understanding that the case being analysed cannot be done so within the parameters of our present environment, it needs to be understood within the context of the past. In historical case studies, it is useful to see time denoted in the way that Decker (2022) describes the role of time: either by temporal bracketing that is determined by the unit of analysis, or periodisation which is either determined by the researcher or a construct of the historical tradition that has been delineated over the decades (i.e. ‘the early modern period’, ‘the reconstruction era’, etc.) but still open to interpretation, and thus less exact. We can uncouple historical case study from longitudinal case study by the criteria described by Decker (2022), and the value of contextual explanation (Welch et al., 2011) may be one way for doing this. Generalisability should not be the goal of research and the studies outlined below demonstrate the value from not seeking out over-arching generalisations.

HISTORICAL CASE STUDY AS TRADITION AND NEW METHOD

Historians conduct historical case study, particularly from a narrative approach, almost as if a natural instinct. They will tell a story based on carefully pieced together primary evidence. It is not scientific per se in that often there is not a method outlined which can be replicated, but it is often detailed and rigorous. Historical case studies in business history have often begun with an explanation of the case in question alongside justification and outline of significance, before diving into an analysis of the case through carefully selected primary evidence, typically qualitative and dug out of an archive (Tennent and Gillett, 2023). On many occasions, there is no detailed methods section, no intricate outline of the research process but a summary of findings from the archive, some of which have been studied forensically to construct a holistic case. What one observes more recently, is the persistence on the historical case with the incorporation of social science methods (Lieberman, 2018) and thus, a greater intention behind how methods and cases are presented and justified.

‘Contextualised Explanation’ Meets Microhistory

While pinpointing an exact methodological process for historical case studies is challenging given the diversity in approaches, one can look to microhistory for some lessons in how fine details of singular cases can reveal wider significance (Carnegie and McBride, 2023). Significantly, Hargadon and Wadhwani (2022) demonstrate how microhistorical approaches in management research can reveal unique phenomena previously hidden. Microhistory, an outgrowth of social and cultural history, delves deeply into the human story and treats everyday life as a key to understanding movements, human agency, impacts of capitalism and global history more generally. A small, seemingly ordinary story will illuminate wider trends and patterns, while the intricacies of everyday life will illuminate a more general picture of the way it was. With this, historical case studies which offer a microhistorical approach, provide an opportunity to use a place, a person, a firm or an event to delve deeply into broader issues relating to organisations and the contexts in which they exist.

Ghobrial (2019) offers a suggestion that what is often criticised about microhistory (offering too narrow a glimpse at life to make generalisations) is what is, in fact, most remarkable about microhistory. Through capturing individual stories one can bring together a kaleidoscopic perspective on a particular time, place or phenomena, in an effort to draw out significant ontological and epistemological conclusions. The same can be said about case study use in general. As Welch summarises, 'case studies are not sites for identifying potential candidates for generalizations; rather, they are sites for tracing the mechanisms by which outcomes are produced' (Welch et al., 2022, p. 9).

Historical Case Study Use in Business and Management Journals

While microhistory is an approach to historical case study which is now deeply entrenched in historical methods and history education, it has not commonly been utilised in business history. Classic historical case studies of monolithic firms and big industry have been produced for decades (Chandler, 1964; Barker, 1977; Pettigrew, 1985). For example, Chandler (1962) drew on a multi-case approach for examining large company evolution and function through the likes of Du Pont, General Motors, Standard Oil and Sears. These detailed and precise accounts offered narratives of strategic evolution and industrial or international expansion (Rowlinson et al., 2023). In recent years, historical case studies are becoming more evident as a framework for explaining context within many strands of business and management studies, inclusive of strategy (Boje et al., 2016; Lubinski and Wadhwani, 2020), entrepreneurship (Popp and Holt, 2013; Bisel et al., 2017), organisation studies (Anteby and Molnar, 2012; Hatch and Schultz, 2017), accounting (Preston, 2006; Booth et al., 2007) and international business research (Kobrak et al., 2018; Lubinski, 2014). The core journals for business history include a plethora of examples of historical case study, evident in every issue, and therefore, a summary of these would be nearly impossible in the space of a chapter. Outside of key business history journals (i.e. *Business History*, *Enterprise & Society* and *Business History Review*), one can see an emergent strand of historical case study papers offering contextualised explanations for known (and unknown) phenomena (Decker, 2014; Maclean et al., 2018; Lubinski and Wadhwani, 2020). A classic characteristic of historical case study is the analysis of the subject amongst and in relation to key endogenous and exogenous factors. Maclean et al.'s (2018) study of Hilton International and how this organisation has been shaped by the political ideologies held internally and externally, is an excellent example of how historical case study has made a significant impact on organisation research. The use of the past literature also incorporates excellent use of historical cases to examine how organisations use their pasts either to inform strategic decisions (consciously or unconsciously) or gain legitimacy. For example, Lubinski's (2014) case involves a collection of German firms that operated in India from 1890 until the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. Building on this, the literature on collective memory (Rintamäki et al., 2023) and forgetting (Anteby & Molnar, 2012) employs historical case study via interviews often as a way of showing how organisations navigate collective memory and occasionally, use these to further their strategic goals (e.g., Crawford et al., 2022).

Historical Case Study Use in IB Journals

Despite the subject and temporal boundaries mentioned above, the unit and level of analysis in historical case studies vary greatly, as does the timeframe in which they are examined.

Classic IB historical case studies often incorporate an evaluation of multinational strategy or internationalisation over time. Kobrak et al. (2018) draws illuminating conclusions from the historical context surrounding German firm decision making in the interwar period. Similarly, historical case studies in IB also place heavy emphasis on the role of contextually significant phenomena on global business, for example social movements, key events or watersheds in history. For example, Minefee and Bucheli (2021) analyse Royal Dutch/Shell in the context of apartheid South Africa in the 1980s and their strategies for dealing with the impact of doing business in such an economy.

The purpose of using historical case in IB research is also vastly varied. For example, Amdam and Benito (2022) use a key firm decision, Harvard Business School’s first FDI venture, to demonstrate how different perceptions of time in FDI research and IB research more broadly can impact on understanding of the internationalisation process. Through the case, the authors advocate a ‘multitemporal’ view that can provide valuable insights into ‘complex processes over a long period of time’ (Amdam and Benito, 2022, p. 10). Others combine multiple cases into one study to demonstrate the ways in which firms reacted to or were impacted by specific environmental factors. For instance, Aldous and Conroy (2021) examine how British MNEs, operating in India, responded to Indian Independence by geographically adapting their strategy. Similarly, Bucheli and Salvaj (2018) analyse non-market strategies of numerous multinationals operating in Chile while Kothari et al. (2013) employed a ‘multiple company historical analysis’ to examine emerging market MNCs, highlighting the utility of multiple cases to isolate the diversity of experiences of EMNC’s which permits for certain generalisations.

Figure 14.1 and Table 14.1 detail a sample of historical case study use (18 articles). In each article, the authors employed different methods (e.g., interviews, social network analysis, narrative approaches) to construct their historical case. The temporal range was also varied. However, by and large most still retained the unit of analysis as the firm through single case study.

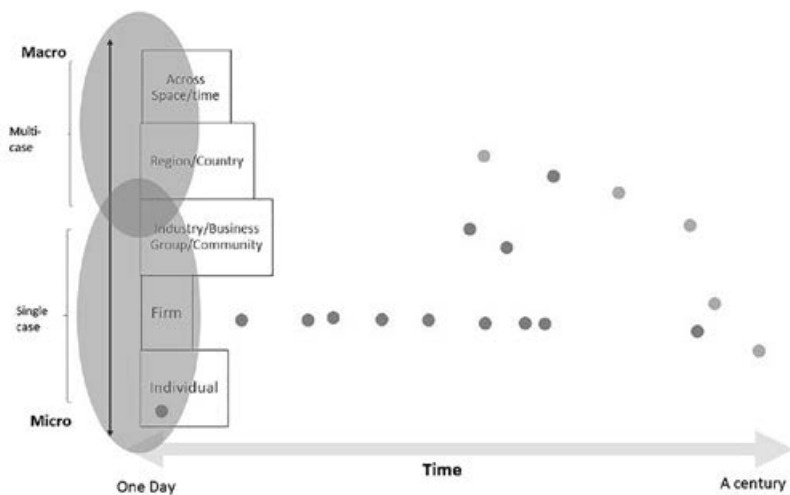


Figure 14.1 *Subject-temporal boundaries of historical case studies within IB journals*

Table 14.1 Subject-temporal boundaries of historical case studies within IB journals

Author(s)	Year	Title	Time	Unit of Analysis	Single or Multi-Case?
Kobrak et al.	2018	Escape FDI and varieties of capitalism: Why history matters in international business	Inter-war period	A period	Multi-case
Ma et al.	2013	How much does subnational region matter to foreign subsidiary performance? Evidence from <i>Fortune</i> Global 500 Corporations' investment in China	8 years	Country	Multi-case
Haley & Boje	2014	Storytelling the internationalization of the multinational enterprise	Span of organisational memory	Firm	Single case
Pant & Ramachandran	2017	Navigating identity duality in multinational subsidiaries: A paradox lens on identity claims at Hindustan Unilever 1959–2015	66 years	Firm	Single case
Blankenburg Holm et al.	2015	From outsider to insider: Opportunity development in foreign market networks	30 years	Firm	Single case
Bucheli & Aguilera	2010	Political survival, energy policies, and multinational corporations	A century	Firm in multiple countries	Multi-case
Bucheli & Salvaj	2018	Political connections, the liability of foreignness, and legitimacy: A business historical analysis of multinationals' strategies in Chile	41 years	Country	Multi-case
Scalera et al.	2014	A longitudinal study of MNE innovation: The case of Goodyear	26 years	Firm	Single case
Bucheli et al.	2019	Better together: How multinationals come together with business groups in times of economic and political transitions	40 years	Business groups/networks	Single case
Da Silva Lopes	2010	The entrepreneur, ownership advantages and the eclectic paradigm	40 years	Industry	Single case
Cheung et al.	2020	Institutional logics and the internationalization of a state-owned enterprise: Evaluation of international venture opportunities by Telecom Finland 1987–1998	21 years	Firm	Single case
Smith	2016	An LBV perspective on political risk management in a multinational bank during the First World War	5 years	Firm	Single case
Hatani	2016	Institutional plasticity in public–private interactions: Why Japan's port reform failed	50 years	Location (port)	Single case
Amdam & Benito	2022	Temporality and the first foreign direct investment	1 year	Specific firm decision	
Aldous & Conroy	2021	Navigating institutional change: An historical perspective of firm responses to pro-market reversals	3 epochs	Collection of firms and an event	Multi-case
Kothari et al.	2013	Rules of the game for emerging market multinational companies from China and India	Varied depending on case and company founding	Firm	Multi-case
Minefee & Bucheli	2021	MNC responses to international NGO activist campaigns: Evidence from Royal Dutch/Shell in apartheid South Africa.	10 years	Firm	Single case
Niittymies et al.	2022	Temporality and firm de-internationalization: Three historical approaches	20 years	Firm	Single case

Although the intention was to choose a sample of historical case study use from any year, it became evident that historical case study use in IB journals is a phenomenon of the past 10–20 years, with most studies emerging in the last 8–10. Much of this was likely in response to calls from scholars such as Jones and Khanna (2006) to ‘bring history (back) into IB research’ and Burgelman (2011) on the role of history in longitudinal qualitative research, which largely relies on the case study for framing. Of course, within business and economic history publications use of the historical case study to examine aspects of global business and globalisation is a rather long tradition (Wilkins and Hill, 1964; Wilkins, 1988). Despite the longevity of historical case study and the authors own use of them, below is an attempt at outlining the process undertaken to construct one.

DOING HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES

Selecting a Case

The process of selecting a case is as varied as the data used in constructing cases. Not all who adopt historical case studies set out to do so or have a topic in mind. At times, historical case studies emerge organically from the archive. A researcher enters this research site, selects data on an industry, place, firm, individual, and while they may set out and write a case study based on their initial intended topic, it does not always occur this way. Presence in the archive can reveal hidden units of analysis that warrant further investigation or offer insight into significant phenomena. Alternatively, archives can also not reveal seemingly integral parts of a historical story and thus, these ‘silences’ become a case study (Decker, 2013). Suitability of the case is also something that must be considered and is an essential part of the development stage of case study research. Suitability is thus linked intimately to purpose: Does the case address the aims of the study? Does it address the key research questions or hypotheses? (Vissak and Francioni, 2013).

Navigating the Archives for Developing Historical Case Studies

Setting out to conduct a historical case is not a simple task, it takes quite a bit of ground work as well as visits and revisits to the research site. The beauty of business history, or any history, is the rigour of its archival research. Historians, particularly those of historical periods where existing data is limited, undertake a certain degree of archival detective work, culminating in multiple sources and a patchwork of data, spliced together to present a holistic view of ‘the case’.

The archival process in case study research is delineated by Welch (2000) as five critical stages: discovery, access, assessment, sifting and cross-checking. The process described, while not incorrect, outlines the basics of the archival process and perhaps ignores more of the nuances of the archival research process. That said, for researchers new to archival research, Welch’s explanation provides integral first steps. One important element for researchers to acknowledge is that the archive is constructed and, therefore, how they are constructed and what is included will shape the historical case studies that are an output of these spaces (Popp and Fellman, 2019). The intentions behind document survival will impact upon how history is written and thus, is essentially a limitation to archival research.

One must also acknowledge the use of oral history in historical case study construction (Crawford et al., 2022). Oral histories are typically captured in two ways: one, the researcher conducts interviews with a focus on the past from living participants and two, the researcher utilises collections of recorded oral histories that are generated over time (Lamberg et al., 2021). Oral histories are frequently used together with archival documents to piece together a case study through data and method triangulation.

Constructing the Case Study: Data Diversity and Triangulation

Data and method triangulation accompany archival work, given the diversity of data available there, the multiple sites of research in some cases, and at times the gaps that appear. The danger of taking too wide a lens in historical case studies is that it creates opportunity to *miss* things. The benefit of using historical methods is the rigour and forensic-like reading of documents that often occurs. Therefore, one must find the correct balance between data variation and method, driven by theory, to shape a complete and rigorous case study.

Building on Nielsen et al.’s (2020) review of various forms of triangulation, the matrix in Figure 14.2 outlines the products of method triangulation and data variation inherent in case research. In this respect, we think of the historical case less as a method but as an approach for framing research and, thus, the relationship between method and data is important. Constructing the case study is about piecing data together in a logical order; method triangulation might encourage illumination of hidden elements and using multiple data types and collections may be necessary to fill in the gaps.

		<u>Data Variation</u>	
		Singular Data Type	Multiple Data Types
<u>Method Triangulation</u>	Multiple methods	Simple Mixed Method Case	Complex Mixed Method Case
	Singular method	Simple Case	Multi-Source Analysis

Figure 14.2 Method-data matrix for case study construction

Drawing Out Significance

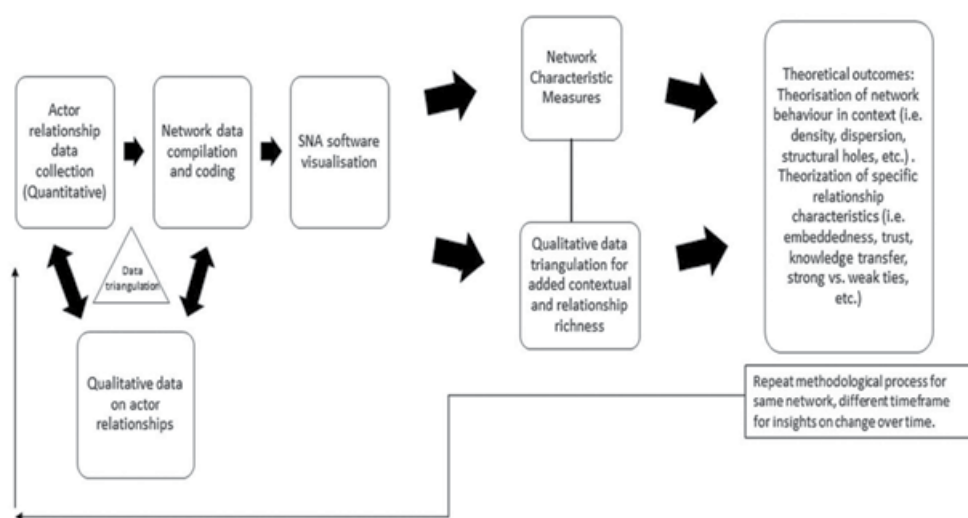
As Welch et al. (2022) describes, one of the core uses of historical case study is that it illuminates phenomena in context which allows for theorisation of the context in return. In particular, this is where historical case studies diverge from simply longitudinal cases, because of the emphasis of context and the intersection of meaning between the unit of analysis and the environment in which it exists (Decker, 2022, p. 4). Case studies can be theorised in a way that allows us to see ‘connections between different contexts’ (Ryan et al., 2002, p. 149). In certain instances, this can also serve to build new theory or validate (or invalidate) current theory, provided appropriate contextual sensitivity is adopted.

A CASE OF A HISTORICAL CASE AND DRAWING WIDER CONCLUSIONS

The following is an exploration into how I came to construct a case on the Liverpool–New York trade network and more specifically on the case of Ferguson, Ogden & Day–Bolton, Ogden & Co., a transatlantic partnership that survived many crises, until it did not. The story of this firm has been pieced together through multiple sources, multiple archives across continents. The fact that this firm formed over 200 years ago plays a part in the patchiness of its history. This case study was one of many isolated in the Liverpool–New York trade network, the subject of a larger research project. Analysing the case of this network, and this firm within it, allowed for important conclusions to be drawn about the nature and survival of transatlantic networks in time of flux and firm strategies for navigating complex barriers to commercial processes. In keeping with the process listed above, this case was only partially pre-selected. In undertaking research into the Liverpool–New York trade network, I undertook the following steps to uncover this case:

- *Select the subject and geographic parameters:* Liverpool was always the starting point to examine 18th- and 19th-century trade networks, given its rise to prominence in this period, which was well-established by other scholars (Hyde, 1971). In the search for a transatlantic partner to this port, New York was an obvious choice. It had remained a British port during the American Revolutionary War (1789–1775) and its growth in the 19th century was marked. However, at the stage of selection, I was not aware of how intertwined the two ports’ histories would end up being, and how the complexity of the trade network both helped and hindered the growth of each respective port economy and the mercantile firms within them.
- *Set temporal boundaries for the project:* 1763 was selected as the starting point (the end of the seven years’ war) and 1833 as the end date (abolishment of slavery in the British Empire). This date was later pushed back to 1838 to incorporate the Panic of 1837 because it was later found to be a critical watershed for this network.
- *Initial archival visits to UK archives:* the discovery here was that little qualitative material relevant to this network was contained in UK archives beyond trade records. Therefore, the trade between the two ports could be pieced together as an essential part of the network function but this did little to illuminate network relationships.

- *US archive visits*: The visits to New York archives such as the New York Historical Society and New York Public Library manuscripts collection were much more fruitful. I spent a total of two months in these archives collecting data. The archives permitted photography and therefore, I was able to collect nearly 5000 photographs of primary material, mainly correspondence from firms that operated within the Liverpool–New York trade network.
- *Dealing with spotty data*: the trade accounts and custom house records or newspapers allowed for an account of all firms trading between Liverpool and New York, so a network based on commercial exchange could be constructed. This data is thought to be mostly complete. However, qualitative material which provided insight into key relationships was far less accessible. Much did not survive and only a few firms appeared to have a chronologically complete record of their correspondence. At times, only one side of the correspondence existed and so I was faced with half conversations where much had to be inferred.
- *Piecing together the broader network case*: to build a comprehensive case study of this network I used a combination of data and method triangulation which included both text-based analysis of qualitative material, statistical analysis of trade records and social network analysis to produce network visualisations using network analysis software. This followed the research process outlined by Buchnea and Elsahn (2022) and provided in Figure 14.3.



Source: Buchnea and Elsahn (2022).

Figure 14.3 Historical social network analysis methodological process model

- *Drawing out case studies from within*: an aim and purpose of the study was to delve deeper into specific relationships illuminated by the network. I pinpointed key firms for further investigation. This process was done alongside the construction of the network given that once relationships were illuminated, their records could be searched in archives in the UK,

US and farther afield. This process made case construction a long and difficult undertaking but was necessary in order to ensure veracity in the data. Through this process and the reading of the correspondence, the case of Ferguson, Ogden & Day–Bolton, Ogden & Co. was selected to highlight particular features of the network and responses to key crises it faced. The key findings of the case timeline are detailed below.

Jonathan Ogden, an influential merchant in New York who first appeared in the New York–Liverpool trade in the 1790s, started his life as a textile manufacturer in Yorkshire. An immigrant to New York, he soon entered the commercial business as part of the British expatriate firm, Ferguson, Ogden & Co (Killick, 1974). Killick (1974) has written a detailed case study of Bolton, Ogden & Co.; however, I was not aware of this case until the network revealed this firm. Killick's account is a traditional narrative account of the growth of this textile trading firm. Re-examining this firm through the archives with the purpose of constructing a case illuminating the nature of firm and network survival can breathe new life into the case.

In the first decade of the 19th century, Ferguson, Ogden & Co. traded frequently with Hobsons & Bolton, of which Thomas Bolton was the key contact in Liverpool (Ogden Papers, 1800–1804). By 1814, the two firms had formed a transatlantic partnership under the name of Bolton, Ogden & Co. The wider case study of the network revealed that this sort of partnership was common and almost expected of firms with highly embedded ties in this network. The archival collections for Jonathan Ogden and his respective firm reveal the nature of this networks. The firm possessed an extensive network in both New York and Liverpool, but also farther afield which gave them access to cotton dealers in the South, dyestuffs and other commodities that were traded to Liverpool and other parts of Europe.¹ Their networks in the productive centres of Lancashire and Yorkshire flourished (John Ogden to Tennants & Petterson of Leeds (22 Feb 1803), OP, NYHS). The network case study demonstrated that a critical point of survival or failure for these firms was the Anglo-American War (1812–1815) which saw a cessation of direct trade between the two ports through the Orders in Council. Not many firms survived to see the period of growth that followed this conflict, but Bolton, Ogden & Co. did, which was a key motivation for studying this firm further. Their survival was likely due in part to their well-established networks and a diverse commodity portfolio. The success of Ogden as a merchant in New York was noticed by others in the network and his actions in business were often markers to others of what sorts of trade to engage in (J. A. Willink to J. and D. A. Willink, 22 Nov 1817).

However, Ogden also exemplified brash and careless decision-making at a number of critical points. A good example of this is the cotton bubble of 1825 to 1826. The cotton bubble was a key economic crisis which directly impacted the US and the UK who were engaged in a growing cotton and textile exchange, precipitated by a vast fluctuation in the price of cotton in UK markets. Bolton, Ogden & Co. both traded in cotton and provided credit to firms in the cotton trade and textile manufacturing industry. During this crisis, Ogden made unwise decisions concerning shipments of cotton and by sending large quantities after the price dropped in Liverpool and extended enormous amounts of credits to firms in Liverpool. His actions put the transatlantic partnership at risk of serious losses. Following the near-ruin, one of the firm's partners in New York, John Day, expressed his wishes for his business partner for the future:

¹ Letters to Liverpool firm Hannay & Logan indicate that Ogden had also been shipping coffee to Hamburg; John Ogden to Hannay & Logan (17 Mar 1803), OP, NYHS.

'let moderation in all things for the future be your constant and invariable rule of action ... years are accumulating too fast upon you for you to jeopardise again, as has been the case, your Family's and your Friends' happiness and peace of mind' (John Day to Ogden, 29 May 1826). It was the resourcefulness of Bolton which led to a favourable sale of the cotton and thus spared the firm. Although Ogden, on occasion, caused damage to the business, his adventurous and perhaps risky behaviour, as well as his portfolio of useful contacts, was responsible for much of the firm's success up to this point.

Misfortune once again greeted the firm in the Spring of 1837. The Panic of 1837 was another cross-border economic crisis which occurred because of a loss in confidence in American remittances by British firms as a result of a series of crop failures and changes to American monetary policy (Rosseau, 2002; Lepler, 2013). In March, Bolton warned Ogden to not have too much confidence in the paper issued by American drafters 'for you may rely that you have to encounter a worse period than 1825' (Bolton to Ogden, 18 Mar 1837). In his letters, Ogden appears to be the optimist, declaring that cotton consumption was on the rise and continuing to transact in that commodity. The only activity Bolton advised was to collect debts from American houses as quickly as possible, 'be firm as well as prompt in obtaining from them as much more as you can for the low price of cotton and other passing events must we think involve them in difficulties from which with all their skill in financing they will not be able to extricate themselves' (Bolton to Ogden, 7 Mar 1837). Through April and May, Bolton wrote Ogden of further failures in Liverpool, growing mistrust of American houses and the numerous firms which were refusing to accept Ogden's drafts (Bolton to Ogden, 22 Apr 1837, 8 May 1837 and 17 May 1837). In a letter dated 2nd of June, Bolton ends by stating, 'June will be a most trying month to all houses in the American trade' (Bolton to Ogden, 2 June 1837). Letters from Bolton to Ogden in New York for the remainder of the month detail the Bank's intervention in their business and sadly, the appropriation of their private property to pay their debts (Bolton to Ogden, 17 Jun 1837 and 20 Jun 1837).

The above case was constructed through careful reading of multiple manuscript collections (though mostly one-sided), sifting through trade records and incoming vessel lists in New York and Liverpool newspapers. Though not detailed in its entirety here, it presents the key watersheds in the history of the firm. Of course, the gaps persist but in reconstructing the past through historical case study, one accepts that gaps need to be navigated. The examination of this case in key points of their network life highlight the importance of grounding cases in context. It also allows for conclusions to be drawn about the nature of networked relationships, survival and responses to and outcomes of crises. In constructing a case, we may assume some things about the future and in that sense, we are using a case or better yet, a collection of cases to generalise future patterns and make predictions. For instance, Bolton, Ogden & Co.'s highly embedded transatlantic network saved them from ruin in the Cotton Bubble of 1826. However, it could not save them in the Panic of 1837, likely because contextual factors made doing so unfavourable or even impossible. From this (and other similar case studies within this network), we can assume that embedded networks protect firms when contextual factors allow for it (Buchnea, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The historical case study detailed above, like many historical case studies, was constructed in a piecemeal process that led to a *somewhat* complete picture of that firm's life. However, historians do not often describe their research process in such detailed terms because often, historical case studies are constructed using non-linear processes of endless detective work culminating in a patchwork of data that has been triangulated in order to ensure authenticity and accuracy. It is encouraging to see the use of historical case study emerging in the last decade as a respected methodological approach or framework. Its use in some of the leading business and management journals signifies a general openness towards methods and approaches, particularly from a qualitative tradition. Greater emphasis on context and 'contextualised explanation' provides an excellent forum for the historical case study. Indeed, scholars such as Welch et al. (2011) have set the stage for many who use or plan to use historical case study to take advantage of the wealth of data contained in archives to add to our kaleidoscopic understanding of how organisations strategise, evolve and grow.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Amdam RP and Benito GR (2022) Temporality and the first foreign direct investment. *Journal of World Business* 57(5), 101363.

A fantastic illumination of a case of a finite decision in context published in a top IB journal. Scholars interested in publishing historical case studies in IB journals should use this one as an exemplar.

- (2) Eisenhardt KM (1989) Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14(4), 532–550.

Eisenhardt produces an invaluable guide to case study development and theorising from the case in this 1989 article. It is a seminal work which should be standard reading for all wishing to construct theory-building case studies.

- (3) Gerring J (2007) Is there a (viable) crucial-case method? *Comparative Political Studies* 40(3), 231–253.

Here, Gerring offers an evaluation of the use of the case study and its usefulness in generating, confirming or disproving theories. Scholars interested in exploring why we might employ the case study will find rich debate here.

- (4) Popp A and Holt R (2013) Entrepreneurship and being: The case of the Shaws. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 25(1–2), 52–68.

Another exemplar of excellent historical case building with particular sensitivity to the complexity of source collection and source reading. This study demonstrates how even the most traditional historical case study, utilising a narrative approach (among others) can be impactful in business and management research.

- (5) Yin RK (2014) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, fifth edition. London, UK: Sage.

Yin's work, first written in 1984, provides the essential guide for constructing case studies. It should be the first port of call for anyone undertaking a case study; however, it is not history-specific so the reader must be mindful of the subtleties of historical research as well.

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PART III

HISTORICAL PRACTICES OF ANALYSING DATA AND SOURCES

15. Critical hermeneutics: deriving meaning from historical sources

R. Daniel Wadhvani

INTRODUCTION

Historical research typically entails interpreting the meaning of textual sources. Certain forms of interpretation involve establishing “what happened” with regard to an event or development of interest – who was there, what did they do, when did they do it – that employ source criticism to produce a credible historical representation (Kipping et al., 2013; Wadhvani and Decker, 2017). But most historical interpretation also grapples with deeper questions of understanding: what did the text mean in the context in which it was produced, why did the historical actors come to understand it that way, and what implications do those meanings have for us today? Hermeneutics, a body of philosophy about how a reader interprets the meaning of a text, has long played a pivotal role in shaping historical methods with regard to the challenging task of attaining “understanding” (Howell and Prevanier, 2001; Gardner, 2010). In this chapter I provide an introduction to hermeneutic thought and methods in history with the aim of highlighting its value to the study of management, organizations and organizing.

A number of scholars have previously outlined effective hermeneutic approaches to interpreting communication in and around organizations (Phillips and Brown, 1993; Prasad, 2002). These publications have elaborated on critical hermeneutic methodologies for interpreting contemporary organizational communications (Phillips and Brown, 1993; Khaire and Wadhvani, 2010), for analyzing power (Prasad and Mir, 2002; Myrden et al., 2011), for cultivating greater individual reflexivity (Robinson and Kerr, 2015), and for grappling with the challenges of making normative claims (Stutz and Sachs, 2018). These works, however, do not focus per se on the particular challenges and opportunities that “temporal distance” between past and present creates in the case of historical interpretation (Phillips, 2013; Decker et al., 2021). This chapter therefore focuses in particular on the role of hermeneutic thought and method with regard to the challenges and opportunities that temporal distance presents for interpreting historical texts.

The approach I describe is based in particular on the hermeneutic thought of Paul Ricoeur (1976, 1991, 2004) and is sometimes referred to as “critical hermeneutics.” The way I will refer to “critical hermeneutics,” however, will be somewhat different than the way it has been previously treated in management research. In organizational research, the focus of “the critical” in critical hermeneutics is that it is “concerned primarily with uncovering the relations of power and domination that go into the very formation of a text” (Myrden et al., 2011: 441). While my account does not ignore the importance of power, its main emphasis will be on another form of criticism that lies at the core of hermeneutics: an interpreter’s critical understanding of themselves and their culture. As Ricoeur (1991: 118) explains, hermeneutic interpretation ultimately culminates in “self-interpretation of a subject who henceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself.”

The process of historical interpretation from a critical hermeneutic perspective, therefore, needs to be conceived as dialectical: in order for researchers to effectively understand their historical texts they must be willing to challenge their own preconceptions, including the settled theoretical constructs and explanations they hold in the present. It is this self-critique and self-understanding that arises from a critical hermeneutic approach to reading a historical text that distinguishes it from other forms of textual interpretation used in management. I will further argue that it has distinctive value for theorizing in organizational research.

The chapter is organized into five main sections. I begin by explaining what hermeneutics is and then elaborate on why it has long played a particularly important role in historical interpretation. Next, drawing on Ricoeur's approach to critical hermeneutic interpretation as involving a dialectic of "distanciation" and "appropriation," I describe how hermeneutic reasoning can be used as a method for the interpretation of historical sources. I will then illustrate this method using an example from my own research. I conclude by discussing how critical hermeneutic methods can be linked to the related challenge of theorizing from history.

WHAT IS HERMENEUTICS?

Stated most simply, hermeneutics is a body of thought about interpretation that posits that a reader does not derive meaning from the formal attributes of a text alone but also by implicitly or explicitly placing a text into a broader context. For a reader, the meaning of a single word of text – for example, pencil – derives both from its dictionary definition and from the context in which it is read. Consider this sentence from a hypothetical novel: "A pencil was used to stab the victim." In this example, the meaning of the word pencil does not conform to its denotative or dictionary definition alone: "an instrument for writing or drawing, consisting of a thin stick of graphite or a similar substance enclosed in a long thin piece of wood or fixed in a plastic case." Rather, the meaning of the word as used is fundamentally recast by the context of the sentence – that is, a pencil can be a weapon. Likewise, if the sentence above appears in a novel in which the victim later dies, "pencil" takes yet another meaning when put in that context: a murder weapon. Ultimately, it is the deeper, secondary meaning of "pencil" – in which an instrument of communication is used, literally or figuratively, as a murder weapon – that surprises us as readers and holds the potential to expand our understandings of the motives and effects of writing.

Hermeneutic thought further extends this view of interpretation to posit that an entire document (e.g. a book, an article, a letter) is interpreted within a cultural context, which in turn can be defined as the broader body of texts within which a focal text is placed. Phillips and Brown (1993: 1550) explain this succinctly in saying that in hermeneutic thought "culture is a more or less organized system of texts that are used to interpret and structure the daily flow of social life." If we imagine the text described above as being of particular importance in a culture that is foreign to us in time and place, we can imagine the word "pencil" taking on a host of meanings and connotations, related perhaps to danger or criminality, that would be completely surprising and different from our assumptions of its meaning based on its denotative and cultural meanings in our own time and place. Ricoeur (1991: 245) hence describes the purpose of critical hermeneutic interpretation as revealing "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative."

Moreover, hermeneutic thought posits that we “preconceive” the context for a text even before we consciously interpret it. In effect, we inhabit an intertextual cultural world of meanings through which we pre-interpret texts based on our interests and intentions even before we read them. For example, before we read an organization’s annual report we pre-interpret it based on our cultural preconceptions of what an annual report ought to be about. Hermeneutics thus rejects the notion that interpretation is either a purely objective experience or a purely subjective one, since our initial interest in a text inevitably takes shape through our cultural assumptions about its form and meaning. Ricoeur (1976: 686) writes that our interpretations are “always preceded by an experience of belonging-to, of belonging to what knowledge attempts to posit in front of the subject as its object of knowledge.” Even before we encounter the word “pencil” in the text above we hold a number of preconceptions of the meaning of the word; we might already anticipate that “pencil” means a yellow No. 2 pencil, given their widespread use in classrooms and on exams, or perhaps infer an association to editable writing in contrast to writing permanently in ink. In this way, our pre-interpretive associations with a text are shaped by our own culture and our own histories, which already work to ascribe meanings to a text before we actually engage in the act of reading.

Critical hermeneutics, in turn, involves remaining “open” to the text in ways that allow it to challenge our preconceived meanings and expand our cultural horizons by allowing that a text may have a very different context and meaning than the one we expect it to. For example, chances are that none of our preconceived associations with the word “pencil” produce associations with a weapon or murder or criminality. Yet, its use in the hypothetical text above expands its meaning in a way that implies its effectiveness as a weapon in attacking another person – whether literally or figuratively. Critical hermeneutic interpretation can hence be understood as proceeding in a way in which an interpreter remains open to the ways in which a text might hold the potential to reconfigure our cultural prejudices and how they shape our perception of the world.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

Historical interpretation of sources introduces to hermeneutic reasoning the challenges and opportunities created by “temporal distance” between the interpreter in the present and a text (i.e. a “trace”) that was produced in the past (Phillips, 2013; Decker et al., 2021). Temporal distance (also known as “historical distance”) is sometimes understood as the objective passage of time between an event in the past and an interpreter in the present that allows for a “dispassionate” or “objective” interpretation. In contemporary historical thought, however, temporal distance typically refers to a variety of ways in which an interpreter may choose to bridge the “then” and “now” of historical understanding – the divide between the context in which a historical text was produced and the interpreter’s own context in the present. Early hermeneutic thought, which still remains influential and valuable in historical practice, emphasized the need for an interpreter to take an empathetic stance in interpretation in order to overcome temporal distance; “understanding” required a kind of psychological effort to imagine a historical actors’ mind and world (Dilthey, [1910] 2002).

More recent hermeneutic thought, especially since Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (1975), has emphasized the unique interpretive opportunities as well as challenges of temporal distance. If the aim of historical interpretation is not only to understand a text in the past but also

to understand oneself and one's own culture better, then "temporal distance" creates a productive opportunity for self-understanding. It does so because it is difficult to gain critical distance when examining one's own culture up close, precisely because the interpreter, the text, and the author may share the same cultural preconceptions (Gadamer, 1975). The temporal distance of history hence creates the essential opportunity to better understand one's culture in the present. The particular theoretical model for how temporal distance could work to produce a critical interpretation differed in the writings of the two late-20th-century philosophers of hermeneutics with greatest influence on historical thought.

For Gadamer (1975), the theoretical model of hermeneutic interpretation was derived from the model of a conversation or dialogue (Smith, 1987; Gardner, 2010). Based on such a model, the written text represents a faded trace or mark of a communicative act in the form of speech or conversation and is situated in a specific moment in time. While the temporal distance between that communicative action in the past and the interpretation in the present can never be fully overcome to create the kind of understanding one could produce through conversation in a shared present, the interpreter could proceed by "participating" in dialogue with the *text*. Though the interpreter could never fully understand the conversation on which a text was based because that context is lost to time, he or she can attain what Gadamer called a "fusion of horizons." By using the text to consider how the interpreter's interpretive horizon was similar or different from one's own, the interpreter at least gained the capacity to generate a new and broader understanding of one's own time and oneself. However, as *Truth or Method*, the title of Gadamer's magnum opus suggested, this interpretive process could not be rendered as a "method," in the social scientific sense, since no set of techniques for analyzing a historical text could actually bring back the past context of the conversation it captured.

Ricoeur (1976) embraced Gadamer's notion that temporal distance afforded an opportunity for interpretive, self-understanding but rejected both the "conversational model" for interpreting a text and the conclusion that the interpretive process could not be reflected in method. The nature of a text, he responded, lay precisely in the way it was relationally linked, through its discourse, to other texts across time and space. This made it very different than a conversation, which was situated in a specific time and place. A critical hermeneutic interpretation of texts needed to recognize how the "world of the text" was hence distinct and different from the speech-based model of the conversation (Smith, 1987).

Temporal distance still mattered in Ricoeur's view, but it was not "the brute fact of distance" (1976) of an unrecoverable past moment from the here and now of the present, but rather something more akin to seeing the bigger picture in which the discourse of the text was situated – taking the stance of interpreting a text from a distance. "The question is not the measurable gap that separates us from the past," he explained (*ibid.*). "This gap is rather the place of and the occasion for a mediation that may be characterized as textual or quasi-textual in nature." Distanciation of this sort allowed an interpreter to step back and to see anew the relationship between a focal text and other texts and contexts than the ones an interpreter had preconceived. The next section articulates a historical interpretation process model based on interpretive capacity of distanciation.

CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS AND HISTORICAL METHODS

Unlike Gadamer's model of hermeneutic interpretation as a conversation, Ricoeur's approach allowed for clearer methodological implications. For Gadamer, temporal distance was an inherent condition; a fact created by the separation in time between the moment in the past at which a historical actor produced a text and the present in which the interpreter tried to understand it. In freeing textual interpretation from the metaphor of the in-person conversation, Ricoeur's hermeneutics recast historical distance into an interpretive stance, as something more to do with *how* we read. Distanciation could hence be understood as a method for how an interpreter entered the world of the text and deciphered its links to other texts over time and space in order to confront one's own preconceptions and expand one's interpretive horizons.

To depict this interpretive process, I display it using "the hermeneutic circle" in Figure 15.1. The hermeneutic circle or spiral, the classical way in which hermeneutic interpretation has been visualized, depicts the reciprocal relationship between text and context; interpretive meaning arises as a reader places a text in context and in turn understands context from the text. It draws attention to meaning making as a dialectical rather than a denotative process: interpreting a given text in a socio-historical context produces new understandings. Hence, a reader's interpretive horizon expands and new meanings emerge as they are able to place the text in broader contexts.

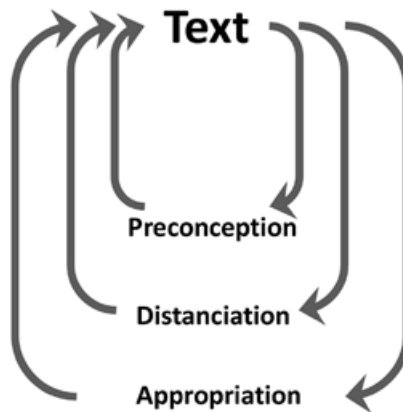


Figure 15.1 Process of critical hermeneutic interpretation

As Figure 15.1 displays, in our initial encounter with historical texts we preconceive what it means and why it is important to us based on our cultural understandings of it in the present. As noted above, philosophical hermeneutics emphasizes that there is no objective point of interpretation outside our culture. Our initial engagement with a historical text is inevitably guided by preconceived notions of it and by our pre-interpretation interest in it. Within many approaches to management research, such as the Eisenhardt approach to case studies (Buchnea, 2023), one might even select a text based on the principle of "theoretical sampling" – in effect pre-interpreting the meaning of the text as belong to a particular theoretical

perspective. Our initial reading is shaped by this preconception, guided by our anticipation of what we will encounter.

Crucial to the critical hermeneutic promise of expanding our understandings, however, is maintaining an “openness” to the historical text that challenges our preconceptions. Ricoeur (1976) posits that this requires embracing “methodological doubt,” in which one is willing to question one’s own interpretation, to which one might include “theoretical doubt” about the theoretical presuppositions that made the text initially seem relevant. Such a stance involves actively looking for aspects of a historical text that strike one as surprising, inconsistent, or problematic in comparison to initial expectations – hence serving as an entry point to understanding the text as somehow fundamentally different from its preconceived interpretation. This move initiates a second round of interpretation based on “distanciation” or “externalizing” the text from one’s situated experience by trying to place it in historical context that is different from one’s own.

But distanciation as a methodological move also involves not limiting the text to the specific author and circumstances of its creation. Unlike situated conversations, texts hold the possibility of extending their meaning outward from the specific moment and place of their production and it is in identifying these patterned ways in which a text is part of a broader discourse that distanciation holds the promise of identifying deeper cultural meanings (Smith, 1987). As a practical matter, this can proceed by identifying substantive themes or structures in the text that can be linked to other texts that reflect broader contexts, especially ones that are different from the contexts in which they had been preconceived. This practice is consistent with the hermeneutic stance of treating culture as an intertwined web of texts. In historical interpretation, this process of distanciation can proceed using both credible secondary sources and other primary sources. Secondary sources, in effect, provide alternative contexts for extending the text across time and place, while focused primary sources can provide opportunities to confirm, modify, or extend one’s understandings of the text over time and place.

Appropriation, the third interpretive stage, involves the process of incorporating one’s insights from distanciation into one’s own cultural and conceptual horizons in the present. This operates by considering how those interpretive insights recast major questions, assumptions, constructs, and claims that are commonly accepted in one’s contemporary culture. Within the context of the study of organizations, appropriation might involve considering how one’s historical insights reconfigure key research assumptions, constructs, and theories in ways that change the way one’s contemporaries and oneself views the world of organizations. It is this openness to the ways in which a researcher’s interpretations of the past reshape their understandings in the present that forms the beginnings of what might be called a historical consciousness (Tennent et al., 2020). As Ricoeur (1976: 689–690) puts it, “Consciousness so exposed to history is a consciousness of being affected, the project of letting oneself be affected, and the competence to stay affected.”

AN EXAMPLE

To illustrate the method outlined above I will use it to interpret a document I used in “Poverty’s Monument: Social Problems and Organizational Field Emergence in Historical Perspective,” an article I published in the *Journal of Management Studies* (Wadhwani, 2018). The document is the first annual report of the “Bank for Savings” in New York City and was issued by the

Table 15.1 The growth of savings banking in the United States

Depositors and deposits at all US savings banks, 1835–1880			
Year	Banks	Depositors (000s)	Deposits (\$M)
1820	10	9	1
1830	36	38	6
1835	52	60	11
1840	61	79	14
1845	70	145	25
1850	108	251	43
1855	215	432	84
1860	278	694	149
1865	336	981	243
1870	517	1,631	550
1875	771	2,360	924
1880	629	2,336	819

Source: Wadhwani (2018).

organization’s trustees in 1820. The Bank for Savings was one of the first mutual savings banks established in the United States with the aim of serving working-class savers. As Table 15.1 illustrates, such savings banks grew significantly over the course of the nineteenth century in terms of number of organizations, number of depositors, and financial resources under management. In fact, by the 1870s they accounted for approximately a quarter of assets under management by financial intermediaries in the United States and set the precedent for the entry of a host of other new institutions serving the financial needs of the mass market. The first regulatory report issued by the Bank for Savings in 1820 hence holds the potential for helping an interpreter study the emergence of a form of financial organization that played a major role in shaping the development of modern consumer banking.

Preconception

Our preconception of the text is shaped by a number of cultural and theoretical expectations. As a document produced by a financial institution to meet regulatory requirements, we expect that it will focus on how it complies with the law and with good management and that it will provide evidence as proof of its compliance. Since it is a financial institution, we expect the text will focus on the organization’s financial conditions and operations. Given extant theories of financial intermediation and organization, we would also anticipate that the main governance issues to anticipate would be ones that pertain to principal–agent alignment, transaction costs, and information asymmetries. Indeed, the most well-cited organizational research addressing the historical development of savings banks interprets them exactly from these theoretical perspectives, providing well development theoretical arguments for how their mutual corporate ownership structure served to overcome transaction and agency costs (Rasmusen, 1988; Hansmann, 2000).

A first reading of the document offers much support for our preconceived understanding of the document. We notice that the “sums are generally too small to be received at any of the banks,” confirming the focus on small savers as its main clientele. The report further provides data on depositors and deposits, providing proof that it in fact is serving small savers, and explains that a special committee “invested [the deposits] in the public funds, agreeable by

law.” And, the report explains the specifics of how it has “established a system of management and inspection for the bank,” supporting the theoretical contention that mutual savings banks thrived because they development effective corporate governance.

A conventional approach might at this point entail choosing to proceed by interpreting the organizational form of savings banks as a “case of” variation in organizational form and governance in response to transaction costs. In fact, this was the approach used by extant organizational research on savings banks, treating their form as a response to contracting problem. Leading law and economics scholar Henry Hansmann’s *Ownership of Enterprise* (2000) takes an agency theory perspective to look at various forms of organizations historically, including mutual savings banks, and has garnered 4,331 citations. Finance professor Eric Rasmusen (1988) uses a descriptive quantitative analysis of mutual savings banks to posit a theoretical model for mutual savings banks as efficient organizational solutions for “uninformed depositors.” And one can just as easily imagine a paper that builds theory from the case of the Bank for Savings based on a theoretical sampling of it as a case of “hybrid organization.” Interpretation of historical texts based on preconception, in this sense, may even be especially effective as an approach to building and extending extant theory from history. But proceeding on to a critical hermeneutic reading of the Bank for Saving regulatory report highlights the extent to which such a reading diminishes, and even undermines, our capacity to use history to expand our interpretive and theoretical horizons.

Distanciation

Ricoeur talks of two forms of distanciation as important to an interpretive process that moves beyond initial preconception (see Table 15.2). The first form is similar in both terminology and meaning to Gadamer’s notion of distanciation as a process of recognizing the foreignness or strangeness of the text. This requires shifting interpretive focus from aspects of the text that are familiar and anticipated to those aspects of the text that are surprising or seem to contradict the content and forms the interpreter and/or the scholarly field would expect.

The first column in Table 15.2 excerpts some quotes for the regulatory report that challenge our preconceptions above. I clustered these into three themes. A first set of quotes ascribes socio-historical significance and effects to savings banking that extend well beyond the field of finance, implying the organizational form’s particular importance to political economy, social behavior, and the health of society as a whole. These quotations suggest that savings banks were part of a social movement that sought to create a novel organizational response to poverty. A second set of excerpts referred to the way trustees dispensed moral advice and promoted good habits, the way the institution promoted good over evil, and the philanthropic and spiritual aims of trustees. These contrast with the preconceptions of both extant theories of financial intermediaries and our current financial culture. They point to the philanthropic and educational designs of the organization. A third set of passages refer to some seemingly strange organizational practices when compared to current understandings of the practices of financial institutions, like operating the bank based on voluntary labor, using rotating committees, and running the institution out of the New York Institute (later the New York Institute for the Deaf and Dumb) and the arts council. Careful attention to the strangeness of these excerpts already begins to suggest contexts for the reading of the document (philanthropy, welfare, pauperism) that highlight the insufficiency of our preconceptions based on current financial culture and organization theories.

Table 15.2 Distanciation and appropriation in the interpretive process

Distanciation – Step 1	Distanciation – Step 2	Appropriation
Identify surprising text in focal document and group into themes that loosely link to constructs in management and organization literature.	Contextualize themes within the historical moment by tracing links to other texts (using primary and secondary sources). Use the contextualization to interpret meaning, causes, and consequences of the theme.	Synthesize themes into a new historical narrative. Identify ways the new narrative suggests useful revisions to extant constructs or the introduction of new constructs.
Social Movement Organizations Savings banks are “high in the esteem of the political economist, the practical philanthropist, and the diligent promoter of sound morals” (pp. 6–7) “The habits which a resort to [savings bank] induce, hold out the best pledge for a reduction in the public burdens, as they are connected with indigence and want. They tend to inspire a spirit of independence, and in the moral operation lessen crime, poverty, and disease. They teach a man to depend on his own assertions, encourage industry, frugality, cleanliness, and self-respect and effectually prevent [them]... from applying either to public provision, or private bounty for support” (p. 10)	Questions: Why were savings banks, as an organizational form, understood as so crucial to individual and societal wellbeing? Selected Secondary Sources: Himmelfarb, <i>The Idea of Poverty</i>; Lees, <i>Solidarity of Strangers</i> Selected Primary Sources: Townsend, <i>Dissertation on the Poor Laws</i> (1786); Colquhoun, <i>Treatise on Indigence</i> (1806); Malthus, <i>Essay on Population</i> (1817); Carey, <i>Address to the Wealthy of the Land</i> (1831) Interpretation: Begging in the 18th century, social critiques of existing welfare institutions (i.e. Elizabethan or Old Poor Law) posited that charitable relief <i>caused</i> pauperism by undermining independence and fostering a host of related problems (idleness, drinking, etc.). Reformers introduced savings banks (along with asylums, poor houses, hospitals, and prisons) as a form of organized welfare that avoided the historical mistakes of the Old Poor Law by encouraging citizens to save for their own needs rather than being dependent on others.	Social Crises as Drivers of New Organizational Forms While social movements literature has focused on introduction of specific new organizational forms and fields, social crises in fact create movements that drive organizational innovation across multiple fields. While social movements literature has focused on analysis of collective sensemaking frames, it has not accounted for the role of historical sensemaking in the construction of these frames. I introduce “historical framing” as movement sensemaking that delegitimizes old institutions and produces the notion of a “social crisis.”

Innovation and Organization Design Trustees gave "advice to many of the depositors as they believed would tend to promote careful habits and moral feeling. The gratification which they have received, in numerous instances, have amply repaid the attending committee for this gratuitous labour" (p. 6) "The value of an institution is to be estimated by the evil which it prevents, or the good which it produces" (p. 8) "The effect on the moral habits is not more certain than striking" (p. 8) "In the provision which he is making for futurity, is associated all which can gratify him as a father, a husband, a brother, a guardian, or a friend" (p. 8)	Questions: How does the changing discourse on the institutional principles of social welfare shape the design of the organizational form of the savings bank? Selected Secondary Sources: Katz, <i>In the Shadow of the Poorhouse</i>; Rothman, <i>Discovery of the Asylum</i>; Mohl, <i>Poverty in New York</i> Selected Primary Sources: Society for the Prevention of Pauperism Reports (1818–1821); Thomas Eddy Correspondence; Twiss, <i>A Tract on Savings Banks</i> (1816); PSFS Articles of Association (1816) Interpretation: Savings banks were a cutting-edge organizational response to pauperism that sought to encourage the poor to save rather than to depend on public welfare or private charity. They shared with other new institutions (e.g. schools, asylums, poorhouses) an Enlightenment belief that bad institutions <i>created</i> pauperism and that the design of rational new institutions could produce independent individuals and healthy societies.	Institutions and the Design of Innovations Whereas previous research has shown how design of products and services can help introduce innovation by framing these in the terms of existing institutions, savings banks show how the delegitimization of old institutions can lead to different role of design. In this case, it highlights the role of organizational design as embodying responses to the critiques of old institutions.
Institutional Practices The SB "was opened for deposits in a room of the New York Institution, granted to the Institution by the Academy of the Arts, and approved by the Corporation, for the term of two years, gratis" (p. 3) Management by a "committee of the month" "to receive deposits; to see that entries were duly made; to make inquires as to the situation of the depositors" (p. 3)	Questions: How did savings banks' social welfare origins shape their practices and the evolution of financial institutions over time? Selected Secondary Sources: Lamoreaux, <i>Insider Lending</i>; Willcox, <i>History of PSFS</i>; Olmstead, <i>Mutual Savings Banks in Antebellum America</i> Selected Primary Sources: PSFS Collection; Images of saving bank interiors; individual accounts and memoirs Interpretation: Welfare organizations were primary innovators in the organization and management of modern financial services for the public; for profit financial institutions emulated welfare organizations.	On the Co-Evolution of Welfare and Finance Social-welfare motivated financial institutions (e.g. microlending) are not new but rather crucial to the formation and dynamics of modern financial systems. "Hybrid" organizational forms predated "pure" organizational forms. The boundaries between welfare and finance as fields are constructed and evolve over time as practices evolve and drift between fields.

Ricoeur's second meaning for the interpretive principle of *distanciation* was very different from anything Gadamer had to say. It involved stepping back in a way that allowed one to trace these surprising aspects of a text to other related texts and contexts to which they refer. This practice is based in the premise of treating "culture" as an interrelated web of texts that the focal text is part of. Tracing these links hence becomes part of the hermeneutic method of interpreting a text in relation to its cultural context. This can be done by posing questions that the textual excerpt raises and then by looking incrementally outward to secondary and primary sources that can provide contexts and textual patterns for answering the question. For example, with the second theme I asked "Why were savings banks, as an organizational form, understood as so crucial to individual and societal wellbeing?" Drawing on secondary sources on these topics allowed me to locate savings banks as one of a host of new philanthropic institutions that the same cluster of interlinked reformers were introducing: asylums, schools, poorhouses, each of which sought to "educate" the poor in habits, which they understood as a way to structurally address poverty.

A similar process of *distanciation* by tracing outward from puzzling themes to other texts and broader contexts served to fill out other aspects of an interpretation that transcended the preconception of savings banks as arising in response to transaction cost problems. Using contemporary political economic treatises and secondary sources on changing ideas and policies with regard to poverty and social welfare, I was able to decipher why and how the view of savings banks as an effective response to welfare emerged. Economists and social reformers had increasingly come to see older welfare institutions (particular the Old Poor Law which distributed financial aid to local citizens in need) had come to be framed and understood as the actual cause of poverty and pauperism. While major changes in material circumstances, such as increasing dependence on wage labor for subsistence, may in fact have played a major role in poverty, contemporaries had come to historically frame poverty as caused by bad habits generated by excessive public and charitable generosity. By educating the poor to save for themselves, savings banks were seen as an important shift in organization of welfare. Finally, by tracing savings bank practices to those of other philanthropic institutions, one could begin to understand why savings banks operated out of public institutions and managed the way they did. Existing commercial banks were small private institutions without the physical, managerial, or organizational capacity to interact with mass market. But philanthropies had begun to develop these capabilities.

Drawing these three themes together allowed me to generate a historical narrative that is very different from the one created by the preconceived interpretation and that situated in the history of welfare as much as in the history of finance. The historical plot structure of that narrative is as follows: intellectuals and social reformers worried by rising rates of pauperism in America, framed the causes of poverty as rooted in the morally corrosive effects of the "Old Poor Law," the preexisting system of welfare that provided relatively generous financial support to local residents in need. Savings banks arose and succeeded precisely because they embodied a critique of the Old Poor Law and, like the other institutions that reformers pioneered, focused on the moral rehabilitation and economic self-reliance of the individual. Their success inadvertently drew massive number of depositors and deposits into the financial system, eventually drawing in a set of for-profit financial institutions which had once been reluctant to serve small savers.

Appropriation

To incorporate the interpretive insights generated through distancing into organizational scholarship and theory today, I synthesized the themes into a new historical narrative of the emergence and evolution of the savings bank as an organizational form and drew out its implications for a more deeply historical understanding of institutional theory. The narrative: (a) located the origins of the form in changing social ideas and discourse about the causes of poverty that ascribed it to a degeneration in personal character caused by the payment of welfare itself; (b) identified the savings bank's organizational design as intended to inculcate individual moral improvement, much like the asylum, the poorhouse, and the other institutions reformers established; and (c) explained how the organizational practices it created to provide financial services to working and poor people drifted over subsequent decades into other financial systems and became part of modern retail banking. I then used the narrative to derive more general theoretical claims of how each of the three themes provided useful revisions to extant theoretical constructs or could be used to introduce new constructs.

The first theoretical contribution pertained to how the "social crisis" of poverty that spurred the development of savings banks reshapes our understanding of social movements as drivers of institutional and organizational change. While social movements literature has focused on the introduction of specific new organizational forms and fields, social crises in fact create movements that drive organizational innovation across multiple fields. Moreover, while social movements literature has focused on analysis of collective sensemaking frames, it has not accounted for the role of historical sensemaking in the construction of these frames. I introduce "historical framing" as movement sensemaking that delegitimizes old institutions and produces the meaning of a "social crisis."

The second contribution provided insights into the role of design in innovation. Whereas previous research had shown how design of products and services can help introduce innovation by framing these in the terms of existing institutions, savings banks show how the delegitimization of old institutions can lead to a different role of design. In this case, it highlights the role of organizational design as embodying responses to the critiques of old institutions.

The final contribution pertained to the ways in which the evolution of organizational practices shaped the relationship between fields. Social-welfare-motivated financial institutions (e.g. microlending) are not new but rather crucial to the formation and dynamics of modern financial systems. "Hybrid" organizational forms predated "pure" organizational forms. The boundaries between welfare and finance as fields are constructed and evolve over time as practices evolve and drift between fields.

CONCLUSION

As the process of appropriation makes clear, critical hermeneutic interpretation should be considered not only a method for the interpretation of historical sources but also an approach to theorizing – albeit one that is quite different from existing approaches in organizational research. Much of organizational research uses mechanical metaphors in depicting the relationship between interpretation and theorizing. Texts and qualitative information are analyzed and categorized to "build" or "extend" theory.

In contrast, the discussion of critical hermeneutics as a method in this chapter suggests a visual metaphor for theorizing. Interpretation is not understood as a process of necessarily building on what is already conceptually known but a way of questioning, critiquing and re-seeing what initially seemed familiar in a new light. Such an approach treats organizational theory not only as a scholarly field but also as the cultural community it clearly is – one in which existing theory shapes our preconceptions of phenomena and evidence. In this context, critical hermeneutics and the process of re-envisioning offer a distinctly historical approach to theorizing by questioning the field's theoretical preconceptions.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Khaire, M. and Wadhvani, R.D. 2010. Changing Landscapes: The Construction of Meaning and Value in a New Market Category. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53: 1281–1304.

This article explicitly uses hermeneutic methods to examine the historical construction and value of Indian art as a category of “modern art.” It focuses on the interpretation of auction house catalogue descriptions and their meanings within the context of art market discourse.

- (2) Prasad, A. and Mir, R. 2002. “Digging Deep for Meaning: A Critical Hermeneutic Analysis of CEO Letters to Shareholders in the Oil Industry,” *Journal of Business Communications*, 39: 92–116.

This article analyzes US oil industry CEO letters to shareholders during the 1970s and 1980s in the context of their turbulent relationship with OPEC. The article finds an “Orientalist” trope in the letters that reveals a deeper intent in the meaning that CEOs were trying to construct.

- (3) Wadhvani, R.D. and Decker, S. 2017. Clio's Toolkit: The Practice of Historical Methods in Organization Studies. In *The Routledge Companion to Qualitative Research in Organization Studies* (R. Mir and S. Jain, eds).

This chapter situates hermeneutic interpretation within a broader set of methodological practices that characterize historical approaches to study of organizations.

- (4) Stutz, C. and Sachs, S. 2018. Facing the Normative Challenge: The Potential of Reflexive Historical Research. *Business & Society*, 57: 98–130.

This paper develops hermeneutic methods for historical case study research, particularly in cases that involve ethical evaluations of cultures other than ones own.

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16. Critical realism in historical research

Alistair Mutch

INTRODUCTION

The social theorist Margaret Archer, in arguing for what she terms ‘analytical narratives of emergence’ provides us with the following two concerns about the relationship between theory developed from philosophical premises and evidence gleaned from historical practice. Such analytical narratives, she argues,

can never ever be *grand* precisely because the imperative to narrate derives from recognising the intervention of contingency and the need to examine its effects on the exercise or suspension of the generative powers in question – since outcomes will vary accordingly but unpredictably.

On the other hand, *analytical narratives* are obviously distinct from any version of historical narration tout court, for although social realists in general have no difficulty in accepting the strong likelihood of uniqueness at the level of events, the endorsement of real but unobservable generative mechanisms directs analysis towards the interplay between the real, the actual and the empirical to explain precise outcomes. (Archer, 1995: 343)

This text provides us with an entrée into the challenges posed by relating the philosophical tradition of critical realism to the practicalities of historical research. In this chapter I seek to explain some of the potential that studies rooted in critical realism might bring to the study of organisational history, while being cognisant of some challenges that such application brings. I start with Margaret Archer because her work illustrates well some of the moves that need to be made to make that application successful. The first important point is to note that I introduce Archer as a social theorist, *not* as a critical realist. Such a distinction is important for critical realism as a philosophical tradition that claims to be a conceptual underlabourer for substantive theories, not as a substitute for such theories (Edwards et al., 2014). Archer is crystal clear that her work is based on debates in sociology and social theory. As she notes of her morphogenetic framework (which is outlined below):

Analytical dualism can be used by any researcher to gain theoretical purchase on much smaller problems where the major difficulty of seeing the wood from the trees becomes much more tractable if they can be sorted out into the components of temporal cycles of morphogenesis – however short the time-span involved may be. (Archer, 1996: 228)

However, that does not absolve the researcher from doing the substantive work. The same, then, is true of the relationship between critical realism and history. The former can be immensely valuable in clarifying some of the basic concepts and pointing us in rewarding directions for our inquiries, as I hope to show below.

If one takes the challenges being the use of ideas from critical realism into the framing, investigation and reporting of historical problems and events, then the branch where this has already been demonstrated to good effect is historical sociology. An exemplar of this contribution is the investigation of the origins of the disciplinary revolution by Philip Gorski (2003).

His careful examination of the impact of the ideas unleashed by the Reformation stresses the important contribution of Protestant religious practices, particularly in the Netherlands, to this process. In so doing, he convincingly relocates the origins of the disciplinary revolution proposed by Foucault from eighteenth century France to the sixteenth century Low Countries. Many historians, however, are a little suspicious of the claims of historical sociology, with its focus on the tracing of the origins of key concepts (Gorski, 2018). Their concern is that such a move imposes analytical categories derived from the present on the past, running the risk of searching out evidence that fits the constructs. Sensitive as they are to the vagaries of evidential survival and the uniqueness of historical events, they are often sceptical of the claims of theory. That is not to say that many historians do not work with a sophisticated conceptual apparatus, rather that they prefer to let that apparatus emerge from a detailed engagement with their sources. For example, the historian of the sense of local place in England, Keith Snell, in admitting that ‘I have deliberately not engaged very openly with sociological and cultural theory in this book’ argues that this is because ‘Some of the theoretical literature contains many historical mistakes, and it is probably best to use it as a jumping-off point, inspiring new questions, rather than regard it with too much respect’ (Snell, 2006: 23). A reading of his work, however, indicates a subtle use of theoretical work (Harvey and Maclean, 2023). While some historians might not examine the assumptions that underpin any form of investigation into human activity, it is a caricature to think that this applies across the board. Assuming, for example, that the profoundly unreflexive accounts provided by some commissioned corporate histories can be thought to be characteristic of history in general is a profound mistake (Bowden, 2021; Rowlinson et al., 2023).

In the account that follows I wish to consider three areas where historians might have legitimate concerns about the ambition to provide ‘analytical histories of emergence’ and to show how critical realism might help with these. These three areas are concept formation, the status of evidence and the unique nature of historical events. Rather than providing a guide to critical realism (both because of limitations of space and because good outlines are available elsewhere: Edwards et al., 2014; Porpora, 2015; Sayer, 2010) I seek to weave a consideration of what critical realism can do into a practical consideration of some issue in historical investigation. I seek to do so in particular through an account of my own work on the history of management in public houses in the United Kingdom (Mutch, 2004). I show how that focus emerged from an engagement with organisational theory, specifically new institutionalism, and how it informed a detailed engagement with historical sources (Rowlinson and Hassard 2013; Suddaby et al., 2014). From this discussion of both general historical concerns and my detailed empirical work I then draw out some pointers to the contribution critical realism has made to both. Throughout, I provide further references to the rich bodies of work that have been informed by critical realism, so that those whose interest has been piqued by my overview can take their own investigations further.

CONCERNS

Social Theorists and Use of History

As I have already noted, historians can be suspicious of those who seek to draw lessons from historical material without engaging with historical sources directly. Of particular relevance

to the subject of this chapter are the responses to the work of both Max Weber and Michel Foucault (Cummings and Bridgman, 2023). In both cases, the concern is that conclusions are being drawn from a rather thin set of historical evidence fuelled by assumptions drawn from their contemporary location. In both cases, the evidence on which rather sweeping conclusions are drawn is based on a selective reading of secondary material. Weber's influential but much contested Protestant Ethic thesis, for example, owes much to his reading of Benjamin Franklin (Kadane, 2013: 90). In similar vein, Foucault's work on the place of the confession in the formation of discipline owes much to guides to the practice for those who were to carry it out (Mutch, 2016a). We could term these 'advice manuals' and we know from contemporary examples of the gulf that can exist between the nostrums they contain and how they are deployed in practice. Stuart Elden, for example, recognises Foucault's dependence on 'a fairly small range of secondary material' and, even further, 'it is not clear that Foucault read the texts themselves' relying instead on the work of an earlier historian (whose own assumptions are open to question) (Elden 2002: 37). Pierre Payer (1985) notes that 'for the thesis about the influence of the confessional tradition documentation is virtually non-existent'. Noting that 'the evidence is far more ambiguous than Foucault makes it out to be' this historian observes,

one is placed in the position either of simply taking Foucault's views on faith or waiting for subsequent volumes in the hope of receiving the documentary evidence. To expect a reader to take on faith such a novel thesis about the role of penance in the development of discourses on sexuality is to make unreasonable claims on his credulity and to show contempt for his intelligence. Philosophical speculation about historical movements ought, surely, to be grounded in evidence related to these movements regardless of how attractive the rationality of the thesis. (Payer, 1985: 314)

Concept Formation

It should be noted that these critiques do not question the importance of conceptual discussion and development but rather are concerned that these be founded in the available evidence. Often the concern is that starting with a conceptual apparatus means a search for suitable data. In economic history, in particular, this results in the use of proxy data (Hudson and Ishizu, 2016). That is, as direct evidence of the phenomena under consideration is not available, a data set is constructed from that which is available. This can result in the profoundly anachronistic reading back of data from a more recent time to distant times, as when data about religious affiliations from the nineteenth century is used to test Weber's Protestant ethic hypothesis, which is in essence concerned with the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Ekelund et al., 2006). Often concern about such approaches to evidence is tied to a perception about the scientific method, that is a coupling with a deductive approach concerned with the formulation and testing of hypotheses.

In rejection of such an approach in the face of the difficulties posed by the nature of historical evidence there can be a turn to the inductive methods that characterise much qualitative sociology (Sewell, 2005: 13). However, here the concern from historians is the access to the evidence that is used as support, when interview and observational data are shielded from public view by concerns about ethics and confidentiality. For historians accustomed to giving precise details of the location of evidence based on conventions that are jealously conserved the lack of traceability is a concern (Tennent and Gillett, 2023). There is, however, a further concern about the turn to induction and this is that it deals with the interpretations that participants have of events. Such interpretations are, of course, important, but they can be mistaken.

It is here that debates in critical realism can help. For, drawing on explorations of scientific practice that emphasise what scientists do rather than what they say they do, critical realists favour an abductive approach that takes phenomena and seeks to trace the mechanisms that produce them (Sayer, 2010). That is, critical realism stresses an ontological approach in which the term ‘real’ is properly applied to the properties that produce effects.

A word here is useful on the distinctions given in the quotation from Archer that we started the chapter with, those of the ‘empirical’, the ‘actual’ and the ‘real’. The ‘empirical’ is that which appears to our senses, as when we perceive a rainbow as a coloured arch in the sky. We know that what we are seeing is actually the refraction of light into its component parts as it passes through water droplets. What produces this are the properties of light and water respectively that in particular circumstances combine to produce the optical effect that in turn is processed by the structural properties of the human eye and brain (Mason, 2017). Thus, the task of investigation is to work out the mechanisms that produce effects. Further, in the social realm, the search for such mechanisms is placed firmly in the context of social systems as open systems in which cause and effect needs to be thought of in terms of tendencies rather than laws, tendencies which occur in distinctive contexts (Collier, 1994: 63). Such an approach stresses the importance of time in exploring the conditioned emergence of phenomena. It seeks to trace the conditional influences that play out over time, an approach which clearly favours history.

Status of Evidence

Of course, such an approach is still open to the critique that the search for mechanisms conditions what is explored, whereas for many historians the lesson from detailed work in the archive is the need to be open to surprises – for historians are well aware of the distorting possibilities of record survival (Decker, 2013). Such survival is sometimes haphazard and open to the play of chance, but it can frequently represent the play of power (Coller et al., 2016). Archives, that is, are shaped by decisions about what is important and needs preservation and sometimes, as in the case of British imperial administrations, what needs to be suppressed (Barros, 2023). In organisational terms, this means that it is often the formal documents, such as board minutes, that survive. Often such records are kept for legal purposes, which might not be the records that the historian wishes to see. It is often the mundane documents that are produced as a regular by-product of organisational action that speak loudest if they survive. In her insightful account of changes in administrative practice occasioned by shifts in technology such as the typewriter and the filing cabinet, JoAnne Yates (1989) provides a window into the way in what seem like mundane practices, such as the development of filing systems, changed the nature of hierarchical organisations. What this suggests to us is that as well as being alert to what the very nature of record survival can tell us about organisational priorities, we also need to be aware of both the content and the form of records. That is, archives are often mined for the content but the changing form of the records examined can also be a valuable way into organisational life.

Historical Events

If the nature of evidence is a prime concern for historians, then so too is the unique nature of historical events. As Archer notes, those working in the critical realist tradition cannot but

be aware of the unique nature of events. However, comparative exploration is still possible even when events are considered unique. What is important here is that we are not looking for invariant laws but for the conditioning impact of the contexts in which historical actors find themselves involuntarily placed. The historian William Sewell is one of those who recognised that the effort to do so required a turn to social theory. In his case his recourse was to the account of the relationship between structure and agency provided by Anthony Giddens' structuration theory.

I argue that events should be conceived of as sequences of occurrences that result in the transformation of structures. Such sequences begin with a rupture of some kind – that is, a surprising break with routine practice. Such breaks actually occur every day – as a consequence of exogenous causes, of contradictions between structures, of sheer human inventiveness or perversity, or of simple mistakes in enacting routines. But most ruptures are neutralised and reabsorbed into the preexisting structures in one way or another – they may, for example, be forcefully repressed, pointedly ignored, or explained away as exceptions. (Sewell, 2005: 227)

There is no contradiction between such a formulation and the approach essayed by Archer, although Archer is a fierce critic of Giddens' formulations (Mutch, 2014). She argues that in collapsing structure into agency in the form of memory traces that are instantiated in action he actually precludes the crucial examination of the interplay between agency and structure. Such critique formed the basis of her alternative morphogenetic approach:

Every morphogenetic cycle distinguishes three broad analytical phases consisting of (a) a given structure (a complex set of relations between parts), which conditions but does *not* determine (b), social interaction. Here, (b) also arises in part from action orientations unconditioned by social organisation but emanating from current agents, and in turn leads to (c), structural elaboration or modification – that is, to a change in the relations between parts where morphogenesis rather than morphostasis ensued. (Archer, 1995: 91)

Of course, we are now back to theory; it is time to place these rather more abstract considerations in the context of empirical historical practice.

INVESTIGATING MANAGEMENT IN UK BREWING, 1840–1990

In this section, I give an account of my own historical investigations into aspects of management. My exploration was prompted by work on the use of information by public house managers in the UK in the 1990s (Mutch, 2000). Generally referred to as 'pubs', such places, licensed by the state for the consumption of alcohol on the premises, are often regarded as a distinctive feature of, in particular, English social life. Selling a range of alcoholic drinks they are seen as a focus for the local community and to be important for the activities of a range of other organisations as varied as trade unions and music groups. As such the way in which they were shaped by business organisations and the nature of the person running them has often been assumed but not investigated by historians (Mutch, 2004). Exploring the impact of business strategies required the use of concepts drawn from organisation theory. Two of these, the idea of industry logics (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986) and the nature of management, are explored in what follows.

Two initial points are important here. One is that much of the focus of existing work was on brewing, that is, on the activities of companies involved in producing alcohol (Cabras and Higgins, 2016; Gourvish and Wilson, 1994; but see Jennings, 2007 for a history of the pub, albeit one with little to say about management). In such work, as in the industry itself, the network of public houses was seen as subordinate to the logic of production, being seen as a distribution network. By contrast, it seemed apparent that by the late twentieth century the order had been reversed (Mutch, 2006b). The growth of licensed retailing put the emphasis on public houses as a prime point of contact with customers, whose preferences could then shape the production process. The second point is that central to licensed retailing was the employment of salaried managers in the context of marketing and branding strategies.

In order to understand what a radical shift this was, one has to understand that for much of the history of the public house there were two dominant ways of running the outlet. One was where the pub was owned and run by an independent owner, the so-called 'free houses'. Here, owners were free to sell whatever products they chose, often, in the early days, brewing their own products. However, the rise of large brewing companies from the beginning of the nineteenth century saw them controlling large estates of pubs that were run by tenants. These were the 'tied houses', in which the tenant paid a low rent for the premises itself but was tied to take the products supplied by the brewery. The tenancy model became the dominant one in an industry controlled, up to the 1990s, by a small group of large companies with significant geographical reach. However, licensed retail, the context in which I was exploring information use, was dominated by the employment of salaried managers operating to carefully laid down brand standards.

Archer (1995) would suggest that analysis should progress by examining a series of morphogenetic cycles, in each one of which the results of action across a delimited time formed the conditions of possibility for the next cycle. A focal point for identifying such cycles is the unique historical event and what follows examines these and the context in which they occurred. In each case those conditions were both structural and cultural – in our case, for example, both numbers of managers and ideas about the legitimacy of such managers. While one could set the initial point for analysis as the years immediately preceding investigation of contemporary practices, sensitivity to historical investigation suggested that this was insufficient. In order to start the morphogenetic sequence, it was necessary to identify the starting point, that point at which the employment of managers to run pubs originated. Examination of the standard histories provided little illumination but pointed to the series of investigations stimulated by fierce political debates about the nature and impact of the trade in alcohol that punctuated the nineteenth century. In one such investigation was found the statement that 'the founders of my company are generally credited with being the originators of the system'. Ernest Ellis, secretary of the Liverpool company Peter Walker & Son, was alluding to the 'managerial system' (Mutch, 2006a: 3). Further investigation found that the company had produced a substantial booklet celebrating 50 years of operation that include a forthright defence of the employment of managers. Not so much 'hidden from history', therefore, but rather obscured or forgotten. The sheer vehemence of the defence of their practices also suggested something of the opposition that the employment of managers provoked, an opposition that could be traced in the pages of the trade press. It is here that historical investigation needs to consider not just numbers of any given phenomena but also the ideas that shaped reaction to them.

From the pages of the trade and wider press it was clear that there was substantial opposition to house managers. For some this was a matter of opposition to the very nature of the trade in alcohol, with temperance advocates opposed to anything that might make the trade more effective. However, a deeper level of opposition, especially amongst legal officials and politicians drawn from a particular social elite, was a concern with the very legitimacy of salaried employees. By their nature, it was argued, they would be the mere pawns of their employers and so prey to illicit practices. Their concerns were shaped by ideas drawn from a landowning elite in which the model was of tenant farmers paying rent for their land (Mutch, 2010). These ideas in turn shaped a wider suspicion of businesses run by paid managers as opposed to owners who ran the moral hazard of failure. Such ideas constrained the spread of house management as a business practice in the running of public houses. While the practice was dominant in Liverpool and, later, Birmingham, it was much rarer elsewhere, thanks to the conservatism of those running brewing companies and the resistance of licensing officials. However, the example provided by Peter Walker & Son shaped the next morphogenetic cycle, in which the cause of house management was taken up by an unlikely source.

The movement against alcohol sparked by its deleterious social and economic impacts was split in the nineteenth century between those who favoured outright prohibition of the trade and those who argued for tighter regulation of the trade. In the latter camp were those who favoured the demonstration impact of providing outlets in which the supply of alcohol would be tightly controlled and supplemented by the provision of both alternative refreshments and food. In order to ensure the necessary control, those in the 'Trust House' movement advocated the concept of 'disinterested management' (Mutch, 2010). Seeing the control that brewers like Peter Walker & Son could exercise, the leaders of the movement saw that the model could enable them to control consumption in their public houses. While the example was not attractive to brewers outside the heartlands of the managerial system thanks to the hostility that debates about alcohol engendered, it was important in the next morphogenetic cycle.

In 1914 the UK declared war on Germany. In the ensuing years, industrial production of ammunition became vital to the prosecution of warfare. Major centres were set up with large numbers of munition workers. One such area was in the region around the northwest city of Carlisle. Concerns were raised about the scale of alcohol consumption amongst the workforce, which was causing significant adverse impacts on production. The answer was seen to be the taking into control of the city's pubs, which were to be run by a state commission. Drawing on the experience of the Liverpool and Birmingham brewers, given legitimacy by the advocacy of disinterested management by the Trust House movement, the pubs' tenants were replaced by salaried managers under strict orders to moderate the consumption of alcohol. The pubs also featured the supply of food. The exigencies of wartime emergency thus gave momentum to practices of management that had hitherto been limited to particular places or specific interest groups. Learning from state control in wartime then shaped the ideas available when peace returned.

Peace saw ideas about house management taken up by a number of influential brewing companies. While resistance on the part of licensing magistrates to the employment of managers continued, especially in London, it was much reduced. In large part that was because the attitude of some major brewing companies, notably Whitbread and Barclay Perkins, both major players in London and the southeast, had changed. House management was no longer seen as a grudging response to the demands of temperance advocates but as a positive part of a shift in business strategy (Mutch, 2010). Coming to be known as the 'improved public

house movement' this saw the construction of large pubs featuring a wide range of features far removed from the drinking dens that had previously characterised many pub estates (Gutzke, 2006). The new pubs, often built on the housing estates that were being constructed on the outskirts of major cities as part of a programme of slum clearance, were too large for all but the most highly capitalised tenants. They were therefore ideal for the employment of house managers, especially as the new pubs came to be seen as a vitally important shop window for the brewery companies, not least in burnishing their image with the wider public and legislators. In order to operate effectively, the pubs would need to reflect a consistent image, one that salaried managers could be used to maintain.

In the war that broke out in 1939, pubs played a far more central role, shaped by the legitimacy they had won through the improved public house movement. Peacetime brought many more experiments with direct management as companies sought to respond to changing leisure opportunities. The growth of licensed retailing meant that by the 1970s, house managers were an accepted part of an industry in which ideas drawn from retailing more generally were widespread. Thus, over a 100-year period management had gone from being a practice greeted with hostility and suspicion to being an accepted business practice. Understanding that development is helped by viewing it as a series of morphogenetic cycles in which both structural and cultural development took place. One can trace this development through examination of the annual reports of the major companies, in which discussions of both management and retailing gain ever greater prominence (Mutch, 2006b). However, what we are faced with here are surface indicators. The challenge is to get below these indicators.

It is here that we faced by the limitations of archive survival. As noted above, our analyses have to be conditioned by the nature of the evidence available to us. Quite often what survives for companies like Peter Walker & Son or Whitbread, both of which have substantial surviving archive material, are the official minutes of bodies such as boards of directors. Other surviving documents are frequently those required for legal purposes, such as property records. What are less likely to survive are records which give an insight into the detailed nature of managerial hierarchies. For the existence of house managers implies a supporting system of monitoring and control. The regional or area managers who formed the backbone of such systems are often shadowy figures, whose presence and activities often has to be inferred from other records. Tracing the evolution of the area manager in one company, Allied Breweries, required me to stitch together a number of fragmentary sources, indicating the extent to which historical work requires the tracing of connections across a range of sources (Mutch, 2006c).

The investigation outlined here ranged across many such sources and resulted in a number of publications. However, what might appear as the excavation of aspects of history that had been obscured, in large part because they did not feature in the major concerns of those approaching the history of alcohol production and consumption, was more revealing, I would suggest, than simply the correction of the historical record (important though that undoubtedly is). Rather, historical work can shed light on contemporary theoretical debates (Mutch, 2019). It is my contention that the shifts towards management have to be placed in the context of broader institutional logics; logics that provide resources to those engaged in developing ways of running organisations.

In the context of the origins of pub management, for example, the work on the archives of Peter Walker & Son suggested the pivotal role of Andrew Barclay Walker. The starting point was curiosity as to the potential influence of his Scottish Presbyterian background on the approach he took to the management of his estate of public houses (Mutch, 2004, 2006a).

Work carried out here led to comparative work on England and Scotland. The power of contrastive explanation is something urged by critical realist informed scholars such as the economist Tony Lawson (1997). In the present case it suggested a divergence between what I have termed a systemic form of accountability in Scotland and a personal form of accountability in England (Mutch, 2013). In the case of systemic accountability, emphasis was placed in the detailed specification of roles and checks on the performance of those roles through detailed record keeping that enabled monitoring in a structured fashion. By contrast, the emphasis in personal accountability was on the character of the office holder, with trust being employed that such character would mean that the right course of action would be followed.

In turn, deploying the ideas of institutional logics that have been outlined above, one can place these two styles of accountability in the broader context of the institutional logics that conditioned action in both countries. For the broader contexts were quite different (Mutch, 2015). In Scotland, a system of basic education, put in place through an emphasis on enabling the reading of religious texts, produced a literate and numerate population well in advance of the situation elsewhere in Europe. At the apex of this educational systems were universities that had an emphasis on the production of medical and legal professionals. The emphasis in such universities was on philosophical schemes that worked from first principles, something reflected in a legal system that drew on Roman Law precedents. A focus on system, that is, marked the distinctive cluster of logics that shaped Scotland in the eighteenth century. By contrast, education in England was dominated by the clerical training provided by the universities. They depended on the shaping of character through engagement with classical literature. Their philosophy was a profoundly empirical one, mirroring a common law system that worked from precedent and so was shaped by cases actually litigated. Stitching together these logics was the figure of the ‘gentleman’, a man of character whose actions were governed by conventions of trust. Working from practices to the larger logics that they instantiated enables us to draw broader conclusions. It revealed a distinctive Scottish focus on accountability and management, one which had wider implications for the development of managerial thought in the nineteenth century (Mutch, 2016b).

DISCUSSION

One could argue that the realism presented above is the background working assumption of many historians. As noted in the introduction, the work of Keith Snell (2006) weaves theoretical discussion into discussions of his findings, wearing his concepts more lightly than is the custom in social scientific accounts. Nevertheless, the theory is present. For our current purpose the important passage is ‘I have no problems in believing that the past was “real”, that much of that reality can be discerned and outlined, and that certain themes, emphases, patterns, experiences, and consistent personal accounts emerge repeatedly from the documentary and quantitative evidence’ (Snell, 2006: 26). That is a statement consistent with the critical realist informed social theory presented at the outset of this chapter. Ideas drawn from critical realism can help bring conceptual clarity, acting to firm up working assumptions.

However, what has also emerged from Snell’s work and from the account given above is the unavoidable reliance on fragmentary evidence. Often what we are doing, for example when tracing the development of the area manager, is drawing inferences from a range of evidence, little of which touches directly on our principal focus. It is here that we face the ineluctable

need for the exercise of the historical imagination. The fractured and partial nature of the evidence available to us, shaped as it is by considerations of what it was thought fit to retain, mean that all historical work is of necessity an interpretation. For critical realists working on the nature of social life we are talking about tendencies, not laws. Social systems are open systems subject to the interaction of a range of mechanisms. Such mechanisms include ideas about what is legitimate and appropriate. Thus we eschew talk of prediction and aim instead for explanation. In historical work we might take this further and recognise that we are talking about interpretation, interpretation that is as much a product of craft as art and certainly not of science (in the natural sciences sense).

Critical realism is characterised by three commitments: ontological boldness, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality (Porpora, 2015). Of these three, it is the latter that is the most challenging. Ontological boldness stresses that ontology, how we conceive of the world, needs to have priority (Archer, 2013). The assumptions we make about the nature of that slice of the world that we are examining shapes the methods we might use to gain better knowledge of it. The argument is that some explanations are better than others, but how we determine what is better remains a matter for fierce debate within the ranks of critical realists themselves (Porpora, 2015). What we can say is that these debates indicate that the explanations we seek are always provisional and open to revision (Evans, 2018). They should be grounded in the best evidence we have available to us. How we obtain that evidence depends on the nature of the world we have before us. Approaches such as Archer's, founded on critical realism, stress the importance of time and emergence. They thus provide a guide to historical investigation but, unlike in the social sciences, historians cannot create their own evidence but need to work with what they have (Rowlinson et al., 2014). The historical imagination can seek out a wide range of evidence and part of the craft is reading the records for what they inadvertently tell us, sometimes by the absences they contain. In making sense of such evidence there is no substitute for theoretical framing, framing which can be gained both from immanent critique of existing bodies of work and by a dialogue between the historical evidence and the theoretical concepts.

For those working in the critical realist tradition, the question of methods is firmly placed as subordinate to ontological questions. However, once such questions are addressed, important issues are posed about how the phenomena identified are to be investigated. I noted above that emergent from my own inquiries, both through empirical work and theoretical engagement with new institutionalist theory, was the significance of taken-for-granted quotidian practices (Mutch, 2017). Looking for such practices poses challenges for the historian. In contemporary organisational theorising, considerable emphasis is placed on the observation of such practices in order to foreground them. Uncovering such practices is challenging for the historian who is denied direct access for observation. However, I have suggested (Mutch, 2021) that attention to the form as well as the content of evidence can give us some insights. So, for example, in my explorations of the differences between traditions of accountability in Scotland and England I have paid considerable attention to the form of accounting records (Mutch, 2013). Examining both comparatively reveals significant differences that enable us, with other supporting evidence, to recover patterns of practices. I hope that my description of my own enquiries will stimulate some to explore the nature of critical realism further through the introductions offered by the suggested reading that accompanies this chapter.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Edwards P, O'Mahoney J and Vincent S (2014) *Studying Organizations Using Critical Realism: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

An edited collection covering the range of methods (including historical) that can be used to explore the world of organisations informed by critical realism.
- (2) Gorski P (2003) *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Draws on critical realism to frame an in-depth and innovative study challenging aspects of Foucauldian analysis.
- (3) Mutch A (2019) *Reframing Institutional Logics: History, Substance and Practices*. London: Routledge.

Explores critical realism and its contribution to the reframing of institutional theory by drawing on historical work.
- (4) Porpora D (2015) *Reconstructing Sociology: The Critical Realist Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Very accessible overview of the contribution of critical realist ideas to social analysis.
- (5) Sayer A (2010) *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*. London: Routledge.

An accessible guide to the methodological implications of critical realism for investigations of human activity.

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17. Prosopography and microhistory: illuminating historical actors

Garry D. Carnegie and Karen M. McBride

INTRODUCTION

There is no recorded history without humans and their stories; people as historical actors in events or occurrences in diverse contexts can be the subjects of written and oral histories. History is often concerned with what is regarded as the wealthy, the first or the famous as human subjects. Some historical actors meet these criteria, and accounts of their lives, careers, and roles in past events or occurrences have been prepared. Often, these actors were men and have been described as “great men” (Carnegie and Napier, 2012, p. 339; cf. Carnegie and Napier, 1996) or “heroes” (Hammond and Sikka, 1996, p. 79) or “movers and shakers” (Flesher and Flesher, 2003, p. 98), in accounting, business, and management and organisational history. The history of human subjects is biased towards the selected few, those notable or exceptional, but this does not constitute a complete history of people as contributors to human development and existence. Under-represented groups in history have been described as the “previously silent”, indeed “voices that may have been deliberately silenced” (Napier and Carnegie, 1996, p. 5), for example “indigenous peoples” whose lands were colonised such as in Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Bastien et al., 2020; Carnegie, 2022; Mika et al., 2020), and “the lives of ordinary people” (Hammond and Sikka, 1996, p. 3) or as “the experiences of the ‘voices from below’” (Carnegie and Napier, 2012, p. 346). In short, mainstream history is seen as insufficiently inclusive or too narrow.

Walker (2008a) identifies a trinity of bases of exclusion and oppression, specifically gender, race and class. Historical research in accounting, business, and in management and organisations reflects the axes of power that have long existed in such disciplines. Women have been seriously underrepresented in discipline histories (Dean et al., 2020, Kirkham and Loft, 1993). However, there have been moves in recent decades to extend and expand an understanding of the past as lived by those who were participants in developments, but were not necessarily seen as having sufficient influence or adequate profile to lead or shape such developments. Oppressed peoples, as voices from below, were often impacted unfairly, even harshly, lacking any say or influence (see Bastien and Coraiola, 2023). This has led historians to focus increased attention on those who lived under one or more of the bases of marginalisation.

This chapter addresses the use of prosopography, or “collective biography”, and microhistory as two research methods that can help management and organisational scholars explore the past by reference to historical actors, even those marginalised, as key players in helping to shape developments and the fabric of social life from within a chosen community, network, neighbourhood or town as cases for the study of general trends in society. As our collective experience shows, for many scholars, prosopography is a relatively unknown and unadopted research method. So, what is prosopography? Stone (1971, p. 46) defines “Prosopography is the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by

means of the collective study of their lives” (p. 46) (see also *The Times Literacy Supplement*, 1970). Common background characteristics include date and place of birth, date and place of death, marital status, place and type of residence, educational settings and education level, ethnicity, and religion. Prosopography is broadly concerned with exploring and appreciating patterns underpinning relationships and connections of a well-defined group of individuals. The research subjects to be identified are to have sufficient in common for relationships and connections to be discerned.

Microhistory is a form of history that focusses on research of small places or units of research, with a focus on an incident, a group, an individual or on a community (Ginzburg, 1980, 1985, 1988, 1992; Levi 1992). According to Tosh (2015, p. 67), it “fills out in small-scale and human detail some of the cultural and social features that are otherwise known only as ‘generalizations’”. According to Verboven et al. (2007 p. 41), “the ultimate objective of microhistory is to gain insight into the social structures and processes determining everyday social life”. We focus on addressing key methodological developments in microhistory and prosopography in recent decades, relating particularly to groups of human actors, whether they belonged to elites or the masses in society. We present an understanding of these key approaches drawing on previous research undertaken in related fields, and provide guidance for management and organisational scholars, particularly those with an historical research orientation.

We briefly address the main connection of prosopography and microhistory. Prosopography provides a detailed analysis of people, objects and events to render an understanding of the complex relations weaving the subjects (individuals) into the fabric of a society or on the outskirts of a society. Verboven et al. (2007, p. 41) suggest that “prosopography can provide an important contribution to microhistory”. Prosopography is a key research method focussed more on the “macro” than the “micro”: this in-depth method can provide insights to help form an appreciation and understanding of microhistory. Prosopography “makes it possible to place everyday events and phenomena in a meaningful context and to distinguish between what is isolated and exceptional and what is common” (Verboven, et al., 2007, p. 41). As in any historical research, an understanding of the local, time-specific context of the lives under study by means of prosopography and microhistory is necessary.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The next two sections examine the approaches of prosopography and microhistory respectively, structured using sub-sections addressing the nature, foundations and historical context of each approach; we then outline the practice of each approach, using our personal experiences of research undertaken in these areas; then explore studies undertaken in each approach. This is followed by concluding comments.

PROSOPOGRAPHY

Nature and Foundations

The Times Literacy Supplement (1970) observed prosopography as “a term borrowed from the ancient historians” adding that, to the prosopographer, “the group is held to be more interesting than the individual or the institution” (p. 1326/4). Prosopography derives from the Greek word *prosopon* which, according to Field (2013), was initially deployed to designate the face created or a mask in a theoretical setting, but later took on a theological meaning, translating

as person (Field, 2013; Stone, 1971). In historical research, the word is given to designate the aggregate study of the lives of an identified group of people.

Drawing upon biographical investigations, prosopography is more macro-orientated than biography and focuses on exploring social structure, for instance, the analysis of the roles of a certain group of people, such as holders of titles or honours, members of professional and occupational groups, and economic classes. Keats-Rohan (2000) explains prosopography entails “what the analysis of the sum of data about many individuals can tell us about the different types of connection between them, and hence about how they operated within and upon the institutions – social, political, legal, economic, intellectual – of their time” (p. 2). Field (2013) notes that prosopographical research is a combination of genealogy, onomastics, and demography techniques. Various techniques are used to evaluate the data collected in prosopographical research which may involve qualitative and quantitative research¹ and interdisciplinary perspectives.

There is a long tradition of prosopographical research on pre-modern societies, “especially in secondary works on ancient and medieval history” (Field, 2013, p. 238). Stone (1971) used prosopography in his magisterial study of the crisis in the English aristocracy, and over the past 50 years it has been utilised for early modern and modern history (Field, 2013). Stone (1971) contrasted an “older” form of prosopography that was primarily conducted on the lives and careers of social elites, dealing most commonly with well-known and influential historical actors (Beard, 1913; Namier, 1929, 1930), with a newer form of prosopography concerning much wider populations including “ordinary people” (Le Roy Ladurie, 1978). Stone (1971, p. 47) referred to “two fairly distinct schools” of prosopography: the “elitist school” and the “mass school”. The mass school is more statistically minded, drawing their inspiration from the social sciences (Stone, 1971).

According to Stone, this newer mass school, “have a sense of history which is determined by the movements of popular opinion rather than by the decisions of so-called ‘great men’ or by elites” (1971, p. 48). Stone adds, the mass school “have been aware that human needs cannot usefully be defined exclusively in terms of power and wealth” (1971, p. 48). The earlier established elite school is now commonly described as “elite prosopography”, dealing with elite populations or groups (Hollister, 1981; Stuckey, 2006; Lunding et al., 2020). There is considerable potential for comparative prosopography (Berghoff and Möller, 1994; Charle, 2015). In the perspective of Tosh (2015, p. 54), “human curiosity” in the form of biography came to the fore during the twentieth century with the concern of new histories being “about ‘society’”, as translated into prosopographical research.

Prosopography in Related Sub-Categories of Historical Research

Carnegie (2022) calls for greater collaboration among researchers in what the author labelled “commerce history”: accounting history, banking/finance history, business history,² as well as management and organisational history. Such collaboration was identified as potentially

¹ Prosopography often involves computerised processing, statistical tables and factor analysis as well as the use of electronic databases.

² Business history has tended to be regarded as a dimension of economic history (Barjot, 2007) which, on writing, seems to be a matter to opinion. For instance, Booth (2017, p. 1) suitably portrays the above fields of “commerce history” (Carnegie, 2022) as “contiguous and overlapping fields”.

contributing to the cross-fertilisation of scholarship across the management studies disciplines. The use of the prosopographical method for undertaking historical research is addressed in these sub-categories. This overview of previous research of the genre commences with the accounting history literature.

Prosopographical studies in accounting history include these studies: Carnegie and Edwards, 2001; Carnegie et al. (2003); Edwards et al. (1997); Lee (2006) and Richardson (1989). Of these studies, three are derived from the same major research project, all of which involved Carnegie and Edwards as lead researchers in collaboration. Richardson (1989) conducted an analysis of “Canada’s accounting elite: 1880–1930” and compared the social characteristics of this group with randomly selected non-accountants within the Canadian population. Lee (2006) examined the influence of early Scottish chartered accountants who emigrated to the United States and developed their careers in that country from 1876 to 1914. While the author did not specifically use the term prosopography to describe the method, Lee presented a series of researched biographies of the accountants and an analysis of their common background characteristics.

Another prosopography study was conducted investigating the professionalisation of accounting in Australia, through the analysis of the 45 founding members of the IIAV (1886),³ all of whom were male and admitted as Fellows without formal examination for entry (Carnegie and Edwards, 2001; Carnegie et al., 2003; Edwards et al., 1997). The authors identified the capacity of prosopographical studies “to augment the predominantly vocational and institutional focus” of the previous literature on the sociology of professions (Carnegie et al. 2003, p. 790). Such opportunities are of relevance in management and organisational history research, where prosopography can personalise leading developments or innovations in management and organisations which occur through cooperation and engagement, involving people who are connected or like-minded people (see, for instance, Fellman, 2014 in *Business History*).

Prosopography has been applied in banking history. An early prosopographical study was undertaken by Cassis (1985), who examined bankers in English society in the late nineteenth century, revealing that “the analysis of education, social life, and marriages gives clear evidence of the early integration of bankers to aristocratic circles” (Cassis, 1985, p. 229). In France, Bonin and Chaumel (1998), describe the archives of Société Générale which were subsequently used to carry out a prosopography of banking elites. Bonin and Lescure (2011, p. 120) acknowledge the foundational works of Alain Plessis (1932–2010), an early exponent of the method, stating “his analysis appears retrospectively to be a methodological breakthrough well in advance of the later blooming of prosopography”.

A classic research area in the literature on business history is the study of business leaders, with an elites’ approach, although the earlier exponents did not specifically indicate that prosopography was applied (see, for instance, Miller 1949, 1962; Mills 1945, 1956; Taussig and Jocelyn, 1932). More recently, there have been prosopographic research studies in business history focused on wider groups of individuals, such as in relation to professionalisation and modern management (Fellman, 2014), family ownership and management (Kansikas, 2015, 2016), the roles of women in organisational leadership (Rinaldi and Tagliazucchi, 2019). In

³ The IIAV is the earliest antecedent body of CPA Australia which, on writing, had in excess of 170,826 global members in over 100 countries, <https://www.cpaaustralia.com.au/about-cpa-australia> (accessed 1 July 2022).

his prosopographical analyses set in London during 1400 to 1550, Colson (2016) examined commerce, clusters and community in a re-evaluation of the occupational geography of the city in an era before modern management and organisations. Rinaldi again, with Vasta, used network analysis and a prosopographic approach in two studies across two distinct periods to consider the structures of Italian companies (Rinaldi and Vasta, 2005, 2012). Management and organisational historians can gather impetus and insights from examining key research of the genre in business history.

Prosopographical research in management and organisational history is an underexplored and -utilised method.⁴ Some researchers of the genre, however, are apprised of prosopography. Suddaby et al. (2016) adopted prosopography in examining “the micro-foundations of field-level organizational change by analyzing the role of social skill and social position in individuals” (p. 230). They relied upon prosopography “to investigate the relationship between individual biographies, strategic reflexivity, and the capacity to change in a highly institutionalized field” (ibid.). In concluding, the authors positioned prosopography “as a method for exploring the structural aspects of social position and the meaning aspects of social biography in a highly institutionalized context”, adding that “prosopography can be used to capture both elements of the status order of field and the core identity or meaning structure of the field” (2016, p. 243).

Around the same time, Suddaby (2016) focussed on the notion of “organizational legacy”, with a primary methodology of prosopography (Stone, 1971), suggesting collaboration between management theorists interested in individual differences as a causal explanation and historians who are interested in microhistory. Another study by Coles et al. (2018) illuminated the method by “focusing on the roles of early feminists within the development of non-profit human service *organizations* ... to demonstrate the possibilities of prosopography to identify and understand groups of women who have been erased in social work history” (p. 85; emphasis not in original).

The Practice of Prosopographical Research, with Examples from Personal Experience

Prosopography uncovers and illuminates the sociological and cultural features of a selected groups of individuals. It helps to solve the scarce evidence dilemma, such as may exist in the form of written biographies, especially when focusing investigations on voices from below, where biographies may be difficult to trace or largely unavailable. It also offers an explanatory mechanism for the behaviour of people with attachment to rural or regional locations, organisations (for profit or not, in public, private or social institutions, including religious communities), and within a diversity of other segments or common interest or attachment to gatherings of society. Researchers adopting this method need to be explicit in the particular people comprising a group or community and explain why the designated research population was chosen.

The methodology of such studies is expressly dependent on the type and extent of source materials available for examination, access to which may be expensive; for example, the cost of acquiring birth, death and marriage certificates. Therefore, prosopographical studies are best funded, at least in part, by means of externally-funded research grants or bursaries.

⁴ *The Palgrave Handbook of Management History*, published in 2020 (Bowden et al., 2020), for instance, does not mention prosopography or collective biography.

Keats-Rohan (2019, p. 53) stresses the importance of sources in prosopographies; these are determined after defining the group of individuals to be investigated. Individuals whose lives and careers have sufficient commonality for relationships and connections to be discerned, can be refined or augmented by means of the evidence uncovered. Information from existing biographical dictionaries is helpful to undertaking prosopography, but often “the biographical details have to be assembled from scratch” (Sturges, 1976, p. 212).

Prosopographical research involves the minute examination of the sources to which access is authorised or publicly available and is often written up using a series of detailed footnotes. The evidence gathered is typically drawn from an array of sources: this permits the corroboration and consolidation of the findings through a process of verification, which may be strongly aided by increasingly sophisticated forms of digitalisation and computerisation and the time-saving use of electronic databases (see Nix et al., 2023). Prosopographies produced in this way, become a “metasource” (Keats-Rohan, 2019, p. 24), following the elimination of some of the defects of different types in the base sources. According to Stone (1971, p. 57), other defects “go deeper, and arise from some political and psychological presuppositions which are embedded in the foundations upon which prosopography rests”. Further considerations of “payoffs and outfalls” in prosopography are found in Carney (1973).

We now provide some observations from our personal experience of undertaking prosopographical investigations. These are outlined, in an advisory matter, using sub-headings.

This research takes time and may be costly

The first-named author was a member of a research team which employed the prosopographical method of data collection to interrogate the occupational and commercial backgrounds of the Incorporated Institute of Accountants, Victoria – IIAV’s 45 founding members. The founding members needed to be “sufficiently well-established in public accounting practice” (Carnegie and Edwards, 2001, p. 319). In this study, strong reliance was placed on primary sources such as birth, death and marriage records (i.e., certificates), shipping records, obituaries, probate documents and other records. This research was costly when undertaken, especially as it involved paying fees for each certificate obtained, many of which were sourced from abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK). It was time-consuming, but was also found to be rewarding and illuminating in terms of producing important and interesting information for the project. Historians are advised not to set unrealistic timelines or skimpy budgets, thereby avoiding the potential associated challenges.

Keep an open mind

An open mind – open to surprising or unexpected findings – is necessary in conducting such historical investigations. In the research by Carnegie and Edwards (2001), many of the IIAV founders – all admitted to the senior rank as “Fellow” members without any entrance examination – were found to be “once non-accountants” and/or “also accountants” (see also Chua and Poullaos, 1993, 1998) who combined accounting work as a form of income earning with other forms of commercial activities. Only two of the founders were found to have been members of other professional accounting bodies on joining the others to form the IIAV in 1886 (incorporated in 1887). Therefore, in such detailed prosopography research drawing upon official statements made in the past about occupations and careers, it was necessary to be alert to findings that may potentially surprise researchers with present day mindsets.

Such observations are regarded as equally relevant in management and organisational history research (see Mutch, 2023; Wadhwani, 2023).

Look out for clues to later major developments

For example, the IIAV founders study mentioned above produced an insightful finding in the form of some adult sons of the founding members deciding to join a competitive national association of public accountants, known as the Australasian Corporation of Public Accountants (ACPA), established in Sydney in 1907 (incorporated in 1908) which indicated some tensions around public practice and professionalisation. This later development of another professional body was an important, yet divisive strategy within the emerging organised accounting profession (Carnegie et al., 2003).

Be alert for previously undiscovered evidence

In another study, of government officials, naval administrators and politicians, the linkages between a group of individuals involved in an historic change of accounting practice were investigated (McBride, 2021). The research ascertained the influences of, and the interplay between, the key individuals involved in exploring the competing logics and the paths that were followed in adopting that major accounting change. This prosopographical style study considered the backgrounds, interactions and influence of key actors in the move towards this accounting change. Using a prosopographical approach, led to uncovering previously undocumented international influences on this accounting change.

Prosopography awaits as an opportunity for management scholars interested in historical research, requiring a purposeful commitment from both present and future scholars, requiring an appreciation of studies of the kind as outlined, and an awareness of their considerable explanatory potential.

MICROHISTORY

A people-oriented approach to the study of accounting, business and management history and in understanding these practices in history (McBride and Verma, 2021), is that of microhistory. This is a historical method focusing on examining small components or individual elements of research, for example investigations of an individual, a community, a settlement or even an event, with the focus of individuals or the group as a key subject for research. Microhistory aims to discover actions, ideas, practices, beliefs and impacts that would remain undiscovered in what can be described as overarching, general approaches to undertaking historical research (Brewer, 2010; de Vries, 2019; Ginzburg, 1993; Levi, 1992; Mills, 2017; Rosental, 1996; Wickham, 2017).

A Micro History of Microhistory

Microhistory developed to enable historians to appreciate the lived experiences of people. The method was promoted by Italian scholars (Simone Cerutti, Carlo Ginzburg, Edoardo Grendi, Giovanni Levi, and Carlo Poni), who set up the journal *Quaderni storici* (*Historical Notebooks*) in 1966 and the series *microstorie* (Ginzburg, 1993). The approach soon spread with *Alltagsgeschichte* in Germany (Lüdtke, 2003; Medick, 2001), post-Annales history in

France (Lepetit, 1993; Revel, 1996; Rosental, 1996), and it was also adopted in North America (Demos, 1994; Ulrich, 1990). These scholars were looking for an alternative to the prevalent historical studies of large groups and the *longue durée* studies of history over long periods of time (Braudel, 1958; Guldi and Armitage, 2017; Tilly, 1984). Such large group or long time period studies generally apply a reductionist analysis, with a top-down method, and statistics often being used to produce generalised understandings of historical change, reducing many peoples' experiences to a few general economic, demographic and structural findings. Microhistory, instead, involves exploring how individuals interacted with each other and with wider economic, demographic and social structures.

The original ideas were underpinned by ethnographical work from the field of anthropology (Geertz, 1972, 1973). In observing the individual parts of a social system in action, the system, as a whole, could be more clearly understood (Geertz, 1973). The uniqueness of the individual experiences which contributed to the whole, ensured that a fuller explanation could be derived of the whole. This "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 312) is an in-depth description of human social action, including describing the context of behaviours as interpreted by the actors, as it is understood by others. Rather than applying universal rules that abstract away the human experience, this method requires the lived human experience to be included, with social structures being interpreted via these experiences. The method, "to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts" (Geertz 1973, p. 321), was attractive to academics practicing microhistory. Summarising, a microhistory approach examines people and groups of people as individuals, elucidating their interactions with each other and within the wider social structures.

The microhistory approach offers appeal to management and organisation, accounting and business historians. In accounting history, Williams (1999), for instance, advocates studies and stories at the micro level, rendering microhistories which can enhance our understanding of the impact of accounting in action, on people, and organisations (also Carnegie and Napier, 2017). In business and management history, Decker (2015) and later, Maclean et al. (2017) call for a microhistory orientation on processes that make up the daily experiences of individual actors, and for historical sensemaking in business, management and organisations. Wickham (2017) encourages the application of microhistory approaches to compliment other historical approaches, noting that the interpretive findings of microhistory "offer us ways into the nuanced analysis of the way economies actually work which standard narratives often deny us" (p. 197). Considering the micro dimension in organisational studies, Hargadon (2015) outlines the use of microhistory case studies and the application of grounded theory to study organisations' past (see Israelsen and Mitchell, 2023). Vaara and Lamberg observe "interpretive history can add to our knowledge of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices, and microhistory can specifically help us understand the construction and enactment of these practices in historical contexts" (2016, p. 633).

Microhistory in Related Sub-Categories of Historical Research

Microhistory studies investigate exceptional or unusual individuals or behaviours, exposing unexpected results of practices. In accounting history, studies of individuals are the most popular way of carrying out microhistories (Abraham, 2008; Hollister and Schultz, 2010; Hronsky et al., 2015; Masiero, 2020; Napier and Giovannoni, 2021; Samkin, 2010; Walker, 2008b), alongside the study of groups of unusual peoples (Bisman, 2012; Cummings and

St Leon, 2009; Flesher, Almand and Barfitt, 2019; Miley and Read, 2021; Sian and Verma, 2021; Walker, 2017). Records of individuals and small businesses have been used to explore everyday lives (Brewer, 2010), accounting and business practices (Hollister and Schultz, 2007). Microhistory results are often framed in terms of progress (Williams 1999), suggesting improvement, a value judgement which may be problematic (Napier, 2001).

In business history, studies of social and professional elites have been carried out using a microhistory approach (Battilana, 2006; Bottomore, 1993; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Maclean et al., 2006). Studies also consider small businesses via microhistories (Amdam et al., 2020; Blaszczyk, 2017; Decker, 2008; Holt and Popp, 2013).

There have been calls for management and organisational history microhistories. Vaara and Lamberg, (2016) propose microhistory to assist in the understanding of the construction and enactment of strategic management and organisation practices in historical contexts. Mills (2017) highlights microhistory as a way forward, reviewing the potential of microhistory to provide alternative (critical) approaches to historiography in management and organisation studies. A recent study using a microhistorical approach (Deal et al., 2018), examines the making of a commercial airline exploring the impact of warfare, gender, and memory on its development. Seppälä (2018) investigates the dynamics of legitimisation processes at a micro level, exploring the unwanted introduction of the hypermarket for efficiency in retailing in Finland.

The Practice of Microhistory, with Examples from Personal Experience

Microhistory requires a new way of looking at archives and documentary evidence or other potential sources. Investigating this evidence requires looking for social interactions in a similar way to the research methods of anthropology (Geertz, 1972, 1973). Whilst the historian cannot typically directly observe, interview or converse with the group of individuals being studied, they can investigate the evidence available in archives, seeking to identify the social interactions, beliefs and actions of these individuals. While this data has been selectively included in archives, it can be used to make observations and even to draw broader conclusions in as meaningful and substantiated ways as possible (see Barros, 2023; Tennent and Gillett, 2023).

Often microhistorians begin an investigation from an unusual phenomenon: something that stands out because it is different, such as an unusual story or individual, some surprising or unusual facts. The historian then seeks to explain these (de Vries, 2019); this involves an element of conjecture (Muir, 1991). It is indeed the opposite of, but complementary to, other approaches to history where large amounts of data were collected and analysed, or long lengths of time studied, to prove or disprove an understanding about past behaviours (Braudel, 1958). Microhistory does not seek to prove a theory, but make uses of theories that seem to render the best plausible explanation of the evidence uncovered (Ginzburg, 1993).

Historians who prefer a more normative approach to microhistory may ascertain those individuals who made up the historical context by means of identifying them, such as searching for their names in various records (Ginzburg and Poni, 1979). The documents relating to an individual can be sourced in birth, marriage and death registers, past tax returns, deceased estate records, and other details: criminal or civil court cases, wills and other documentary records, giving ideas of when and where people lived and with whom and how they interacted – details relating to their transactions, wealth and disputes; their friends, colleagues and community

organisation roles; and the nature and extent of their social and business spheres (i.e., how they lived their lives).

People, their careers and lives are of interest to historians. What are they doing and why are they doing it? What will be the effect of these actions? In preparing this chapter we have been requested to provide personal perspectives on our topic area and to draw on our own research experiences. Microhistories can be fascinating and often are, mostly because they reveal people. Now we weave some of our experience of undertaking microhistorical investigations, with guidance or tips on doing microhistory.

Be a detective, use an evidence-based approach

Historians undertaking microhistory tend to apply what may be dubbed a Sherlock Holmes orientated approach to the detection of a microhistory, looking for clues (Ginzburg, 1989), following up on a lead, observing a story and seeking information to investigate it, looking at the documentation and wider information to explain a situation, gathering all the available evidence to substantiate it. A thorough evidence-based approach to microhistory starts from the documentary data and archival evidence, moving from the individual experience to the wider findings and application (Ginzburg, 1990, 1991).

This was the approach adopted in a study of purser accounting and control of alcohol provisions in the Royal Navy (McBride and Hines, 2019). The study investigated the regulations and accounting for controlling the consumption of beer (and other alcoholic drinks). McBride and Hines (2019) investigated and observed that initially the accounting was determined for cost and provision control. Beer was issued for health and well-being (for example, for the prevention of scurvy), while an effect was to keep the seafarers in a controllable, but mildly inebriated state, which tended to alleviate some of the hardships they experienced in the Royal Navy's service. The accounting assisted in this process, providing the means for individual alcohol allocation to be adequately measured and effectively controlled.

Microhistory methods are based in anthropology, use sources that are near to “being there”

Microhistory's method was developed using the methods from anthropology and particularly in emulating an ethnographic approach to the investigating and telling of history. Micro historians examine their subject matter using sources that are the nearest they can get to being there in the local, time-specific context, using their subjects and their stories as devices to focus the microhistory being told (Lepore, 2001, also see Fellman and Rahikainen, 2012).

In a study of Samuel Pepys (McBride, 2022a), the personal diary of Pepys was examined in depth to uncover insights into accounting and accountability from an individual and ethnographic perspective. The words “account” and “accounts” were regularly mentioned in the diary. On investigation and analysis of the specific use of these words, it became apparent that Pepys was underpinning many of the situations of his life, roles and work, around the use of accounting, to both measure his experiences and to shape his lived environment. Pepys is recognised for his development of business administration within the British Royal Navy. His detailed and informative diary renders an almost autoethnographic insight into personal experiences of the times in which he lived, perceptions of work at this time and the approach to business (see also, McBride, 2022b), professionalism, and the roles of accounting. The diary was analysed to glean an individual's understanding and experiences of “being there” at that

time and in that context. The factual details of the wider “story” based on his perspective were substantiated by other archival evidence, such as correspondence to peers, and between others.

A theory can help to inform the story

Theoretical ideas can assist in interpretation, often not created afresh, but adopted from other studies (Geertz, 1973). These theories are borrowed from other disciplines, including historical literature using theories from management disciplines (Carnegie et al., 2020).

For example, another microhistory study considered a group of people, pursers on board Royal Navy ships, and an unusual phenomenon: the purser’s (short) measure (i.e., 7/8ths of the total provision) (McBride et al., 2016). The study of the actions of this group around the use of this measure, and the related accounting practices pursers developed to control consumable rations, were analysed using applying the key elements of the underpinnings of agency theory, drawn from economics.

Do not be overly creative

It has been argued that the microhistory approach allows for limitless speculation and even a foray into storytelling (Venturi,⁵ quoted in Finlay, 1988). Understandably, it would be easy to become caught up in the creative story telling. It would also be easy to view the past with a degree of presentism, the mistake of introducing perspectives and ideas from current day thinking and values to interpretations and descriptions of the past. Care should be taken to ensure findings are clearly set within the historical context (see Mutch, 2023; Wadhvani, 2023).

In a microhistory study of John Evelyn and his pamphlet *Fumifugium* (1661), the historical background of environmental accounting was investigated through his account in the pamphlet, detailing and highlighting pollution in London in the seventeenth century (Atkins and McBride, 2022). Overcrowding and smoke from the sea coal burnt by industries and in homes made London an unhealthy place to live and caused the pollution reported in Evelyn’s pamphlet *Fumifugium*. Whilst telling the story, Atkins and McBride (2022) establish the context in which *Fumifugium* was written and presented to the King (Charles II), who then authorised publication by Royal Command. This microhistory of Evelyn’s actions, ideas and beliefs in making the adverse consequences of pollution visible to those in power, and his unusual solutions, are presented within this specific historical context of worsening environmental and related health problems.

Remain open to a variety of interpretations

In considering microhistories of the past, the archives and the documentation, it is important to remain open to a variety of interpretations. It is important to consider the setting and context of the time, but also the cultural underpinnings that influence human behaviour. Levi (1992) notes those interpreting histories should not indulge in creative analysis but remain grounded in the conceptions of economic power, social hierarchies and culture.

McBride (2021) explores the role of key actors and their views, actions and beliefs in the official introduction of double entry bookkeeping in the Royal Navy. Previous studies had explored this introduction providing context and illustrating the importance of individuals and

⁵ Ginzburg (1993, p. 32). Ginzburg notes Franco Venturi’s criticism of ‘history with additives’.

their contribution in times of accounting change (Edwards et al., 2002; Mann et al., 2016). By using a microhistory approach (McBride, 2021), the input and influence of certain key actors was discerned in more detail, including, uncovering and interpreting previously undiscovered evidence. This evidence introduced alternative interpretations linked to the emerging debates surrounding this major accounting change, including perspectives on the local, time-specific quality of accounting elsewhere in Continental Europe.

Look out for the unusual or the exceptions

Micro historians often look for exceptions to the norm, the “exceptional normal” (Grendi, 1977, 1994, 1996), for a story of historical happenings. Although these exceptions do not initially seem representative, they show the ability of microhistory to uncover hitherto undiscovered groups or practices that were taking place on a day-to-day basis, undetected by previous broader approaches. In a study looking at accounting practices in Australian homes (Carnegie and Walker, 2007a, 2007b), a microhistory approach was adopted to examine surviving household records, typically, maintained by women. The study aimed to look further than the usual public arena of work in the private and public sectors: Carnegie and Walker (2007a, 2007b) examined accounting and gender in everyday life, in the domain of the family home by means of these household accounts which themselves played a role in relationships of power and control in the home.

Look for a bigger picture

Broader results can be achieved by extrapolating from microhistory research findings. In a study of an unusual event, that of the impeachment of Melville (First Lord of the Admiralty), McBride (2019) found that this action had a wider historical impact. With subsequent increased scrutiny of public spending there was increased pressure for control, accountability and governance in the Royal Navy and within the public sector more generally. After Melville’s impeachment, substantial changes were made in the regulations for sea officers with the intention of increasing governance and accountability. Due to rising social expectations, and the advent accounting reforms, the rise of both professionalism and bureaucracy increased within the Navy (McBride, 2019).

In management and organisational history studies, looking for the bigger picture might relate to studies of how social and business structures inhibited personal choice, studying the way individuals shaped their responses to those constraints, whilst still acknowledging the power of the economic and social structure.

DISCUSSION

It is often stated that “From little things big things grow”, the song (by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody, 1991) tells “the inspiring story of the Gurindji people’s struggle for equality and land rights after their walk off at the Wave Hill property in 1966” (National Museum of Australia, 2021). All stories are important, so all histories are important. This truism applies to both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of nations or regions. Microhistories contribute to a void in this respect. Prosopography contributes a detailed practiced form of investigation.

The early advocates of prosopographical research, while innovative in their time, were concerned with elites. Searches of historical truth can not only be found in the great historical

actors of past eras, whether they were acting alone or in leadership roles or whether they were part of groups of people contributing of historical developments of their times. What we have sought to show is that both prosopography and microhistory can, and should, be about historical understanding, no matter from which side of any status divide people or groups of people emerge. In our view, this is important for historians, and we advocate a greater use of these methods for management and organisational historians in illuminating the past.

The endearing feature of prosopography and microhistory is the potential to uncover hidden stories, individuals and practices at work, and to show more diverse as well as more in-depth viewpoints of human and group behaviours within management and in organisational settings. We recommend both prosopography and microhistory in management and organisational history, to help in creating a more balanced view of the world in historical perspective, contributing to a better understanding of the present and thereby in helping to create a better future.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

For readers wishing to learn more about microhistory and prosopography, the following publications are recommended reading.

- (1) Magnússon, S.G. and Szijártó, I.M. (2013). *What is Microhistory? Theory and Methods*. London and New York: Routledge.

This book introduces the development and methods of microhistory, and renders examples of this methodology.

- (2) Port, A. (2015). History from below, the history of everyday life, and microhistory. In *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*.

A clear summary of the origins, characteristics, and goals of microhistory, of stories from below or people's history.

- (3) Keats-Rohan, K. (Ed.) (2007). *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook*. Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research.

This handbook contains essays exploring current uses of prosopography from ancient to modern history.

- (4) Svorenčík, A. (2018). The missing link: Prosopography in the history of economics. *History of Political Economy*, 50(3).

This article suggests prosopography as a framework for interpreting academic communities, with examples to illustrate this potential.

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18. Insightful empirical knowledge in grounded theory and historical organization studies

Trevor Israelsen and J. Robert Mitchell

INTRODUCTION

A research methodology is a set of underlying principles that guides the generation of knowledge from empirical observation (Kara, 2015; Silverman, 2020 [1997]). Such principles can focus, for example, on the general manner in which empirical observation is designed and conducted (e.g., Gioia et al., 2013), the meaning of specific methods of observation and analysis (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989), the trustworthiness of specific forms of observation and analysis (e.g., Pratt et al., 2020), or the preferred applications of empirically-derived knowledge (e.g., van Burg et al., 2020). As underlying principles, methodologies are generally taken for granted *within* a given domain of research practice. This taken-for-grantedness may be appropriate when research is situated within a single domain, but interdisciplinary research—including recent work that introduces historical methodologies into management and organization studies—requires the development of methodological reflexivity that can enable scholars to situate differing methodologies with respect to one another. Interdisciplinary research, thus, involves a process of situating sets of underlying principles across domains with the communicative intent of “reaching understanding” (Habermas, 1984, p. 286) within and across otherwise disparate domains.

In this chapter, we seek to develop such an understanding focused on the notion of insightfulness in the generation of knowledge. We explore how empirically-derived, insightful knowledge can be realized through methodology that is situated simultaneously in both history and management and organization studies. When we use the words “insightful” and “insightfulness” in this chapter, we mean the ability to elicit knowledge that is understood to represent a useful or worthwhile achievement with a strong potential for resonance in research and practice.

We argue that the need for precision and reflexivity regarding questions of insightfulness is particularly important when the empirical observations of a scholarly domain are routinely oriented toward either (1) real-time observations in the immediate field in which a phenomenon is instantiated, and (2) toward historical observations that are distributed across wider spans of time and space. We observe that the generation and justification of insightful empirical knowledge from “grounded theory” (e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in management and organization studies (e.g., Gioia et al., 2013; Locke, 2001; Suddaby, 2006) have tended to privilege the former (i.e., proximate observations grounded primarily in interviews with participants in a field). But, in our view, the emergent methodological formulations of historical organization studies (e.g., Harvey and Maclean, 2023; Maclean et al., 2016, 2021) hold potential for developing a broader and more practical conception of insightful empirical knowledge in management and organization studies that is also attentive to the latter (i.e. to observations

of phenomena that, by nature, extend beyond an observational field to encompass wider spans of time and space).

By comparing the underlying principles governing the generation of empirical knowledge that can be considered insightful for theory and practice, as described in these articulations of grounded theory and more recent historical organization studies, we seek to identify methodological principles that permeate both. Such methodology, we argue, can enable the development and justification of a broader view of knowledge about management and organizations that can encompass phenomena that are stretched through time and space beyond the present, sensory experiences of the observer.

Furthermore, we argue that such an extended view of insightful empirical knowledge is critical for the ongoing success of management and organization studies as applied domains of knowledge. Despite grounded theorists' pragmatic approach to defining insightfulness (e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001)—much of the knowledge that has proven to be resonant in management practice has relied not only upon direct, field observation but also on broader historical modes of theory generation and elaboration (e.g., Chandler, 1993 [1977]; Christensen, 2013 [1997]; Collins, 2001; Freeman, 2010 [1984]; Mintzberg, 1978; Weick, 1993). For this reason, we focus specifically on how the means of generating knowledge of phenomena that are distributed across time and space can be made more accessible to a broader group of scholars who are working to generate theoretical knowledge from historical research. In this respect, we draw inspiration from the core ethos of grounded theory methodology that has focused explicitly on the development of a “rhetoric of [theory] generation” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 18) which can help to democratize, guide and justify the creation of insightful knowledge on the basis of research methodologies.

INSIGHTFUL EMPIRICAL KNOWLEDGE IN GROUNDED THEORY AND IN HISTORY

A research methodology is concerned with the ways in which empirical observations are and should be organized in a research process (Kara, 2015). Such organization—informed by theory—is the means through which inchoate observation becomes rationalized as knowledge (Silverman, 2020 [1997]). Unlike methodologies that focus predominantly on the verification of hypotheses, grounded theory is closely related to theorization itself insofar as it adopts as its overarching goal the abductive development of theory with and from empirical observation (Reichert, 2007).

Grounded theorists use the term *theory* to denote the intellectual architecture through which sensory experience is organized so as to constitute empirical observation. So, while debate persists within management and organization studies regarding the meaning, importance and forms of theory (see, e.g., Suddaby, 2014a) grounded theorists have adopted a broad view of the nature of theory. For grounded theorists, theory exists in the “middle range” between essentialist “grand theories” (construed as universal laws) and the new-to-the-world chaos of unmediated sensory experience (e.g., Merton, 1968). Theorizing is, thus, an instantiation of disciplined imagination that enables the observer to *describe* and, in some manner, *explain* an identifiable set of observations as a phenomenon that can be characterized with and through language (Weick, 1989, 1995). It is for this reason that Suddaby (2014a, p. 407) writes “theory

is simply a way of imposing conceptual order on the empirical complexity of the phenomenal world”.

The fundamental methodological question of grounded theory is the manner in which such conceptual order is established in empirical observation. American sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss believed that sociological research of the mid-twentieth century was characterized by “too great an adherence to verification as the chief mandate for excellent research” (1967, p. 2). As they saw it, sociologists were far too deferential to Weber, Durkheim, Marx, and so on, who established the “grand theories” which everyday sociologists worked to validate, verify, falsify, or modify. If empirical knowledge had to be justified in research based on “a rhetoric of verification” (p. 7) then sociology was, in Glaser and Strauss’s view, an intellectual pyramid scheme where established authorities acted as “‘theoretical capitalists’ to the mass of ‘proletariat’ testers, by training young sociologists to test their teachers’ work but *not* to imitate it” (pp. 10–11).

Instead, Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to articulate a “rhetoric of [theory] generation” (p. 18) that could justify empirical observation as insightful knowledge on the basis that explanations of phenomena were “systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research” (p. 6) and, therefore, broadly resonant “to laymen and colleagues alike” (p. 30). In this sense, the aspiration of grounded theory is that “the people in situations for which a grounded theory has been developed can apply it in the natural course of daily events” (p. 249).

Given that grounded theory has defined what we are terming insightful empirical knowledge using such practice-focused criteria, it is not surprising that it has become a dominant methodology for qualitative research in management and organization studies. After all, management and organization studies are applied disciplines which aspire to, ultimately, generate knowledge that can inform the ways in which management and organization are conducted in the world. This notion of applied knowledge was, perhaps, best articulated by James Thompson (1956) who (as editor of the first edition of *Administrative Science Quarterly*) argued that “an administrative science will be an applied science, standing approximately in relation to the basic social sciences as engineering stands with respect to the physical sciences, or as medicine to the biological” (p. 103). Grounded theorists concur and the methodology has become a dominant form of knowledge generation in scholarly domains such as nursing (e.g., Cutcliffe, 2000), education (e.g., Hutchinson, 1986) and social work (e.g., Oktay, 2012) which require knowledge that synthesizes insights among basic scientific and practical domains. It is for this reason that Locke (2001, p. 96) writes, grounded theory “with its insistence on pragmatic usefulness as a criterion of good theory, is particularly adept at bridging theory and practice, providing employees and managers a way to identify and institute changes that might improve their situations”.

In this sense, the chief methodological principle governing the generation of empirical knowledge provided by grounded theory focuses on interpreting “the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings” (Gephart, 2004: 457) rather than on verifying theory which was generated by mere guesses or by logico-deductive reasoning from conceptual priors. It is in this sense that Suddaby (2006) argues that grounded theory is “most suited to efforts to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience” and focuses on “knowledge claims about how individuals interpret reality” (p. 634). Grounded theory, thus, follows the long sociological tradition of explaining “the subjective meaning of human action in context” (Weber, 2019 [1921], p. 79).

The Role of “the Field” in Grounded Theory’s Definition of Insightful Empirical Knowledge

We adopt a stance of critical appreciation with respect to grounded theory—highlighting both those aspects of thought that we believe to be generative and also foregrounding problems that we perceive in grounded theory’s definition of insightful empirical knowledge. That is, as we see it, grounded theory has tended to assign a privileged ontological position to real-time, proximate observations in the field. The analytical toolkit developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is, in some ways, deeply ahistorical in the sense that it is geared primarily toward explaining observations that surface within the immediate sensory experience of the direct observer (see, e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1979). Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 226) idealize such observation writing “the field worker who has observed closely in this social world has had, in a profound sense, to live there. He has been sufficiently immersed in this world to know it”. Grounded theorists assume that phenomena in the social world can be known, or at least interpreted, through up-close observation in the field.

It is perhaps for this reason that many methodological articulations of grounded theory prescribe systematic, analytical coding as a means through which observations can be organized using static, entitative idioms such as “conceptual categories” or “conceptual properties of categories” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).¹ The most insightful of these categories are seen as those which apply to the largest number of units of analysis, termed “cases”, that constitute discrete phenomena that are deemed to be part of the same conceptual category. The applicability and usefulness of conceptual categories is, in grounded theory research, established by “comparative analysis” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 28). By qualitatively comparing cases, theorists are enabled to “delimit a grounded theory’s boundaries of applicability” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 24). The goal of such comparative analysis is not verification or validation per se but, rather, to expand the imagination to modify emergent conceptual categories. This is because, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) note, “a theory’s only replacement is a better theory” (p. 28).

Grounded theorists observe a distinction between two types of conceptual categories: substantive and formal. Substantive categories reflect the empirically observed social categories at use in everyday life (e.g., customer, family, children’s hospital, etc.) whereas formal categories are more systematic and symmetric in their conceptual composition (e.g., social action, legitimacy, identification, etc.). Most grounded theorists (at least in management and organization studies) tend to see substantive categories largely as an instrumental means for generating formal categories.

Gioia and colleagues (2013) codify this presumptive superiority of formal categories in their description of the process of grounded theorizing as an aggregation from “first order concepts” to “second order themes” and, ultimately, to “aggregate dimensions”. In management and organization studies, the aggregate dimensions of Gioia’s account generally represent formal categories insofar as they reflect systematic, technical language developed by scholars for the purpose of analysis. Such formal categories obtain privileged status within academic conversations insofar as they are understood to represent insightful observations upon which knowledge can be organized and structured to inform future research, teaching and practice.

¹ Coding, as a means for identifying conceptual categories, is more central to Strauss and Corbin (1990) than to Glaser (1992). While Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasize the importance of systematic coding, Glaser (1992) places relatively greater emphasis on the “theoretical sensitivity” of the scholar.

In this sense, formal categories are taken to be more insightful than substantive categories because they have a greater capacity to explain systematically the underlying characteristics of a phenomenon that can be observed across comparative cases (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Whereas Glaser and Strauss (1967) use the term “field research” to describe real-time proximate observations of phenomena within a situation that is narrowly bounded in time and space, they use the term “library research” to refer to the analysis of historical phenomena using books and other source materials that they associated primarily with libraries. Notably, they argue that the basic principles of grounded theory can be applied directly and unproblematically to such historical research. However, in so doing they assume that the same basic system for conceptual organization used for field research can be applied in a straightforward manner to the analysis of historical phenomena that are distributed over wider spans of time and space. So, for example, they argue that the “various procedures, or tactics, available to the field worker for gathering data have their analogies in library research” (p. 176). They even argued rather dismissively that “historians have made a virtual fetish of chronology and narrative; we need neither be so compulsive about nor so enraptured with the temporal features of library data” (p. 180).

Many of the basic assumptions that make historical thinking and research possible are not always self evident to scholars educated in other methodological traditions. Of course, attention to time and narrative are more than simply a “fetish”. And historians’ attention to questions of context, time and change (e.g., Wadhvani et al., 2020) are not the result of mere “compulsivity”. Rather, we perceive subtle differences here in the underlying conceptions of the nature of insightful knowledge and how this can be realized through empirical research. A narrow view of insightful knowledge places management and organization studies at risk of a narrow understanding of management and organizations. By making explicit the respective contributions *and* limitation of field-based and historical observations we see grounds for expanding definitions of insightful knowledge so as to encompass greater understanding. Indeed, our contention is that a view of insightful knowledge that excludes historical reasoning relegates many of the constitutive phenomena of management practice and organizational life *outside* of the purview of grounded theory.

Evident in Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) exploration of the applicability of grounded theory to “library research” are some problematically narrow assumptions regarding the nature of insightful empirical knowledge and how this should be realized in social science research. On the one hand, they—and many subsequent grounded theorists—assume that insightful observations will be comprised of entities that exhibit stable characteristics in the social world such that they can be adequately described and explained using static, synchronic idioms such as “categories” and “properties of categories” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This assumption—informed by symbolic interactionism—makes sense when observations relate to the subjective interpretations of participants in some neatly-bounded aspect of the social world. For example, in Glaser and Strauss’s (1979) case, the experience of terminally ill patients who had differing knowledge of their health status can be theorized categorically based on variability amongst immediate observations made by scholars in the field. But this assumption may not hold when the salient features of the phenomena under study are inherently dynamic—such as the temporal variability involved in the emergence of new ventures or processes of organizational change (see, e.g., Wadhvani, 2023).

Perhaps even more fundamentally, grounded theorists tend to assume that the phenomena under study will exhibit sufficient vibrancy and variability within the social world that they

can—with sufficient exposure, analytical rigor and creativity—be noticed and observed in their own right and not merely as stable background characteristics or conditions of that world as a whole. This assumption is less likely to hold true for structural or cultural phenomena such as institutions that persist over extended periods of time by virtue of their cognitive legitimacy and taken-for-granted status (e.g., Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

By defining grounded theory in a fundamentally static, ahistorical manner Glaser and Strauss (1967) carved out a view of insightful empirical observation that, while helpful in many respects, nonetheless excludes many of the phenomena of greatest importance to management and organization studies. This is particularly the case in an era of grand challenges such as climate change, structural inequality, and residual colonialism (see, e.g., George et al., 2016), which foreground the critical importance of taken-for-granted institutions that are only recognized and observed through imaginative processes that extend the mind into the distant past and future.

We believe that the broader aspiration and potential of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) work in translating the underlying ethos of grounded theory to historical methods was muted by the degree to which they assign privileged ontological status to observations in the field. The use of entitative idioms such as "categories" and "properties" that they developed for use in field research—and the associated tools of analytical coding and the creation of data structures to clinically demonstrate processes of analytical abstraction from substantive categories to formal categories—are not well suited for the theorization of the dynamic, extended phenomena of primary interest to historians. Such tools and the methodologies can of course sometimes be used or adapted to explain and justify historical observations. But the *standardization* of such grounded theoretical assumptions and tools in qualitative research in management and organization studies can also impose unnatural, unneeded and unreflexive requirements on the generation and evaluation of empirical research that is organized around the more narrative, processual idioms commonly favored in historical modes of explanation and theorization (see, e.g., Langley, 1999).

By defining grounded theory methodology in a way that privileged narrow field observations over forms of observation that are distributed over wide spans of time and space, we argue that Glaser and Strauss (1967) and many subsequent grounded theorists in management and organization studies carved out a relatively narrow, largely synchronic vision for the nature of insightful empirical knowledge. More troublingly for the future of management and organization studies, it would appear that a growing number of managers, entrepreneurs and other practitioners in organizations have come to believe that such a limited vision of empirical knowledge—one focused squarely on the here and now—is not a very far-seeing vision after all (e.g., Suddaby, 2014b).

The Observation of Phenomena that are Distributed Over Time and Space in Historical Research

Many of the most important practical concerns in management practice and organizational life relate to temporally extended, processual phenomena (such as new venture emergence, sustained competitive advantage, and institutional change) which are not well explained only by static theoretical idioms such as conceptual categories or properties (Cornelissen, 2017; Langley, 1999). And, while such temporal concerns may not be well explained by traditional field-based approaches to developing grounded theory, historians have developed sophisti-

cated techniques for orienting and organizing empirical observations in a manner that can account specifically for dynamic, temporally extended phenomena.

Historical modes of observation and theoretical elaboration are not new to management and organization studies. Early theorists of organizations—including Weber (2019 [1921]) and Schumpeter (2008 [1942])—were extremely adept at explaining the pressing strategic concerns of current-day managers within well-organized, richly-illustrated theoretical narratives. Indeed, while most academic management and organization theorists of the late twentieth century focused their attentions respectively on the large sample verification of logico-deductive theory or on grounded theory development in the field, many of the management ideas that have actually gained the most currency amongst practitioners have tended to come from highly imaginative *historical accounts* (e.g., Chandler, 1993 [1977]; Christensen, 2013; Collins, 2001; Freeman, 2010 [1984]; Mintzberg, 1978; Weick, 1993; and others). In such accounts dynamic phenomena (including organizations, technologies, systems, etc.) extend well beyond the perspectival capacity of specific participants. Insightful observations in this vein are observed and explained primarily by stitching together evidence taken from variegated settings in the past and extending suppositions and patterns thereby derived into the imagined future.

For these reasons, we argue that the main problem currently facing those of us who want to use historical observations to develop management and organization theory is *not* the articulation or legitimation of historical research per se.² Rather, we think that we are faced with a variation of the same dilemma that Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified where there is a need for *democratizing* the use of historical methods for generating theory such that the capacity to justify such efforts is not limited to the recognized leaders of management theory and practice only. Indeed, just as Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued for the need to develop methodologies that could extend beyond the verification of established frameworks, we believe that there exists a similar need in the articulation and use of historical analysis for the production of knowledge that is seen as insightful across the domains of management theory and practice. Accordingly, we feel that there exists a need to draw upon and synthesize both grounded theoretical and historical approaches to develop a broader and more practical vision for the creation of empirical knowledge in management and organization studies that is oriented toward observations of phenomena that encompass broader swaths of time and space.

Helpfully, there has been a recent and concerted effort to develop and elaborate a formal set of methodological principles that can be used to realize, and rhetorically justify the use of, historical observation for the development of theory about management and organizations (e.g., Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014; Booth & Rowlinson, 2006; Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Maclean et al., 2016, 2021; Rowlinson et al., 2014). And we see these methodological principles not only as a means for enhancing the trustworthiness and rigor of historical observations but also as an emergent “rhetoric of [theory] generation” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 18) for democratizing the use of historical methods for the development of more insightful empirical knowledge in management and organization theory.

² Indeed, the present volume is part of a broader series of sophisticated treatises on the applications of historical methods, techniques and approaches in management studies (e.g., Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014; Decker et al., 2015; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Wadhwani & Decker, 2017; Wadhwani et al., 2020).

INSIGHTFUL EMPIRICAL KNOWLEDGE IN HISTORICAL ORGANIZATION STUDIES

In this section we contribute to recent efforts associated with the creation of “historical organization studies” as an emergent domain of scholarly inquiry. That is, we work toward a set of methodological principles, mutually grounded in history and organization studies (see, e.g., Harvey and Maclean, 2023; Maclean et al., 2016, 2021), that can facilitate the generation of insightful empirical knowledge in management and organization studies. We do so by exploring how certain methodological principles articulated by Maclean and colleagues (2016, 2021) hold promise for fruitfully extending those introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Our intention in doing so is to begin to identify underlying methodological principles that can enable the generation and justification of empirical knowledge of dynamic and/or enduring phenomena that extend through time and space. We also supplement this section with lessons we have gained from our own experiences where we are working to use historical observations to develop theoretical narratives in management and organization studies.

As previously noted, any research methodology has, as a fundamental concern, the ways in which empirical observations should be organized in a research process (Kara, 2015; Silverman, 2020 [1997]). In this broad sense, both grounded theory and historical organization studies are focused on the manner in which empirical observations are conceptually organized and justified such that they constitute insightful knowledge. Yet there are important linguistic differences in the manner in which such conceptual organization is structured between grounded theory and historical organization studies. Whereas Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that insightful observations are those that generate new conceptual *categories* and *properties* that can be used to explain the underlying features of phenomena derived from comparative analysis in the field, Maclean et al. (2021) argue that insightful observations are those that generate “historically-informed theoretical narratives” that can explain “organizational dynamics” and “the contexts and forces bearing upon organizations” (p. 3).

The domain of historical organization studies, thus, comprises “organizational research that embeds organizing and organizations in their socio-historical context(s) to generate historically informed theoretical narratives attentive to both disciplines” (Maclean et al., 2021, p. 4). So, within the emergent methodological formulations of historical organization studies, the static idiom of “conceptual category” is replaced with the dynamic idiom of “theoretical narrative” as the primary analytical structure through which empirical observations are organized in research on management and organizations (see also Foster et al., 2017).

The emergent methodological principles of historical organization studies have yet to fully elaborate. For example, the notion of “theoretical narratives” remains somewhat ambiguous. We work to unpack this central concept in terms of its relationship to the substantive and formal categories of interest in grounded theory. So, as we see it, the domain of historical organization studies involves two main types of theoretical narratives. The purpose of the first type of narrative is to organize historical observations so as to account for the passage of actors and events through relatively broad swaths of time and space, whereas the purpose of the second narrative is to organize historical observations to solve some higher order conceptual tension. Following Glaser and Strauss (1967) we suggest that the first type of stories can be called *substantive narratives* and the second type *formal narratives*.

The Insightfulness of Substantive and Formal Narratives in Historical Organization Studies

The natural tendency of the historian is to generate substantive narratives. So, for example, Chandler (1993 [1977]) writes about the historical emergence of the modern, multiunit business enterprise. While Chandler's narrative is cast in the substance of everyday life, it is, in our view, both highly imaginative and theoretical in the sense that it constitutes a novel, well-organized *explanation* of historical observations. Substantive narratives in this sense represent the temporally-extended theories of everyday life that are used to make sense of the relationship between the past, present and future on the basis of some overarching, diachronic conceptual order (see, e.g., Roberts, 2001). Substantive narratives are thus intended to describe and explain phenomena that can be identified and studied as such through indirect observation based on traces that are scattered across disparate spans of time and space. Substantive narratives are traded not only amongst scholarly communities but may also obtain the status of "living history" (e.g., Suddaby et al., 2022) through their intersection with the collective memory of broader audiences.

In our ongoing work using historical methods, for example, substantive narratives have to do with the formation and evolution of children's hospitals, business dynasties, water management projects, or state-owned marketing agencies. We enjoy working with substantive narratives, in part, because of their richness and the effect of reality (Barthes, 1968) which they provide to our conceptual understanding of the world. We also appreciate the practicality of substantive narratives and their connection to, and sometimes resonance with, the historical consciousness of individuals in the world of management and organizations.

In contrast, formal narratives operate at comparatively higher levels of conceptual abstraction. In their literature review on theory building in management research, Shepherd and Suddaby (2017) argue that "compelling theories are at their core compelling stories" (p. 60) and note that the requirements for generating theory in management include the same basic elements that constitute good stories: conflict, characters, setting, plot and narrative arc. They write:

Management theories are typically triggered by tensions that exist between what we know and what we observe. [...] Conceiving of and constructing theories involves developing the main characters (or constructs), constructing the context or setting, and actively engaging the audience's imagination through the introduction of plots and themes. Finally, [...] the theorist needs to select the story elements that build the narrative arc of a theory, that is, justify and evaluate the theory. (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017, p. 80)

In this sense, we suggest that the theory-as-narrative idiom introduced by Maclean and colleagues (2016, 2021) does not eliminate the sort of conceptual categories of interest to grounded theorists. Rather, it animates them as the main characters of an abstract story that can solve a conceptual drama around which an overarching theoretical narrative is cast.

Like one of the originators of grounded theory (Glaser, 1992), historical organization theorists are seldom content to merely "code" or "abstract" categories from a synchronic or unidimensional mass of data; rather we derive emergent conceptual characters from across the assorted landscape of available sources and traces from the past. And we work to immediately put these characters to work (sometimes in spite of their flaws) as a means of explaining some conceptual conflict—a paradox, problem or challenge that exists in the gap between the liter-

ature and the world. For example, in our published work, formal narratives have focused on the explanatory work performed by conceptual characters such as “stakes” and “stakeholder identification” (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2021) and “entrepreneurial visions” and “rhetorical history” (e.g., Suddaby et al., 2021). We enjoy working with formal theoretical narratives, in part because of their elegance and the degree of aesthetic and explanatory coherence which they can impose on reality. Formal narratives are, in our view, an important means of bringing order, coherence and beauty into the otherwise chaotic or messy world of unmediated empirical observation. We also value formal narratives because they enable us to participate in conversations that extend across the domains of management and organization studies and practice.

However, in contrast to some articulations of grounded theory in which substantive categories are made instrumental primarily for the creation of formal conceptual categories (e.g., Gioia et al., 2013), our contention is that, in the most insightful empirical knowledge, substantive and formal narratives *weave together and interpenetrate one another*. Some of the best exemplars for this style of blended theoretical storytelling in management and organization studies are Karl Weick’s historical reconstructions of organizational accidents such as the deaths of firefighters in Mann Gulch, Montana in 1949 (e.g., Weick, 1993) or the gas leak and industrial disaster in Bhopal, India in 1984 (e.g., Weick, 1988, 2010). In such works, Weick seamlessly blends historical observation and narration with a small cast of conceptual categories (e.g., enactment, sensemaking, etc.). The goal, in this style of work, is neither to make a contribution the historiography surrounding these events (in fact Weick relies heavily on existing historical accounts) nor to generalize through the sort of comparative case analysis described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Rather, such work is conceptually useful *because* the empirical observations were at once idiosyncratic and resonant. That is, by blending substantive and formal narratives, Weick (e.g., 1988, 1993) was able to catch the imagination of large audiences of both scholarly and practitioner communities and helped them see both their own work and the broader social world with fresh eyes.

In our view, Weick’s work achieved such resonance largely *because* he did not allow substantive narratives to become merely instrumental for the creation of formal narratives. Because he used substantive, idiosyncratic historical narratives to introduce and communicate formal, abstract theoretical narratives, Weick’s concepts gained a “reality effect” (Barthes, 1968) that they would not have had if they had been articulated only in the formalized genre of prevailing theories of management and organization. For this reason, he reserved his more formal theoretical language for *after* he had established his reasoning and argumentation on the basis of substantive narratives—thereby using privileged intellectual space to tell rich stories about the observable world.

In this sense, we do not believe that substantive narratives are, in any way, less important for theorization than formal narratives. Some highly imaginative historical works, such as Chandler’s (1993 [1977]) work on the managerial revolution in American business, or Crosby’s (2016 [1972]) work on the Columbian exchange, have been enormously insightful largely because of the creativity and persuasiveness of their substantive narratives and their interpenetration with formal narratives. Indeed, such work has not only formed academic disciplines (i.e., business history, environmental history) but also led to substantial changes in the ways in which resources are organized in the world of practice (informing both public and corporate policies around the world). Yet such substantive narratives rarely “generalize” in the sense of comparative case analysis described by grounded theorists. So, as Wadhwani

and Decker (2017, p. 123) observe “for historians, theory also encompasses the explanation of unique events which may not be fully, or even not at all, generalizable to a broader category”.

Theoretical narratives need not generalize per se but they must have resonance. Whereas a generalizability-based criterion for insightful knowledge involves the degree to which a conceptual category is formally applicable across units of analysis (e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967), a resonance-based criterion for insightful knowledge involves a more pragmatic, substantive expression of interest by scholarly and practitioner communities (see, e.g., Van Maanen et al., 2007). Benford and Snow (2000) argue that the resonance of any theoretical frame is based on socially-situated criteria such as credibility (e.g., internal consistency, empirical credibility and authorial legitimacy) and salience (e.g., perceived centrality, commensurability and narrative fidelity).

Resonance is established through collaborative acts of distributed intellectual agency in which the patterns and stories derived from scholarly observations of a given phenomenon are described with just enough richness to catch the imagination and to enable the reader to “determine how closely their situations match the research situation and, hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1995, p. 58). In this sense, the theorization process is a highly systematized, naturalistic form of “communicative action” (Habermas, 1984) in which scholars make observations and interact with one another and with broader audiences for the socially-situated purpose of “reaching understanding” (Habermas, 1984, p. 286).

DISCUSSION

We began this chapter by noting that research methodologies represent underlying principles that guide the generation of knowledge from empirical observation (Kara, 2015; Silverman, 2020 [1997]). Within this chapter, we have worked to situate grounded theory with respect to historical organization studies with the overarching intent of carving out a pathway for realizing and justifying empirical observations of historical phenomena as insightful within the domains of management and organization studies. Furthermore, in this chapter we have argued that the future success of management and organization studies as applied fields of knowledge may be contingent on the development of a rhetoric of insightful empirical knowledge that can account for dynamic and extended phenomena that encompass more time and space than can be observed within the narrow context of an immediate observational field. And we have argued that recent articulations of historical organization studies hold promise for developing such a rhetoric.

More work is required in order to fully realize this vision for the methodological potential of historical organization studies. Grounded theory provides some clues as to how we might (and might not) proceed with this effort. First, the core insight of Glaser and Strauss (1967; see also Merton, 1968) was that theory exists in the “middle range” and can be developed abductively with, and articulated from, empirical substance. Research in historical organization studies builds on this insight by weaving abstract, formal language into the empirical observations of the world. Theory is something that should be communicated using the substance of everyday life—whether that substance arises from a proximate field or from what has been termed “mental travel” to distant locales in time and space (Suddendorf et al., 2009; Tulving, 1985).

Second, we learn from grounded theory that there are dangers in defining empiricism narrowly in terms of the knowledge from immediate sensory experience. There is no observation

without imagination. While grounded theorists recognize the importance of imagination in comprehending phenomena that they encounter that fits within a perspectival lens with the scale and scope of the field, they have largely failed to extend this insight to account for observations with greater scale and scope. Historical observation is particularly dependent on the ability of the observer to conjure up distant worlds based on fragmentary evidence from the past. The analytical strictures of coding and data structures used by grounded theorists to demonstrate movement from substantive to formal categories can sometimes impede—rather than facilitate—the development of disciplined historical imagination (see, e.g., Carr, 1961; Partner & Foot, 2012). More problematically, these tools may inadvertently convey what we see as an erroneous assumption that the substantive narratives and the vibrant “living histories” of everyday life are, somehow, less important to scholarly understandings of the world than the formal, technical (and admittedly sometimes rather bland) language of abstract theory.

Third, grounded theory provides clues regarding the way empirical knowledge can be justified as insightful in applied domains of inquiry in which major intellectual achievements are understood to resonate not only within intellectual communities but also broader communities of practice. Specifically, grounded theory adopts a very practical definition of insightfulness and aspires to intellectual recognition by “laymen and colleagues alike” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 30) where “the people in situations for which a grounded theory has been developed can apply it in the natural course of daily events” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 249). As noted, management and organization studies can be said to suffer from a relevance crisis due to a lack of resonance of academic theory for practice (e.g., Suddaby, 2014b). And we believe that the domain of historical organization studies has the potential to address this problem, which can lead to further justification and legitimation of historical research methods in management and organization studies.

In our view, the domain of historical organization studies contains an emergent set of methodological principles that build upon the core ethos of grounded theory whilst also working to address its core limitations. To make these methodologies actionable for grounded theory development, future work should develop more specific tools and recommendations for scholars seeking to establish empirical knowledge of dynamic and extended phenomena that is useful for researchers and practitioners alike.

For example, future work should seek to situate and integrate common principles and tools—such as triangulation from diverse sources of data—in the development of historically-grounded theory. In practice, much grounded theory has been developed using unidimensional data (often in the form of field interviews). However, Glaser and Strauss (1967) note that reliance on a single source of data is actually problematic for grounded theorizing.

A grounded theory that is faithful to everyday realities of a substantive area is one that has been carefully induced from diverse data [...] Only in this way will the theory be closely related to the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas, and so be highly applicable to dealing with them. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 239)

Historical research often combines diverse sources of data—synthesizing amongst archival documents, historiography and other assorted traces of the past—in order to theorize (e.g., Bucheli and Wadhwani, 2014). The necessity of triangulation in historical research, thus, addresses a common limitation in the development of grounded theory.

Furthermore, Suddaby (2006) noted that “theoretical sampling” and “constant comparison” constitute two basic methods for conducting grounded theory research. We suggest that future methodological work in historical organization studies can work to further develop and extend these practices to explain how decisions of what to observe and how observations and analysis should proceed in the research process. So, on the one hand, methods are needed to specify how the exploratory selection of historical evidence should be sensitized by and premised on evolving conceptual narratives. And, on the other hand, the methods of historical organization studies can help to explain the specific forms of comparison incident to historical observation.

In our experience, such comparison and sampling decisions must be undertaken with great care so as to conduct observations primarily within a logic of theory generation rather than within established concepts or metanarratives of received knowledge. The natural tendency of the researcher may be to work quickly to reduce the chaos associated with exploratory historical observation to gain some sense of coherence and plausibility. Such verification and validation certainly have an appropriate and important role to play in historical organization studies (e.g., Maclean et al., 2021) but there is a need for methodological elaboration which can explain how historical verificatory techniques such as source criticism and triangulation (e.g., Bucheli and Wadhwani, 2014) can and should be situated within those research processes that adopt, as a primary purpose, the generation of new conceptual narratives (e.g., Decker, 2022). In this sense, we note that additional methodological work in historical organization studies might attend more systematically to the nature of the imaginative, historical thought trials (e.g., Weick, 1989) through which substantive and formal narratives are constructed in research processes.

The goal of theorization in historical organization studies is to create a resonant set of richly contextualized conceptual patterns organized in theoretical narratives that span time and space. Achieving this goal requires the democratization of theory generation amongst scholars working to not only understand similar phenomena across different historical contexts (i.e., in historical disciplines oriented primarily around substantive narratives) but also across different technical jurisdictions (i.e., in social scientific disciplines oriented around formal theoretical narratives). Being *mutually situated* within and between domains that are oriented respectively around historiographical concerns surrounding substantive narratives (e.g., history of ancient America, early-modern Europe, etc.) and theoretical concerns surrounding formal narratives (e.g., sensemaking, identity, institutions, etc.) requires both methodological reflexivity and ongoing, ever present justification. But we suggest that inhabiting the interstitial intellectual space between substantive and formal research domains represents a means of generating insightful empirical knowledge that, we believe, has a strong potential for resonance within the scholarly communities of management and history, as well as within the field of management practice.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Bucheli M and Wadhwani RD (Eds.) (2014) *Organizations in time: History, theory, methods*. Oxford University Press.

An excellent place to start for scholars interested in learning more about historical methods in management and organization studies, this edited book works to situate

historical methodologies with respect to management and organization studies and introduces some basic historical methods such as “source criticism” and “triangulation” along with chapters that explore their potential for theory development in management and organization studies.

- (2) Decker S, Kipping M, and Wadhwani RD (2015) New business histories! Plurality in business history research methods. *Business History*, 57(1): 30–40.

This article argues against the tendency to reduce the complexity and variety of historical methodologies in interdisciplinary research. We note that a similar argument may be fruitfully applied to grounded theory research—exploring the plurality of historical methodologies alongside variations in grounded theory methodology (c.f. Glaser, 1992 vs. Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

- (3) Glaser BG (1978) *Theoretical sensitivity*. University of California.

In this volume, Glaser emphasizes the importance of the interpretive skill and reasoning of the theorist in grounded theory research. This approach can be usefully contrasted with Strauss and Corbin (1990). In our view there is much to be gained from understanding the role of historical consciousness and historical imagination in fostering theoretical sensitivity in grounded theory.

- (4) Glaser BG (1992) *Emergence vs. forcing basics of grounded theory analysis*. The Sociology Press.

Here Glaser responds to Strauss and Corbin (1990) and challenges their predominant (somewhat mechanical) emphasis on systematic coding for the development of grounded theory.

- (5) Glaser BG and Strauss AL (1967) *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Publishing Company.

Scholars interested in developing theory using historical methods should read Glaser and Strauss (1967) from the standpoint of critical appreciation, perhaps focusing specifically on chapter 7.

- (6) Maclean M, Harvey C, and Clegg SR (2016) Conceptualizing historical organization studies. *Academy of Management Review*, 41(4): 609–632.

In this article Maclean and colleagues introduce the idiom of the “historically informed theoretical narrative” as the underlying grounds used for realizing empirical research that can be situated, with “dual integrity”, in both historical methodologies and management and organization studies.

- (7) Maclean M, Harvey C, Suddaby R, and Clegg S (2021) Historical organization studies: Advancing new direction for organizational research. In *Historical Organization Studies*. Taylor & Francis.

In this edited volume Maclean and colleagues expand upon the notion of “historically informed theoretical narratives” and authors of various chapters illustrate how these can be used to structure empirical research in management and organization studies.

- (8) Strauss A and Corbin J (1990) *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage.

Here grounded theory takes on a heavy emphasis on the mechanics of systematic, analytical coding. This can be contrasted with the more organic, interpretivist approach to grounded theory advocated, for example, by Glaser (1978, 1992).

- (9) Suddaby R (2006) From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4): 633–642.

Suddaby (2006) introduces “constant comparison” and “theoretical sampling” as two key principles from grounded theory for the domain of management and organization studies. We note that future methodological developments at the intersection of historical organization studies and grounded theory may fruitfully elaborate specific techniques for the application of these principles in historical methodologies.

- (10) Wadhwani RD and Decker S (2017) Clio’s toolkit: The practice of historical methods in organization studies. In *The Routledge companion to qualitative research in organization studies* (pp. 113–127). Routledge.

Here Wadhwani and Decker note the critical role of the position and perspective of the researcher in historical methodologies. We note that this argument may be fruitfully extended relative to Glaser’s (1978) emphasis on the importance of theoretical sensitivity in the development of grounded theory.

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19. Foucauldian approaches to researching management histories critically

Stephen Cummings and Todd Bridgman

INTRODUCTION

The idea that history is not a factual, objective account of what happened in the past, but rather a malleable strategic resource, has received increasing attention in management studies in the past two decades (Kieser, 1994; Zald, 2002). This is not a new idea. In *The Use and Abuse of History for Life* (1874), Friedrich Nietzsche made a case against “universal history”: the notion that history is a matter of collecting and presenting the objective and immutable facts of the past. He argued that this view was naïve – there is no such objectivity: historians always select some aspects they see in the past, and do not see or ignore others, creating causal chains that appeal to them while steering people away from alternative interpretations.

One hundred and fifty years after the publication of Nietzsche’s essay, our field (or at least parts of it) has embarked on an “historic turn” in this spirit, as discussed by Rowlinson, Decker and Hassard (see also Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Coraiola et al., 2021; Mills et al., 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014). This “turn” resonates with similar developments in a widening range of social sciences that have sought to investigate how history is subjectively deployed and a key element in power/knowledge dynamics (Klein, 2017).

The person often viewed as Nietzsche’s intellectual successor with regard to writing histories critical of objective histories, Michel Foucault, developed an extensive oeuvre. While Foucault did not want to reduce his work to a step-by-step method, we can discern a number of general attributes that his studies often shared. Foucault and his interpreters acknowledged and outlined different approaches that developed across three decades of research (Burrell, 1988; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983).

Foucauldian approaches have been applied in fields similar to management such as criminology, economics and psychology (Cohen, 1985; Lowry, 1987; Richards, 1996; Smith, 1988). Scholars first started exploring how Foucault’s approaches could be applied to think critically about Management some decades ago. These authors focused either on particular periods of Foucault’s work (McKinlay and Starkey, 1998; Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002); or discussions or critiques about the use of Foucault (Barratt, 2002, 2003; Burrell, 1988; Knights, 2002); or they sought to unravel a particular target or aspect of management by using Foucault’s particular approaches (Cummings et al., 2016; Fox, 2000; Hoskin, 1994; Hoskin and Macve, 1986; Knights, 1992; Townley, 1993); or they applied some aspects of Foucault’s thinking to a particular dimension in a company or sample of companies (Covaeski, et al., 1998). Recent years have seen a rejuvenation of interest in Foucault in management studies (Raffnsøe et al., 2019 provide a good review of this). However, it is not so easy to find a simple and practical

“field guide” outlining why and how scholars might use Foucauldian “methods” to examine management histories.¹

Providing such a guide is our aim here. We do this by first discussing the general methodological threads that weave through Foucault’s work. Then we explore how these threads are drawn on with different lenses across the four main periods of Foucauldian work. We then utilize the threads to study a historical representation in management: the so-called classical foundations of the sub-field of change management. As Buchnea argues, there is much to be learnt from historical case studies such as this. We then use the different lenses as means for discussing how Foucault’s approaches may be applied to a range of research topics in management.

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, Michel Foucault articulated an approach to history that he had been developing for decades. His work (1985: 9) sought to “learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently”. Foucault was at pains not to be seen as a historian. He might be variously described as a philosopher, sociologist, anthropologist or ethnographer, and he wrote histories from all of these perspectives, but he was not a historian of any of these fields in the conventional sense. Foucault (1985: 9) described his projects as “studies of ‘history’ by reason of the domain they deal with and the references they appeal to; but they are not the work of a ‘historian’”.

The historian that Foucault does not wish to be confused with is a scholar who writes history in a Hegelian manner: uncovering the truth of events, the theses and anti-theses of past periods, and presenting them as a chronological chain of progress in a linear way – a chain that leads to or causes our present higher-level synthesis. For this kind of historian, events or causes not seen as contributing to our current achievements are glossed over. This adds up to a history of “winners”, where past events, while seen as separate from the present, are believed to be linked in a cumulative sense, and this “chain” is built in terms of present circumstances.

For Foucault, what this type of history does, sometimes unwittingly and sometimes with purpose, is legitimate or add credence to the present establishment. Foucault (1985: 9) claimed that “instead of legitimating what is already known”, his goal was to know how and to what extent it might be possible to rethink the history of conventional historians and enable thinking in the present and for the future. Foucault proposed that the histories of conventional historians are part of the “truth games” that created objects and subjects that we assume to have a real or ahistorical existence. It was these histories and their limiting effects that he sought to question.

FIVE GENERAL FOUCAULDIAN “METHODS”

Subsequently, Foucault used conventional histories, and the assumptions they promoted, as starting points that his work would unravel by showing them to be part of a web of contingent relations. Foucault’s own studies then engaged in a “recurrent dialogue” with these conventional histories to produce “counter-history” (Foucault, 1977b; Noujain, 1987) – histories that would challenge established historical assumptions. As a guide to this critical unravelling

¹ Foucault did not like the word “methods” applied to his work, so while we use the word here to conform to this book’s aims, we apologize in advance to those who agree that it is a limiting term for Foucault, and a word that would bother our subject greatly.

there are five common themes that run through all of Foucault's counter-histories: a bias against conventional histories; critiquing points of origin and cumulative evolution; juxtaposing discontinuities; seeing developments as the result of particular problematizations rather than evolutionary; and seeing subjects and objects not as independent entities but co-created. We frame these as "methods" below.

1. Be Explicitly Biased Against Conventional Histories

Foucault insisted that no history can give the complete or objective story. Given the dispersive nature of events and the multiplicity of lines of explanation between them, there is always a "polyhedron of intelligibility", and, subsequently, many ways to represent history, each with its own biases (Flynn 1994: 38). "Historians", wrote Foucault (1977b: 156–157) channelling Nietzsche, "take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place [all] the unavoidable obstacles of their passion". They "invoke objectivity, the accuracy of the facts, and the permanence of the past [and] hide [their] singular malice under the cloak of universals".

In contrast, Foucault's historical sense would be "explicit in its ... acknowledg[ing] its system of injustice. Its perception is slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation [of] the history of the present" (Foucault, 1977a: 31). Thus, Foucault never claimed to reveal the whole truth in his histories, but rather to raise doubts about what historians promoted as the truth of an object or subject's evolution. In a similar vein, we are clear at the outset that our targets are the conventional historical understandings of knowledge in management.

2. Critique Historical Continuities Stemming from Points of Origin

Conventional histories tend to look back with hindsight to seek out "present needs at the origin", then outline a "progress of consciousness" from that point upwards, culminating at our present heights (Foucault, 1980: 70). They present history as the identification of essential kernels of truth that define what a subject or object is about and then chart progress from there (Foucault, 1977a). Foucault's counter-histories sought to unsettle these conventional points of origin and the consequent evolution of knowledge drawn by historians by "dissolv[ing] the relationship ordinarily established between the eruption of an [origin] event and necessary continuity". Such histories, Foucault claimed, become "the site of truth" and make "possible a field of knowledge" by defining what it is about; but this "truth" becomes "the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it [has been] hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history" (Foucault 1977a: 144).

3. Juxtapose Surprising Discontinuities to Unsettle Assumptions About Progress

Foucault's (1977b: 160) explicit counter-historical bias against established origins and the continuities of progress presented from their starting points, led to a third characteristic of his work: the development of "counter memories" through "a transformation of history into a totally different form of time". This involved moving from linear chronological time as an organizing schema for a historical narrative, to spatial juxtapositions that organized narratives by jumping across time and/or space to juxtapose different artefacts as a way of highlighting ruptures rather than evolutions. For example, in *The Order of Things* (1970: xv), a Chinese

encyclopaedia's categories set against Western sensibilities in the same period illustrate "the exotic charm of another system of thought [which is at once] the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of [Western people] thinking *that*". And in *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), he began by presenting the description of a man punished by being publicly tortured to death, next to an excerpt from just a few years later of a prison timetable that described punishment achieved via the discipline of a mundane drudgery behind closed doors. How, Foucault's counter-history of punishment proceeded to ask, did things change so much, so quickly? This could not be an evolution of understanding about the best way to manage punishment. It was an eruption that we have smoothed over in order to satisfy ourselves that our knowledge is cumulative and progressive – a particular eruption that Foucault set out to re-examine. A method that places unconventional primary source artefacts side by side can open a window through which one might begin to probe our knowledge's forgotten predispositions.

4. Show How Developments Result from Particular "Problematizations"

This focus on sudden discontinuities where conventional historians see continuity and evolution meant that Foucault needed to specify an alternative rationale as to why things changed or developed, rather than by a logic of the natural progress of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Hence, Foucault's (1985: 10) counter-histories sought to reveal how transitions occur with shifts in "the conditions in which human beings 'problematize' what they are, what they do".

For example, some of Foucault's (1965, 1975) most well-known counter-histories showed how psychology and the human sciences emerged with the arrival of an age beyond that in which sovereigns could maintain control by "doing violence" to transgressors. This shift created a problem of how social control could be upheld by other means. This problem spurred the development of the human sciences and their outlining of human norms and laws of behaviour that should be adhered to and which could be policed. By a similar token, Foucault's (1980) *History of Sexuality* outlines how people in the 19th century became interested in understanding and managing reproduction and sexuality as urban populations swelled, seeing the rise of new subjects like population ecology and the codification of sexual norms.

5. Explore How Subjects and Objects of Study Co-Create Each Other

Relatedly, rather than the perspective taken by many historians, that the objects that people studied have existed in an objective state, while the subjects or sciences that study them emerged later and independently, Foucault saw objects and subjects co-determining one another. He argued, for example, that the species "Man" as we understand him now, did not exist until the practices constituted by the rise of humanism and the human sciences took hold (Foucault, 1970); and that what we define as "madness", could not be conceived without the conditions that enabled psychology (Foucault, 1965).

FOUR FOUCAULDIAN LENSES

While the five Foucauldian "methods" outlined above pervaded Foucault's work, he developed different counter-historical lenses within which he used them through his lifetime (see

Table 19.1) (Burrell, 1988; Flynn, 1994). Understanding these can enable more nuanced methodological analyses in management studies, as we will illustrate later in the chapter.

The Early Works: Uncovering How Histories Have Hidden the Truth

Foucault's first works (1965, 1975, 1976b) examined the history that elevated psychology and psychiatry's status as sciences and its assumption that "normal" sanity is an objective, pre-existing condition. Foucault's examinations (1976b: 73) countered that "Man became a 'psychological species' only when the Age of Reason made madness a problem to be resolved and, hence, an object of inquiry". "Madness" was not always present; it was brought into being by the very practices that made its science, Psychology, possible.

Foucault (1965: 142) interrogated the role played by psychology's history in this deceit: it presented psychology as arriving in "that happy age in which madness was at last [properly] recognized and treated in accordance with a truth to which we had long remained blind". Foucault showed that because this history is written in the terms of presents "heights", two contradictory ideas took hold: (1) that madness was *not recognized* until it was rigorously grasped by science (here historians find the origin of psychology), and (2) the pre-modern approach to madness was either simplistic or erroneous (despite psychology's history recording that such an object *had not been recognized yet*).

More than this, Foucault argued that psychology's attempt to found itself as a science had not overcome a mis-recognition: it promoted a mis-recognition of a primordial understanding. The modern discovery/creation of "madness" *concealed* real madness. During the Renaissance, for example, our understanding of madness was richer and *more truthful*.

Archaeology: Examining the Structures Supporting Historical Truths

But how could we know that an earlier experience was more real or essential (Derrida, 1978; MacIntyre, 1991)? Foucault came to see this as a methodological problem. Seeking a way around it, he backed away from countering the history of one human science toward seeking "to determine the basis or archaeological system common to a whole series of scientific 'representations'" (Foucault, 1970: xi–xii). His methods still sought to critique the "scientificity" of human sciences, but not how an accepted history was keeping us from the truth; but instead what was it that *motivated* the human sciences to present themselves as sciences, to create histories that promoted this identity?

Recognizing the problem in promoting a pre-modern view of madness as superior, Foucault now argued that all truths, all conceptions of objects, are bound by the *epistemic* "strata" within which they are situated. He defined an episteme as: "a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape" (Foucault, 1976a: 191). And he defined an "archaeological" method as creating: "a history which is not that of [knowledge's] growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility" (1970: xxii). In the modern Western episteme, for example, Foucault's method sought to show how human studies must satisfy the conditions of the so-called "normal" sciences to be considered "valid".

Table 19.1 A summary of common Foucauldian themes and different approaches

Common Themes	Different Approaches			
	A. Early Works	B. Archeology	C. Genealogy	D. Interpretive Analytics
1. Explicit bias/aim to raise doubts	Reveal "truths" that may lie buried underneath misguided	Seek to see how what has come, over time, to be "truths" are actually what the prevailing episteme steers us to look for and to subsequently see.	There are no essential "truths". Seek to see how what we take to be true is only that which has been developed by a network of power relations that has grown to maintain and develop itself.	Create apparatus that show what different networks and episteme see as the "truth", then to compare/ contrast to enable thinking differently about a problem.
2. Critiquing origins/espoused continuities	historical beliefs that have developed as subjects have sought to appear more scientific.			
3. Juxtaposing discontinuities				
4. Examining problematizations				
5. Analysing how subjects and objects create each other				

Genealogy: Questioning the Political and Professional Networks that Create and Maintain Truth Claims

Foucault's archaeological approach had its problems. Foucault implied that an episteme is a structure from which all thinkers of a particular period cannot escape (e.g., Foucault, 1970: 17–19; 1976a: 72–74, 146–147), thereby denuding his or any other researcher's ability to affect change. In hindsight, Foucault (1980: 105) claimed that “what was missing from my work was the problem of ‘discursive regime’, the effects of power proper on the enunciative play. I confused it too much with systematicity ... or something like a paradigm”. To help him change tack he drew on Nietzsche's view that there are no objective essential forms that can be appealed to: only chaotic webs of change and chance relations. In being afraid of this non-foundational uncertainty, people seek to develop grand origins, profound intentions and immutable necessities. In this way, genealogy's methods move away from archaeology's structuralist tendencies. All knowledge is historical as before, but all history, and consequently the development of humanity, can now only be “a series of interpretations” not related to the nature of things but to particular political interests (Foucault, 1977b: 151).

The question then became if there is nothing objective that knowledge can attach itself to, what sustains our belief in the interpretations that we take as knowledge? Like Nietzsche, Foucault's answer was power. Archaeology examined the knowledge statements promoted by various strata or episteme. Genealogy would focus upon the relationship that Foucault (1977a) called “power/knowledge”. While Foucault (1980: 52, 194) recognized power as positive, or “perpetually creating knowledge” by producing “domains of objects and rituals”, he also found that “knowledge constantly induces effects of power” by “excluding”, “abstracting”, “concealing” and “repressing” alternatives.

Playing an integral part in this producing–repressing relationship is the historical identity that a subject constructs out of a multiplicity of potentially contributing elements. This *produces* by shaping the view and boundaries of the subject, thus making knowledge possible. However, it at once *represses* other interpretations. In response, genealogy: “transposes the relationship ordinarily established between the eruption of an event and necessary continuity ... records the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality [and] disturbs what was previously considered immobile” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 120; Foucault, 1977b: 154).

Interpretive Analytics: Examining How Motivational Structures and Political Networks Use History to Shape Truths We Must Think Beyond

Foucault's final lens, interpretive analytics, combined the earlier lenses. Archaeology was denuded by the all-encompassing nature of the episteme. Genealogy turned every order into an inauthentic order, a facade sustained by power that marginalizes alternatives. Taylor (1986: 93), and others (Brenner, 1994; Habermas, 1986; Honneth, 1991), subsequently argued that Foucault thus relinquished any critical power by claiming there is “no order of human life ... or human nature, that one can appeal to in order to judge or evaluate between ways of life”.

Interpretive analytics is an attempt to develop a method that gets around this problem. It emerged as Foucault took the archaeological step back from genealogy necessary to enable him to be both analytical and critical. While genealogy looked at the role of power in the *formation* and maintenance of knowledge, archaeology enabled the provision of a system within

which the *forms*, or statements of this formation, could be marked out and analysed (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 104ff.).

While Foucault’s (1978) last genealogical work, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, began with particular unquestioned assumptions (e.g., sexual norms) and the historical power/knowledge that sustained them, interpretative analytics acknowledged that critique required an archaeological belief underlying this that things have been different and could be different again. “Having begun on the inside” as a genealogist, the interpretive analyst must then recognize that to interpret, analyse and be critical requires an archaeological isolation of the present strata of networks relative to alternatives (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 106).

Foucault’s method subsequently became to construct an apparatus (he termed it a *dispositif*) of alternative views of sexual subjectivity starting with the Ancient Greeks, to re-start his counter-history of sexuality. This apparatus would show a range of other strata of power/knowledge relations to show how things had been otherwise to aid getting free of the present historical conventions, provide the courage to write alternative histories, and thereby providing means – or inspiration – to think differently.

These four approaches are summarized in Table 19.1, with the five “method” threads earlier described shown cutting across them. In the discussion below we apply the five Foucauldian threads with an explicit bias: to critique a “foundation stone” in the history of change management. We unpick the idea that a key artefact is a point of origin. We juxtapose two diagrams (Figures 19.1 and 19.2) to undermine the conventional historical narrative. And we show how this history was woven and maintained by key subjects in response to particular problems that emerged in the 1980s. We then outline how the four Foucauldian lenses could each be applied to delve deeper into interrogating the conventional history of change or management more generally. As we shall see, Foucauldian research often means digging out and examining primary sources: old books, pamphlets, notes, diagrams and so on, and juxtaposing these against later interpretations. Digital search engines may not help you start, but as we’ll show they may be helpful to you later.

DISCUSSION: A FOUCAULDIAN INTERROGATION OF THE IMMUTABLE FOUNDATIONS OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

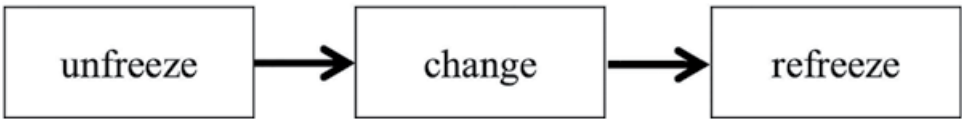


Figure 19.1 *Change as three steps*

If you take the time to look for the unfreeze–change–refreeze model in Figure 19.1, attributed to Kurt Lewin and regarded as the “fundamental” or “classic” approach to, or classic “paradigm” for, managing change today (Robbins and Judge, 2009: 625; Sonenshein, 2010: 478; Waddell, 2007: 22), you are unlikely to find it.

The commonly cited singular origin point for the model, which is assumed to have sprung from the head of Lewin, the great scientist as change as three steps (or CATS), is “Lewin,

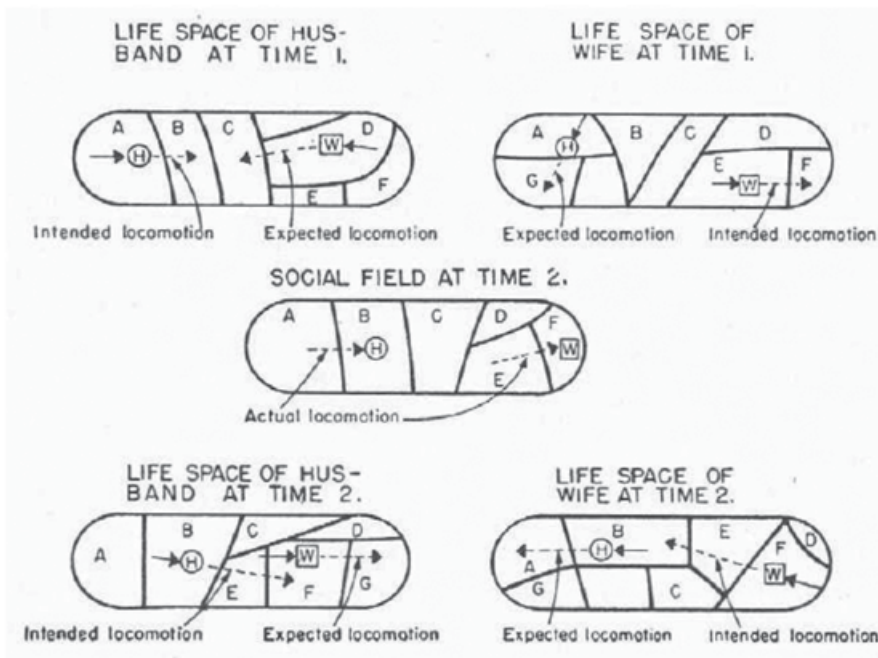


Figure 19.2 The only diagram about change or transformation contained in Lewin (1947a: 11)

1951”: a book titled *Field Theory in Social Science*. If you know that Lewin died in 1947, the date seems unusual. However, this is not a book written by Lewin. It is a posthumously “edited compilation of his scattered papers” (Shea, 1951; 65). *Field Theory* was edited by Dorwin Cartwright as a second companion volume to an earlier collection of Lewin’s works compiled by Kurt Lewin’s widow with help from Lewin’s colleague Gordon Allport (Lewin, 1948).

The paper that contains the ideas that would be formed into CATS is an article published in the journal *Human Relations* in 1947 titled “Frontiers in Group Dynamics” (Lewin, 1947). It was received by the journal just weeks before and published just weeks after Lewin’s death. But if you read this article, either reproduced in the 1951 book or in the original 1947, you will not find “Lewin’s classic model of change”. The closest thing you will see is presented in Figure 19.2, a quite different set of diagrams illustrating examples of the movement of a husband and wife in a “social field”.

Having juxtaposed these two diagrams, one portraying what most in management believe is Lewin’s major contribution, the other the only graphic illustration of how transformation happens in the source primary scholars attribute CATS to, we are faced with some questions we might label Foucauldian. If the point of origin the history of change management has attributed to the field isn’t true, how did it come to pass? What problem did the invention of this false foundation seek to solve? Which subject (individuals and institutions) shaped the formation of CATS? Let’s explore the facts around the “discontinuity” where we had assumed a continuity first.

A Questionable Point of Origin

Unsurprisingly perhaps, given the disparity between what Lewin actually offered as a model of change and the model attributed to him, referencing of Lewin's work in this regard is unusually lax. Of the over 10,000 citations to "Lewin, 1951" listed on Google Scholar, none of the 100 of most highly cited of those who cite Lewin provides specific page references for CATS. Normally in academic writing, providing a name and date reference without a page number implies that the idea, example or concept referred to is a key aspect of the book or article. But this is not the case in this instance. Reference to a model of change is difficult to find in Lewin 1947 or Lewin 1951: it is the subject of just two short paragraphs, 131 words in a 338 page book (1951: 228); and 131 words in the final substantive section in an article of 45 pages comprising 25 sections.

Furthermore, unlike the other points made in *Field Theory* or the 1947 article, no empirical evidence is given or graphical illustration provided to support the idea that a change can be thought of as having three aspects, and unlike Lewin's other writings, the idea is not well-integrated with other elements (Lewin, 1947: 34ff.). Thinking of change in three stages is merely described as a way that "planned social change may be thought of" (Lewin, 1947: 36; 1951: 231); an example explaining (in an abstract way) the group dynamics of social change and the advantages of group versus individual decision making. It appears as an afterthought, given that the metaphor of "unfreezing and freezing" that Lewin uses seems to contradict his more detailed empirically-based theorizing of "quasi-equilibrium", which is explained in great depth in *Field Theory* and argues that groups are in a continual process of complex adaptation rather than a frozen state.

This contrary metaphor that Lewin dabbled with at the end of a long article is doubled-down upon by later writers. "Refreezing", the full-stop at the end of what would become change management's foundational framework – a term that implies that frozen is an organization's natural state until an agent intervenes and zaps it (as later textbooks promoting Lewin's "classic model" would say, "refreezing the new change makes it permanent"; Robbins, 1991: 646) – is not a term that Lewin ever wrote anywhere. The re-phrasing of Lewin's original term freezing to "refreezing" happened first in a 1950 conference paper by Lewin's former student Leon Festinger (Festinger and Coyle, 1950; reprinted in Festinger 1980: 14). Festinger said that: "To Lewin, life was not static; it was changing, dynamic, fluid. Lewin's unfreezing–stabilizing–refreezing concept of change continues to be highly relevant today." It is worth noting that Festinger's first sentence seems to contradict the second, or at least to contradict later interpretations of Lewin as the developer of a model that deals in static, or at least clearly delineated, steps. Furthermore, Festinger misrepresents other elements; Lewin's "moving" is transposed into "stabilizing", which shows how open to interpretation Lewin's nascent thinking was in this "preparadigmatic" period (Becher and Trowler, 2001: 33). In addition, Lewin's original second element, "moving" went from "moving" to "stabilizing" on through a series of other terms to settle on what we attribute to Lewin now: "change". So, not only is the linear boxes and arrows diagram we assume Lewin promoted completely alien, two thirds of "his" three-step model of change are not his.

Despite the CATS model now being seen by modern authorities as Lewin's main contribution to management (Burnes, 2004; Burnes and Cooke, 2012; Edward and Montessori, 2011), there's little evidence to support this if one actually reads Lewin's works cited as the basis for

the model. How can we explain the disparity? Understanding *how* “Lewin’s classic model” came to pass first requires us to figure out *when* it came to be?

CATS was not regarded as a significant contribution by Lewin or others when Lewin was alive or in the period after his death.² So when, then, did “Lewin’s classic model” or CATS emerge? Because management’s history was being written up throughout the 20th century, we can delve into it to find some initial insights. The first comprehensive histories of management written in the 1960s do not mention Lewin at all (George, 1968; Pollard, 1974); or they mention him but only in relation to concepts other than CATS (Wren, 1972). Indeed, Wren’s *Evolution of Management Thought* is a particularly useful source in this strata, because since 1972 multiple editions at intervals of about five years were published. Until the third edition (1987) no mention of Lewin’s views on change are included. But the fourth edition in 1994 inserts a new paragraph into this discussion telling us that “Lewin viewed change behaviour as a three-step procedure” (Wren, 1994: 279). Given this we might surmise that the *Evolution of Management Thought* is reflecting a shift that happened in the late-1980s?

Because they move through multiple editions at regular time intervals, management textbooks can also be good sources of data for Foucauldian research into management, as their layers show how the subject and its objects shifted over time. A good illustration of how CATS was invented decades after Lewin’s death is provided by French and Bell’s popular textbook *Organization Development*. The fifth edition (1990: 81) states that: “Kurt Lewin introduced two ideas about change that have been very influential since the 1940s ... [one] was a model of the change process ... unfreezing the old behavior; moving to a new level of behavior; and refreezing the behavior at the new level.” And yet, despite it supposedly being very influential since the 1940s, earlier editions of *Organization Development* make no mention of Lewin’s model.

Robbins’ *Organizational Behaviour* (Robbins et al., 2009: iii), supports this timeline. First published in 1979, with new editions appearing at regular intervals, the first edition does not mention Lewin in the main text. However, in a chapter on “Organizational Development”, it does state that “In very general terms, planned change can be described as consisting of three stages: unfreezing, changing and refreezing” (Robbins, 1979: 377). A footnote cites “Lewin, 1951”. There is no change in the second edition of Robbins (1983). But by 1986, and the third edition, the passage “change can be described as consisting of three stages: unfreezing, changing and refreezing” has been expanded into a sub-section in its own right titled “The Change Process” (1986: 457ff.). And accompanying the text is a new diagram showing a linear progression from unfreezing, to movement and refreezing (in the same form as Figure 19.1).

² Tributes to Lewin acknowledge many important contributions, such as action research, field theory and his concept of topology, but not CATS (Likert, 1947; Lippitt, 1947; Marrow, 1947). None of the many book reviews of *Field Theory* mentions it as a significant contribution (Kuhn, 1951; Lasswell, 1952; Lindzey, 1952; Shea, 1951; Smith, 1951), and neither does Cartwright’s extensive introduction to the volume. Papers on the contribution of Lewin to management on the 25th anniversary of his death presented by his daughter Miriam Lewin Papanek (1973) and William B. Wolf (1973) do not refer to CATS. Even a three volume retrospective on the Tavistock Institute (publishers of *Human Relations*), which refers extensively to Lewin’s research, contains nothing on CATS (Trist and Murray, 1990, 1993, 1997).

The Formation of the Object of CATS Reflects Problematizations Faced in the 1980s

Why did Lewin's classic three-step model for managing change emerge in the 1980s? Looking at some of the problematizations impacting on management practitioners and scholars can provide some reasons.

First is the way in which management consultancies in this period were looking for a competitive edge through new products that looked professional and could easily be implemented. McKinsey and Co moved to match the Boston Consulting Group's BCG matrix, by developing models like the Seven-Ss (Cummings et al., 2016).

This period also sees the rise of quick to digest "pop-management" books found in airport bookstores (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Jacques, 1996). Demand was fuelled by a growing number of managers made anxious by their own status mobility, and the rise of Japan's business culture and the comparative decline of US industry was also seen as a problem that required a response in American management circles. An enlarged managerial class, eager for the knowledge that would help them climb the ladders of the new knowledge economy, turned books like *Theory Z* (Ouchi, 1981), *The Art of Japanese Management* (Pascale and Athos, 1981), and *In Search of Excellence* (written by McKinsey's Peters and Waterman, 1982) into the first management "blockbusters".

A further problem was felt among management scholars. How should they respond to pop-management and management consultants producing knowledge? Initially, many in the Academy were critical. A *Sloan Management Review* article reviewing *Theory Z* and *The Art of Japanese Management* (Schein, 1981: 58, 62, 63), noted that "neither book refers to the growing literature", that their arguments were supported by a "meagre data base" and their "quick fix ... prescriptions" were "glib", "superficial" and "naïve". The idea that one of the 20th century's most innovative social scientists, with an outstanding track record of theory development based on solid experimentation and lengthy empirical observation, and could be seen as the "father" of change management, was good to embrace by a field worried about a lack of scientific foundation.

However, the Academy soon began to fear its own irrelevancy in the eyes of the growing audience of managers wanting actionable knowledge. In 1985, a special Academy of Management symposium devoted to organizational change was organized. It noted that executives were wrestling with the challenge of keeping organizations competitive and that "an examination of what these executives and their organizations were doing would probably reveal that, in fact, many of the things being tried were consistent with research and theory in organizational behaviour" (Pfeffer, 1987: 31). This idea was used to propose a new "linking endeavour" between academics and practitioners (Burke, 1987: 5).

So, the problem for management as a field became how to appeal to a growing population of managers and students with practically applicable knowledge, that could also be seen to be based on good scientific research (Hunger and Wheelen, 1980). Simple but professional looking models, like CATS, fitted the bill. Such models appealed to authors and publishers of textbooks, which, from the 1980s, moved away from long screeds of text toward more colour, visual aids and diagrams being inserted.

An Influential Network of Developers Promote “Lewin’s Legacy”

By tracing the trail of citations and the way texts seem to influence and support what is promoted as truth in other texts, we can see how a network emerged to support and promote the convention that Lewin’s great legacy is the creation of change management’s foundation stone.

As G.W. Allport writes in his Foreword to the first posthumous volume of Lewin’s edited works, while the collection will “outline his change experiments, it is not in any sense a final report ... Others ... will [have to] carry ... forward his program [because b]efore this vital work reached the stage of completion Lewin died” (Allport, in Lewin, 1948: xiii). While the problems outlined in the previous section encouraged making Lewin’s fragment into a linear diagram to be used as a model for change managers, through the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s a series of other influential academics had tended and grown Lewin’s ideas about change to make them fitter for that purpose. Key figures like Ronald Lippitt and Edgar Schein were instrumental in making Lewin’s work visible to other management writers while adapting it in particular ways.

Ronald Lippitt, like Leon Festinger, was Lewin’s PhD student – but unlike Festinger, who became a more conventional psychology academic, Lippitt wanted to make models for managers. Despite not regarding CATS as worthy of mention in his lengthy 1947 tribute to Lewin after his death, Lippitt re-thinks how important it is a decade later as he cites what he calls Lewin’s “three phase” model (Lippitt et al., 1958: 129) as the basis for his and his team’s five- and seven-phase models of change.

Connecting to a highly regarded social scientist was useful for Lippitt et al. at this point, as reviewers’ eyebrows were raised as they noted that it was not clear what else their model was based on. One review claimed that “since the authors have not attempted to test any one set of hypotheses, many more questions are raised than answered” (Brotman, 1958: 342). Change models like his and Lewin’s were, according to Lippitt, designed to be used by what are termed, in a new turn of phrase, “change agents” (Lippitt et al., 1958). Subsequently, the focus on Lewin’s idea as one to be used by change agents, or managers to speak generally, starts to turn Lewin’s abstract thinking about change into a general instrumental model.

Not long after Lippitt’s work was published other pieces of the puzzle that would become Lewin’s classic change model would be woven in by other interpreters. For example, the first record we can find of “refreezing” being used in a management context was by Schein in a 1961 article. Schein, who cites the 1947 *Human Relations* article, also describes the three elements attributed to Lewin as “phases”. Although he does not cite Lippitt in his first interpretations of CATS, by 1965, in a more considered work Schein co-authored with Warren Bennis, Lippitt’s work is widely acknowledged, particularly with respect to furthering our knowledge of what Schein and Bennis term “change agency” (1965: 206).

Now cross-stitched back to Lippitt’s posthumous interpretation of Lewin, Schein’s take loads the emphasis further toward Lewin’s idea being an intervention tool. While Schein originally acknowledged that what he had developed was a “derivation of the change model developed by Lewin” (1961: 62), by 1992 Schein describes CATS as what Lewin found to be “the fundamental assumptions underlying any change” (Schein 1992: 298). These interpretations of Lewin’s germ of an idea about a way of thinking about change by Lippitt and his colleagues, Schein and Bennis, would lay the groundwork for the creation of the visual three block linear model of change.

From the 1990s onwards, interpretations of the foundations of change attributed to Lewin and responses to the object now known as CATS solidify. We can trace this by following later editions of Robbins' textbook.

In the fourth edition (1989), the material on Lewin is supported by other references (e.g., Burke, 1982: 30), and refers to the similarities between Lewin's CATS and Lippitt's Model of Planned Change to claim an underlying fundamental approach to change management. In this edition of Robbins, an additional reference to Kolb and Frohman (1970) also appears to provide stronger links to Lewin.

In 1991's fifth edition, a new section called "Point–Counterpoint" (1991: 651) has been added. Here old theories, like "Lewin's three-step model" are contrasted with more recent, more complex thinking. In the sixth edition a new section called "Approaches to Managing Organizational Change" outlines the development of "several popular approaches to managing change", starting with "Lewin's classic three-step model of the change process" (1993: 676).

By the mid-2000s the collection of approaches begins with "Lewin's classic" and ends with "Kotter's eight-step plan" (Robbins and Judge, 2009: 625–628). The anti-Lewinian/CATS counterpoint now makes it clear that Lewin's approach "has become obsolete. It applies to a world of certainty and predictability ... However, this paradigm has little resemblance to today's environment of constant and chaotic change" (Robbins, 2001: 574). We have evolved from our origins.

Lewinian Paradoxes

Our counter history highlights two contradictory views of Lewin have formed. He is a great founder who developed the classic model that marks a point of origin for change management, and an outdated researcher whose simplistic thinking has been surpassed by better models. On the one hand lauded as "the intellectual father of contemporary theories" (Schein, 1988: 239), the leader of "the study of Change Management" (Jeffcutt 1996: 173), and the foundation for "the fundamental assumptions underlying *any* change in a human system" (Schein, 2010: 299), with CATS "dominat[ing] almost all western theories of change over the past fifty years" (Michaels, 2001: 116); with all subsequent theories of change "reducible to this one idea of Kurt Lewin's" (Hendry, 1996: 624). On the other hand, Lewin's so-called major contribution is an overly simplistic abomination: "Lewin's ... quaintly linear and static conception – the organization as an ice cube – is so wildly inappropriate that this is difficult to see why it has not only survived but prospered" (Kanter et al., 1992: 10); the "classical Lewinian unfreeze–movement–refreeze formula [is] inappropriate for the rapid pace of change at the beginning of the 21st century" (Marshak and Heracleous, 2004: 1051; see also Child, 2005; Clegg et al., 2005; Palmer et al., 2009; Stacey, 2007; Weick and Quinn, 1999); and his "simple chain of unfreeze, move, refreeze" just a re-packaging of a mechanistic philosophy behind "Taylor's (1911) concept of scientific management" (Clegg et al., 2005: 376, see also Tsoukas and Chia, 2002).

In short, to serve other ends, Lewin is feted and demeaned in management for a model he did not create. Both celebrated as a point of origin – "the classic" – and dismissed for being naïve and simplistic. Lewin never presented CATS in a linear diagrammatic form. He was adamant that group dynamics must not be seen in simplistic or static terms and believed that groups were never in a steady frozen state (1951: 199). He never promoted a model that could be used by a change agent. He did, however, do significant research and published highly

respected articles that argued *against* Taylor's mechanistic approach (Lewin, 1920; Marrow, 1969: 14ff.).

Furthermore, whereas writers in management now argue for a break from Lewin's simplistic CATS thinking, by placing the many change models described in this section together (see Figure 19.3) we can see that there is more continuity from the "Lewinian approach" than we might care to imagine. Admittedly we are biased (all Foucauldian histories are explicit in this) but all the modern models look like CATS with frills.

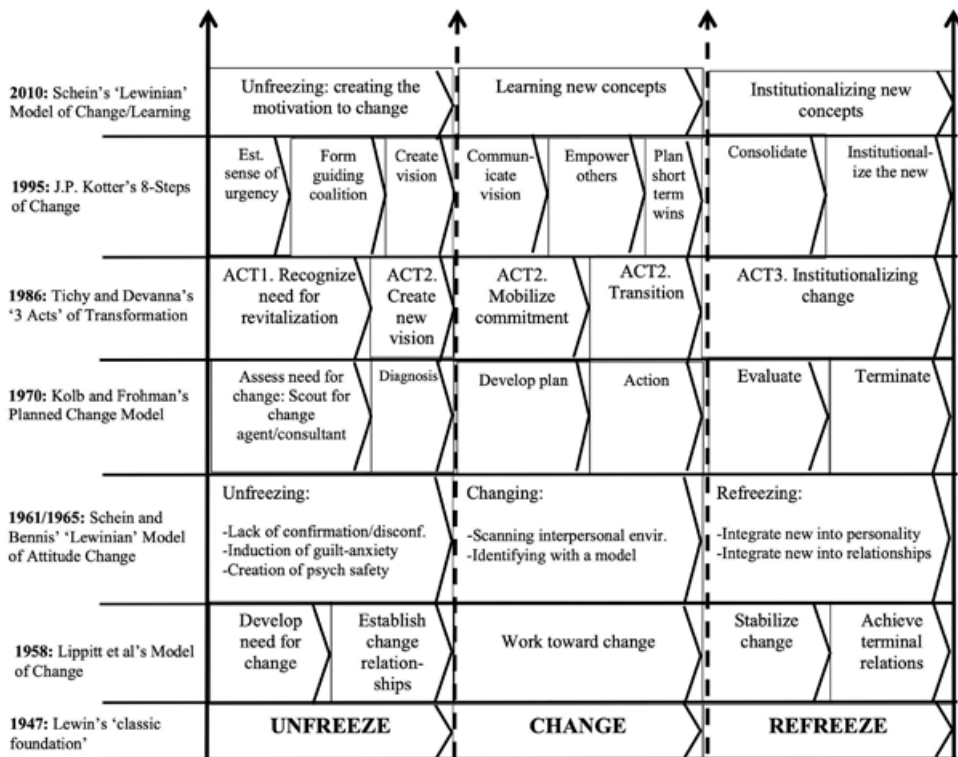


Figure 19.3 CATS as a grand foundation

Deeper Investigations

The study of the origin of change management presented above, provides a simple example of how a student or scholar might start a "Foucauldian" historical analysis. Start with the explicit aim to undermine a conventional historical narrative. Seek to critique a simplistic or singular point of origin story. Juxtapose artefacts from different spaces of times to highlight the discontinuities where continuity is normally assumed. Explore how historical trajectories emerged as responses to specific problems rather than as part of some objective or natural evolution. And, examine how subjects and objects co-create, form and support the truths that support them,

over time. However, if you want to dive deeper, you may want to focus more on a particular one of Foucault's periods and the lenses associated with that.

Inspired by Foucault's early works, researchers might explore our illustrative case of CATS further. They could examine how the presentation of Lewin and his research on change is misrepresented: how the conventional history of change management theory, from what are seen as Lewin's original ideas to our more evolved understanding now, actually conceals truths that Lewin and others' work revealed in an earlier time.

Indeed, as management marches on from many of the "classic" works that are seen to provide foundations, and those original sources lie beyond digital search engines, there is greater scope for the critical historian to delve into primary source materials like old books, and reveal surprising infidelities between what these works presented and how they have subsequently been re-presented in later management articles.

With an archaeological lens, one might investigate how the affordances of institutional structures that prevailed in last decades of the 20th century would shape management frameworks like CATS, and how and why textbooks and other instructional materials like Powerpoints would package knowledge in ways to privilege such frameworks. How would this strata take Kurt Lewin's thought and boil it down to an essential A–B–C model?

Or, more generally, the archaeologist could examine the way in which the institutional context promotes certain types of knowledge in management above others, for example: teaching using case studies, or quantitative methods, or journal articles over books. Good documents to examine might be reflections on the development of the field or sub-fields, strategy documents or meeting minutes from bodies like the Academy of Management or other professional associations. Or works commissioned on the future of the field like the Carnegie or Ford Foundation reports.

Foucauldian genealogy encourages examining the individuals and networks that were drawn to Lewin's work as a source of historical gravitas. What were their motivations and interests? And how did their work combine to elevate and promote their interpretations of what was important to take from Lewin so as to create a web of conventions that was difficult to see beyond?

Whereas an early-Foucauldian approach might assist a researcher to question the fidelity of *what* is promoted in management to the historical facts; and archaeology encourages a critical examination of *how* structures bring forth certain approaches or forms of knowledge; genealogy is an excellent approach for researching aspects related to *who* is creating and maintaining the knowledge that is promoted in management. With whom are they interacting of working, and *why* could it be politically useful for these bodies to do this? Here it could be good to analyse citations, memberships of key associations, editorial boards, and personal communications and other "ego documents" that may illustrate how scholars and others relate to and support one another and particular views of management knowledge.

Having argued that present views of change management are built upon contingent structures (archaeology) and particular networks of supporters and texts (genealogy), the interpretive analyst might construct a *dispositif* of alternative approaches to change management drawn in terms of the different problems faced in other ages – alternatives that could inspire thinking differently about managing change today. For example, this could suggest how managing change might have been theorized prior to Lewin's work, in Lewin's own time influenced by all of Lewin's research, and in today's current epistemic conditions. Researchers

could explore the relative values of these expressions of knowledge and outline how change management could be conceptualized differently in the future.

And, by applying a similar logic, a management historian could examine any aspect of management by sketching out the conditions that promote certain types of knowledge now, and contrast this with other time periods or locations without needing to discern an evolution that would privilege one over another. For example, a Foucauldian counter-history of business schools might show how business was taught differently in earlier times or in other environments as a way of interrogating whether current conventions are universal or even desirable.

CONCLUSION

Gilles Deleuze (1988: 96), perhaps the most sensitive of Foucault's interpreters, claimed that Foucault's multifarious body of work came together or "culminated in the *Use of Pleasure's* [*– The History of Sexuality Vol. 2*] searing phrase: 'to get free of oneself'", and this, ultimately, is the promise of Foucault's oeuvre. It can help a management researcher to think critically about our field's presentations of knowledge over time, as a way of getting free from present norms and encouraging thinking otherwise.

It is important to note that this presentation of how Foucault's counter-historical thinking may be applied is brief. However, we hope this simple introduction might inspire people to explore his work further and use it to interrogate historical assumptions about management: to destabilize these foundations enough to get free of them, refreshing our vision of our field and what we might wish it to be. To paraphrase a work that inspired Foucault on his path, who knows the forgotten potential that might be brought to light once we place management history "in the balance" in this way (Nietzsche, 1974: 34).

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Cummings S, Bridgman T and Brown K (2016) Unfreezing change as three steps: Rethinking Kurt Lewin's legacy for change management. *Human Relations* 69(1): 33–60.

This article presents our case of Lewin using a "Foucauldian approach" in more detail.

- (2) Cummings S, Bridgman T, Hassard J and Rowlinson M (2017) *A New History of Management*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In this book a range of other well-accepted ideas and theories in management are critiqued in a similar way, for example the notion that F.W. Taylor is the field's "founder", the "seminal" work of Elton Mayo, Maslow's co-called "Pyramid of motivation", and Max Weber's supposed promotion of bureaucratic organization.

- (3) Foucault M (1985) *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two: The Use of Pleasure*. New York: Pantheon.

If you want to start reading Foucault's original works (in English translation), we think this book is the best place to begin. In the introduction, Foucault seeks to bring together many of his earlier threads into a cohesive overarching approach to historical critique.

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PART IV

HISTORICAL RESEARCH FOR ORGANIZATION AND SOCIETY: EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES OF HISTORICAL METHODS TO INVESTIGATE SPECIFIC THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

20. A call for postnational historiography: notes on writing “history from above”

Arun Kumar

INTRODUCTION

Earlier in 2021, I woke up to a social media message from a fellow academic alerting me to the appropriation of my work on the Ford Foundation’s involvement in management research and training in India (Kumar, 2019). My research was cited by a right-wing, tech-entrepreneur turned Hindutva¹ “public intellectual”. He had for years fashioned himself as a defender of Hindu India’s “civilizational superiority” and has become an outspoken critic of “distorted” historiography by “left-wing”, supposedly “anti-national”, historians. Like other Hindutva ideologues, the “public intellectual” believed that Indian historiography had become both undesirably “negative” and uniquely lacked a positive basis. This bias was caused, in his misreading, by a scholarly focus—especially from those who had trained or worked in the “West”—on the failures of the Indian nation-state and in particular its failures to uphold human rights for all. To him, such criticisms from the “outside” were part of a sinister plot aimed at “breaking” the Indian nation from within.

In the paper about the Ford Foundation’s involvement at the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad (ASCI; Kumar, 2019), I had set out how the foundation’s personnel and consultants undermined the use of syndicates,² and promoted the use of Harvard Business School’s case-method of teaching and researching. The foundation’s meddling and their export of management studies’ pedagogy to so-called third world countries such as India in the name of their development and modernization, I concluded, was part of contemporary American efforts aimed at countering communism, promoting Americanism, and establishing the USA as the pre-eminent neo-colonial power (Kumar, 2019). To the Hindutva ideologue, my postcolonial critique of the Ford Foundation’s programs was unambiguous evidence of

¹ Hindutva refers to a form of right-wing nationalism, whose primary objective is the constitution of a Hindu *rashtra* (or country) where the Indian state, civil society, and wider social formations in the country are reorganized along “Hindu” principles and beliefs. Although it has had a longer lineage, with episodic refashioning of what it signified, since the 1980s at least, Hindutva movements have synthesized nationalist politics with growing Hindu militancy, relegating non-Hindus such as Christians, Muslims, and so on as second-class citizens (see Jaffrelot, 1996 for details of the Hindutva project). Since the Bharatiya Janata Party returned to power in 2014, the Hindutva project has been effectively mainstreamed across the country’s social, political, legislative, judicial, and economic institutions.

² An instructional method, the use of syndicates was pioneered at the Administrative Staff College at Henley-on-Thames, UK (now the Henley Business School at the University of Reading). It involved 10–12 member groups, called syndicates, who were assigned a particular task at the beginning of each week or module. A self-instructional method, syndicates involved short lectures, visits, extensive group discussions, and so on among the members of the syndicate, who worked under a syndicate chair (with members of the syndicate holding the position on a rotating basis). Participants were expected to reflect on their own work experience as well as that of others within the group.

foreign interference in the development of Indian social sciences, management studies in this case. As abhorrent as the Hindutva ideologue's appropriation of my postcolonial critique of management studies' historiography for his nefarious nationalism might be, it was hardly novel or even unexpected.

In a recent lecture on the problems of postcolonial critique of science and its complicity in the rise of medicinal Hindutva nationalism during the Covid-19 pandemic, the historian Meera Nanda (2021) noted: "For postcolonial science studies, the universality of Western science is purely a matter of raw imperial power." "So any discourse that challenges it," she adds, becomes "by definition anti-imperialist." Moreover, such challenges to colonialism and imperialism derive their positive intent, authority, and legitimacy in their championing of the "nation"; thus, rendering them desirable (Kumar, 2021, 2022). Such a facile anti-imperialist attribution to any discourse or thought that challenges colonialism's power is frequently appropriated by twenty-first-century nationalism for their own malign gains (in our case Hindutva).

How then might we overcome these limitations of postcolonial critiques, which train their attention narrowly on colonialism and the supposedly nationalist challenges to it? And how might we do this considering that many of these critiques now embolden twenty-first-century nationalisms? One way forward I wish to outline in this chapter is to think of the present as not simply postcolonial but as the postnational condition. Following de Alwis et al. (2009), I understand the postnational neither as the end of sovereign nation-states and their replacement by global governance institutions nor as a signifier of the inevitability of globalization. Instead, it ought to be understood as a "position of critique – from a serious ongoing interrogation of the history of nation states and the souring of its great dream of ... citizenship" (ibid., 35). In this way, the postnational condition does not simply interrogate colonialism's long shadow and its remnants, but also interrogates its successor and counter, the post-colonial national form, as well as the unravelling of its promises to the subaltern masses.

To demonstrate how a postnational historiography moves past the pitfalls of postcolonial historiography and what it might yield, intellectually, I reflect on my own experiences of writing what the historian Srirupa Roy (2007) calls "history from above". Unlike history from below, which focuses on ordinary workers and individuals and their perspectives and experiences, "history from above" focuses on influential elites and the making of dominant institutions as its primary subject. For me, "history from above" has involved interrogating how particular meanings and modes of development and modernity (and the case method, for example, from the opening vignette) were seeded and centred in modern India.

Beginning with a short overview of my attempt at writing history from above, I discuss the perils of a narrow postcolonial critique and how it emboldens twenty-first-century Hindutva. While I present an ontological critique of postcolonial historiography, it has methodological implications nonetheless. Writing history from above involves, among others, (a) working through elites' anxieties about history, which manifest itself in the archives and in the production of historiography; and (b) paying closer attention to the context one is writing about in order to track other (alternate) ideas and approaches, which elites seek to push into the margins in the making of their own dominance. These are outlined in detail towards the end of the chapter.

WRITING HISTORY FROM ABOVE

For a decade now, I have been researching and writing the inter-linked histories of development and management in twentieth-century India, with a particular focus on elite Indian and US philanthropic organizations. Among others, this work has focused on the “determining influence” of philanthropic foundations (Khurana et al., 2011) on the founding of management education and its links with the dismantling of Indian educational institutions’ connections with Britain via colonialism (Kumar, 2019); and its role in the rise of the United States of America as the predominant neo-colonial power (Cooke and Kumar, 2020; Kumar, 2019). Elsewhere, I have discussed how the Indian elites’ have used their philanthropy, strategically, to endear themselves to the colonial authorities by signaling their shared concern for civic life (also see Haynes, 1987); their patronage of anti-colonial nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century; their “pioneering” role in India’s nation-building and modernization in the second half of the twentieth century; and in consolidating their own place in society (Kumar, 2018, 2021, 2022).

Somewhat unusually, this history-writing from above has focused less on the “field” that the poor inhabit, and which tends to be the conventional focus of development research, but studies development and management from above, through a reading of the minds and motives of an otherwise notoriously slippery class of social actors, that is the elites. History from above focuses on the elites’ strategic use of philanthropy to shape ideas of development, social reform, and modernity (and routes to its attainment) across a wide range of historical context: from the colonial administration to twentieth-century anti-colonial nationalism, the post-independence nation-building by the Nehruvian state with its emphasis on social welfare and mixed economy and its liberalization, and the rise of authoritarian Hindutva nationalism. In this way, history from above interrogates the making and consolidation of dominant ideas and institutions across society, which I discuss in some detail next.

From diets and bodies to behaviours and institutions, India’s business elites have used their philanthropy to propagate particular visions of a “modern nation” as part of its development (Kumar, 2018, 2021). In the first half of the twentieth century, for example, the Marwari Hindu business elites used their philanthropy to champion social “reform” that left earlier configurations of caste, gender, and religion wholly intact.³ As leaders of caste-associations such as the Aggarwal Mahasabha, Maheshwari Sabha, and Marwari Sahayak Samiti, business leaders such as Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894–1983) and Jamnalal Bajaj (1889–1942) called for an end to caste-Hindu rituals and taboos such as child marriage, enforced widowhood, *ghoonghat*, and excessive expenditure on marriage and death ceremonies.⁴ Similarly, the All-India Anti-Untouchability League, founded in 1932, aimed to “free the Hindu community ... from all the evils springing from the institution of untouchability” (All-India Anti-Untouchability League, 1932). Several leading Indian businessmen, including Bajaj and Birla, made generous donations of their money and time voluntarily, serving as president and members of the board of the League, as well as in shaping the League’s work (Kumar, 2021).

³ Marwaris are a socially conservative, commercial caste group that migrated from Marwar in modern-day Rajasthan to major commercial and industrial centres such as Ahmedabad, Bombay, and Calcutta in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁴ *Ghoonghat* refers to the covering of women’s head and sometimes their faces, practiced in some South Asian communities, especially in company of male elders and outsiders.

Organizations such as the League were part of nationalism's wider challenge to colonialism as they sought to constitute a private, cultural domain, whose reform was not the responsibility of the colonial administration. Instead, the founding of such institutions was designed to signal that such matters could be left to the caste-Hindu elites to resolve and reform from within, autonomously. Such reforms became part of the founding logic of India's nationalism, that was based not on racial or ethnic differences between the colonizers and the colonized, but on colonialism's economic burden that drained Indian society of its wealth and prevented it from reaching its potential and addressing the poverty and hunger that plagued its masses; thus, developing India. Nationalism and development, thus, came to be intimately wound up together in colonial India (Chatterjee, 1993; Kumar, 2021). Post-independence, the Indian nation-state sought to build and consolidate its legitimacy through social justice and welfare, now guaranteed constitutionally. With the realization that this was not attainable within the earlier colonial institutional framework, the Indian state now set about building the nation and its institutions as part of its development. And so, the earlier nationalist logic of development became the new ideology of nation-building, duly adopted by the governing elites (Chatterjee, 1993).

However, the lack of seriousness in elites' philanthropic efforts at tackling caste-based exclusions remained unchanged, post-colonialism. Even as the caste-Hindu elites, such as the Birlas, turned their attention away from social reform (such as that outlined above) towards modernization—funding elite research and training institutions for management, engineering, and so on, as well as planetaria and museums—they continued to fund Hindu and Hindutva projects for various kinds, from funding the construction of opulent Hindu temples to supporting right-wing Hindutva organizations and its political leadership (Hardgrove, 2004; Kumar, 2021). Despite such an extensive record of public philanthropy for social reform, modernization, and religious charity, there was no attempt to address caste-based oppression.

While one might attribute Birlas' silence towards addressing the caste question to their own community's conservatism, the Tatas (one of India's largest global conglomerates with interests in automobiles, aviation, housing, information technology, retail, steel, etc., and with over a 125-years-long history of formal philanthropy), who belonged to the Anglophile Parsi community that prides itself in its unequivocal embrace of modernity, were no different. Despite a long and extensive record of philanthropy and commitment to India's development and modernization, even the Tatas had relatively little to offer when it came to addressing caste-related issues that oppressed India's subaltern masses. Despite establishing both operating and grant-making foundations working on a wide range of issues from disaster relief, livelihoods, education and healthcare, science and technology, and arts and culture, caste remains an absent presence (Kumar, 2021).

Aside from their philanthropy aimed at funding development, they have also been open in their support of right-wing Hindutva leadership. In 2008, for example, Tatas' Nano car project in Singur, West Bengal, came under threat due to a farmers' agitation who were facing forcible eviction from their own land to make way for a manufacturing plant. Ratan N. Tata, chair of the Tata Group and the Tata Trusts, was among the first major business leaders to come out in support of Narendra Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat and responsible for the 2002 Gujarat pogrom that led to the deaths of over a thousand people, a large majority of whom were Muslims. As Modi lured Tatas' Nano car factory to Gujarat, Ratan N. Tata casually remarked that he hoped "there is a bad 'M' and a good 'M'. We need that transition" (*Hindustan Times*, 2008). With Mamta Banerjee, then political leader of the farmers' agitation, representing the

“bad M” while Modi represented the “good M”, the move towards Modi, in Tata’s opinion, constituted an important transition for India’s industrial development and economic growth. While one might be tempted to attribute Tata’s endorsement of Modi as part of his immediate commercial concerns, their support has only consolidated since. For example, recent news reports suggest that the Tata Group’s Progressive Electoral Trust was the single largest donor to Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party, just before the 2019 parliamentary elections in India. They donated Rs. 356 crores (roughly equal to £34.8 millions) in 2018–19 alone. This was more than half of the total donations received by the Party, and nearly seven times the amount the Tatas donated to the Congress party, India’s major opposition (*The Wire.In*, 2019).

Although exclusionary and limited (as I go on to explain more below), such social and economic reforms were still deemed desirable and legitimate as they were tethered to twentieth century nationalism (Kumar, 2021, 2022). In other words, their imbrication in nationalism’s fight against colonialism, and later nation-building, lent even such exclusionary reforms their legitimacy. In this way, “history from above” interrogates not just the continuities and representations of colonialism in twentieth-century development (Kothari, 2011), but interrogates, critically, the shape-shifting role of nationalism and nation-building on elites’ philanthropy and their development visions, and vice versa. This becomes all the more relevant from the point of view of the subaltern poor, whose relationship with nationalism and nation-building are markedly different, on which more below.

THE LIMITS OF A NARROW POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE

A narrow and sympathetic postcolonial reading of Birla and Bajaj’s early philanthropy might interpret their attempts at modernizing society as anti-colonial and nationalist (a claim commonly found in several biographical and hagiographic accounts). For example, both Bajaj and Birla were patrons and followers of several leaders of the Indian independence movement in the first half of the twentieth century (Kumar, 2021). Their early philanthropic efforts were part of the wider reform movement, that sought to distinguish, according to Chatterjee’s (1993) history of Indian nationalism, an inner, private, cultural domain from an outer, material domain; where even as the latter is colonized and governed from outside, the former should be self-governed from within. That is, a narrow postcolonial reading might lead one plausibly to conceptualize such efforts as part of a “hybrid” modernity that attempted to synthesize Indian “traditions” and social structure *within* the oncoming modernity; with a view to constituting a separate domain of public life that could be governed, autonomously, without or outside colonial influence.

Similarly, the League’s work on untouchability, while inextricably linked to the wider political struggle against colonialism, was part of, and inspired by, Gandhi’s relatively modest nationalist initiatives at reforming caste-Hindu society from within. But such early developmentalism was “circumscribed” (see Kumar, 2021 for a more detailed discussion) given the League’s refusal to work on the wider dismantling of the caste system itself that was the root cause of untouchability. Without propagating inter-caste marriages or challenging the prohibition against dining with people from so-called untouchable castes, the League focused its attention on symbolic initiatives such as temple entry for Dalits (a term used to denote castes considered “untouchable” by other upper caste groups), or giving “attention to their industries”

(All-India Anti-Untouchability League, 1932; also note the distancing imbued in the use of *their industries*).

As Ambedkar, India's leading constitutionalist, economist, and the foremost political leader of its subaltern masses in the twentieth century (see Kumar et al., 2022 for more), makes clear such efforts were often prompted by elites' personal experiences and were targeted at reforming their own families and caste-communities. Their ineffectiveness was laid bare by elites' refusal to address, through their philanthropy, wider issues of inter-caste marriages and dining together, which were integral to creating "the feeling of being kith and kin", without which "Caste will not vanish" (Ambedkar, 2014 [1944]: 67). Similarly, the distancing of Dalits' industries in the work of the League founded and led by India's business elites came in for a scathing attack from Ambedkar (2014 [1944]), who believed it will only work to separate different caste groups and thus perpetuate untouchability, not address it.

Not very different to their nationalist reform from within during colonialism, elites' post-colonial embrace of modernization in their philanthropy has made little dent in tackling the caste question. Similar to Tatas' modernizing philanthropy, the endowment of new, private universities by Indian business elites, such as Wipro's Azim Premji, also side-stepped reservations (constitutionally mandated quotas for students from different marginalized backgrounds and caste/tribe groups). Invoking their commitment to "quality" and "merit" as well as their "private" status, such universities have become largely inaccessible to students from disadvantaged communities.

Thus, while a straightforward postcolonial reading that might view Birla and Bajaj's philanthropy as nationalist (and by extension, anti-colonialist as Nanda, 2021 sets out), I would argue that it has worked to perpetuate, even consolidate, caste-Hindu supremacy. It has left India's subaltern masses exposed to the oppression of the caste system that pre-existed its colonization; the dispossession and impoverishment due to India's colonization (which has been the subject of the postcolonial critique); and the failure of its ruling elites, including the business elites' philanthropy that paid no more than token attention to them, and has continued to exclude them from its development and modernization in independent India.⁵

It is clear, therefore, that a postcolonial critique's narrow focus on colonialism's continuities and representations left nationalism's and later nation-building's irresolution unaddressed.

ON THE POSTNATIONAL CONDITION

Unlike India's business elites who emerged from colonialism's shadow to both contribute to and profit from India's nationalism, its subaltern masses continue to struggle with the citizenship's "souring" that once promised them social justice and welfare, but has delivered neither (or only partially, at best). And so, it is no longer enough to ascribe their impoverishment and dispossession at colonialism's door (and its continuities, representations, and remnants, post-colonialism). They have also been failed by post-colonial nation-building that followed—

⁵ The construction of large hydropower dams (the temples of modern India in Nehruvian imagination) such as the Narmada dam project, for example, has led to the displacement of over 33 million people (over 50 million according to other estimates as there is no official headcount), largely from the Dalit-Bahujan communities (Roy, 1999).

whether as part of nation-state’s social engineering or by the business elites through their industry and philanthropy (see several examples above).

It is, therefore, important to conceive of the present as not just postcolonial (and direct our critique at colonialism only); but as postnational, which will enable a more thorough-going interrogation of the national form alongside colonialism and imperialism. This constitutes an important but necessary ontological consideration. Now more than ever!

Even as the subaltern masses struggled under the multiple oppressions of caste, colonialism, nationalism, and the pursuit of nation-building, Indian business elites have mobilized their nationalist credentials from the past to accumulate reputational capital in the present. The Tatas, for example, claim that their early years “were inspired by the spirit of nationalism” (Tata Group, nd). Its leaders “bequeathed most of their personal wealth to the many Trusts they created for the greater good of India and its people” (Menezes and Pandey, 2017). Post-independence, the primary interest of its philanthropy “was in encouraging nation-building activities and experiments which gave promise of contributing to national welfare” (Manshardt, nd; quoted from Kumar, 2016).

Similarly, the Birla Group also cites its industry and philanthropy, as well as their patronage of M. K. Gandhi, as evidence of their nationalism and commitment to nation-building. G. D. Birla’s founding of businesses in “critical sectors”, his work as Gandhi’s “confidant”, that he represented India at the round-table conferences in London and that Birla House was the site where “luminaries of the Indian freedom struggle often met to plot the downfall of the British Raj,” are all cited as evidence of his anti-colonial nationalism. His principles, we are told, “were soaked up by his grandson, Mr. Aditya Vikram Birla, the Group’s legendary leader” (Aditya Birla Group, nd).

At the same time, individual members of the Birla family have also endorsed and supported Hindutva nationalism, both in twentieth-century colonial India, as well as the twenty-first century (Kumar, 2021). Basant Kumar Birla (1921–2019; and son of G. D. Birla) openly endorsed Modi, crediting him for “creating an environment which is supportive of business houses and is, therefore, a worthy candidate for the country’s leadership” (Sehgal, 2011: 175–176). Thus, business elites’ philanthropy for twentieth-century’s anti-colonial nationalism now serves a dual purpose. While it bestows reputational capital bolstering their commitment to the “noble” cause of nation-building, it also elides their morally questionable endorsement and continued funding of contemporary Hindutva, then and now.

Management Studies is No Different

Mainstream management scholarship is similarly using postcolonial critiques of “western” thought/science to propagate and consolidate twentieth- and twenty-first century nationalisms. To illustrate, I looked at the sessions sponsored by the Indian Academy of Management at the annual Academy of Management conferences in 2020 and 2021 (when the conference was scheduled entirely online due to Covid-19 restrictions). Bemoaning a narrow emphasis on “facts” and deep roots in “scientific temper” that undergirds “western” knowledge systems, such a scholarship seeks a return to “eastern” spiritual knowledge by drawing on ancient Indian scriptures (Rai et al., 2020). Such narrow critiques of western knowledge systems tend to position its unique “Indian culture and world view, Indian mind-set” (Pandey et al., 2020), and so on, as a productive counter that has the potential to overcome systemic global problems.

In doing so, though, they tend to paper over the irresolutions of such systems and world views, such as those discussed previously. For example, Shapiro and Burgess (2021) sidestep the Modi government's disastrous handling of the Covid-19 pandemic (Rao, 2021) and its catastrophic death toll, estimated to be 3.1–3.4 million deaths or 6–7 times higher than the official figure (Jha et al., 2022). And, instead, they turn to the Hindu scriptural knowledge to inspire frontline workers. Thus, a narrow focus on critiquing colonial/western knowledge and thought finds a readymade “solution” in its ideological counter. That is, India's ancient scriptures, wisdom, culture, mindset, and so on, in the twenty-first century. All while leaving the latter's exclusions wholly unchallenged. It is now time, therefore, to also put the national form under critical scrutiny!

IN CONCLUSION

Postcolonial historiography has presented a necessary and influential criticism of neo-colonialism that undergirds contemporary business and management. However, this narrow attention on colonialism's continuities and representation has left the post-colonial national form largely intact and outside the bounds of critical scrutiny. Reflecting on my experiences with writing history from above that scrutinizes the role of elites' philanthropy and its entanglements with nationalism and nation-building, as well as development and social reform, I outline the limitations and consequence of a narrow postcolonial critique. I have argued that a sympathetic but misguided reading of Indian elites' philanthropy would have characterized their giving as “hybrid” and that sought to fashion its own forms of modernity, that challenged colonialism's universalizing and modernizing tendencies. Such a reading, however, leaves the dispossession and impoverishment, engineered by the post-colonial ruling elites, remains under-scrutinized. Moreover, their deliberate tethering of “circumscribed” social and economic reforms to the national question (Kumar, 2021) are now being appropriated by twenty-first-century Hindutva nationalism. Following de Alwis et al. (2009), I suggest viewing the present as a postnational condition so that we can simultaneously interrogate colonialism's continuities as well as nationalism and nation-building's limitations and irresolution.

Here, it is worth reflecting on some of the methodological challenges involved in writing such histories—of elites, who despite their extensive presence in the public imagination and ubiquity in the archives, remain peculiarly slippery—from above. I wish to draw attention to two main points, here.

Elites suffer from deep-seated anxieties about history (see Kumar, 2021 for a more detailed discussion). Hardly surprising, given business elites, in particular, use history to consolidate their competitive advantage (Suddaby et al., 2010). This anxiety about history manifests itself both in the archives (in the inclusion, order, destruction, access, etc. of source material) and in their historiography (its commissioning to sympathetic “outsiders”, establishing linearity and continuity to perform their nationalism, omission of events deemed reputational risks, for example; see Kumar 2016 for a more detailed discussion). Altogether, this works to mask what is otherwise concealed and maintain its invisibility (Fan and Liu, 2022). Following Stoler's (2010) suggestion to reading texts “along the archival grain” then enables us to uncover both the making of dominant institutions and imaginaries (of development and modernity) as well as particular historical narratives, in the making of elite power.

Secondly, given the insidious coding of power within the archive, writing history from above requires a more extensive and intensive engagement with the contemporary context (see Tennent and Gillett's Chapter on archival research). This helps plot the making of the dominant historical narratives, and challenge them. For example, the writing out of caste from the archives of elites' philanthropy makes it challenging to point to the circumscribed nature of reform, championed by the Indian business elites. But a more thoroughgoing engagement with contemporary anti-caste movements and the critique of reforms championed by the elites, as I have demonstrated above, enables a counter-critique of their narrow nationalism. Thus, writing history from above necessitates an iterative back and forth between the archival texts and contemporary contexts than would otherwise be common. This will enable us to challenge the dominant histories that institutional (and institutionalized) archives perpetuate.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) De Alwis M, Deshpande S, Jeganathan P, et al. (2009) The postnational condition. *Economic and Political Weekly*: 35–35.

The editors and contributors outline the necessity and potential of rethinking of the present as postnational, both in order to interrogate the nation-state and its histories as well as the unbecoming of its promises, particularly when it comes to the subaltern masses.

- (2) Stoler AL (2010) *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

As an ethnography of colonial archives, Stoler offers intriguing insight into the manufacturing for colonial elites' power. Distinct from Spivak's suggestion to read against the archival grain, it points to the importance of studying history from above to understand the centring of particular modes of governing which has violent effects on the subaltern masses.

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21. Researching the living past: discovering past occurrences through conversational inquiry

François Bastien and Diego M. Coraiola¹

INTRODUCTION

Ray Bradbury's famous dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* depicts a society in which books are banned and there is a special group of "firemen" whose single purpose is to find and burn them. Burning books was a symbol of the violence of a totalitarian state afraid of the incendiary thoughts and ideas they may contain. Bradbury's book depicts the awakening of fireman Guy Montag to the absurdity of that society and his refusal to take part in the system. At the end of the book, the protagonist finds solace in a rebel community in which each person has chosen a book to remember; a society of human-books. Written a few years after the end of WWII, the flames were still vivid in the memory of the survivors, the heat could still be felt. Ray Bradbury was writing about the fear of social oblivion produced by a totalitarian regime. Missing from his account, however, was the loss of human wisdom undergoing within democratic regimes.

At the time *Fahrenheit 451* was published, Indigenous peoples were required to attend residential schools in Canada and American Indian Boarding Schools in the United States. These schools embodied the philosophy of assimilation best captured by Captain Richard Henry Pratt whose stated goal was to "kill the Indian, and save the man". The declared purpose of these schools was to assimilate *Indians* into society by *civilizing* them with Christianity. Numerous children were separated from their families and sent to these schools where they were disconnected from their traditions, prevented from speaking their native languages, and subjected to the woes of western religion. The purported objective of these schools was to save their souls. Instead, what happened was the destruction of their spirits. The schools and their operators tried to erase their memories, their identities, and their communities. Many Indigenous Nations, after a few generations, were merely left with the remains of their cultures and their knowledges. Knowledge keepers became scarcer, their stories left unheard, and many Nations struggled to transmit their wisdom to the next generation(s). Having no books to destroy since Indigenous peoples are embedded in an oral tradition, colonists focused instead on annihilating human-books. The stories survivors tell today are stories of resilience; a quest to dig up the past in the present and to rebuild what colonization could not destroy (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

To know the past of Indigenous Nations one must know their present. One needs to engage with the peoples, with their communities, and with their lands. Indigenous peoples are alive and healthy, in spite of efforts otherwise. They know who they are and have known it for thousands of years, much before the arrival of settlers. Indigenous peoples know of themselves and their world through stories. Some of those stories were recorded and are now available

¹ Both authors contributed equally to the chapter. Names are displayed in alphabetical order.

in different media to be studied and analysed. From an Indigenous perspective, however, they are possibly the less interesting stories. They serve well when Indigenous peoples have to deal with white settlers, with a notarial system that attributes truth to objects instead of people, to written documents and signatures instead of mutual trust and ongoing relationships. For Indigenous peoples, though, stories are alive. They change and evolve, they reflect the past and the future, and they do things in the world. They are, in that sense, performative and transformative.

Indigenous stories are told in specific places, for different purposes, and in particular times. Storytelling, it is called. Everybody tells stories, but knowledge keepers and elders play an important role in remembering the collective past. For an Indigenous audience, storytelling is about the transmission of culture. For outsiders, however, these stories are difficult to decipher because westerners lack the historical, contextual and cultural embeddedness required to capture their meanings and importance. These traditional stories, myths, and legends express core elements of Indigenous realities, a context that is foreign and incommensurable with the experience of most western researchers. Westerners listen to Indigenous stories with western ears. Without an understanding of Indigenous cultures as living manifestations of a people, they risk focusing on peripheral aspects of the stories; those embedded in a western oppressive perspective of superiority. It is in this sense that King (2003: 57–58) writes that western depictions of Indigenous peoples contain “the unexamined implication that the lives of Native people needed improvement”, which suggests that even attentive listening may not be enough to protect the western researcher from cultural appropriation.

Cultural distance has not prevented Indigenous peoples from being one of the most studied groups of all times (Smith, 2012). Western research has long considered that the past knowledges and traditions of Indigenous peoples are valuable and should be studied. However, the study of Indigenous peoples has long been based on epistemological ignorance (Fricker, 2007) and the othering of research subjects (Said, 1977). Until recently, the history of Indigenous peoples was the one told from the perspective of settlers (Brown, 2007; Fixico, 1997; Treuer, 2019), and they appeared only at the margins of Western history. The emergence of cultural history (Burke, 2008) promoted an interest in the study of history from below (Thompson, 1966; see also: Kumar, 2023) and the development of approaches such as microhistory (Ginzburg, 1992; Carnegie and McBride, 2023) and oral history (Vansina, 1965; Giacomini, 2023). This movement has motivated historians to focus more on the history of Indigenous peoples and to begin to pay attention to the Indigenous side of the story (e.g., Brown, 2007).

Historians approach the stories Indigenous peoples tell as sources for their own retelling of the past. Their job is to emplot the past in a meaningful and authentic way according to what is considered truthful and legitimate knowledge within their discipline (White, 1973). In this, their uses of oral history differ from Indigenous peoples. For Indigenous peoples, oral histories are not a method of historical inquiry, but a collective endeavour intrinsically connected to the identity of a community and of a Nation. In contrast, Western researchers approach oral history as a research method (Thompson, 2017; Giacomini, 2023). Their primary goal is to record information that will later be transcribed and analysed as text. The interviewer sets the direction of the conversation, even if minimal. The setting is usually artificial and planned to maximize the quality of the recording (Lamertz, 2023). As a result, the stories they capture are rigid stories, stories that were told and retold many times, and every time they are told, they lose part of their vitality until they became just shadows of the real, true stories that still live on within the community (Fentress & Wickham, 1992). Oral history approached this way

essentially freezes the past, removing the dynamic component of Indigenous stories. In so doing, researchers treat the past as Western science treats nature, capturing it into a still-life, a specimen that can be dissected and examined under a magnifying glass.

By contrast, the past that matters for Indigenous peoples is the past that lives on and informs the way they define themselves as distinct groups in the present. Indigenous peoples are pre-historical in the sense that their mnemonic practices precede the arrival of history as a Western discipline and an imposed particular historical consciousness (Dussel, 1995). If they now engage with the production of academic history, that has more to do with their dependence on Western institutions and their willingness to rediscover, revive and preserve a past that colonization destroyed than with a failure in their modes of recalling the past. The living past of Indigenous peoples is not to be found in colonial records and scholarly recordings but in the collective memory of Indigenous communities (Coraiola et al., 2023). And the best way to approach that knowledge is to actively engage with it, to take part in that past by engaging in conversation with Indigenous peoples. Conversations provide a unique perspective on an Indigenous understanding of the past to the extent that it offers an approach grounded in Indigenous methodologies. Individual conversations, group conversations, collective reminiscing, these are all occasions to learn more about the past, about the living past and not the past sedimented into repeated stories.

The past is known as it is relived and recreated through conversations. No conversation is the same. No story is the same. People tell stories in different situations, in response to different questions, and with different motivations. The past is not what was once fixed and registered but what is re-created in a specific situation for a particular present purpose (Coraiola et al., 2015; Lubinski, 2023). Active participation and engagement are thus central components of an inquiry into the past. On the one hand, participatory research through conversations allows non-Indigenous scholars to examine their own epistemological assumptions while providing a shared platform for relationship building, learning, and action. On the other hand, conversations offer the opportunity for Indigenous peoples to have a real voice in the research. They find an opportunity to express their knowledges and identities and shape the conversation according to what they perceive as important and with respect to their own worldviews (Kovach, 2009).

In this chapter, we develop a conversational inquiry approach to the study of the past in Indigenous communities. We follow the advice we received from a Cree Elder and use the term *past occurrences* (Bastien et al., 2021: 90) to refer to “the collection of individual memories about the past that exist in stories held by members of a community and passed on over time, linking the past, present and future”. We define conversational inquiry as a form of research that takes place through a dialogical interaction between a researcher seeking knowledge and several individuals recognized as knowledge keepers. The final product of this inquiry is a story, a narrative of peoples, things, and events that satisfies both the knowledge keepers’ need for expression and the knowledge seeker’s quest for knowledge. This co-construction is critical for moving away from cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2018) and epistemic ignorance (Kuokkanen, 2008), while reinforcing a shared approach to data collection and interpretation. This is distinct from the Western approach of the “art” of conversation (Burke, 1993). This has also little to do with the branch of linguistics known as “conversation analysis” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Even though we do not deny that such approaches could be relevant to analyse extracts from these stories to understand micro-elements of ethnomethodological talk-in-interaction, we prefer to look at conversations as the *ongoing process of construction of*

a story about past occurrences (Bastien et al., 2021). An approach that provides those engaged in the process a platform to mutually learn, listen, and co-construct an understanding of the past.

We begin by providing an overview of the problem with Indigenous history. We use this as a starting point to argue for the relevance of *past occurrences* as the real living past of Indigenous peoples, and as an important source for knowledges. We continue by demonstrating the way that conversations can be used as windows to the past and by offering insight for researching *past occurrences* through a conversational inquiry.

THE PROBLEM WITH INDIGENOUS HISTORY

Indigenous history is an oxymoron. First, because much of popular history has been used against Indigenous peoples and has portrayed a stereotypical view of them. Second, because western conceptions of history do not capture Indigenous understandings of the past and their knowledges. Western history has kept Indigenous peoples locked in a fictional past (King, 2013), fugitives of their own lands with their reality squeezed out through practices of cultural genocide (cf. Treuer, 2019). The list includes foundational stories about settlers defeating *savages*. Stories of Christians in a quest to convert the *pagans* to the service of the true God. Stories of the romantic encounter with *noble savages* (King, 2013). In using their own accounts of the past, colonizers were – and still are – quite creative in constructing their own (mis)interpretations. Western history thus remains a powerful colonizing tool justifying the superiority of western thinking and their rights over “discovered” land (Dussel, 1995).

Western historical constructions of Indigenous peoples are still ubiquitous in schoolbooks, history classes, and, until very recently, implied in school curricula. The past, it seems, is the only place Indigenous peoples can exist in Western eyes. Western interests in Indigenous peoples often revolve around their antiquity and traditions. This is well illustrated by famous Indigenous author Thomas King in his book “The Inconvenient Indian” with his depiction of the *Dead Indian*. King eloquently details how generational settlers today romanticize over the same peoples and cultures brutally decimated by their own ancestors. An unsettling fascination, he explains, for those *Indians* found in museums and old pictures who until very recently appeared everywhere including “in advertising, in the names of businesses, as icons for sports teams, as marketing devices for everything from cleaning products to underwear” (King, 2013: 59).

One of the many negative consequences inherent to this stereotypical view of the “*Indian*” killed by modernity is the lack of perceived diversity among Indigenous Nations and their cultures. Othering, as Said (1977) has theorized, “effectively buttressed the dominant, mostly white, cultural group as the ‘central’ ethnicity of the multicultural mix, the norm against which other ethnicities are judged” (Ashcroft et al., 2008: 164). This generalization of “other cultures” ignores the fact that Indigenous peoples were, and still are, the first inhabitants and are highly diverse in their cultures, languages, and traditions. In addition, Indigenous Nations and their peoples have histories composed of very different pasts because of the vast ecology of their homelands, the distinctiveness of their cultures, and their specific pre- and post-colonial experiences (Bastien et al., 2023; Nabokov, 2002). Colonization has led some Nations to develop strong relationships with colonial governments, while others remain less engaged in western society. Several Indigenous Nations today are engaged in resurgence (Corntassel, 2012), and

cultural revitalization, proudly expressing their sovereignty although many others still endure strong dependencies on colonial governments. Some communities even practice Christianity in spite of countless others having been devastated by Christian residential schools.

In North America, popular culture has participated in this deception of the *Indian* by generalizing its depiction and blurring the distinction between Huron-Wendats, Cherokees, Mohawks, Crees and all other Indigenous groups. The problem with this universal western portrayal is that the *Indian* has no Nation and no culture. They are simply an *Indian* like all other *Indians* existing today and throughout history. Although there have been attempts at a pan-Indigenous definition for the sake of land claims and treaties, Indigenous Nations remain unique and distinct; a singularity that is key to each Nation's survival. Indigenous peoples do not identify as part of the same ethnic group. Every Nation's continued existence is dependent on their specific past experiences which is heavily rooted in the different lands that they occupied and cultural practices they performed on these lands.

Colonization has kept Indigenous Nations stuck in an ageless, fabricated world while their real past experiences – that is, their memories, identities, and knowledges – remain locked away, buried under centuries of cultural genocide. Today, while western depictions of the *Indian* are fictional, inaccurate, and “frozen in time” (Battiste & Henderson, 2009: 6), Indigenous voices linger, struggling to be heard, silenced by western institutional barriers. Indigenous cultures are not living shrines or “cultural treasures” or “a piece of North American antiquity” (King, 2003: 79). They are alive! They exist and thrive in many forms. They are unique, rich in culture, and carriers of important knowledges. Indigenous peoples are living and breathing individuals and exist in contemporary realities (Treuer, 2019). As stated in the *Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development*, this tendency of embedding Indigenous peoples in a distant collective past is “dehumanizing” since “real human societies live and change” and in all Indigenous Nations “there is both continuity and change”.

KNOWING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES THROUGH INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING

One of the primary measures that can help capture the complexity of Indigenous Nations and their knowledges is to foster deeper levels of historical and methodological reflexivity. As in all fields of knowledge, in Management and Organization Studies (MOS), Europeans and settlers have dominated the narratives used to understand and describe important business concepts such as economic development, organizational effectiveness, growth, leadership, innovation, and even *progress* just to name a few (Bastien et al., 2023). These colonial narratives are historically embedded in western rationalities of individualism, self-interest, and control, evident in their quest for individual profit at the expense of the natural world. As argued by Verbos et al. (2011), these narratives have contributed to vicious circles of unresolved historical grief that include cultural genocide, loss of homelands, and endemic poverty. Colonial approaches to managing and organizing continue to infiltrate the ways we approach our topics and present our ideas in business schools and management programs. In fact, these ideas continue to be reproduced, unquestioned, and harmful, discounting and defying the many voices of Indigenous peoples and their pasts. Worse yet, it provides a narrow understanding of the complexity of our discipline, one that is ill-fitted to tackle some of the “grand challenges” that our discipline has recently pledged to undertake.

Further, much of what is produced about Indigenous Nations in MOS treats Indigenous peoples as research subjects. They have been *othered*, objectified, and used to generate knowledge that primarily benefits settlers and colonizers. Research is seldom designed to enhance the lives of Indigenous peoples in positive ways nor to translate their knowledges and lived histories. Rather, scientific research continues to reinforce the epistemological myopia and dominance of western thought (Fricker, 2007) attached to vicious circles of colonization (Said, 1977) because research is done for settlers' purposes and with settlers' eyes (Smith, 2012). These dynamics are not completely visible but manifest in the form of structural discrimination in the field of MOS, leading to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples and their ways of being and knowing (Bastien et al., 2023). Doucette et al. (2021: 473) recently argued that "the way we share the past to derive lessons now and for the future, are the foundations of all knowledge systems – including Indigenous knowledge systems". The control of history by westerners restricts what is considered legitimate knowledge; a dynamic still firmly rooted in the field of MOS.

To counteract the insidious nature of cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2018), we argue that scholars in MOS need to acknowledge the existence of Indigenous groups and more specifically recognize the historical denial of their importance, the systematic discrimination of western research practices, and the self-fulfilling nature of western historical narratives. This is an important step towards a more inclusive, respectful, and humane academic field of research. Without critique with an eye toward alternative interpretations of history, MOS will continue to produce research that discounts and ignores the voices of Indigenous peoples, while reinforcing western historical constructions. It is time to recognize the value of Indigenous peoples, their worldviews, their knowledges, and the richness of their pasts in the present. To do so, we advocate for in-depth engagement through conversational inquiry and participatory research approaches (Tobias et al., 2013). The field of MOS has a real opportunity to drive important social change instead of continue to implicitly reproduce colonial dynamics.

PAST OCCURRENCES AS LIVING PAST

To know the past of Indigenous peoples one needs to know their present and their stories. The best way to learn the stories of Indigenous peoples, if they so permit, is to engage in *conversational inquiry* through participatory research. This approach requires researchers to consider Indigenous peoples as active partners in the process of research inquiry, participating in all stages of research. A good beginning is to have a question that emerges from an insider's perspective. A question that is not imposed from the outside to satisfy the voracious appetite of western science, but a question that speaks to and resonates with the needs and demands of a specific Indigenous Nation. This requires building long-term relationships with Indigenous communities and their peoples. Stories, like relationships, unfold over time. They have their own pace and should not be rushed. Knowing the past from an Indigenous perspective is a relational process. It requires researchers to be alert and attentive to the present and actively engage in weaving stories into narratives as they build meaning through conversations.

Inherent to learning from Indigenous peoples through their ways of knowing is to connect to different pasts, to rewrite history and to embrace alternative ontologies and epistemologies. We argue that engaging with Indigenous peoples requires moving away from settler history by embracing a commitment towards the study of *past occurrences* (Bastien et al., 2021). We

believe that the dominant tendency to historically embed organizing within a western perspective has considerably limited our understanding of contemporary social issues and the role of organizations in society. A focus on the present and presence of Indigenous pasts instead of on the dead past of ancient societies is a political action that aims to reinsert Indigenous peoples in the collective conscience of contemporary society. We thus argue for a renewed engagement of MOS scholars towards Indigenous peoples in the present. Essentially attending not only to “traditional knowledges” but, also and more importantly, to “contemporary Indigenous knowledges” (Bastien et al., 2023). In this lies the advantage of the notion of *past occurrences* in relation to traditional western views about the past. *Past occurrences* refer not to a present that once was but to a past that is alive and vivid in the present memory of a community (Coraiola et al., 2023). It captures the enduring presence of the past in stories that are commingled with the present and future.

Past occurrences are thus narratives that are not reflected in written documents and reveal Indigenous ways of being and knowing in metaphors and visions about the past, the present and the future (Bastien et al., 2021). For western researchers, these are difficult to decipher since they are not seen as “texts” by Indigenous peoples but an integral part of Indigenous cultures. They are neither handled with the same objectivity as they are in Western societies nor open for literary and scientific inquiry. They are, instead, performative and transformative practices that define Indigenous identities. They are preserved by those who hold and keep knowledges and are manifested in specific occasions and circumstances. They reflect a circular ontology (Talaga, 2019); a process of cyclical cultural perpetuation that takes place before, during, and after the individual lives of Indigenous peoples and through the existence of the community itself. Narratives of *past occurrences* essentially connect the identity of individuals with the collective identity of their communities. Community identity lives through the individuals that inhabit it. *Past occurrences*, therefore, live and exist in and through Indigenous peoples. They are autobiographical. They bring the past and the future of the group to the present in a spiritual spiral of interconnectedness that includes the natural world, places, things, visions, ancestors and descendants. In fact, interconnectedness, that is, the reciprocal relationality of all things in the world, is central to many Indigenous ontologies (Gladstone, 2018). This worldview embraces the sacredness and centrality of all living things, the permeable boundaries between humans and non-humans, and the fluidity of the past, present, and future. The past lives through the present and in the future, and the present exists because of the past. That is why *past occurrences* do not exist in a historical past, but in the past–present–future nexus that constitutes the totality of how Indigenous peoples experience time. For Indigenous peoples, reality is multitemporal. Time is not detachable as prescribed by settler time (Rifkin, 2017). Rather, the reality is characterized by temporal multiplicity in which there is little distinction between the boundaries of time tenses that constitute the past, present and future.

Language is essential for those in the present who share their stories. Although some Indigenous languages have been decimated by colonization, many have survived, and several others are being revitalized (Walsh, 2005). Joseph (2018: 66–67) maintains that “in oral societies, when the words are gone, so are the histories, the value systems, the spiritual, ecological knowledge, the worldviews, the stories and the songs [where] the loss of language severs the connection between a people and their culture”. In contrast to written, stable statements, oral stories are in constant movement. Capturing these stories in the present, in their traditional languages, with the help of interpreters, can provide a window to connect to different pasts and break away from western depictions and colonial interpretations. As MOS scholars, we

must listen to Indigenous peoples, provide them with the opportunity to add to their stories passed-on from their ancestors in order to not only guide their descendants, but also to inform how western researchers think and feel. *Past occurrences* are not static, they are flexible and changing. They move “forward and welcome the future” (Doucette et al., 2021: 481).

An important step towards breaking the firm grip that cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2018) holds on the field of MOS is to have conversations about *past occurrences* that relate to specific instances, in specific places, expressed in traditional languages. A focus on the natural environment (Etzion, 2007), animals (Sayers, 2016), and the importance of place and the material world (Carlile et al., 2013; Clegg & Kornberger, 2006) can be “enlightened” by centuries-old ancestral knowledges that survived and are still alive today in the collective memory of Indigenous communities. A more mutualistic and reciprocal relationship among humans and non-humans (Sundberg, 2014) can offer important alternatives and new ways westerners can embrace a different relationship with the socio-natural world, and also lead to better decisions by contemporary organizations. By honouring the real lived pasts of Indigenous Nations can also generate “a virtuous, inclusive circle within management education” and research, while also “benefit[ing] an underrepresented minority group” (Verbos et al., 2011: 21).

CONVERSATIONS AS WINDOWS TO *PAST OCCURRENCES*

We argue that *past occurrences* are constructed through conversations. The past is talked into being and is at the same time discovered and rediscovered by the people taking part in conversations. Some conversations are recent and may last less than a summer. Some others will perhaps last a lifetime. And yet others will be ongoing for hundreds of years. When seeking for approaches to study *past occurrences* through conversations, we found little guidance from established fields such as of conversation analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998) and conversational storytelling (Norrick, 2007). These approaches are suitable for the research of dead texts with their structuralist analysis and meticulous focus on utterances, turns, connectors, and lexicon. However, they provide little insight for the analysis of *past occurrences* in the context of Indigenous lives in which the focus is less on the micro-understanding of certain stories and the way they are deployed, and more on how stories woven into conversations are part of broader and more meaningful wholes that construct who they are and the place they inhabit in the world.

Looking beyond this literature, we have identified other western and non-western scholars engaged in developing research in Indigenous communities that have reached a similar consensus about the importance of conversations. Related to our intentions, they have attempted to identify advantages and approaches to use conversations as a form of methodological inquiry. For instance, Kovach (2010) has proposed that conversations can be used as a method for data collection aligned with Indigenous research methodologies. Similarly, Boje and Rosile (2020) have developed an indirect method for collecting data through interviews embedded in a modified version of conversational storytelling adapted for Indigenous methodologies. More recently, Doucette and colleagues (2021) have used a combined approach between autoethnography and conversation style to describe their experience researching the connection between Indigenous knowledges and management education. Prior work thus provides some suggestions on how participatory research can be developed through conversational exchanges.

We draw from these sources as well as from our experience doing research in Indigenous communities in Canada to propose conversational inquiry as a novel and relevant approach to the study of *past occurrences*. We contend that conversational inquiry is an ongoing process of constructing stories about *past occurrences*. We label it an inquiry because the search for the past is motivated by a question. It does not need to be a scientific or an academic question, but an expression of interest in better understanding a specific dynamic in the life of a community or Nation. The motivating question also needs to emerge from inside the Indigenous community or Nation, that is, it needs to be an authentic question. A question is a point of departure and not necessarily the place of arrival. It will push the spinning wheel to produce a thread of conversation focused on a topic of interest. An answer to the question should satisfy both the knowledge keeper and the knowledge seeker taking part in the conversation. A conversational inquiry approach thus offers a path for a researcher to weave together multiple conversations into a singular piece of research that is collectively fulfilling and mutually useful.

RESEARCHING *PAST OCCURRENCES* THROUGH CONVERSATIONAL INQUIRY

In this section, we propose a set of core principles to guide a conversational inquiry approach. But, first, we describe the appropriate frame of mind needed by researchers to engage in conversational inquiry. It is not uncommon, and sometimes even expected, for researchers trained in the western tradition to enter their research field with a confidence to predict what they will find (Lune & Berg, 2017). They are taught to devise their categories ahead of time, to know what they are seeking, and to focus on regularities across data. They spent much of their initial time reading western literature and developing their research skills in western institutions. They then approach research with an implied conviction about their abilities and a strong credence for western ontological and epistemological assumptions. They presume that they can contribute to western knowledge and assume an equal – if not greater – understanding of the research field than those inhabiting the context. There is such a strong belief in the body of knowledge they are drawing from and in the research methods and protocols they are using that many are hardly surprised with their findings. In other words, this authoritative western stance is incommensurable with the scientific openness new discoveries require. Research in non-western and marginalized settings exacerbate this uneven relationship between the observer and the observed, which is detrimental to the construction of rapport and the development of truthful and useful knowledge.

The study of *past occurrences* is an inquiry into the experience of those that preceded us. The ones that provided the conditions for us to exist in the first place. The ones that nourished us and cared for us. They are the elders and the knowledge keepers. Developing a conversational inquiry approach requires first and foremost an attitude of respect and humbleness. Researchers should undress themselves of their cloaks of wisdom and authority before stepping in the position of knowledge seeker. They should recognize the incompleteness of their knowledge and embrace their ignorance as a passport to engage in true conversation and as a pathway to enlightenment. Once on this path, they must trust those that will lead them. Throughout their journey of discovery, they must surrender control and realize that their investigation will be taking them from one knowledge keeper to another, from one theme to the other, from the past, to the present, to the future, and back again. They will need to manage

the uncertainty and ambiguity of their sense-making inquiry. This cannot be a quick process since engaging in conversations implies building strong relationships which cannot be hurried. Every conversation is unique, time-consuming and challenging. The quest to unveil *past occurrences* in Indigenous communities requires humility, respect, and a modest appreciation that truth and knowledge are not universal. This mindset may run against the core beliefs espoused by some approaches in MOS.

To better describe how the process unfolds in practice we will use the weaving spider as a metaphor. Weaving is a common trope for the production of Indigenous knowledges and is similar to other tropes such as yarnning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) and braiding (Kimmerer, 2013). Before the spider can spin its web, it needs to anchor the thread creating a bridge between two points. A third point is added, crisscrossing the initial bridge, and forming a triangle. It is then, from the centre, which constitutes a fourth point, that the spider builds the spiral web. Similarly, the study of *past occurrences* in the context of Indigenous peoples requires the observance of four important principles. Akin to the three initial points that support the web the spider spins, the first three principles we identify (*contextual sensitivity, relational connectivity, dialogic interaction*) provide the grounding for conversational inquiry. Once the inquiry is established, the researcher can then work towards spinning the thread of the conversation through *reflexive engagement* by connecting the dots between individual conversations that have occurred, while weaving a novel, meaningful pattern of understanding. This is what helps give perspective to the knowledge seeker.

Contextual Sensitivity

To begin with, an important component when developing research with Indigenous peoples is the context. Indigenous peoples have a strong connection to the land, which is the source of their identities and the cradle of their knowledges. Researchers must spend time understanding a particular Indigenous territory prior to commencing any conversations with Indigenous peoples. In other words, researchers should spend time getting to know the land where the Indigenous people dwell to better understand the stories associated with that particular place. Further, researchers should walk the land with their Indigenous research partners to learn how the past is interweaved with the material context. Another important dimension of the context is time, which involves the temporal embeddedness of the stories told, the time of the story and the temporal connection with the people that tell the story. For Indigenous peoples, there is an important connection between landscape and memory. More specifically, certain stories are only shared in particular places, at particular times, under specific conditions, and reflect specific periods of the past and their connection to both present and future.

Relational Connectivity

The second element to consider when researching *past occurrences* is the relational dimension of the conversations. There is, of course, the relational sensibility of co-presence and interaction, but the idea of relationality here goes beyond physical encounters. The relational aspect of the conversations extends beyond the immediate present of co-presence and incorporates the relationship with past individuals and future generations. The search for answers thus require researchers to engage with several people both present and absent that may bring different views on the past and on past artefacts related to the inquiry. Western researchers need

to be mindful of their relationship with Indigenous communities and the specific individuals they seek to engage with. In addition, they need to cultivate relationships so they can identify other people that may add to the story that they are trying to understand and decipher. They may find themselves taking part in conversations that have already begun and that are still ongoing. They may even reignite older conversations and raise new points of interests.

Dialogic Interaction

Third, the interaction between knowledge seeker and knowledge keepers must be dialogical. There is no clear architect of the conversation that flows from one person to another. This is different from traditional interview approaches in which decisions regarding the flexibility and aperture of an interview are defined beforehand. It is also distinct from storytelling in which the knowledge keeper controls the story to be told. Conversations are not simply structured as an exchange of information between two or more people. Rather, they are ongoing constructions with multiple initial co-authors and ultimately in the end, with numerous co-editors. It begins with the motivation of a knowledge seeker exploring and searching for answers and it finds closure with the knowledge keepers' satisfaction in sharing their knowledge and how that knowledge will actually be used, and the knowledge seeker's sense of fulfilment of their learning journey.

Reflexive Engagement

Fourth, knowledge seekers must then take time to reflect, understand, and accept what may have changed for them as result of the conversations. This means engaging with themselves, the stories they heard, the context in which they are embedded, and with those who have taken time to share their wisdom and knowledges. Pondering through various individual conversations can allow for a bigger picture to form and for a higher understanding to develop. This bigger picture materializes through the reciprocal engagement of knowledge seekers and knowledge keepers, between research institutions and specific Indigenous communities. This should be an ongoing process that extends beyond a particular research project. This is a journey. It requires continued self-reflection by the researcher, a responsibility towards those that hold and share knowledge, and a respect for the community in terms of both *place* and *time*.

CONCLUSION

This chapter advances a participatory research method to the study of *past occurrences*. Our conversational inquiry approach is grounded on four main principles: contextual sensitivity, relational connectivity, dialogic interaction, and reflexive engagement. The objective is for MOS scholars to develop a more profound and complete understanding of the world through Indigenous peoples, their ways of being and knowing, and the lively presence of their past. Conversations with Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders also offer a path for researchers to discover more about themselves and their worldviews. Indigenous methodologies do not separate subjects and objects. For Indigenous peoples these conversations are as much about the past, present and future as they are about heart, mind and spirit. These, again, cannot be

separated. Western researchers may have a lot to learn, or perhaps to unlearn, until they can see themselves as books in which the life of the past is written and rewritten.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READINGS

- (1) Bastien F, Coraiola DM and Foster WM (2023) Indigenous peoples and organization studies. *Organization Studies* 44(4): 659–675.

The authors of this essay encourage Management and Organizational Studies (MOS) scholars to critically reflect upon how Indigenous peoples and their knowledges have been, and continue to be, systemically discriminated against. They argue the systemic discrimination against Indigenous knowledges results from the historical legacy of colonization which continues to define what gets accepted as truth and marginalize approaches that do not fit within the narrow boundaries of the western canon. The authors devise three concurrent paths to start demarginalizing indigeneity in MOS by proposing changes in the academy, the business school, and the classroom.

- (2) Salmon E, Chavez JF and Murphy M (2022) New perspectives and critical insights from Indigenous peoples' research: A systematic review of Indigenous management and organization literature. *Academy of Management Annals*. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2021.0132>.

This article offers valuable insights on how Indigenous peoples have enriched management and organization theories and literature. The authors provide a systematic and thorough analysis of Indigenous Management and Organization Studies research published over a 90-year period (1932–2021) and synthesize this body of work into a multi-dimensional framework, exploring the various features and methodological considerations of Indigenous research.

- (3) Doucette MB, Gladstone JS and Carter T (2021) Indigenous conversational approach to history and business education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 20(3): 473–484.

This article demonstrates how three Indigenous business scholars use applied relational methods to imagine new possibilities for business studies. Using a combination of autoethnographic and conversational style writing, they reflect on their experiences as Indigenous scholars working, learning, and teaching in business schools. They highlight how business school knowledge systems – past and present – reinforce colonial narratives, despite calls for diversity. The authors explain the double bind that Indigenous scholars face engaging with the critical study of history and encourage our colleagues to consider using relational methods to reflect on their sources of agency within business school systems.

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22. The City of London: genealogy of a contemporary heterotopia

Nelarine Cornelius and Eric Pezet

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have highlighted the potential benefits of applying social sciences, and organisation studies in particular; to historical studies, which normally sits within the humanities (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Rowlinson, 2013), as well as the importance of plurality in business history methods (Decker et al., 2015). An important challenge to the researcher of powerful institutions is that of ‘silencing’ within the most readily accessible company archives (Decker, 2013): what was good business centuries ago was built on practices now viewed as unacceptable, and the experiences of the exploited are often distorted or masked altogether.

To account for a range of phenomena, their interconnectivity, and the nuances and dynamics they yield for our understanding of the history of financial district, the City of London (the City) and its institutions, we concur with this call for a cross-disciplinary approach. Understanding the evolution of Crown/City relations is a way of understanding better the past, and current, status of the City. Our illustration of the theoretical and methodological challenges is the changing relationship between the City and the Crown/state across the centuries. We study the relationships between the City and its socio-political environment, as we contend the City is built on alternative norms that can be perceived as disruptive and disturbing by political and administrative powers, yet is nonetheless tolerated, indeed respected, and its power and influence acknowledged by the Crown/state.

Capitalism brings together organisations with very different operating norms. While there are dominant norms in society, some organisations deviate from the common norms because of their relationship to space and time. Foucault’s (1986) concept of *heterotopia* allows us to grasp this dimension (Cummings and Bridgman, 2023). A heterotopia is a physical and social space that has specific norms and values and is largely self-regulating, operating in a manner *de facto* distant from mainstream societal norms and values. Heterotopia studies occur in cognate disciplines including geography, cultural studies, architecture and art and postcolonial studies (e.g., Javangwe, 2016) but merit greater scrutiny with regards to its potential in business and management history studies.

For Foucault, societies are constructed by *integrating* heterotopias, by accepting these worlds apart. To have a stronger sense of the heterotopia as a distinctive physical and social space, we refer also to the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre’s work on the history of cities and urban theory, in particular, the history of cities and the production of social space (1991). Lefebvre’s suggests that cities contain anomic locales, that is, areas that have different norms, values and morals from society. Lefebvre ([1974] 1991: 129) also notes that cities often include “Anomic groups (that) construct heterotopic space which are eventually reclaimed by the dominant praxis”. Lefebvre employs a distinctive meaning of anomie, consistent with Guyau, who defines anomie as “the absence of apodictic, fixed, and universal rule” (cited by

Orru, 1983: 505; see also Guyau, [1885] 2008, 1887; Durkheim, 1947, [1897] 1951; Riba, 1999) and views anomie as the basis for challenging societal norms, important for the development of societies (to be contrasted with more negative, Durkheimian interpretation).

There are also cases where the construction of the heterotopia accompanies the history of the society, as is the case with the City, which we employ to demonstrate this, through the concept of heterotopia. We apply additional concepts from the fields of history and social sciences that support the study of the City as an *enduring heterotopia*.

Further, although some heterotopias are viewed as important to the realisation of aims of the Crown/state, and may be accepted, it could be argued that this is because they are difficult to challenge and control. Indeed, the Crown/state and business do not coexist harmoniously: corporations have their own agendas, and many have the capacity to both resist and act to limit the powers the state exercises towards its activities. It is important, therefore, to understand the City from the point of view of its internal structures and its organisation. We are interested also in the City's external relations, as this is another way of studying its strategies for avoiding stronger Crown/state oversight and regulations. Specifically, we contend that this will require drawing on an approach at the intersection of historical and social science methods to understand better the evolution of the City's distinctive position.

Further, we explore an activity which we contend as important to the City's enduring power and influence, *diplomatic relations* (Foucault, 1986; see also Pezet and Cornelius, 2017 with the Crown/state. We believe that this is crucial understanding better how the City maintains its distinctive position, yet continues to retain constructive relations with the Crown/state to the extent that its activities are deemed essential to the economic health and power of the nation.

To enrich our application of heterotopia studies, we draw on the work of historian Fernand Braudel, and specifically his idea of the *longue durée* (1982; 1996) which enables us to understand the evolution of City/Crown state relations over long (across many centuries) rather than the more usual shorter (many decades) time periods addressed in business historical studies. Therefore, we have developed a methodological framework which draws on the work of the philosopher, social scientist and historian of ideas, Michel Foucault, the historian Fernand Braudel, and the philosopher and sociologist, Henri Lefebvre: the framework is thus at the intersection of history, philosophy, and social sciences. However, the Foucauldian and Braudelian concepts are the core of our methodological framework.

We will illustrate the use of our methodological framework first, for the development of an initial literature review. This review enables us to scope the problematic; decide on an appropriate time frame, the *longue durée*, to be researched, and develop an archival strategy. Braudel requires a topic of enduring interest to focus on across the *longue durée*; in our illustration it is diplomatic relations between the City and the Crown/state. To investigate this, for our illustration, the archival strategy should enable analysis of changing diplomatic relations across centuries.

Additionally, of interest as indicative of fluctuations in the balance of power are *agreements* between diplomatic actors, which may be formal and/or informal. These agreements are *objects of interest* as they are indicative of the value placed on the relationship. For example, when the actors are in agreement, what are the actions each actor will take to progress these agreements? What are the formal arrangements that are established?

Table 22.1 *Heterotopic engagement with national law*

Normative position of the heterotopia	Type of diplomatic activity	
	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Active</i>
<i>Defy the law</i>	Squat	Mafia
<i>Accommodation of the law but live according to the norms and rules created within the heterotopia</i>	Carnival	Church

HETEROTOPIAS AND THE *LONG DURÉE*

A heterotopia is both a physical and social space with specific norms and values. Heterotopias are accepted when the mainstream social and political norms organising society are unable to accommodate norms, values and behaviours which are recognised as fulfilling a societal need, but which society struggles to acknowledge. Foucault (1986) describes three kinds of heterotopias to illustrate this: crisis heterotopias (e.g., military service), heterotopias of deviation (e.g., psychiatric hospitals and prisons) and heterotopias of compensation (e.g., Jesuit Latin American colonies in the 17th century that tried to achieve human perfection). Heterotopias can be a status quo-supporting heterotopia (such as religious institutions), or arrangements that subvert, for example, brothels (Ntounis and Kanellopoulou, 2017): all have a function in society, though the latter can be seen by the Crown/state as counter norms and, as such, problematic. Foucault was clear that his typologies were not exhaustive: new types of heterotopias may be “discovered”.

Scholars have applied the concept of the heterotopia to the roots and development of modernity and understand the geography, the characteristics of its districts including those that are heterotopic in character (e.g., Hetherington, 1997). Heterotopias may challenge the state as their norms can be unsettling for the society. As they are counter spaces, they can be contested by the society. A cultural heterotopia like a rave party can be informally tolerated though formally forbidden by the authorities. Therefore, heterotopias are distanced from society but not disconnected; aside from society but not hostile; acknowledged by society; tolerated as long as their activities do not spill over into mainstream society.

Heterotopias and Diplomacy

Further, we contend that heterotopias can survive and potentially thrive through the maintenance of ongoing dialogue and relationships with the Crown/state, to protect and potentially legitimate their activities: expressly, *diplomacy* and *diplomatic relations*. Our interest in the latter is from a Foucaudian perspective. Diplomatic relations are based on a mutual acknowledgement of relative strength and, consequently, the relationships that evolve and it is these that we argue are key to the maintenance of the connexion between heterotopias and the Crown/state (see Table 22.1). It should be noted that Foucaudian diplomacy comprises *unstable* relationships because it is a mutual relation of strength. Further, these relationships evolve over time.

Heterotopology

Scholars have identified how clusters of heterotopic spaces within specific geographies establish a *heterotopology*. Heterotopologies refer to several geographies – physical geography, social geography, virtual – with different location criteria. These places are many and diverse in nature and function and include boarding houses (Holden, 2003), hospitals (Street and Coleman, 2012) and squats (Kotronaki, 2018). As a heterotopia is a reflection of society, bodies can be seen as a heterotopia, especially the body of the colonised (Javangwe, 2016). It can be a diasporic space where standards from another place are applied (Armstead, 2008). An island that receives refugees can be a crisis heterotopia (Pugliese, 2009). Other examples are prison and detention archipelagos whose genealogy is part of the process of Italian (Lampedusa) and British, then Australian (Christmas Island) colonisation (Pugliese, 2009). What these types of heterotopia suggest is that some heterotopias are so powerful that they are able to challenge the state/Crown and its institutions, including state laws. For simplicity, the City may be viewed as a heterotopia. A more nuanced reading is that the City comprises many institutions within the defined geographical location often referred to as the Square Mile, is that the City is a heterotopology. We use the more familiar term heterotopia in our chapter.

The Longue Durée: Evolving Relations and Structures

The City is a heterotopia in a long-term (centuries-long) relationship with the Crown/state. To explore this relationship of a historical tradition which addresses all-but-permanent, slowly evolving structures, we draw on the work of Braudel and specifically, the *longue durée* (Braudel, 1982, 1996; Braudel and Wallerstein, 2009). Braudel's work distinguishes between the time scales associated with contemporaneous chroniclers – a more episodic historical analysis, which typically takes place within much shorter time periods – and that of an explicitly, centuries-long view. This is essential to deepen our understanding of the evolution of the City and its diplomatic relationships with the Crown/state.

He developed his ideas first, through his historical analysis of capitalism within the context of political, social and economic structures and events, specifically the development of the Spanish Empire during the reign of Phillip II; and then, his most expansive work, his three-volume work, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*. The *longue durée* concerns the events that occur, liminally, across centuries which slowly change relationships between people and the world; the development of insights into the evolution of social and institutional structures; and other elements such as geography and capitalism. Also of importance within the *longue durée* is prosopography (Carnegie and McBride, 2023): an understanding of more “mundane”, commonplace lives, and the relationships and dynamics within the networks they inhabit (rather than those of the famous), which forms the basis of alternative, more holistic accounts (see, for example, Roffe and Keats-Rohan, 2016). It is also required that a specific factor, or factors, be present across the *longue durée* to explore how relationships and structures change over time. We discuss potentially useful factors later in the chapter.

Specifically, we pose the following questions to highlight the methodological framework employed in order to understand the enduring power and influence of The City, and its implications for archival strategy development:

1. What are examples of objects of diplomacy between the City and the Crown?
2. What was basis for the mutual acknowledgment of status and power between these diplomatic partners?
3. What were the objects of agreement within the diplomatic relationship between the City and the Crown?

METHODS

Preliminary and Main Research Processes

To recall, our aim is to understand better evolving Foucauldian diplomatic relationships with the Crown/state that fostered the evolution of the City; to identify the characteristics of the City as a heterotopia; and to identify its anomic distinctiveness, within a *longue durée*.

To undertake such an investigation it is necessary to first, undertake an *initial literature review* to establish a *chronology* of diplomatic relations between the City and the Crown/state. This is the preliminary phase that enables the development of a broad historical timeline can be created containing “critical” moments, especially those of support for, or challenges raised against, the City by the Crown/state (and other powerful strata within society), that appear to be central to more detailed investigation.

The initial literature review draws from ancient and modern sources. Our interest is what and who influenced this diplomacy and how to decide the timeframe for our *longue durée* perspectives. It is especially important that contemporaneous accounts, if available, are included (rather than just modern accounts reviewing historical events) as they capture something of the norms, values, attitudes (societal, political etc.) that prevailed at the time. Sources for the latter might be either in the form of original or facsimile documents, or online e-resources. This chronology will inform the subsequent, more detailed literature review, and archival strategy.

The second phase is the determination of the appropriate time frame or *longue durée* that is to be researched. The third phase is a *full literature review* that explores first, a refined and more nuanced set of research aims within the time frame to be investigated in particular, with the actions, events, and factors that help us understand more robustly City–Crown/state diplomatic relations.

The full literature review provides the foundations for the fourth phase, development of an *archival strategy*, including the identification and evaluation of the most appropriate archives to research. Finally, the findings from these phases need to be reviewed iteratively, including the *re-examination of commonly held historical views*, and the identification of *new phenomena*. To understand these phases and the links between them better, we have developed an abridged version of the research phases for our illustrative example.

Initial Literature Review and Chronology Highlighting Diplomatic Relations Between the Crown/State and the City

Although a full research project might consider many more institutions, we have selected to illustrate three. First, we consider the formal governance of the City, that of the City of London Corporation (legally and formally, Mayor and Commonalty and Citizens of the City of London, most recently renamed the Corporation of London in 2006), established in 1191 as an important institution that highlights the degree to which the City's governance was controlled by the Crown/state, and the ways in which this control was resisted. The organisations' liberties and customs were enshrined in the Magna Carta (1215), an English medieval document which is a charter of rights for the church and barons (the baronage) which put into writing limits on royal authority and the rights of "free men" to justice and a fair trial (Heal, 1972; Holt, 2015; Sharp McKechnie, [1904] 2012). Charters granting rights and liberties to individuals and, eventually, groups including City institutions, and others throughout society, were issued by the Crown, based on the Magna Carta. The City has institutional status and is, therefore, not isolated from the Crown/state. On the contrary, the City interacts with the Crown in a sense that it is clearly recognised as legitimate and operates at the interface of the business and political worlds. We also consider two institutions, the Goldsmiths Guild (now named the Goldsmiths' Company), which eventually was also instrumental in the founding of the Bank of England. Both the Goldsmiths and the Bank of England (BoE) continue to be prominent within the City, with the BoE in particular wielding great and enduring national and global influence and power.

Timescales

Our initial literature review commences from the early history of these three institutions. The City of London Corporation received a royal warrant in 1067, and the Goldsmiths' Guild (the origins of the Goldsmiths' Company) received its warrant in 1327. We have drawn on the work of Reddaway and Walker (1975), who not only chronicle the guild's early history but also details the Goldsmiths' Book of Ordinances; Price ([1870] 2018), who focuses on the evolution of bankers from the Goldsmiths', building on contemporaneous records from 1677; and Clapham (1958), who produced one of the definitive accounts of the Bank of England, drawing heavily on the Bank's extensive archives. We also consider briefly the development of the new institutions in the City in the 20th and 21st centuries, new guilds, with roots connecting to their medieval predecessors.

Literature Review – Chronology and Preliminary Findings

London: early beginnings – the foundations of the City as a heterotopia and the acknowledgment by the Crown of the strength of the City

Although there is good evidence of Bronze Age settlements, many consider the founding of London as 43 AD as part of the Roman occupation of Britain. During this period, *Londinium*, the site of what is now the City of London, was a port City with a multi-ethnic population estimated at between 40 to 60 thousand inhabitants. It eventually declined as the Roman Empire crumbled, as a result of plague and fire. London was also an important City during the Anglo-Saxon period and was also subject to Viking threat and, at times, control. The

Anglo-Saxons restored and rebuilt parts of the old “Roman” London and, along with others in England, established four mints producing coins of the realm in the City by the Anglo-Saxon king, Edward the Confessor (Besant, [1910] 2011).

It is of note that after the Norman Conquest of 1066, the City of London does not appear in the Domesday Book, a survey of properties and goods owned in much of England and parts of Wales in order to levy taxes, which was completed in 1086. Indeed, it could be argued that London was never tightly controlled by the Normans. The Normans were repelled at London Bridge and they sought a passage across the Thames at Berkhamsted, Surrey, where three Anglo-Saxon kings surrendered to them (Bartlett, 2003). The City of London was then issued with a royal charter (the awarding of rights and privileges via incorporation, by the Crown) in 1075, although three castles were built as a symbol to the locals of Norman military power. By 1130, a sheriff was appointed to control the City and Middlesex (organised as a single administrative area until 1888). By 1141, the City of London was designated a community (or commune: the administration of which are the origins of the City of London Corporation). Citizens were given the right to appoint, with the King’s consent, their own mayor in 1189, and by 1215, directly elect their own mayor. Systematically, the governance of the City was developing its own norms and rules which ran alongside those of the nation as a whole (Cooper, [1752] 2018). The City was and is also the home of the guilds (which eventually became livery companies), which represented members of specific trades and crafts, to protect guild members’ interests and regulate the quality of goods, workmanship and training. The guilds were also a source of financial support and loans made to the Crown/state. Funds were often needed for, or in the aftermath of, military campaigns at home and abroad, as well as for funding the diverse requirement of the royal household (Reddaway and Walker, 1975). The Square Mile became a destination also for bankers, financiers and craftsmen from Europe during the early Middle Ages, in particular Italy and the Netherlands; the former for their expertise in finance, banking, insurance, production of fine jewellery and textiles; the latter for their expertise in national and international finance and banking. The role of the guilds, the growth of financial activity and the adoption of foreign expertise would, in turn, also help to shape the norms of the City.

From its ancient origins, the City was treated as a region in London valued highly by the Anglo-Normans. A good illustration is the exclusion from the Domesday Book, one of the first historical acts of Crown/state-sponsored collation of formal public, national accounts. Consequently, the City was excluded from the prevailing system of taxation. It was allowed to elaborate its own norms and governed by its own mayor. Of course the Crown/state formally approved many of the City’s activities through laws and royal *déclarations* (forms of control), but the Crown/state also become financially dependent on it. Through this interdependence, the foundations for developing as a heterotopia and diplomatic relations with the Crown/state, were laid.

Tensions between the City and the Crown/state

The City of London Corporation had a royal warrant from the reign of William I in the 11th century, with a number of warrant and royal charters issued over the centuries, though, occasionally, some were withdrawn by the Crown.

More dramatically, in the 17th century, the default on royal loans by King Charles II and thousands of aristocratic families, and a small group of City-based private bankers, led to the Bond Crash of 1676 which, ultimately, further strengthened the position of City institutions.

Although high rents and taxations by the Crown/state helped to alleviate the situation, the City refused a bailout (Milevsky, 2016). In response, in the law courts, a writ was issued against the Corporation by Charles II, withdrawing its authority to issue franchises or licences to trade (Jordan, 2017), in part with a view to increase revenues to the Crown. On the death of Charles II in 1685 his brother, the Duke of York, became king of England, Scotland and Ireland. His reign was a difficult one, as a Catholic king in a predominantly Protestant kingdom, and he was eventually replaced in a bloodless revolution by his Dutch Protestant cousin, William of Orange (his mother was the eldest daughter of Charles II) in 1689, who restored in full the rights of the Corporation.

Past wars and lingering Crown debts led to an increasingly interdependent relationship between the Crown and the City with, eventually, responsibility for the management of the states' reserves moving from the Crown's exchequer to the Goldsmiths, or more precisely now the Goldsmith-Bankers, the founders of the Bank of England (Acres, 1931; Clapham, 1958) which they founded in 1694. The Bank of England continued in its role as the British central bank, in spite of challenges to its governance and influence in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Sayers, 1976). The Goldsmiths also continued their control over gold and silver quality and the production of precious metal artefacts, underwritten by a series of royal warrants.

The importance of precious metals to the state and its mints and exchequer made it (relatively) easy to enforce charters, with royal backing. Eventually, the Goldsmiths extended their control to beyond London: work produced in the provinces had to be stamped with the symbol of a lion's head, in London, as assurance of its purity. Thus the Goldsmiths became a legal monopoly via royal charter (1371), maintaining control of the flow of the country's silver and gold as well as controlling the quality of gold and silver (which could be sold for exchange but not for profit), used for English, and eventually British, coins (Reddaway and Walker, 1975).

Through the ancient right of the Goldsmith's to control gold supplies and its quality, the City acquired political weight as gold reserves underpinned the value of the national currency. Strength relationships, economic, political and legal, between the Crown and the City are foundational to their diplomatic relations. The progress from the Goldsmiths guild to the Goldsmith-Bankers and then the Bank of England (formalised by Act of Parliament in 1694), as the UK's central bank, marked a sharp increase in status and power through the management of state reserves.

The 18th century was a testing period for the Bank of England (BoE). Challenges for central bank status from the Hollow Sword Blade Company surfaced in 1710, when the BoE's monopoly was to be reviewed. The monopoly was renewed and the challenge faded. The South Sea Company, established in 1711, was given part responsibility of managing the national debt (a position it held until 1853), though the BoE held the primary role in the management of national debt. The Andrew Fordyce bank went bankrupt in 1772, creating a credit crisis in the City. The BoE drew on its reserves to offset the debts, and although this put a strain on the Bank's reserves these were fully restored by 1773, and its royal charter renewed in 1781.

The City, governance and government

The manner in which the City was governed, a combination of Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman structures, largely remained intact until the Victorian era, when some, albeit few, changes were made.

To this day, the ceremonial governance of the City remains medieval, with a Lord Mayor, Court of Aldermen, Court of Common Council, two Sheriffs appointed by the Livery

Companies (the latter which protects the trades or guilds) and a Town Clerk (chief executive). Before the Reform Act of 1832, the liverymen had the exclusive right to elect the four Members of Parliament representing the City for local government elections. The Municipal Corporations Act 1835 was part of the reform programme following the Reform Act, 1832. Whereas the latter had abolished most of the rotten boroughs (those with royal charters but with few voters, so manipulation and corruption of voting was easy) for parliamentary purposes, the 1835 Act applied the similar reforms in terms of local government to 178 boroughs. The City of London Corporation was not reformed by the Municipal Corporations Act 1835, although it had a more extensive electoral franchise than any other borough or City. Over the next 50 years various unreformed boroughs were affected by successive pieces of legislation. However, none of these affected the City of London Corporation. Further, when the local government of London was reorganised by the London Government Act 1899, the City of London was again excluded (see Allen, 2004; Cooper, [1752] 2018; Welch and Norman, [1896] 2009; Williams, 1774). The new administration of London, the London County Council, informed by the ideas of the Progressive Party, also sought to restrict the power of the City of London Corporation in the late 19th century (Pennybacker, 2013), which LCC Councillor John Benn, railed publicly against the Corporation. In 1892, he highlighted what he viewed as its corrupt and privileged nature. He asserted that:

Let us peep over this fragment of the old City wall and see how the trustees of the wealth left by our fathers, the old craftsmen of London, are getting on. Ah, the City turtle is on this back, the knees of Gog and Magog are shaking, the Griffin is rocking on his pedestal. Another blast from the slums, and like Jericho, the walls will fall, and a greater, a brighter and a better London will be ours. (Pennybacker, 2013, p. 3)

Nonetheless, the City resisted governance reforms, including being unaffected by the London Government Act, 1963.

The City retains a unique electoral system. Most of its voters are representatives of businesses and other bodies that occupy premises in the City. Its ancient wards have very unequal numbers of voters. In elections, both the businesses based in the City and the residents of the City vote. Most of its voters are representatives of businesses and other bodies that occupy premises in the City. In 1801, the City had a population of about 130,000, but increasing development of the City as a central business district led to this falling to below 5,000 after the Second World War. The business or “non-residential vote” was abolished in other UK local council elections by the Representation of the People Act 1969, but was preserved in the City. Uniquely for City or borough elections, its elections remain independent-dominated (Allen, 2004). The City of London (Ward Elections) Act 2002, a private Act of Parliament, reformed the voting system and greatly increased the business franchise, allowing many more businesses to be represented. Under the new system, the number of non-resident voters has doubled from 16,000 to 32,000. The City is the smallest county in England. The City of London Police (which is separate from other police services in the UK) use the wards in their day-to-day neighbourhood policing, as well as in recording crime and other statistics, with each ward having a constable assigned, known as the Ward Constable, with the larger wards having Assistant Ward Constables in addition. In many ways, the City has resisted mainstream legislation and administration for centuries: its role in determining the economic fate of the nation remains strong.

The City has been able to maintain its own rules and governance until the early 1960s, which has been both the signal and the means of its autonomy and diplomatic ability to resist challenges from the Crown/state. The non-residential vote has been maintained and strengthened the City's influence and that of its institutions and businesses. These organisations benefit from this heterotopic position of the City, that is to say its ability to valorise its strength, resist attempts to change its governance by the state, and not only maintain its norms and values, but also resist national legislation aimed at reforming its voting practices; clear indications of its strong, diplomatic capabilities.

One of the best examples of the evolution of City institutions is the London Stock Exchange (LSE). The LSE originated as The Royal Exchange (established in 1571 by royal charter), responsible for the trading of commodities (and eventually, shares), extended its reach to the establishment of other exchanges within its imperial sphere of influence (e.g., in New York and Hong Kong). By the early 20th century, the new technologies of the telephone, telegraph and tickertape transformed the volume of business that could be conducted. In the 20th century, computer-based technologies have again reinvigorated the LSE's global reach, as it provides the technology platforms for its joint operation with the Toronto Stock Exchange, as well as operating in Europe, the Middle East, Israel, Africa, South America, Asia Pacific and China; for the latter, it has established an operation in China (Shanghai London Stock Connect), reflecting LSE's strapline: "the world's international exchange" (LSE, 2022).

Our initial literature review suggests that the likely period to be covered within the *longue durée* could commence within the latter part of early modern period for British history which overlaps with the development of British mercantilism, and Britain's challenge to other European imperial states as it grew as a naval and economic power (late 16th century) through to the late 20th century, in order to evaluate the current status of the City as a heterotopia, and its current diplomatic relations (Cornelius and Pezet, 2019).

DISCUSSION

The City of London: A Diplomatically Strong Heterotopia

The Goldsmiths were a historically influential guild, and one of the first to make their mark through the creation of a hall for the administration of their guild, a dedicated, prestigious location of their own within the City. Their ongoing relationship with the Crown/state, and the growing dependency of the latter to the Goldsmiths could be seen as the start of a progressive structuring of norms and also evolving basis for negotiation. This ongoing, evolving relationship is also reflected in the numerous charters issued across the centuries and the changing powers secured during the era of the Goldsmith-Bankers.

British Crown/state ambitions to establish the first British empire (in North America and the Caribbean) and the expansion of international trade in the 17th century required a strong, reliable supply of money. The loans taken out by the Crown/state, many with the Goldsmith-Bankers, are indicative of the importance of the City in enabling the Crown/state to pursue its ambitions to extend its mercantile and imperial aspirations globally. The Bond Market Crash of 1676 was a financial low point for the Crown/state, but also for some of the Goldsmith-Bankers and others City institutions. However, although the refusal to undertake a full bailout in the aftermath of the Bond Crash of 1676 led to the removal of City privi-

leges, particularly those of the City of London Corporation. The growing weakness of the Crown/state's finances allowed the City and its institutions eventually to negotiate a stronger position, with not only the Corporation's rights eventually restored in 1689, but also the Goldsmiths-Bankers and their allies became the country's central bank, the Bank of England.

These ambitions were underpinned by the distinctive and powerful position of the City of London and its administration which, historically, has systematically been afforded rights and legal status which has allowed it to develop its own norms, values and practices. The range of institutions within the City, including the Corporation of London, and many others such as the Bank of England, and the ancient and new guilds. Guilds continue to be established, the latest include the Worshipful Company of International Bankers (International Bankers, 2022) formed as a guild in 2001 with permission to become a livery company by the Corporation of London in 2004, receiving a royal charter in 2007; and the Worshipful Company of World Traders (World Traders, 2022) formed as a guild in 1985, granted permission to become a livery company in 1993 by the Corporation of London, achieving this status in 2000, and receiving its royal charter in 2013. Although the original guilds were required to have members from Britain only, and to operate strictly within the Square Mile, these two new guilds have permission to admit members from outside of the UK, extending their influence beyond the British Isles.

Heterotopias draw the outline of the powers instituted. A society is made of the regular and of the heterotopic. Heterotopias reflect the society where they reside (Ntounis and Kanellopoulou, 2017). It is important to study the relationship between heterotopias and the powers that surround them, primarily that of the state. The City of London has evolved as a heterotopic space, enabling the development of heterotopic organisations and institutions. Further, it has continually developed and addressed issues and challenges where, at a state level, there were no norms by nurturing organisations, instruments and institutions which created challenges and, ultimately, by developing norms that differed from those within mainstream society.

The intensity of the diplomatic activity of a heterotopia may vary, as can the actor who possesses greater power at a particular moment. We are also interested in the directionality of the diplomacy, with which groups or individuals the diplomacy takes place, and, of course, the purpose of the diplomacy. Heterotopias defy the law or implement their own law which could be an alternative to that of the state: diplomacy is essential for legitimisation of their existence. When interdependency between a heterotopia and the Crown/state becomes fractured, funded institutes of power such as the military or harsh application of law can be used to suppress and then destroy the heterotopia, its members and their structures. Diplomacy is no longer needed, there is no balance of power: control shifts completely into the hands of the state, and the heterotopia's life comes to a close.

It is the shifting balance of power, or the accumulation of power, that is likely to determine the longevity and strength of a heterotopia. Importantly, diplomacy is also a means for exploring how those on the inside of the heterotopia define, develop and refine their normative rules.

However, what is clear from the initial literature review is that the most likely archival strategy is *multi-archival*. For tracking Crown/state resistance to, and eventual support for, the City of London Corporation as the City's administrative hub, the Corporation's archives, alongside legal archives, may be useful. For the Bank of England, the City of London archives hold most of the Goldsmith-Bankers archives, and separate archives held by the Bank of England and the UK National Archives, are likely to be important. Across the City, the awarding of royal

Table 22.2 Examples of archives and their relevance including information relating to internal governance and diplomatic relations

Name of archival source	Date of commencement of archive	The usefulness of the archive re: the City, diplomatic relations, strength relations
e.g., Legal Archives Kings/ Bench, etc.	12th century	Points of disagreement re: specific objects of interests to diplomatic actors
Royal Charters (Privy Council)	13th century	Granting of Royal Charters by the Crown to specific institutions. The details of the charter can be altered, and may reflect a changing balance of power between an institution and the Crown/state
London Metropolitan Archives	11th century	An array of materials from various institutions and actors within the City from the year 1067. A range of digital and documents. Includes historic governance and law archives for the City Of London Corporation and Lloyds of London; and historic maps
Goldsmiths Guild archives	14th century	Largely document-based archive includes Warden accounts and court minutes; financial records; property holdings in the City (books and maps); Assay Office and Hallmarking in the UK
Bank of England archives	17th century	Digitised documents include the Court of Directors; Committee meetings and Directors' Annual Lists; stock collection (names and details of stockholders); Original Subscribers to Bank Stock; records of prosecution of forgers of bank notes
British Library (paper and web archives)	1973	Hard copy and digitised archives of most publications made in the UK including "foundation collections" (private donations) made in the 18th century. This includes hard copy and digitised newspapers from the 18th and 19th centuries; hard copy and digitised books, cartoons and bill posters

charters will also indicate the growing power for specific institutions and the City as a heterotopia (Barros, 2023; Tennent and Gillett, 2023). Additionally, they will also capture voices of dissent. These include first, the law courts, used to challenge the City and its institutions not only by the Crown/state but also powerful organisations and institutions, and those individuals who have fallen foul of, or wish to challenge, the authority and decisions made by City institutions. Secondly, the *vox populi*, those from within the mainstream society who hold an "outsiders'" view of the City. We have listed the relevance of specific archives in more detail in Table 22.2.

1. Cases brought by the Crown/state other powerful organisations and individuals who felt that they had been challenged, or wronged, to the *Kings Bench* (the main London law courts). Our interest is in cases where the Goldsmiths/Bank of England and City of London Corporation were deemed (justly or unjustly) to be in contravention of the law, as well as the use of law by these City institutions to determine who would be included/excluded from them.
2. *City of London Corporation archives*, the organisation responsible for the administration of many institutions within the City of London under the leadership of the Lord Mayor of London (mayor of the City), in order to review the evolution of norms, structures, and protocols for admission/exclusion.
3. *Royal charters*, issued by the Crown/state to give permission for specific activities to be undertaken by designated institutions in the City. In this archive, moments of crisis between the Crown/state and City institutions could be reviewed, which these heterotopia

helped to resolve but which was “traded” for more autonomy via changes to the remit within the royal charters for specific City institutions, would be reviewed.

4. *Dissent and criticism* levelled against the Goldsmiths/Bank of England and City of London Corporation by “outsiders”; either as powerful or weak societal/commercial actors. Sources might include in newspapers, posters, broadsheets cartoons and political observers and commentators of the time.

Heteropia Studies and Business Historical Research

The City remains a powerful national and global presence, which continues create new institutions. Thirty-eight new guilds, that is, nascent livery companies, have been established since 1900, with 19 of these created since 2000 (Livery Committee, 2022). The creation of these new livery companies is likely to be connected to their political role in the City, as the livery companies are integral to the City’s governance: each year liverymen elect the Sheriffs of the City of London, and endorse the election of the Lord Mayor. They also play a prominent role in major events such as the Mansion House Banquet (the Mansion House is the official residence of the Lord Mayor and historically, had its own law court), a contemporary example of diplomatic relations between the Crown/state and the City. The Banquet is attended by the Lord Mayor and members of the Corporation of London, livery company members, the reigning monarch, and the UK Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer (the two most senior offices of state). The latter speaks to “the City” re: the state of the British economy, and the implications for the country and the City (National Archives, 2022; Perks, 2016).

There are many institutions in societies that have a ‘special status’ of predominantly self-regulation with minimal oversight of the state: the interest in how to investigate these extends well beyond Rowlinson (2013) suggests that the work of Michel Foucault could greatly assist in the use of social science thinking in business historical research. We suggest that heterotopic studies provide an approach not only to the exploration of phenomena, but one which enables the researcher to understand the enduring presence of the City and its institutions, and how they exist alongside the state, with neither being dependent or independent of it. To highlight elements of what comprises a heterotopia in terms of its origins and evolution, we consider important historical moments in the development of the City as a centre for international finance and commerce. However, our intention is not to explore the financial or economic structures of global capitalism but to illustrate the development of “apart” and “organisations apart” from the mainstream of society. These spaces apart are within society, but occupy territory within which the norms and controls of the heterotopia, rather than that of society more generally, prevail. Through the study of the becoming and acceptance of heterotopia by society, we aim to illustrate how heterotopic studies enable researchers to explore the *enduring power and influence* of the City of London, which requires a *genealogical* dimension, and consider the implications of this for business historical research.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Braudel F and Wallerstein I (2009) History and the social sciences: *The longue durée*. *Review: Fernand Braudel Centre* 23(2): pp. 171–203.

This article is a presentation of Braudel's concept of the *longue durée*, in which duration and continuity, are explained.

- (2) Foucault M (1986) Of other spaces. Translated by J Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16(1): pp. 22–27.

This is the article in which Foucault defines the concept of heterotopia.

- (3) Meiksins EW (2017) *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*. London: Verso.

This book gives an overview of the growth of capitalism. This work present the *longue durée* of capitalism and provides a context to the expansion of the City.

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23. Exploring organisational identity through historical research methods

Elena Giovannoni and Pasquale Ruggiero

INTRODUCTION

In their pivotal article, Albert and Whetten (1985) defined organisational identity (hereafter OI) as the *central*, *distinctive*, and *enduring* characteristics of an organisation. This definition points to those features that enable the organisation to distinguish itself from others (*distinctiveness*); reflect the core values of the organisation, often manifested in core programmes, policies, and procedures (*centrality*); pass the ‘test of time’ and therefore endure (*temporal continuity*). These criteria are aimed at providing a framework, or key referents (Whetten, 2006), for an emerging research agenda, and have for long stimulated empirical questions and hypotheses, inspiring management and organisation scholars in investigating OI as a specific area of research.

Following the work of Albert and Whetten, studies into OI have proliferated hugely. Ravasi and Canato (2013) identified three waves in empirical work on OI. The first wave focussed on the use of the OI concept for exploring other fundamental themes in strategy, management and organising (see, e.g., Dutton and Dukerich 1991), also through inductive qualitative methodologies. The second wave comprised studies taking an individual-level perspective on OI for explaining antecedents of organisational behaviour (see, e.g., Foreman and Whetten 2002). The third wave focussed on OI and OI-related processes as the core object of research (e.g., Cornelissen et al. 2007). This third wave has tended to use a ‘theory-building approach’, focussing on how OI is constructed and evolves, and its implications for organisations and organising (see, e.g., Corley and Gioia 2004; Gioia et al. 2010).

Despite the substantial theoretical development in this area, scholars have also noted that ‘much less progress has been made empirically’ (Foreman and Whetten, 2002, p. 617), pointing to the need for further empirical research and explicit methodological reflection. Ravasi and Canato (2013) emphasise a lack of consensus on methodological prescriptions in this area. Research methods for exploring OI have ranged from survey-based quantitative methods – mainly for measuring attributes of OI – to qualitative methods based on grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative analysis. This variety reflects the different research paradigms adopted by OI scholars: ‘After all, asking about what counts as evidence of OI is an epistemological question that requires the disclosure of deeper ontological assumptions’ (Ravasi and Canato, 2013, p. 186). Indeed, as noted by Whetten (2006): ‘in some cases, organisational identity is portrayed as a subjective property of observers, whereas in other cases, it is described as a verifiable property of organisations’ (p. 220). These different assumptions explain the variety of research methods employed by OI scholars.

Despite such variety, an explicit reflection on the role of historical research methods for exploring OI is lacking. In this chapter, we discuss the challenges and opportunities for histor-

ical perspectives and methods to delve into the ‘central, enduring and distinctive’ characteristics of an organisation, as well as to explore how these characteristics are enacted over time.

Several studies have highlighted the role of history in the construction of OI (see, e.g., Basque and Langley, 2018; Illia and Zamparini, 2016; Oertel and Thommes, 2018; Zundel et al., 2016), pointing to the rhetorical use of the past and to collective memory as OI resources (Suddaby et al., 2016). As different historical materials may be drawn upon strategically to construct OI referents (Suddaby et al., 2010), historical research methods are likely to be very helpful to illuminate the formation and enactment of these referents and understand the key features of OI. In this chapter, we discuss key methodological issues associated to OI research and the implications for historical research methods in addressing those issues. We complement such discussion with insights from our experience as (accounting) history scholars, researching OI in different case-organisations through historical research methods (we provide some examples in the fourth section).

RESEARCHING OI: CENTRALITY, DISTINCTIVENESS AND ENDURANCE

As noted by Whetten (2006), the central, distinctive, and enduring attributes of an organisation provide for key ‘referents’, or ‘identity claims’, that organisational members rely on when they engage with OI-related organisational discourses and narratives: ‘identity claims are likely to be represented as categorical imperatives – what the organisation must do to avoid acting out of character’ (p. 221). These referents or claims have been also used as guiding elements for researching OI.

‘Centrality’ has been probably regarded as the most essential criteria: ‘if there are no perceived central or core features, it is difficult to even conceive of the idea of identity’ (Gioia et al., 2013b, p. 126). Understanding the ‘core’ features of an organisation requires the researcher to investigate their ‘depth’, ‘sharedness’, and ‘structural centrality’ (Corley et al., 2006): core features need to be researched beyond surface, looking into those fundamental nodes in a network of related elements. For example, as suggested by Whetten (2006), ‘causal mapping’ can be drawn upon by the researcher to link and order organisations’ features resulting from accounts produced by members, then regarding as ‘core’ only those features that cause or explain other features. Also, to be qualified as such, ‘core’ features are supposed to resist under ephemeral threatening conditions or momentary attempts of transformation. For example, without these features would the history of the organisation be significantly different? Are these features invoked by members as dominant or decision guides, particularly under identity threats? (Whetten, 2006, p. 222).

Whereas ‘centrality’ has received wide attention in OI research, ‘distinctiveness’ has been more often overlooked (see, among the notable exceptions, Glynn and Marquis, 2007). The distinctive features of an organisation point to its differentiation/separation from others (see, Corley et al., 2006). This emphasises the need to explore the organisation in its ‘social space’, looking into those claims that are drawn upon to portray the organisation as ‘different’ from others, both comparatively and historically (Whetten, 2006, p. 222). Here, a comparative approach may be helpful to unpack the enactment of an organisation’s feature as ‘distinctive’, not only at a specific point in time but also through a comparative analysis over time.

Among the three identity referents, ‘endurance’ is probably the most debated, revealing its controversial nature. For example, according to Gioia et al. (2000), OI cannot be ‘enduring’ in any strict sense, as this would be leading to organisational stagnation in the face of environmental challenges. Whereas the core ‘labels’ (of core beliefs and values) associated to OI are more likely to remain stable, the interpretation and meanings assigned to those labels, as well as their practical enactment, are likely to be subtle and evolve continuously across different time–space contexts: ‘so invocations like “We stand for service!” or “We are an innovating company” mean different things to different groups at different times’ (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 65). These considerations point to the need for investigating the relationship between fluidity (of meanings) and persistence (of identity labels) as essential aspects of OI *continuity* (Gioia et al., 2013b), rather than endurance in any strict sense.

As noted by Clegg et al. (2007), identity emerges from a constant dialectic between being and becoming, in between the need for stability and the dynamic enactment of identity (see also Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Clegg et al., 2005). In interrogating this dialectic, prior studies have also pointed to the need to focus more on the means and processes through which continuity is sustained. Here, collective memory and rhetorical history have been explored as key resources for achieving continuity (Suddaby et al., 2016): ‘There is an implicit historical element to identity. [...] Organizational identity work is based, largely, on rhetorical history or the strategic use of the past to foster a shared sense of values, places, and meanings’ (p. 311). From this point of view, historical narratives and resources are likely to be involved in a ‘dynamic construction’ of organisational identity (Foster et al., 2017; Lamertz et al., 2016; Zundel et al., 2016), shaping its key characteristics over time.

While OI is formed in a specific time–space context, OI is also transformed over time as members give it meaning and enact it differently (Gioia et al., 2000), imbuing old labels with new meanings through a ‘web of familiar stories, objects, and practices to facilitate interpretation of the new claims’ (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006, p. 449). From this consideration it also follows that exploring OI cannot happen ‘at one point in time’ (see Fiol et al., 1998). Exploring endurance or continuity requires researching the elements that give a sense of stability to evolving meanings, *as well as* their dynamic enactment across different time–space contexts. While exploring identity at a certain point in time can demonstrate resistance to change, exploring identity over time is more likely to reveal the tensions between persistence and transformation.

These considerations suggest the relevance of historical methods for researching OI attributes: historical methods can aid researching those ‘high level’ essential features that have passed the ‘test of time’ and have resisted ephemeral threats, *as well as* exploring the fluid enactment of those features as distinctive elements pertaining to the organisation across different time–space contexts. Furthermore, historical methods can help delving into the historical narratives and resources that are eventually drawn upon in the dynamic construction and enactment of OI.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN RESEARCHING OI

Ravasi and Canato (2013, p. 186) highlight several fundamental issues that need to be unpacked when researching OI. For example, ‘How does one classify an identity belief as “shared”, as one moves from the individual to the organisational level of analysis?’; ‘Are all

collective self-representations or self-conceptualisations evidence of OI?'. These questions are fundamental also for historical research into OI as they reveal that researching OI is not, or better not only, about exploring individual or collective representations and perceptions of 'who we are as an organisation' but it is also about the process through which linkages and engagement between these perceptions form, develop, and become attributes of the organisation, shaping recursively how OI is infused with meanings and enacted socially. Researching these aspects is also dependent upon different views of OI.

The Organisation as a 'Social Actor' and the Social Constructionist View

From a 'social actor' perspective, the organisation is an actor in the field and therefore OI should be researched as a 'property of the organisation' (Whetten, 2006), and not of its members. This perspective suggests historical researchers to look into the 'official' manifestations of identity claims, in conjunction with the very influential and key organisational roles acting upon those manifestations over the history of the organisation. OI scholars have, for example, searched for founders' and leaders' official expressions for presenting core organisational values (Hannan et al., 2006), or organisation's manifestations of membership in an industry or institutional field (Clegg et al., 2007). From this point of view, OI is formed and transformed to seek legitimacy from, as well as distinctiveness in, the broader institutional context. Historical researchers embracing this view need, therefore, to focus on those verifiable claims that have explicitly and publicly articulated 'what the organisation is', and through which the organisation has been presented internally and externally. According to Whetten (2006): 'identity-based arguments are characterized by an imperative tone, associated with commonly understood categorical standards, and put forth as truth claims, on a par with moral obligations' (p. 224).

Identity statements, labels and claims can be for example researched in official statements and public documents, promotional material, external and internal corporate communications, official letters, strategic plans, produced by the organisation's elite and other relevant groups within an organisation at different points in time. Here, archival documentary sources particularly from private corporate archives held by the organisation can be very rich sites of relevant material (Decker, 2013).

The view of the organisation as a social actor is different from, but can be reconciled with, the social constructionist view of OI (Gioia et al., 2013a). From a social constructionist perspective, OI becomes evident in the narratives and enactments of organisational members revealing how members make sense of identity (see Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Scholars adopting this perspective decide to focus on the narratives of specific groups but may also remain sensitive to alternative perspectives and groups. Here, 'identity narratives are revealed in their purposeful use by organisational actors to negotiate their social reality by proposing, imposing, resisting or disputing representations of their organisation' (Ravasi and Canato, 2013, p. 195). Researching these narratives requires a careful consideration of the time-space social and organising context in which they are produced (see, e.g., Brown and Humphreys, 2006), to distinguish them from merely descriptive statements about the organisation.

Researching OI labels and Their Enactment Over Time

Researching the enactment of organisational identity is not a static process: evolving meanings have to be researched through a reflexive approach (Wadhwani and Decker, 2017; Decker et al., 2021), looking for unfolding events and their effects over time. Here, ethnographic history (e.g., Coller et al., 2016; Decker, 2014) can be extremely helpful to illuminate how identity labels are fluidly enacted through unfolding meanings over time, drawing on those archival sources containing texts and materials that could illuminate ‘what it was like to be there’ (Stone, 1979, p. 14). Archival data (see Barros, 2023; Tennent and Gillett, 2023) as historical textual data can be drawn upon to ‘capture the construction, expression, dispute and negotiation of organisational identities’ (Ravasi and Canato, 2013, p. 195). Here, private journals, meeting notes, minutes, memos, private letters and written reflections from key actors belonging to different groups, but also their biographies and key events explaining their decisions, actions and interactions, may all provide historical researchers with fundamental sources for delving into collective sense-making and sense-giving about OI and its social enactment over different historical periods.

As part of this analysis, a snowball approach, and purposeful sampling (Gioia et al., 2010), can be used to identify the key referents for researching both official verifiable identity claims (from a social actor perspective) *and* their social enactment at different points in time (from a social constructionist perspective), moving from the documentations produced by key organisational roles, such as founders and leaders, to identify those other groups or roles providing for ‘key nodes’ for OI negotiation and construction (Corley et al., 2006). Here key nodes can be researched in those roles whose decisions, actions and interaction affected a network of relationships for sense-making and sense-giving around identity labels and claims (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Historical researchers can rely upon an iterative process of analysis of data sources, identification of key roles, their associated identity claims, historical narratives, pointing to further relevant roles, with associated claims and narratives, until saturation has been achieved.

For example, Gioia et al. (2010) focussed on the founding dean of their examined institution as a primary organisation’s figure, looking into his private journals, memos, meeting notes, private notes for his personal use over the history of the institution, thereby identifying further founding members through a snowball technique. In examining the relevant sources, coding processes can help finding identity labels, recurrent themes, representative examples, statements and claims among organisational members and between them and external groups.

Corroborating statements across different key roles and over time, as well as searching for differences, help reveal the formation, negotiation and transformation of shared meanings across the same identity labels, or changes in the labels themselves (see Chreim, 2005; Gioia et al., 2010). For example, in their analysis of OI through 309 internal corporate bulletins over 50 years, Anteby and Molnár (2012) initially identified broad themes by reading randomly selected bulletins, and then used these themes as coding categories, adding new categories when new topics emerged and finally consolidating categories into broader ones. Ravasi et al. (2019) have adopted an iterative process in-between coding of textual data and of uses of historical artifacts, with successive comparative coding across four exemplary cases, thereby combining grounded theory with case analysis in their study of OI.

Also, historical periodisation can be useful to provide for a chronological description of the evolution of OI (see, e.g., Chreim 2005) or for presenting the evolution of the complex setting

in which OI forms and develops (Anteby and Molnár, 2012). Comparison among periods could reveal processes of stability or change of OI features and their deployments. Different strategies can be applied for such periodisation, drawing on key events or activities, identity threats or changes in identity labels or narratives. Multiple layers of periodisation are possible (see, e.g., Hatch and Schultz, 2017). Short time blocks enable delving into OI enactment by a specific group or focussing on the implications of specific events, while longer periods are more functional to unpack the influence of changes in institutional environment. For example, Albert and Whetten (1985) identify OI change in terms of ‘four common life cycle events (Birth, Growth, Maturity, Retrenchment) as marker for the temporal dimension’ of OI (p. 275). Long-time blocks are more suitable to unpack the enduring character of OI, looking into those ‘features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time’ (Albert and Whetten, 1985, p. 265).

MATERIAL MANIFESTATIONS OF OI AND OUR EXPERIENCE

The Material Dimension of OI

As noted above, researching OI requires to look into its material manifestations: how it is officially presented and visualised through, for example, core programmes, policies and procedures (Whetten, 2006), as well as images, verbal or graphic representations, symbols, trademarks and logos (Hatch and Schultz, 1997), products and services (Gioia et al., 2013a), strategy, branding, and organisational design (Schultz and Hernes, 2013), or even ‘buildings, corporate architecture, design, and décor of retail outlets, and aspects of products and services such as product design, packaging, and ritualized behavior’ (Hatch and Schultz, 2000, p. 13). These manifestations do not mean that the core features of identity are tangible or can be reified. Also, these manifestations do not ‘fix’ identity in stone, making it stable, but rather they could play a role in provoking incremental shifts in identity transformation, or even accelerated change processes.

From this point of view, historical researchers need to be careful about regarding material manifestations of OI as ‘passive’ sources of its core features (Watkiss and Glynn, 2016). Rather, researchers need to consider the social enactment of these manifestations in their specific historical context and across different time–spaces. OI material manifestations may themselves have acted as catalyst for identity change, dynamism, or continuity over history.

Examples From the Literature

In their study of OI in Snecma, the French largest aircraft engine manufacturer, Anteby and Molnár (2012) relied upon internal bulletins consistently available for almost 50 years as ‘crucial symbolic devices capturing a constructed identity’ (p. 521). These bulletins were drawn upon by the researchers not only as a consistent source of archival data, but they have been also examined as ‘critical artefacts’ in the making of OI. This analysis required to place the artefacts in context, by examining their use and design over time.

Inspired by the work of Anteby and Molnár (2012), Basque and Langley (2018) drew on a 80-year magazine archive of a financial cooperative (between 1935 and 2015) to explore the rhetorical use of history (particularly invocations of the founder figure) in the making

of organisational identity claims. The magazine was intended for officers (members of the cooperative), managers and employees. This source was combined with corporate histories, books, newspaper articles, and government documents, to better understand the historical context. They articulated their analysis of 606 documents into two steps: the identification and coding of references to the founder of the cooperative (decontextualisation); the examination of patterns in these references over time and in relation to their historical context (recontextualisation). Again, the various issues of the magazine were examined in their evolving historical context, conceiving the magazine not only as a source of evidence but also as a material resource (and space) for OI construction.

In their historical analysis of IRI (Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale – an Italian state-owned enterprise) between 1950 and 1970, Quattrone et al. (2015) examined accounting artefacts (e.g. plans and value added statements) not only as a source of primary data about the core features of IRI, but also as playing themselves a powerful role in enacting ‘common good’ as the locus of IRI’s identity, sustaining a complex negotiation in between different groups of actors. This suggested the researchers explore the making of the accounts in light of the specific historical context in which they were produced, looking for the key actors involved, their relationships and their underlying motivations. The researchers found that the making of the accounts, and particularly their visual dimension, was part of the negotiation of the locus of IRI’s identity, the ‘common good’ (see, also, Monfardini et al., 2022).

Indeed, material artefacts are relevant to historical research into OI also for their visual dimension (Langley and Ravasi, 2019). A picture or a painting could reveal the ‘reality’ of an organisation (e.g., people working in or interacting with the organisation, their values, the layout of the spaces within and outside the organisation, etc.) in a specific time–space context.

Insights From Our Experience: Researching the OI of the Oldest Bank in the World

Here, we offer an example from our current research project on the OI of the ‘oldest bank in the world’: Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena (BMPS), in Italy, whose origins date back to 1472. Written archival sources pertaining to the origin of the bank are preserved in the private historical archive of BMPS, which includes the private archive of the family of one of the most influential Chairmen in the history of the bank. These sources cover the whole history of the bank, from its foundation to the twentieth century.

The official documents pertaining to the early years after the foundation (e.g., the minutes of the governing bodies, the accounting books, the founding statute of the bank in 1472) consistently contain official statements of the bank as an institute committed to supporting the social and economic development of the city of Siena, primarily by helping the poor or people ‘in need’. As we aimed to capture not only official identity statements but also the social enactment of those statements, we found particularly useful to examine a number of visual artefacts produced upon request of the bank in the early years after its foundation with the specific intent of communicating the core values of the bank and the commitments for the future. We found references to those artefacts in the minutes of the governing body of the bank, and in the accounting records. Then, we searched for secondary sources concerning the history of the artefacts, to help us locating them in their historical context. We did not examine these material artefacts in isolation: we searched for a web of objects, actors and episodes linked to these artefacts as a way for reconstructing organisational identity-based historical narratives and the enactment of identity claims in their specific time–space context.

By drawing on our primary sources (official declarations, minutes of the governing body of the banks, accounting records) and secondary sources (about the historical context) we found that several material artefacts publicly regarded as ‘symbols’ of the bank (e.g., the painting in Figure 23.1) were linked to other artefacts owned by the *Commune*, the governing body of the City of Siena. See, for example, the painting in Figure 23.2, owned by the *Commune* and visually linked to the painting on the left of Figure 23.1, owned by the bank. The latter painting was commissioned by the bank to a Siena’s artist in 1481, with the explicit intent of conveying one of the core principles that *had* to inspire actions and decisions of the bank: protecting Siena’s citizens (particularly from poverty and usury).

Another example is provided by the logo of the Bank, which is very similar to the logo of the *Commune*, both based on a white and black background. From our sources, we found that these artefacts *had* to look the same for the bank *and* for the *Commune*, and in some instances *had* to be done by the same artist (with the explicit intent of providing a connection between artefacts) or by Siena’s artisans that needed financial support. This intent persisted over time.



Source: Image reproduced with kind permission of BMPS.

Figure 23.1 ‘Madonna della Misericordia’ by Benvenuto di Giovanni, 1481, Siena, BMPS



Source: Reproduced with permission of Comune di Siena ('© Comune di Siena'). Any further reproduction is forbidden.

Figure 23.2 'Madonna della Misericordia', by Vecchietta, 1457. Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, Museo Civico

For example, from the minutes of the governing body of the bank (Registry n. 263-100 in the section *Deliberazioni e operazioni della Deputazione* of the MPS archive), and secondary sources (particularly, Catoni, 2012), we found that, in 1892, the governing body of the bank commissioned the wooden furniture of the boardroom (Figure 23.3) to a group of 'forgotten' artisans with financial needs, and the same artisans *had* to craft a very similar boardroom for the *Commune* (Figure 23.4), providing for a visible material link between the identity of the bank and that of the *Commune*, while also sustaining the core values of the bank in relation to the local community.

By drawing on secondary sources, we further examined the relationships between the bank and the *Commune*. For example, we found that BMPS is one of the very few banks in Italy that was not founded in connection with religious orders, but in connection with the local



Source: Image reproduced with kind permission of BMPS.

Figure 23.3 Boardroom of the BMPS's governing body (commissioned in 1892)



Source: Image reproduced with permission of Comune di Siena ('© Comune di Siena'). Any further reproduction is forbidden.

Figure 23.4 Boardroom of the Commune

community, the *Commune* and its governing body. This is reflected in the bank's official identity statements and identity-related artefacts, as well as in the meanings associated to those artefacts.

As part of our research design, we plotted a net of material manifestations of OI (publicly recognised as such), with key associated events and figures acting on them, and we explored the relationships between them, drawing on the resulting historical narratives as a way to reconstruct social enactments of OI in their historical context.

Organisational Image, Identity, and Culture

According to Gioia et al. (2000), understanding dynamism and continuity in OI can be aided by exploring the relationship between OI and organisational image. Organisational image has been defined as the way in which the organisation is presented externally, or in other words the way in which the organisation's elite would like outsiders to perceive the organisation. Ideally such an image should be a projection of OI, but it is actually not. Rather, organisational image stimulates OI transformation towards this image, while giving it continuity. Or, gaps between image and identity can provide for identity threats, that lead organisational members to pull the image back to identity (Gioia et al., 2013b). For example, Kjærgaard et al. (2011) show that the external image provided by media is drawn upon by organisational members to interrogate OI (see also Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). As highlighted by Hatch and Schultz (2002), exploring how OI is enacted, its dynamism and continuity requires, investigating the interplay between internal and external forces at the encounter between OI, culture, and image. In this context, organisational culture, and image point to, respectively, the internal and external articulation of OI.

Here, historical narratives could help unpacking any convergence and/or divergence between organisational identity and image, by revealing how they relate with each other in different periods not only by looking at official internal and external manifestations of OI, but also 'plotting' them by comparing, and contrasting discourses and episodes around those manifestations over time. For example, in researching the OI of a Canadian bank, Chreim (2005) examined 'content, context and authorial elements' of the evolving narratives composed by a Canadian bank's senior managers, especially the Chairman of the Board and CEO, over 11 years. The study found a persistent use of 'expansive labels' in these narratives, as well as evolving meanings associated to those labels through processes of subtraction and addition, and recurrent themes imported from the outside context. They compared these narratives with those produced by the media press to search for points of convergence and divergence. This range of sources, key referents, and comparative analysis were drawn upon to explore continuity, ambiguity and change in OI in this specific setting. Here, Chreim (2005) points to 'the need to go backwards and forward in the time-ordered texts in an iterative manner in search of the important themes and their evolution' (p. 572), as well as on the importance of relying on sources that are consistently produced over a long period of time. The understanding of the historical context here is crucial to unpack identity-based narratives which develop inside and outside the organisation.

Exploring Continuity and Fluidity

Historical narratives may be very helpful to explore continuity and fluidity in OI. This requires examining historical texts, searching for recurrent themes, with associated recurrent identity labels and synonyms, and then building a plot with key events that explain how these labels are enacted, thereby revealing their fluid meanings over time, as well as eventual conflicts and negotiation. Here, stability in identity labels over history may not necessarily mean OI stability. Also, change in labels of the organisation or the subtle appearance of new label may point to critical events suggesting the researchers to delve deeper into evolving enactments of OI over time.

In our research on the OI of the BMPS, as we explored the historical context in which official identity statements were produced, we found that changes in these statements happened in conjunction with ‘critical events’ over the history of the bank. These critical events provided us with a unique opportunity for exploring the central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of the bank, as well as for understanding the way in which opposing meanings could be eventually negotiated and associated to identity claims.

For example, in 1861, the bank was pressured by the central government to expand its activities outside the local community. We found that, in conjunction with this situation, identity-related narratives about the bank changed, therefore we classified the specific situation as a ‘critical event’ for exploring centrality, distinctiveness and endurance in OI. Whereas the relationship with the local community remained a core element of OI statements, this was sustained by new identity-related narratives about the importance of the local context as centre for decision making rather than as centre for activities.

As well as examining official communications and secondary sources of the historical context of the critical event, we also looked for changes in material artefacts pertaining to the bank in the same time–space context. We found that the bank decided to enlarge and restructure its main building, also creating a new square in front of it. From official documents, we found that this decision was explicitly driven by the need of ensuring an ‘impressive’ location for the bank, which had to be in a prominent position and visible from outside the city walls, explicitly pointing to the expansion of the importance of the bank outside the local community. But, on that occasion, at the centre of the square, in front of the new building, the governing body of the bank decided to place the statue of a key symbolic figure for the local community (Figure 23.5). The statue holds in his hand a book displaying the sentence: ‘To the Maremma (territory within the Tuscany Region) we need to dilate the heart with some breath of freedom to restore it’. The statue was regarded as a symbol of the link between the bank and the local community as the locus of the identity of the bank.

This plot of events, material artefacts (including the building, the square, the statute, and official documents produced by the governing body), and the analysis of their historical context, all provided us with key elements for developing an historical narrative of the negotiation of meanings associated to core identity labels of the bank: struggling to preserve the local community as the locus of the identity of the bank, while expanding its activities outside the community.



Figure 23.5 The statue of Sallustio Bandini in the square overlooked by the BMPS

CONCLUSION

While we recognise the relevant insights offered by the ‘social actor’ and the ‘social construction’ perspectives into OI, we propose that historical methods can be drawn upon as a useful means to reconcile the two perspectives. Archival research can be drawn upon to find identity labels and recurrent themes, their evolutions over time through additions and subtractions or more revolutionary changes, also pointing to the key historical figures that acted upon them. Archival sources may also enable a snow-ball approach for identifying the web of artefacts and objects providing for material manifestations of OI and/or sustaining OI enactments over time.

Here, historical perspectives can help delving into key historical materials and resources (Rowlinson et al., 2014), mobilised in the making of OI at different points in time. Corporate

sites, artefacts, and material objects participate in the enactment of OI in a specific time–space, but they also provide for key OI resources over time through rhetorical strategies and collective memory processes (Suddaby et al., 2010, 2016), thereby participating to the enactment of OI as a living interpersonal phenomena.

As well as revealing OI resources, historical perspectives enable the identification of critical events in the history of an organisation, which provide for important cues to explore continuity, centrality, and distinctiveness in relation to OI. Here, periodisation and historical reflexivity can help linking identity claims, material manifestations of OI, actions, and decisions across a chain of events, particularly at those points in time when the organisation faces identity threats. ‘Core’ features are more likely to resist ephemeral change and provide for a sort of inertia or resistance in the face of critical events. But core features can also hinder processes of strategic change especially when there are gaps between identity claims and the knowledge manifested in organisational narratives. In some circumstances, disruptive events act as catalysts for change providing for identity threats inducing members to challenge and reconsider their perceptions of the core, distinctive and enduring features of the organisation. In these circumstances, identity change is triggered in response to critical events and can be sustained by organisational culture: here, rather than stimulating resistance or inertia in the face of external challenges, organisational culture can be drawn upon by members to make sense of identity change through the cues provided by organisational symbols, and consolidated practices.

Overall, historical perspectives enable researching OI beyond identity labels and statements, looking into their fluid enactments and negotiation through a web of resources, actors and events, revealing the core, distinctive and enduring features of the organisation, and enabling to compare and contrast the enactments of these features across different time–space contexts.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Ravasi, D. and Canato, A. (2013) ‘How do I know who you think you are? A review of research methods on organizational identity’, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 15(2), pp. 185–204.

This paper provides a critical review of the different methodological approaches used in the literature for researching OI.

- (2) Watkiss, L. and Glynn, M.A. (2016) ‘Materiality and identity: How organizational products, artifacts, and practices instantiate organizational identity’, in M.G. Pratt, M. Schultz, B.A. Ashforth and D. Ravasi (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity*, pp. 317–334.

This paper focusses on three elements of materiality – products, artifacts, and practices – and their role in shaping collective understandings of organisational identity.

- (3) Monfardini, P., Quattrone, P. and Ruggiero, P. (2022) ‘Exploring the middle way: The Istituto per La Ricostruzione Industriale (IRI) in between corporate capitalism and planned economy (1948–1973)’, in R.E. Meyer, S. Leixnering and J. Veldman (eds) *The*

Corporation: Rethinking the Iconic Form of Business Organization (Research in the Sociology of Organizations), Vol. 78, Bingley: Emerald, pp. 77–96.

This paper provides an example of an historical analysis of material artefacts, their visual and social dimensions, to explore the enactment of the OI of a public sector organisation through the definition of a specific locus of OI (the ‘common good’, in this instance).

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24. The past as corporate social responsibility

Robert Phillips, Judith Schrempf-Stirling and Christian Stutz

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the study of history offers a number of fascinating avenues for research. Phillips et al. (2020) isolate three broad ways that history has interacted with CSR:

- The past-of-CSR: examining the history of CSR thought and practice to deepen historical understanding (e.g., Marens, 2010),
- The past-in-CSR: examining empirical records of the past to substantiate or challenge CSR theories (e.g., Stutz and Sachs, 2018), and
- The past-as-CSR: examining the past as a living, yet contested facet of current organisations (e.g., Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016).

This last category of scholarship – the focus of this chapter – builds on an interpretive theory of history to study the contemporary relevance of the past for perceptions of responsibility in and around corporations. More precisely, past-as-CSR is concerned with historic corporate actions – “bad” ones resulting in harm, crimes, and injustice as well as more noble past deeds resulting in societal good – and examines how that past is remembered, interpreted, and used in and around corporations and the implications for understanding corporate responsibility in the present.

The past-as-CSR emerged from the scholarship on business ethics and CSR, recognising the past as an under-investigated aspect in these fields (Mena et al., 2016; Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016). This approach also owes a debt to the organisational history community and scholarship examining how organisations remember their past (Rowlinson et al., 2010), especially how they account for their (mainly “dark”) history and its implications (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Booth et al., 2007; Rowlinson and Hassard, 1993). The last decades have witnessed several historiographical studies examining cases of historic corporate irresponsibility (e.g., Bonhage et al., 2001; Friedländer et al., 2002; Johnson, 2009; Oreskes and Conway, 2010). The past-as-CSR is also indebted to the “rhetorical history” approach (Lubinski, 2023; Suddaby et al., 2010; Wadhvani et al., 2018), which examines organisations’ strategic use of the past to advance current interests. Yet, to date, this research stream has not engaged explicitly with the ethics of such uses of the past.

A recent special issue of *Journal of Business Ethics* aimed to connect the ongoing conversations in the organisational history community and business ethics/CSR to spur the “collective effort of organisational historians and scholars of CSR and business ethics” (Phillips et al., 2020: 211). Several exemplary studies published in this special issue approach past-as-CSR through archival research (Coraiola and Derry, 2020; Van Lent and Smith, 2020). Other recent studies adjacent to the past-as-CSR engage with alternative academic debates, including Federman (2021), Hamilton and Ippolito (2020), and Parga Dans and Alonso González (2020).

For instance, Bernhard and Labaki (2021) build a bridge between family business scholarship and emotion-based approaches to business ethics. However, their theoretical model of how current moral business practices of family businesses can stem from felt guilt for wrongdoings of prior generations provides important, yet unelaborated and, to date, unconnected insights for past-as-CSR scholarship. This is but one example of the potential we see for advancing the past-as-CSR literature.

Consequently, this chapter examines the potential of making these connections more explicit and the prospects for past-as-CSR scholarship given a deepened partnership with the organisational history community. We begin by positioning the past-as-CSR vis-à-vis the advancements of organisational history in terms of methodology, knowledge, and conceptual insights. Then, we unpack the conceptual assumptions about business ethics and historic corporate responsibility that underpin current past-as-CSR scholarship. From there, we describe a number of prospective research avenues to advance past-as-CSR scholarship inspired by the organisational history community (Decker et al., 2021; Maclean et al., 2016), highlighting the promise of various conceptualisations of and ways to research the past. Along the way, we also argue that the existing focus on the “dark side of corporate history” (Booth et al., 2007) overlooks corporate uses of the more noble elements of their histories – what Christensen et al. call the “triumphs of the past” (2013: 380) to build a moral legacy of doing good.

POSITIONING PAST-AS-CSR VIS-À-VIS ORGANISATIONAL HISTORY

Past-as-CSR scholarship offers untapped potential for those in the organisational history community who value the plurality and capacity of using history in terms of methodology, knowledge, and conceptual insight (Decker et al., 2021; Stutz, 2021). Historical organisation studies, arising from the long-standing scholarly debate of how the academic disciplines of history and organisation studies can best work together (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Kieser, 1994; Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Wadhwani and Bucheli, 2014), accentuate history as a new methodological paradigm that combines historical research with organisational theorising (Godfrey et al., 2016; Maclean et al., 2016; Vaara and Lamberg, 2016). This paradigm integrates a variety of historical research strategies (Decker, 2016), and the literature provides practical knowledge to put them into practice (e.g., Stutz and Sachs, 2018).

Recently, Decker et al. (2021) called for an even greater methodological plurality. While most research strategies of organisational history imply the study of the past through archival sources or other historical documentary artefacts, Decker et al. (2021) add an alternative path to investigate the past: retrospective methods. Stylised as the opposite of archival historical research, retrospective methods capture various approaches to collecting non-documentary data about the past. A typical data collection strategy is oral history: the gathering of *post-hoc* recollections of past events and experiences by key actors, eyewitnesses, or other informants (Keulen and Kroeze, 2012). We see both retrospective and archival methods as complementary ways to research the past-as-CSR.

Despite historical organisational studies’ emphasis on using historical methods for theorising purposes (Maclean et al., 2016), some organisational historians stress the importance of the lineage of history in the historical-hermeneutic tradition of understanding (Wadhwani,

2023; Wadhvani and Decker, 2018). Here, history equals knowledge. That is, a source for a historically grounded understanding of contemporary phenomena.

Past-as-CSR is a fellow traveller along this epistemic pathway. Even if biased towards the contemporary and subjective relevance of the past, past-as-CSR takes objective elements, or brute facts of the past, seriously. Schrempf-Stirling et al. (2016), for instance, envisioned a close partnership with professional historians: “Through examinations of historical materials, historians can clarify both the actions taken by the legacy companies and the ‘chain of custody’ of responsibility for these actions” (Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016: 714). We maintain that careful historiographical analysis of both the dark and noble pasts of corporations provides essential context, a baseline for empirical exploration of contemporary uses of the past.

In addition to those historiographical goals, scholars of organisational history have made history – or more precisely collective forms and processes of memory – the subject of theorising. The current literature differentiates between at least two different, yet overlapping academic conversations: rhetorical history (e.g., Wadhvani et al., 2018) and organisational memory studies (e.g., Foroughi et al., 2021). The common denominator is an interest in and focus on aspects of organisational and societal memory – that is, how shared understandings of the past shape organisations and, conversely, how organisations, stakeholders, or larger institutional frameworks shape those understandings (cf. Decker et al., 2021).

This emerging conceptual terrain also stands in the tradition of earlier studies of organisational history that examine the “dark” past of companies and the implications thereof (Booth et al., 2007). Subsequent research has pursued a mostly instrumental agenda. Exemplary of this is the pioneering work by Suddaby et al. (2010), who view the malleability of the past as a valuable asset for strategic purposes. In contrast, only a few have sought a *rapprochement* with the research program of business ethics and CSR to take on those research interests (cf., Coraiola and Derry, 2021; Van Lent and Smith, 2020). The past-as-CSR offers an opportunity for this meeting of the minds.

THE ROOTS OF THE PAST-AS-CSR IN POLITICAL CSR SCHOLARSHIP

The past-as-CSR requires a strong presumption of corporations as inter-generational moral actors, as Schrempf-Stirling et al. (2016) argue. While disputable, this premise is a prerequisite for holding today’s corporations and managers responsible for harm-doing by prior generations. Today’s managers are the stewards of resources created and accumulated through the activities of these predecessors and, as such, bear the legacies – heroic, shameful, and always contested – of how these resources were created.

Our understanding of the past-as-CSR is redolent of the literature on political CSR (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007), which argues that non-state actors, including business, participate in global governance forms (Matten and Crane, 2005; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). This implies that the responsibility of a corporation is dynamic and socially constructed. This is not to say, however, that there are no facts about the past. Distinguishing between the contemporary mobilisation of the past and the brute facts constituting the researchable – even if not “objective” – past is vital to the past-as-CSR. Mena et al. (2016) show that corporations, with an eye on their future legacy, can manipulate their historical footprints. But these traces and artefacts

nevertheless impose persistent limits on how contemporary interpreters may use the past to serve current aspirations. We return to this distinction below.

Legitimacy is another key shared concept between political CSR and the past-as-CSR (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007; Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016). Public criticism of a corporation's past can influence a corporation's ability to achieve its current goals and may even threaten its very "license to operate." Consistent with the broader political CSR epistemology, legitimacy is a social construction that can and does rise, fall, ebb, and flow over time. Loss of legitimacy can hinder – or even fatally harm – a corporation's ability to function. Legitimacy is not, however, a static attribute. Social attitudes can change quickly and dramatically, as evidenced by the myriad conversations around the world concerning the removal, renaming, or contextualising of statues and memorials. These shifts – both seismic and subtle – alter how past actions are viewed and evaluated today. Changes over time in both corporate practices and social evaluations of those practices are the fodder for contested interpretations of the past.

Political CSR also speaks to the social process by which stakeholders or societal actors contest the "official" corporate history. This social process is not at all characterised by a utopian ideal speech situation, but rather a public process of deliberation shaped by the political order, power struggles, and the procedures of public opinion formation (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). Still, political CSR offers Habermas-inspired practical recommendations. It views the corporation's participation in those very processes of deliberation itself as part of the moral evaluation of its legitimacy (Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016, see also Federman, 2022). Stutz and Schrempf-Stirling (2020) maintain that (ir)responsible use of the past is itself a matter of moral integrity and an aspect of professional ethics.

Given the roots of the past-as-CSR in political CSR with its emphasis on legitimacy and public deliberation, the past-as-CSR examines how the past is remembered, interpreted, and used and the implications of this remembering, interpretation, and usage on experiences and behaviours. In other words, the past-as-CSR is about responsibility for the past in the present and the impact this responsibility has on corporate legitimacy. Historic CSR is the most representative discussion within the past-as-CSR (Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016). Schrempf-Stirling et al. (2016) discuss the problematisation of a corporation's past in the present and its effect on corporate legitimacy. More precisely, they examine how the legitimacy of the claim about the corporate past (high versus low legitimacy) and corporate engagement in the contemporary problematisation of the past (high versus low engagement) affects the overall corporate legitimacy and license to operate.

Lying less comfortably at the confluence of political CSR and historic CSR is the study of corporations' honourable past. In addition to the sorts of whitewashing efforts ("remembering to forget") that have more frequently occupied scholars (e.g., Anteby and Molnár, 2012; Coraiola and Derry, 2020), we want to leave open the possibility that some corporations have honourable activities in their past and may wish to highlight these as a matter of past-as-CSR. However, this presents a challenge for a generally critical approach like political CSR. Perhaps a matter of benign neglect in some instances, but positive references to corporate activities are scarce in this literature. Corporations are generally taken to be opportunistically, even manipulatively – self-interested such that any tale of past glories must, *prima facie*, be "strategic" (a term that is often juxtaposed with "ethical" by Habermasians, see Noland and Phillips, 2010) and intended as cover or distraction from the actual past irresponsibilities.

Space precludes a more thorough elaboration of the prospects for the study of the noble side of past-as-CSR. We believe, however, that an even-handed treatment of the corporate uses

of history demands consideration of the possibility that some corporations do have honour in their past. The past-as-CSR may need to reflect on its own origins as described here for suitability outside a critical context. Nor is this the only fruitful set of questions we see arising from the past-as-CSR perspective. It is to these that we now turn.

RESEARCH AVENUES FOR THE PAST-AS-CSR

We envision four research avenues to advance past-as-CSR scholarship arising from organisational history's capacity to approach the past in terms of methodology, knowledge, and conceptual insights. Following Decker et al. (2021), we maintain that past-as-CSR research – via archival or retrospective methods – may serve the methodological and epistemic goals of both history (history as knowledge) and memory (history as a subject of theorising). The juxtaposition of those two dimensions (methodology and epistemic goals) results in our four research avenues (see Figure 24.1). In this section, we unpack the research opportunities and methodological promises for each.

		Conceptualising the past	
		History	Memory
Researching the past	Archival	(I) Historical accounts of past corporate harm- or good-doing, reconstructed from the corporate archive and other sources	(III) Theoretical accounts of remembering, forgetting, or contesting the past <i>in the past</i>, reconstructed from the corporate archive and other sources
	Retrospective	(II) Historical accounts of past corporate harm- or good-doing, reconstructed from recollections of key informants	(IV) Theoretical accounts of remembering, forgetting, or contesting the past <i>in the present</i>, reconstructed from recollections of key informants

Source: Adapted from Decker et al. (2021).

Figure 24.1 Research avenues for past-as-CSR

Researching Historic Corporate (ir)Responsibilities

Aligned with the epistemic goal of history as knowledge, past-as-CSR invites organisational historians and other scholars to deepen our understanding of the brute facts of corporate pasts that evoke contemporary struggles over usages of the past. Historiographical work allows us to revise our current understanding of the past by re-seeing and re-interpreting the past in the light of (new) evidence or changing circumstances (Wadhvani and Decker, 2018).

While applying today's academic concepts of CSR and business ethics to past contexts must be undertaken with caution, we nevertheless see value in the search for a better understanding of the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of *historic* corporate activities. For example, Palmer (2013) views the causes of organisational wrongdoing in organisational structures, systems, and processes, which, in other circumstances, may produce noble activities as well. Schrempf-Stirling et al. (2016) contend that contemporary accountability also hinges on past institutional circumstances and the available knowledge of actors at that time. Clark et al.'s (2021) work helps assess the historic outcome. They qualify corporate irresponsibility in terms of the degree of harm (acts harming human and non-human life or livelihood), the intentionality of the firm (unintentional, intentional), and the rectification of the harm (voluntary, forced, or not at all). Notably, the rectification of a caused harm has a temporal dimension. Campbell (2007: 951) argues that corporations must rectify the caused harm "whenever the harm is discovered and brought to their attention." This can be immediately after the incidence or over the course of historical time. Therefore, Schrempf-Stirling et al. (2016) add durability of the harm as another qualifier.

Following Decker et al. (2021), we see both archival and retrospective methods as complementary ways to deepen our historical understanding of past corporate responsibility or irresponsibility. Archival investigations into organisational processes and behaviours (see quadrant [I] of Figure 24.1) provide a perspective on the past that may be a privileged one. At best, the preservation of the material is unintentional, and the records are the residue of corporate life and experiences (Barros, 2023). Berghoff (2018), for example, investigates the antecedents of one of the most prominent cases of modern corruption: the Siemens corruption scandal erupting in 2006. The judge who presided over this case called Siemens' wrongdoing "organised irresponsibility," implying that "management had conspired to prevent efficient controls and therefore facilitated and promoted corruption" (Berghoff, 2018: 425). Yet, for Siemens, the legitimacy was not restored by means of settling the court disputes. The corporation commissioned historians with a historical reappraisal. "Siemens opened up its archives, in sharp contrast to former policies," as Berghoff (2018: 425) maintained, "in an effort to come to terms with the scandal and to understand the historic roots."

Though privileged, the perspective of archival methods can equally be useful in understanding if and how historic acts of responsibility unfolded. Corporate archives preserve material that, even if skewed towards elite actors (Decker, 2013), provides insights into how corporations, their managers, employees, as well as external stakeholders have perceived past right-doing at the time. Archival research also helps to understand whether such acts of "heroism" or "triumph" occurred intentionally and what personal or contextual factors might have contributed to such acts. Rosen (1995) pioneered such work in the business history community. Her study examines the Society for the Prevention of Smoke, a group of business leaders in late nineteenth-century Chicago who organised themselves to address the mounting environmental problems of industrialisation. This group, unlike the rest of the

business community, supported efforts to impose regulations on businesses. Future studies can follow her and others' approach (e.g., Jones, 2017) to contextualise such acts of responsibility historically.

At the same time, archival research may falsify or amend factually incorrect histories that corporations use. Such "untrue" histories may be fabricated by the "memory-work" of corporate archivists and other organisational actors (Foster et al., 2021). For instance, Rowlinson and Hassard (1993) critically examine the legacy of the former British confectionary Cadbury that, historically, emphasised its origin in Quaker beliefs and social ethos. Rowlinson and Hassard's (1993) archival research identifies the historical moment when the leadership decided to mobilise and, partly, invent this organisational identity. According to Rowlinson and Hassard (1993: 322), a difficult turnaround situation led the corporation to make use of "appropriate and uncontested events in its past to differentiate itself from other companies."

In addition to archival methods, key actors and other eyewitness recollections of the past may substitute (or complement) absent or inaccessible archival material (see quadrant [II] of Figure 24.1). Our focus here is on the scholarly practice of developing a historical account of the past rather than the informants' practice of retrospection (Giacomin, 2023). Life-history interviews may especially give voice to the marginalised or non-elite actors who remain silent through archival research (Decker, 2013). Cruz (2014), for instance, interviewed 40 market women in Monrovia, Liberia, to reconstruct events and practices of the civil wars that wracked Liberia in the 1990s and 2000s. She (2014: 452) posits that "memories proved to be the best path to understanding the past due to the lack of local sources on the Liberian war."

Federman (2021), as another example, examines questions that fall within past-as-CSR through a case study of the French National Railways and their role during the WWII occupation of France by the Nazis. Besides her archival research, she conducted over 130 interviews and 90 of those with Holocaust survivors. According to Federman (2021: 411), those "[d]iscussions often meandered for hours (or days) between life histories and feelings about compensation." Through this interview data, she was able to reconstruct a plausible account of how the survivors experienced the historic wrongdoing and how they ascribed meaning to it and the more recent events. Remarkably, 80% of the 90 interviewees did not seek compensation. In the words of a survivor: "I do not see that we can reproach the SNCF, in particular the drivers of the trains ... I think the SNCF was simply under constraint, just as I [at Auschwitz] worked under constraint, though of course under other conditions" (p. 420). At the same time, this Holocaust case shows the limitations of retrospective methods, as the last survivors – and their memory and emotions – fade away.

Equally representative are oral history endeavours to contextualise tales of noble deeds historically. For example, the business historians Giacomin and Jones (2021) draw from the Creating Emerging Markets Project at Harvard Business School, a large-scale oral history archive consisting of transcripts of life-history interviews conducted with high-profile leaders from 2008 until 2020. The authors used those oral histories to analyse the ethical roots behind the business leaders' philanthropic foundations. Such studies might be complemented with recollections and narratives of eyewitnesses to fact check such elitist accounts. For this, Keulen and Kroeze (2012) suggest a learning history technique that may help interested scholars to contrast and combine the "official" corporate histories with oral histories provided by representatives of all levels of a corporation (see also Rintamäki et al., 2023).

Researching the Memory of Historic Corporate (ir)Responsibilities

The second epistemic goal is to make the contemporary relevance of history the subject of theorisation. Combining the rhetorical history approach (Lubinski, 2023; Suddaby et al., 2010; Wadhvani et al., 2018) with the literature on organisational memory (e.g., Foroughi et al., 2021), we see usefulness in the conceptual notion of collective memory to organise this research. Decker et al. (2021: 1130) define memory as “the representation of the past shared and commemorated by a group – a phenomenon enacting and giving substance to that group’s identity, its present conditions, and its vision for the future.” From the standpoint of past-as-CSR, the scholarly interests lie in the present “narrative contest” (Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016) over responsibilities for past (ir)responsibilities, involving societal actors, historians, the current generation of managers, and victims or beneficiaries, respectively (or their descendants).

In contrast to the research avenues of history, archival and retrospective methods here serve the goal of developing theoretical accounts about the ongoing processes of interpreting, remembering, and forgetting historic corporate acts of (ir)responsibility. First, as depicted in quadrant [III] of Figure 24.1, archival methods allow examining the purposive and political nature of remembering through deconstructing how memories become institutionalised: that is, juxtaposing collective memory in the past with the historical record. For instance, Van Lent and Smith (2020), as well as Coraiola and Derry (2020), have advanced the theory of *historic corporate social responsibility* by examining the public processes of narrative contests *in the past*, reconstructed from corporate archives and other sources. Van Lent and Smith (2020) present a historical case study of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and its uses of the past in relation to various stakeholder groups (see also Smith and Simeone, 2017), whereas Coraiola and Derry (2020) study the U.S. tobacco industry’s forgetting work over the long term.

Conversely, Jørgensen’s (2018) work is instructive for those who are interested in questions of how past actors *wanted* to be remembered and what actions were taken to secure this memory (Mena et al., 2016). She studies one of the forefathers of the Carlsberg breweries, Carl Jacobsen, who is known, well beyond his business merits, as one of the most significant *cultural* entrepreneurs in Danish history. Her theoretical focus is “the processes that underlie and shape understandings of cultural heritage and the role of elite philanthropists and their organisations herein” (p. 298). She concludes that the businessmen were aware of what they were doing to create this enduring legacy. This finding is indicative of the purposive and political nature of remembering that becomes institutionalised in larger social frameworks.

Barnes and Newton (2018) take a reverse approach and ask whether and how corporations appropriate larger societal memory practices (see also Foster et al., 2011). In particular, they examined the Bank of England’s creation of war memorials for the loss of staff members during WWI and WWII and its commemoration practices. The authors show that companies can imitate the remembering habits of nation-states – and claim national membership and significance – to give themselves the appearance of a responsible *national* organisation. This research points towards a novel set of research questions addressing how the new age of nationalism shapes historic corporate responsibility (Scherer et al., 2016).

The second stylised way to research memory is through retrospective methods (see quadrant [IV] of Figure 24.1). This strategy, involving longitudinal qualitative studies, for instance, has been the most popular among organisational theorists interested in strategic usages of the past (e.g., Foroughi, 2020; Foster et al., 2017; Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Ravasi et al., 2019).

Past-as-CSR scholarship can follow this line of inquiry and trace unfolding cases of historic corporate social irresponsibility *in situ*. The advantage here is the availability of data on and by involved actors in the contemporary decision-making of dealing with the past. First-hand accounts are compelling, yet self-serving bias might exist. For instance, in the larger context of critical discussion of responsibilities of states, businesses, and individuals for the atrocities of the colonial slave trade, a business school situated in London changed its name from “Cass,” a former profiteer from the slave trade, to “Bayes,” a stellar scholar. Such a case would allow us to unpack the black box of the corporation in the theory of historic corporate social responsibility and study internal processes and consequences of dealing with a past that has grown darker over time. This research may follow Crawford et al. (2022) who suggest that dark and painful aspects of a past can be repurposed for good.

In a similar vein, retrospective methods can provide value in understanding how corporations remember noble past actions. Case studies of rhetorical history (e.g., Lubinski, 2018) explored whether and how founders’ legacy and actions stand the “test of time” (Ferri and Takahashi, 2022: 1). Yet, noble actions in corporate pasts are rarely subject to past-as-CSR theorising. This lacuna of past-as-CSR is probably linked to its roots in political CSR, which itself is rather a critical theory making laudation of corporations anathema. Thus, studying whether and how noble corporate acts are shared and remembered in corporations would start filling this theoretical void. Such studies could include interviewing internal or external stakeholders regarding their awareness of – and thoughts concerning – the noble past acts and their decision-making process and rationale for remembering these acts in the future.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we examined the prospects for past-as-CSR scholarship and presented several research avenues based on different methodologies (archival and retrospective methods) and the epistemic goals of historiography (history as knowledge) and memory studies (the use of history as a subject of theorising). The past-as-CSR is still in its early stages of theory development and especially lacks empirical work to inform such theories. Given its conceptual affinity with the organisational history community, we hope that this chapter has sparked the interest of organisational history scholars in contributing to the advancement of the past-as-CSR through their methodological and conceptual expertise. This chapter provides the foundation for a diverse – yet balanced – research agenda on failures of corporate responsibility as well as noble past activities.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READINGS

For readers interested in past-as-CSR, we can recommend three articles to deepen the understanding of this field:

- (1) Schrempf-Stirling J, Palazzo G and Phillips RA (2016) Historic corporate social responsibility. *Academy of Management Review* 41(4): 700–719.

The article develops the to date most substantial theory of historic corporate social responsibility.

- (2) Phillips RA, Schrempf-Stirling J and Stutz C (2020) The past, history, and corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics* 166: 203–213.

The article introduces past-as-CSR as one of three ways of interaction between history and CSR scholarship.

- (3) Stutz C (2021) History in corporate social responsibility: Reviewing and setting an agenda. *Business History* 63(2): 175–204.

The article identifies challenges for organisational and business historians who wish to engage with the CSR literature and proposes ways to overcome those.

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25. Embodied microhistories on the move: materializing microhistories through walking to include the affective memories of everyday life

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter proposes “embodied microhistories on the move” as an approach that integrates material sensitive methods (i.e. affective and sensory ethnographies, walking tours) and microhistories. We developed this method during the observational study of an urban intervention in a mid-sized Swiss city that planned and built a new cultural center. Trained in the ethnographic tradition and attentive to how materiality mediates processes of organizing, we soon realized that we had to expand our methodological apparatus to include a historical sensitivity that could grasp the affective and mostly unspoken, historical living of the city. While the urban texture – its buildings, streets, landmarks and statues – can itself be read as an archive rich with historical legacies (cf. Barros, 2023), a city is also saturated by citizens’ more intimate recollections and collective memories of the city space. Indeed, urban places embody microhistories, which include the imaginations and lived recollections of citizens’ past rhythms, spatial practices and emotions. These are central to understanding both citizens’ present affective attachments to and everyday experience in space (Gregory, 1999; Port, 2015), and the broader historical context of a city (Hargadon and Wadhvani, 2022), such as how the urban expresses dominant notions of progress or rational planning at the expense of marginalized notions of community (cf. Haynes, 2010 on the role of oral histories in foregrounding marginalized histories).

Beyond the context of space, this chapter suggests that foregrounding the (habitual historic sources) often excluded histories – which live not only in oral, but, as we will argue, also in embodied mnemonic traces – matters in understanding organizational life (Decker et al., 2021; Haynes, 2010), as they sediment and constitute everyday organizational phenomena, such as how organizational members collaborate or innovate.

Our explorations of how to grasp these embodied, affective recollections of the past, how they come to matter in present practices, and how they allow for appreciating the larger historical context differently than in dominant historical sources, led to the development of a method, which we call “embodied microhistories on the move”. This methodological approach provides alternative representations, attentive to the multiple, historical layering of organizational phenomena. We outline concrete ways of how we used it to foster a sensitivity towards the small, affectively lived, and embodied memories that can be used to grasp the historical texture of organizations (Decker et al., 2021: 1139). We observed the city as an interesting, organized place, to offer scholars oriented on the material and performative turns (Rappaport, 2008) a path to foreground the embodied historical knowledge and the “emotional work” (Wadhvani

et al. 2018: 1674) that relates to collective “material memories” (Schultz and Hernes, 2013). Historical approaches in organization studies have invited researchers to “expand the boundaries of what they consider appropriate sources”, with reference to the overreliance on linguistic texts and discursive traces (De Vaujany et al. 2020; Wadhvani et al., 2018: 1675). Indeed, historical research has often privileged “textual memories”, via the use of archival data (cf. Barros, 2023), case histories or corporate autobiographies, and “oral memories” (cf. Rintamäki et al., 2023; Foroughi et al., 2020) by reporting stories, rituals, and ceremonies (Barnes and Newton, 2018). For example, even prominent historical approaches that shifted their focus from grand metanarratives to ordinary people and events – such as microhistory (Maclean et al., 2016) – often remained oriented on oral and textual accounts (cf. Carnegie and McBride, 2023, and the work on “oral histories”, e.g. Haynes, 2010; Śliwa, 2013; cf. Giacomini, 2023).

The strong emphasis on the word has backgrounded the sensorial and affectively felt experience of the world; words alone cannot grasp specific spaces and times and their plural, contested contexts (cf. Platts, 2023). In view of this, the material turn in history (Otter, 2010; Rappaport, 2008) argued to use “material memories” (Schultz and Hernes, 2013), such as artifacts, spaces, or corporate museums, and to analyze how these are used, for example in identity construction or innovation processes (Blagoev et al., 2018; Ravasi et al., 2019; Schultz and Hernes, 2013). At the same time, research following the historical turn in organizations has suggested that things like buildings are not just made of material stuff but have worked in them a historically layered rhetoric through the entanglement of multiple modes of communication as well as presences and absences (Giovannoni and Napier, 2023; Giovannoni and Quattrone, 2018). Such research has shown that what counts is not only the content of archives and repositories, but also their materiality, which enables important retrospective and prospective processes. Yet, often this materiality-sensitive historical scholarship has mostly been confined to the materiality of archives and museums (Wadhvani et al., 2018: 1670), that is, to objects and spaces with an already institutionalized historical value. However, also the mundane objects and spaces that surround us in everyday life have their “spatial legacies”, as different events become sedimented over time and “history becomes a lived experience rather than being achieved in the ‘past’” (De Vaujany et al., 2020: 77).

Emotion-laden recollections come to matter in organizational processes not for their informational content, or for how people discursively deploy the past for present and future interests (Decker et al., 2021; Petani and Mengis, 2016; Ybema, 2014). Rather, the historical quality of everyday material objects and spaces is often present in their affective and embodied lived practices. Despite the variety of historical methods at our disposal (Decker et al., 2015; Maclean et al., 2016), we still have a limited understanding of how to grasp the historical quality of everyday material objects and spaces, and of how their historically lived experience both comes to define organizational processes and is expressive of the historical context of specific practices of organizing. More specifically, we lack a methodological reflection on how to develop a historical approach that can give voice to the affective, embodied historical living of organizational phenomena that can foreground not only often neglected voices in history writing (e.g. citizens’ oral histories), but also neglected means in writing history (e.g. embodied, material histories).

This chapter attempts to address this question by integrating insights from methods attentive to the materiality and the affective quality of social life – in particular, sensory ethnographies and walking tours – with the tradition of microhistory. More specifically, our “embodied microhistories on the move” build on (1) walking interviews, (2) their visual and narrative

mappings in combination with historical documents, and (3) their re-embodiment in collective, participatory walks.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. We first lay out the context of our methodological challenge, namely urban renewal projects. We then provide a short background on microhistories and present how to materialize them through the methodological practice of walking. After presenting the methodological details of how to work with “embodied microhistories on the move”, describing how we worked with the method, we finally discuss the contributions of our approach to historical methods.

THE METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGE OF ORGANIZING MULTIPLE HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN URBAN RENEWAL PROJECTS

Urban planning represents an ideal context to illustrate the methodological challenge of grasping the historical texture of organizational phenomena as well as the everyday, affective and embodied historical living of organizing, as it shows what organizational value “embodied microhistories on the move” may play in practice.

Cities have a rich historical heritage, where multiple temporalities and rhythms (Hetherington, 2013; Lefebvre, 2004) take on diverse materialities and become differently imbued with power (Dale, 2005). Cities’ historical presence is apparent not merely for the historical layering of its material “infrastructure” (i.e. architectural layout, buildings, squares, streets), but becomes tangible through cities’ performative force on its residents (Rao, 2009), whose recollections of places of the past and their affective living of the city (Hetherington, 2013; Lefebvre, 2004) rhythm everyday urban practices. Citizens come to experience historically bound processes of globalization in their everyday life, for example when the relocation of a slum brings about changes in informal support networks (Rao, 2009), or when dynamic pricing of parking spaces alter citizens’ commuting practices. To grasp a place’s “sedimented patterns of activity, [...] their association with past events, [...] and the [spatial] practices embedded in the fabric of the built environment” (Hetherington, 2013: 18), it has been suggested that cities be read as archives (cf. Barros, 2023). The “city-as-archive” (Hetherington, 2013; Rao, 2009; Sheringham and Wentworth, 2016) proposes to view cities as a material archive in the making, with continual “accumulation” and “subtraction” not only of buildings and things, but also of the political narratives and lived experiences that go with such places and continue to resonate in the present (Hetherington, 2013). In this sense, cities have a historical material grammar, whereby even small places embody a complex nexus of social life (Whyte, 1980).

Yet in urban renewal processes, not all histories of a city are equally represented, as many remain anchored within the lived dimension of materially mediated “mnemonic socialization” processes (Ravasi et al., 2019: 1525), without entering institutional processes. The embodied recollections of places (Massey, 1995) often escape the geometrical and technological representations of maps and Gantt charts favored by urban planners. Their “*selective objectification[s]* of things, states and processes” (Kallinikos, 1995: 118, emphasis in the original; Rao, 2009) do not reflect well cities’ more or less ordered “heterogeneous placings and their spatial, temporal and material arrangements” (Hetherington, 1997: 187). For example, the everyday spatial practices that elderly people engage in to stay socially connected are in no way immaterial for a city’s lived heritage, its rhythms and collective remembering, yet rarely enter the

representations city planners use when planning everyday mobility, waste management, or socialization places.

We now present how microhistories recover the multiple temporalities and histories that constitute urban spaces, to explore ways to develop further the microhistory method, by strengthening its material and affective sensitivity.

MATERIALIZING MICROHISTORIES

Microhistory is an in-depth historical investigation of a small object: a significant event (Stewart, [1959] 1987), a remote forgotten place (González, 1968), or a “village community, a group of families, even an individual person” (Ginzburg and Poni, 1991: 3; Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013: 4; cf. Carnegie and McBride, 2023). The attempt is to “provide [...] an antidote to hegemonic metanarratives” and shed light on overlooked communities and ordinary individuals, their positions, everyday practices, and encounters (Maclean et al., 2016: 623), by recovering and assembling dispersed fragments into a very detailed, narrative account of single events or places. Their “minute dimensions are redeemed by [their] representative characteristics” (Ginzburg et al., 1993: 12) and are often read against the background of the dominant narrative (Hargadon and Wadhvani, 2022).

In the organizational literature, microhistory analyses have been conducted more or less explicitly in various historical accounts of organizational life (Maclean et al., 2016). Popp and Holt (2013), for example, analyzed the personal correspondence of two merchants in Calcutta in 1834 to reframe entrepreneurial opportunity as “a processual experience of ‘making present’” (p. 10). Hargadon (2015) sees the use of microhistories for studying “the dynamics between larger social and institutional forces and individual cognition and action within a single setting or event” (p. 125). For example, a microhistorical account can show in detail how Edison manipulated existing cultural elements and reshaped the larger institutional context through the design of his system of electric lighting, thus favoring the adoption of the innovation (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001). Microhistory addressed, similarly, how workers showed cohesion despite their inherent diversity (through a detailed account of miners’ experiences during a labor unrest; Andrews, 2010, in Hargadon and Wadhvani, 2022), how field constituents organized exchange transactions in the emergence of the US Radio Broadcasting Industry (Leblebici et al., 1991), or how IBM’s commercial computers were rapidly adopted thanks to a fit between the material appearance of early computers and the already existing practices of their customers (Yates, 1999).

An exemplary microhistory in classic historical literature is the detailed, critical analysis of the documents related to a trial the Inquisition carried out to judge Menocchio, a simple sixteenth-century miller from a peripheral village in the Italian region of Friuli accused of diffusing heretical beliefs (Ginzburg, 1976). It presents a close account of the miller’s (mis) reading of theological scriptures and of how his views were judged heretical and led to his execution. Menocchio is “a lost fragment, happened to us by chance, of an obscure world, which we can only tie back to our history through an arbitrary move” (Ginzburg, 2019: xxviii). Yet the microhistorical account of the miller’s destiny is of value not for its “uniqueness”, but for its “exemplariness” (Lepore, 2001: 133), providing insights into the “interactions of elite and popular cultures” (Muir, 1991: 10). Microhistory thus does not only explore micro aspects to exemplify larger constellations of social life, but “allow[s] us to see the performativity of

social life”, such as to appreciate “the multitude of mundane activities that unintentionally produce discriminatory cultures” (Mills, 2017: 20–21). There are clear similarities between some microhistorical approaches and Geertzian cultural anthropology, especially their parallel epistemological stances of the researcher’s capacity to generalize from specific qualitative knowledge, just as a doctor makes a diagnosis not abstracting but more generalizing within single cases: however, Giovanni Levi (1991) differentiates the two approaches, claiming that microhistory does “not attribute a homogenous meaning to signs and symbols, does not presuppose the existence of a homogenous cultural context, but takes its starting point in social differentiation, and, finally, does not sacrifice the individual to generalization” (Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013: 29). We suggest this plural and contested individuality of microhistories affords a methodological reflexive entry point for organizational analyses of complex phenomena, like urban everyday practices (Brewer, 2010; Gregory, 1999; Pink 2012; Port, 2015).

While mostly lacking specific methodological indications, microhistories can draw on many sources, typically archival, such as a collection of letters, a register of official documents or statistical records, a diary (Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013), but can also include more ethnographic methods, such as observations and in-depth interviews (Mills, 2017) to elicit oral histories (Haynes, 2010; Śliwa, 2013). Informed by the methodological legacy of history scholarship, microhistories traditionally privileged textual, interpretative analysis, at the expense of a more material sensitive scholarship. Indeed, microhistories are characterized by their human-centric accounts, placing “great emphasis upon the individual being central to [the] research” (Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013: 153), thereby backgrounding the role of non-human actors (Mills, 2017: 22). We contend that a stronger material siting of microhistories, which our walking method later embodies, strengthens a more than representational, affective grasp (Lorimer, 2005) of the historic texture of phenomena and we here explore concrete methodological means to do so. Regarding spaces and places, microhistories are remembered and told differently, when both the person remembering and the scholar assembling the microhistory are (re-)embodied in the site of and through which past-present-future relations are drawn (Dacin et al., 2010).

Next, we propose how our material siting of microhistories can take place, drawing on the methodological practice of walking, relevant both in the tradition of sensory methodology (Pink, 2008) and amongst space scholars (De Certeau, 1984; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008; Vergunst, 2010), including organizational ones (Beyes and Steyaert, 2021; De Vaujany et al., 2019).

EMBODYING MICROHISTORIES THROUGH WALKING

“Walking in the city” is a practice that has long attracted the attention and imagination of space and social science scholars. De Certeau (1984), within a chapter by this very title, addressed the possibility of moving away from the totalitarian gaze from above, of the planners’ city map. Walking, instead, reflects the elementary form of the everyday experience of a city, which outlives its “panoptic administration” (p.130). Interestingly, De Certeau sees the practice of walking as a possibility to liberate spaces (like the Place de l’Étoile in Paris) from the meanings and symbolic order fixed by their planners, as they become embedded in a web of footsteps and allow for “detours” of distant spaces, “relics” and “legends” to be drawn into the space and positioned over it (p.133). Indeed, the gestures of our walks are expressive of

material and social relations (Vergunst, 2010), and their rhythms and habitual paths create “cartographies of collection” (Lorimer and Lund, 2008: 198), as the experience of any walk is informed by a multitude of associations and attachments to past walks along similar or different paths in a form of “cartographic overlay” (p. 192). Yet, walking not only draws in these multiple histories. It is also anchored in the present, *in situ*, a material practice which unfolds rhythmically and in interaction with the movements of others – humans and non-humans – around us, in a world in the making (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008: 2). By bringing together past, present and future, walking incorporates the history of a place (Vergunst, 2010: 376) and gives it a more than representational expression (Lorimer, 2005). More specifically, the practice of walking allows for heterogeneous and at times contradictory “displacements and condensations” of times and places and can thus provide a sense of how multiple microhistories are joined together to form the affectively imbued meaning of a place (De Certeau, 1984: 133).

In view of the importance of walking for understanding both space and social relations over time, scholars have pointed to walking as an important methodological tool. For example, it has been suggested that “walking tours” serve as an embodied and collective practice (Aoki and Yoshimizu, 2015; Beyes and Steyaert, 2021; Pink, 2008) to surface visibilities and invisibilities and to produce different emotional registers, thereby creating specific atmospheres and experiences of spaces (De Vaujany et al., 2019). As such, walking tours can put forward marginalized histories of spaces (Aoki and Yoshimizu, 2015) by attuning our bodies to others’ routes and rhythms (Pink, 2008; Vergunst, 2010; Whyte, 1980), and thus challenge meanings and stigma hitherto attributed to specific places and spaces (e.g. historical red-light districts). Such methods are part of a “walking/talking practice” in ethnographic research (Gherardi, 2019: 10), in which – while one is performing, that is, producing a particular sense of place through walking – the other is revealing, that is, increasing reflexivity by making apparent the differences between the others’ affective experience of a place and the researcher’s own position (Beyes and Steyaert, 2021; Gherardi, 2019; Mondada, 2017). De Certeau and Ginzburg’s approaches have been described as similar – and part of a noble tradition of scholars like Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin – as their scale of observation (of walking and close attention to exceptional details) empowers as witnesses of everyday life some individuals whom no other method would have remarked as historically significant (Brewer, 2010).

We now describe our own experience with the method of “embodied microhistories on the move” during our ethnographic fieldwork in urban planning contexts.

EMBODIED MICROHISTORIES ON THE MOVE

The method of embodied microhistories on the move involves a process marked by four moments of data collection and analysis as represented in Figure 25.1.

Walking Interviews

In a first phase, researchers carry out walking interviews (Jones et al., 2008; Lee and Ingold, 2006) with people that are typically underrepresented in the official history of an organization, but which importantly shape the everyday life and practice of the organization. In the case of urban planning, the scope is not to represent exhaustively any category, but to sample people usually not involved in the planning process such as a city’s common citizens, who, however,

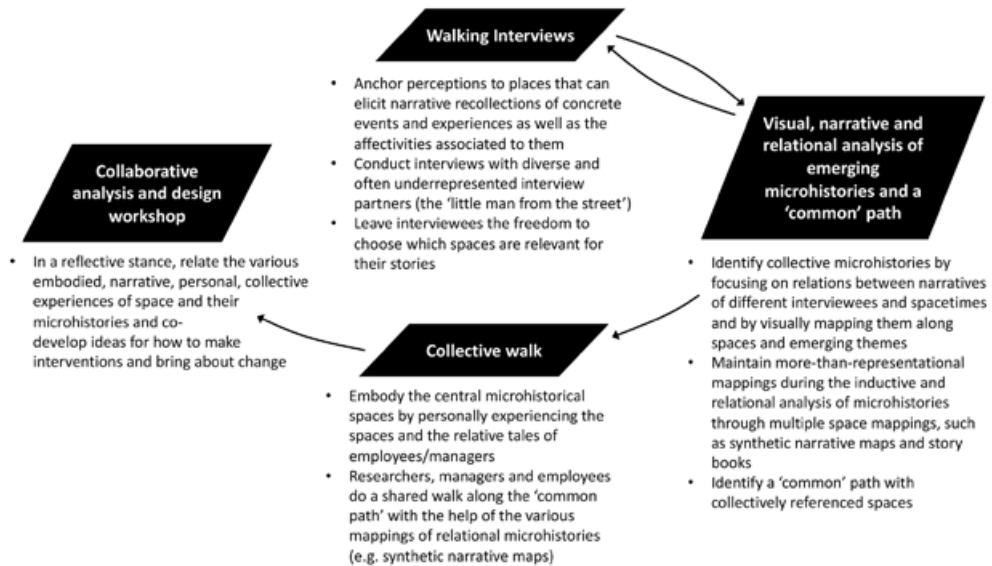


Figure 25.1 *The methodological steps of the embodied microhistories on the move*

have a history of living in the urban space and who are affected by city planning. In our case of renewal processes of urban space, we involved 29 citizens who traditionally are not involved by urban designers – such as the elderly, small shop owners, immigrants, parents, or artists. In our choice of interview's partners, we were careful to include some variety to account for the different historical living of the city, such as born and raised in the city versus people who moved there more recently, or inhabitants living in the city for commercial, or private reasons. The idea was to give voice to a place's different pasts (Massey, 1995).

We asked them to walk-and-talk us through (Mondada, 2017) the city's spaces that are important to them, thereby pursuing the aim of oral histories to critically reflect on hegemonic history writing (Kim, 2008), not only by giving voice and visibility to people usually not included in the urban design process, but also by working with alternative means of expression (e.g. pointing to places) and by physically putting the researcher into the habitual place of the interviewees (cf. Rintamäki et al., 2023).

In other organizational contexts and issues of concern – such as organizational change, organizational identity or the role of affect and emotions in employee motivation – the method could involve a variety of employees and stakeholders walking and talking the researcher through the spaces that matter for them both within and outside the organizational confines, for how and where their practices historically originated, developed and are presently enacted. Such walking interviews could be guided by requests such as:

Lead me to the spaces to which you relate important histories, historical practices, or events that created historical legacies for the organization. Lead me to places to which you feel attached, of which you feel afraid, that (de)motivate you. What has happened in these spaces in the past that still counts today? Can you recall events related to this place that still reverberate today? Which private or common places have you and others cherished to talk about marking personal/corporate problems (i.e. toilet, kitchen, watercooler, coffee machine, corridor, terrace)?

In our context, an example that well illustrates how certain microhistories are neglected in the dominant discourse and planning of the city are citizens' memories of urban mobility and how they come to constitute the experience of a place. Consider the following example of a female shop owner in her 50s describing her commute to work.

In the morning it's impossible to move [...], to reach the lake by car I would need at least half an hour to just go around the neighborhood blocks. So with my bike, I go against the sense of the traffic, on the footpath because on the road I would be scared because they made no dedicated cycle path, it's crazy [...]. When I first arrived here, I used to use a "stingpinne" [she uses her native Swedish to refer to a bicycle safety wing], but then I started to use the footpath. [...] It's not so easy to ride amongst the crowd of pedestrians. And they are all mad at me... "Ah, no, it's not allowed to ride your bike here" and they're right, one should not. [...] At the same time, the bike also gives a sense of freedom, one moves much more easily. But the paths I take, they are all forbidden, all forbidden.

In plans for urban mobility this woman's experience is not accounted for, typically being based on recorded traffic flows, quantified commuters, time of commuting, or peak hours. Instead, her very *personal* narrative of the habitual ride involving skill (e.g. driving through a crowd), bodily investments (e.g. risking to be run over by a car), interactions with others (e.g. people telling her off), and affective responses (e.g. fear, nostalgia, freedom) expresses both an *embodied* sense of fear for her safety and a partially fulfilled (while also frustrated) sense of freedom when riding her bike through any possible path. This embodied sense of mobility acquires a microhistorical quality as it resists the dominant narratives of urban development (Boje, 2001). Moreover, it well illustrates how microhistories of one given place, are not only made of memories of this space (*When I first arrived here*), but also of different places in different times, which her linguistic reference to her bicycle safety wing in Swedish makes clear (having immigrated from Sweden to Switzerland).

We find that the methodological practice of walking through a place allowed people to develop their recollections of the past around the material qualities of the place. Indeed, interviewees often pointed to a particular place or object and organized their recollections around these material references, so that the emerging microhistory was often defined by the spatial path of the walk. Importantly, although we did not frame our interviews as data collection on urban history, the historical quality of the account became evident as we found ourselves walking through the city's lost historical places and collecting microhistories that signaled the importance of the past in the present of daily practice of urban places.

In framing the questions around these spaces, we find it important to ask about people's everyday practices and experiences, such that their bodily immersion into space allows them to affectively relate different experiences and times. To illustrate this point, consider the complex web of affective and embodied relations that arose during an interview with a bookshop salesperson, while walking with us through the historic city center and recollecting her past practices of certain places that historically had changed a lot (i.e. no longer allowing car mobility).

I always walk this way, thinking, it's incredible what it used to be. Just yesterday it occurred to me, where there is the museum now, once upon a time there was car traffic: you could drive through there [pointing at the exact passage] [...] This is what I was thinking about as I was walking, what the city used to be like. At the public squares where we used to play. I used to play a lot here in Piazza Indipendenza, where there's the obelisk. [...] My grandmother lived here in Via Nassa, but it was not today's Via Nassa. It was very beautiful. She lived right at the bottom of the street, and we used to play in the square. So there was a way to go from the Molino Nuovo quarter right down to Via Nassa [...] We used to go there [we get there] There it is. My grandmother allowed us to take the bike and

we rode up and down Via Nassa. Even if there was car traffic. And what I used to notice was that there were many, many Italians. And as a little girl I observed these Italians, dressed very seriously, often they wore a black handkerchief around their arm for mourning. So, I can still picture us children on our bicycles, the crowds of passersby and these people. [...] The place has changed a lot.

The example shows nicely how walking in space – not just in the context of walking interviews – invites an affective, mnemonic-material layering of the city’s historical past practices in its present configuration and lived experience. By walking through Via Nassa today, the bookshop salesperson is sensorially reminded of places of the past (e.g. seeing a passageway through which you could drive) and relates the affective recollection of these past experiences of the place to the present. In other words, she gains a sensorial, aesthetic awareness of the loss of happy spaces of the past (“not today’s Via Nassa”) (see Petani and Mengis, 2016), recalling all the material artefacts and affective states of the past (e.g. the “Italians, dressed very seriously”, the “black handkerchief”, the joy of cycling and of observing people) and how they feel different from today’s sensorial experience of the place (“The place has changed a lot”). Her detailed narrative allows us almost to make a concrete picture of the past, yet not one in black and white, but colored with present feelings. With such microhistorical accounts of urban practices at hand, we moved to a second phase of the process, aiming for a type of analysis that maintained – at least in part – the affective and embodied qualities of the walking interviews.

Visual, Space-bound Narrative Analysis of Emerging Microhistories and a “Common” Path

Already during the walking interviews and then continuing after data collection, we conducted narrative and thematic analyses by identifying recurrent and differing microhistories and relating them to embodied practices, sites, and objects. The use of visual analytical techniques was encouraged to maintain more than representational qualities also in data analysis (Lorimer, 2013), developing, for example, synthetic narrative maps and storybooks.

In the context of our study, we transcribed the walking interviews word-by-word, did repetitive reading of the transcripts, and started to trace the spatial references made during the interviews and the narratives bound to these spaces (marking down also *where* the specific narrating was made *during* the walk). For our space-bound narrative analysis, we created for each interview a visual representation, laying out on a geographical map not only where we had walked through, but – through lines and coloring of squares, streets, and so on – also the spatial references people had made. Indeed, the stories told were mainly fragmented and discontinuous, with memories, experiences and images of other places and times constantly being drawn in, thus forming complex non-linear chronological nexuses of spatiotemporal relationships. We overlaid also quotes from the interviews over specific spaces so that the verbal recollection could be related to specific spaces.

We soon realized that many of the microhistorical accounts of the recollected places were not unique to single interviewees, but also belonged to others, as they were echoed throughout multiple interviews. Coding interviews through a space-sensitive thematic analysis, allowed us not only to learn which spaces were most important in citizens’ recollections, but also to compare their spatial microhistories of a specific place. We coded places as “collective” when the person was speaking in a “we” form or referred to a broader microhistory (not just remembering personal episodes). These “collective places” were not only conventional representative places, but also smaller venues (Whyte, 1980) like historic bars, famous bakeries, and

less known streets, that were not just important for their memorial value, but experienced as presently absent or lost (Petani and Mengis, 2016, 2018). These microhistories of places could inform a recovery-based planning of everyday practices and affective rhythms of urban life, walking being a most revelatory urban practice that goes beyond just *oral* histories or collective retrospective memories of space (Decker et al., 2021), since our *embodied* orality “on the move” gave voice not only through images, but also with touch, noises, gestures and objects, walking us through other times, places and affective rhythms of present and past experiences. We thus visually composed a synthetic collective map, similar to the individual ones, on which we visualized the web of spaces and connections between spaces, which repeatedly surfaced in the citizens’ recollections and microhistorical references, thus overlaying a collection of narratives relative to these spaces (see Figure 25.2).

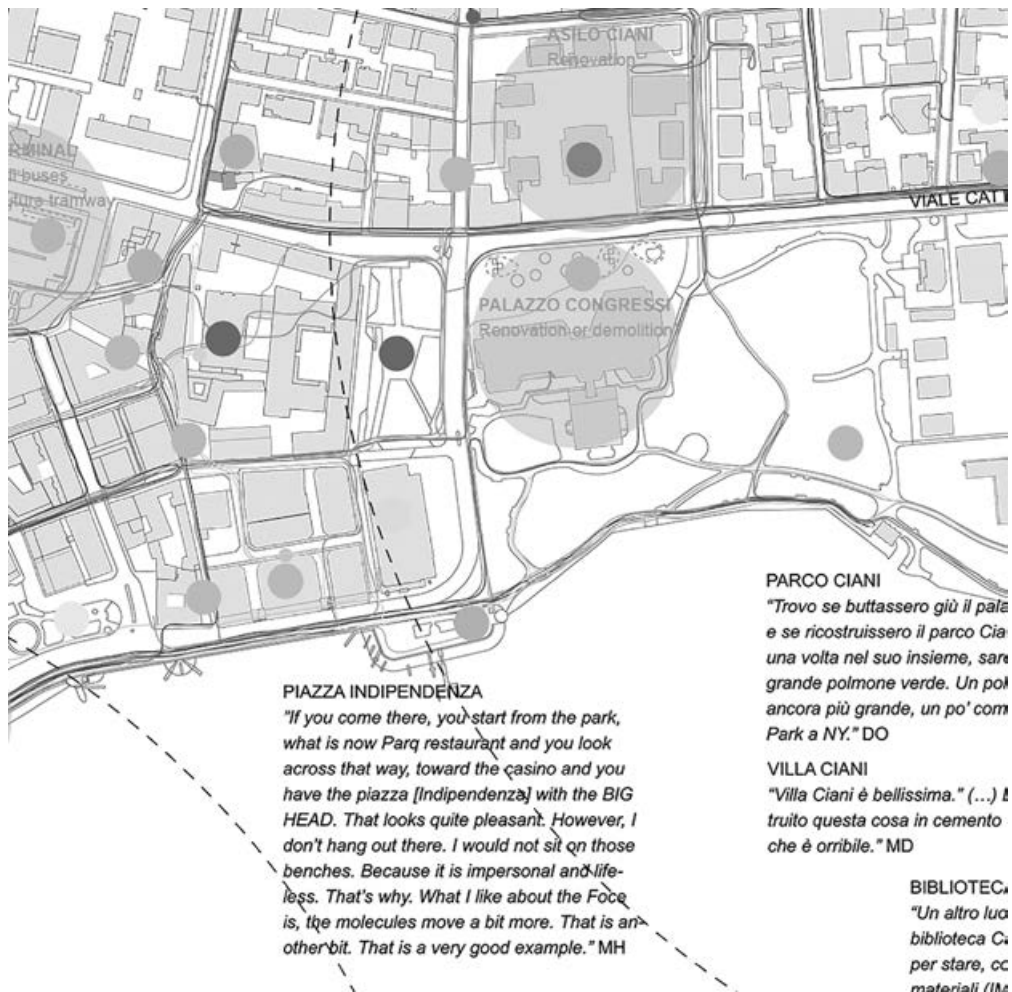


Figure 25.2 The embodied–abstract, historical–present, personal–collective layering of the spatial experience during the urban design workshop

On the synthetic narrative map, we composed a “common” path from all the explorative walks with citizens. This common path reflected the spaces that were particularly prominent in the emerging embodied microhistories on the move, as interviewees frequently visited them in the walks and narrated them in the talks. Every piece of the “common walk” was walked by one or more citizens, its direction emerged from the dominant movement corridors and from people’s shared memories and perceptions.

With the aim to represent the microhistorical data in a more narrative, more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2013) fashion, we composed, next to a synthetic narrative map, also a ‘story-book’ in which we assembled microhistorical accounts from the walking interviews regarding specific places and emerging themes with photographs we had taken during our own walks through the city and with historic photographs (see Figure 25.3). The photographic representations allowed to connect the microhistorical accounts to a more material sense of a place’s presents and pasts, fostering a relational temporal reading of their spatiohistorical becoming.

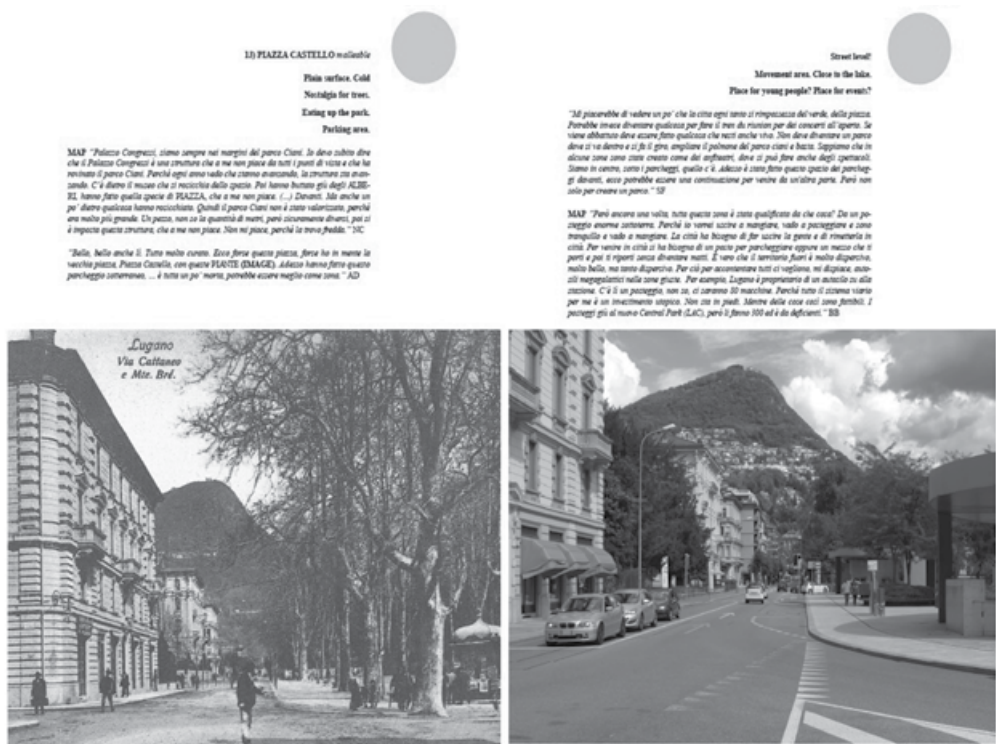


Figure 25.3 *Storybook combining narrative excerpts from the interviews with both current and historic photographs in an attempt to maintaining the narrative, embodied quality of the material microhistories of spaces*

Together, the visual, space-bound narrative analysis with its maps and storybook should help not only the interpretative process of the scholar, but – as we will show in the next step – also provide feedback to practitioners, in our case urban planners, so that they can gain an embod-

ied sense of the multiple historical relations that make up a place ‘on the move’. If you look at the two photos of Figure 25.3, as a planner, and read and walk with citizens currently recollecting the past material configurations of practices of particularly relevant places in the urban history of a city (e.g. the lakefront, a popular square), this should count in imagining the future potential of how to further develop the place, at least on a par with the possibilities traceable via archives. Citizens’ embodied microhistories tell what it was like to be there and then, as an important non-recorded heritage of the city’s past and ongoing identity.

A Collective Walk

In a third step, the method proposes to grasp the significance of microhistories and collective memories, examine them and find ways to embed them in future planning. More specifically, we re-embodied the traces of overlaid microhistories – as represented in the synthetic narrative map and storybook – through a *collective walk*. Indeed, the idea is that one proposes a collective walk with managers and other actors who can benefit from integrating into their decision making the microhistories of usually obscured actors on how they affectively, historically lived a place. In our case, we organized a collective walk with urban designers, architects and researchers and walked along the “common” path with the support of the synthetic narrative maps and the storybook (Figure 25.4).

The aim of the walks is that the people in power can experience the microhistories of the normally excluded actors through their own embodied experience and thus start to grasp the historical layering of a place. Our method suggests a microhistory rehearsal practice. Repeating the material “walk-and-talk through” of citizens’ microhistories retraces the steps of their journeys in the urban past that lives on beyond their words or memories. Far from the grand gesture of macro planning as a grand institutionalized history writing, this humble exercise is a qualitative rescaling and deepening of the multitemporal dimension of the urban rhythms at stake. The material retelling of citizens’ microhistories, walking through the paths that collectively originated them, has a non-linear temporal quality as it draws different “affective heat maps”, in which different times stratify over the same place and enter the conversation and the embodied experience of the architects and planners walking across a plurality of a place’s pasts (Massey, 1995). This step is important also to recognize that all space representations, all (hi-)stories of space are partial and that the collective walk, more than limiting that partiality, simply provides an expansive occasion to counter one’s own embodied experience of space with the one of its citizens, including their affective recollections of spaces of the past. By combining ideas and matters in space of oneself and of others “on the move”, one can both favor a sense of embodied alignment, but also of experiencing difference, both of which are important in gaining awareness of the multiplicity of embodied, affective rhythms, and historical layers of everyday spatial practice.

The architects and urban planners were then asked to bring in this stratified experience of space in a final collaborative analysis and design workshop.

Collaborative Analysis and Design Workshop

In a fourth, conclusive step, a workshop with the participants of the collective walk allowed us to engage in a bodily and materially informed analysis and the co-creation of new solutions and processes. In our case, the planners and architects gathered in a workshop, in which the



Figure 25.4 Collective walk with urban planners, architects and scholars mediated through the storybook and the synthetic narrative map, following a common path

microhistories that had guided their tour and look over the material and affective rhythms of the city, could be further analyzed in light of their own different embodied experience during the collective walk and exposure to the citizens' microhistorical input.

During the workshop, the urban planners and architects further engaged with the narrative representations, historical photographs, ethnographic pictures and quotes from interviews (see Figure 25.5). On this basis, they sketched synthetic representations and visual interpretations of these multilayered spaces. They turned the gathered stories of emblematic "collective" places into images recalling past, present and future lives. These "new" images report everything that is the "frame", and beside being proposals for improvements based on the collected materials, they include/represent also details that in the oral descriptions vanished. The practitioners were asked to produce spatial representations like drawings or collage in a very short time span (two hours) that might have been used in an exchange with citizens. They were not asked to solve a specific problem, nor was any limitation set. They should only propose "something" that would improve the quality of the urban space. They were conceived as reactions to the collective walk, spontaneous and tentative ideas that could speak to the citizens, rather than reflections on the large scale of the city. That suggested tangible and small-scale or microinterventions. Their proposals ranged from taking off the fence around the public park, to making public buildings greener. In this way, the typical abstract two-dimensional representations of planners started to interact with their own embodied experiences of space as well as with the collective, discursively remembered space expressed in quotes from citizens or in conversation with peers during the walk or the following workshop.

Together, the four steps proposed by the method of "embodied microhistories on the move" provided a rich process that allowed for alternative representations and voices to enter urban design processes. They allowed urban designers to take into account the citizens' affective and embodied historical living of an urban space, and how this historical quality of urban space comes to matter for their everyday practices and experience of a city. This method is partial and has its limitations, but we believe it can adapt to inform a historical-sensitive organizational scholarship in contexts other than urban places (since firms have their own rich and secret microhistories that walks could usefully uncover to managers other than city administrators).

Our method may help to research organization and management contexts, but could also be of practical use to familiarize newcomers (in projects or firms) to the rich, historically significant material steps that help to qualitatively retrace the path to the present. The concluding discussion below reflects on the value and limitations of our approach, drawing also methodological insights from the self-reflective assessments that concluded the design workshop.

DISCUSSION

Embodied Microhistories on the Move: A Path to Provide Material Sense to Neglected Histories

Our experience with the "embodied microhistories on the move" method suggests that it can serve as a materiality-sensitive approach favoring personal, affective, and relational accounts of the historical layering of organizations and foregrounding often neglected histories.

In our case, urban designers had their processes of data gathering and representing city spaces and urban life, which often favor objectivist, abstract, linear sequences of totalizing



Figure 25.5 Collaborative workshop – engaging with the microhistorical material for developing ideas (of urban development)

digital representations (or a technocratic “conceived space”, see Lefebvre, 1991). Instead, the approach of embodied microhistories on the move presented here enabled a more sensorial, multi-temporal and affective representation of the everyday life urban spaces and rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004), which draws on multiple memorial relationalities and personal accounts of citizens. Reflecting upon the method at the end of the workshop, architects and planners pointed to the method’s microhistorical/mnemonic value linked to present affect. One architect, for example, remarked:

What is interesting was the history. That he remembers this place without the building. You get a kind of historical depth. [...] It is not history. He feels the place is still completely unsolved and that is interesting. There is a personal anger.

The quote suggests that the method allowed for an alternative, more lived understanding of space (i.e. a “place without the building”), where personal, affective (i.e. “personal anger”), and still open histories (i.e. “unsolved”) became foregrounded as the material absences of historical disposal (see also Petani and Mengis, 2018); places without once-existing buildings tell embodied microhistories on the move, deep in strongly felt emotions. The recollections of citizens were not merely retrospective memories of places of the past (cf. Decker et al., 2021). Rather, by being elicited through the walk and the physical qualities of the space, allowed them to foreground the history of the place, usually excluded both from the grand history of a city and from the planning of its developers (p. 1139).

The excerpt also resonates with a view that microhistories animate a dialectic between the microscopic (e.g. the minute recollections of citizens’ past spatial practices) and the macroscopic (what a city is and has been, a place of community rather than a place of progress or rational planning) (Hargadon and Wadhwani, 2022), and can serve as important counter narratives. Contrary to a totalitarian gaze from above (De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991), the embodied microhistories on the move capture the small scale, specific, everyday life (Brewer, 2010) in the city and its manifold small, but no less important temporal and emotional relations.

Cities are so big, the times are so long, and the discussions are so huge and complex. That is why the small scale is so important, the relationship of the citizen with his part of the city, all relationships of all that are involved in the definition of the small part. I guess somewhere there are good opportunities to solve the urban problem. [...] I think if someone speaks about Zanzibar in Africa, it should be on the map. It is not a joke. Because that is the whole point of what these imaginaries can span and why you take these very sensitive web of associations. (urban planner)

We draw the methodological insight that the lived context of remembered stories and personal history is hard to grasp (even through conventional microhistories), unless walking the often untold affective rhythms of these accounts, getting us closer to where they really belong materially beyond words: the *material “sense”* that embodied microhistories-on-the-move aim for indicates, therefore, both a mobile meaning and a sense of direction that traces a thick affective thread of the past to the present and beyond. Our approach thus adds to microhistories the methodological reflexive awareness that the driving emotions of many accounts are materially grounded, often silent and, if not unspeakable, more accessible/tangible through personal embodied visits, than from the armchair interview (or the impersonal survey).

Contributions to Organizational Historical Methods, Limitations and Further Applications

Our method contributes to extant organizational research in two ways. Firstly, it strengthens a material sensitivity to the existing organizational literature working with microhistories (cf. Carnegie and McBride, 2023; Hargadon, 2015; Hargadon and Wadhwani, 2022). Our attempt at a collective microhistory of urban spaces, while remaining true to the original purpose of microhistorians (Ginzburg, 1976) – to give voice to people often neglected in history – aimed also at extending the approach by including in our embodied analysis often neglected or lost spaces (Petani and Mengis, 2016), materiality and affective more than representational rhythms (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012). Our vignettes built on established qualitative interviews and walking methods (Aoki and Yoshimizu, 2015; Beyes and Steyaert, 2021; De Certeau, 1984; De Vaujany et al., 2019; Gherardi, 2019; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008; Jones et al., 2008; Lee and Ingold, 2006; Mondada, 2017; Pink, 2008; Vergunst, 2010), to suggest a type of microhistorical organizational analysis of the consequences of the past in the present (Hargadon and Wadhwani, 2022). This contributes to overcome the predominant discursive and archive-based narratives (cf. Barros, 2023) of individual microhistories and constructs a collective microhistorical corpus from different micro- or mundane embodied walking experiences.

Secondly, embodied microhistories on the move push qualitative researchers, quite literally, to walk into the steps of their informants, without necessarily refusing to systematize data in abstract representations. While distinct from more conventional ethnographic forms of participant observation, our method contributed a concrete, practical tool for scholars of organizations and management (and for practitioners urban planners), to raise awareness on the limits of linear mappings and linguistic representations, and on the methodological opportunity to re-embody talks and texts in walks and more than representational contexts (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012, 2021), to grasp the material, and long-term sense of microhistories. We hope this suggestion will resonate with ongoing literature on organizational space processes (Stephenson et al., 2020), especially amongst researchers, who propose a *longue durée*, material, historical and embodied approach to spatial change (Dale, 2005; De Vaujany and Mitev, 2013; De Vaujany and Vaast, 2014; Gastelaars, 2010; Giovannoni and Quattrone, 2018; Quattrone et al., 2021; Van Marrewijk and Yanow, 2010), and focus on affect, emotions, rhythms and memories (Beyes and Holt, 2020; De Molli et al., 2020; De Vaujany et al., 2019, 2020; Eisenman and Frenkel, 2021). A fuller integration between the organizational literature on space and history, with interesting methodological experimentations like archival ethnographies (Decker, 2014), may consider our approach as complementary to their organizational analyses. Of course, our method is in no way proposing itself as a more complete (or less partial) microhistorical account because of its collective nature. And while not discounting the use that embodied microhistories on the move may find in further, fuller analyses of the city as an organized place, the space of this chapter did not allow to detail, but recognizes nonetheless at least two promising paths of future organizational research using our approach. Firstly, the method drafted in this chapter may inspire a cross-disciplinary dialogue between organizational and urban scholars, who may use individual and collective microhistories to shed light on everyday urban life organization, whether related to urban planning or not. Secondly, and most importantly, this chapter broadly suggested that going to see, touch, feel and make material sense of the story, makes the reconstruction of histories, micro as may

be, much richer, as the emotional contexts grounded in the “felt rhythms” of the storytellers may help us to tell more meaningful *organizational* microhistories (beyond the city as an empirical setting). Informants know that some microhistories are crucial to access the overall big picture of organizational histories, identities and cultures. Managers and workers at any level know how much they learned from books, and how dear they hold the lessons learned in the field, through emotionally marking episodes of non-official organizational history that set the rhythm and live on in their everyday practices. To embody these microhistories on the move, walking to the significant spaces where they took place, instead of from an armchair, recognizes that certain key events cannot be just told in words, but need to be learned on your feet (Beyes and Steyaert, 2021). There is no way for individuals to forget these microhistories; but the experiences of a lot of low ranked organizational actors are underestimated and never told, so managers may learn and remember them. And although there is no replacement for having been present to see, listen, and feel what particular actors did, embodied microhistories on the move constitute a method to communicate these micro lived experiences that promises rich organizational insights. Many untold stories of apparently insignificant events, situations, people, and places add up over time to make and organize the history of who and how we and our organizations are.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Beyes T and Steyaert C (2012) Spacing organization: Non-representational theory and performing organizational space. *Organization* 19(1), 45–61.
- (2) Beyes T and Steyaert C (2021) Unsettling bodies of knowledge: Walking as a pedagogy of affect. *Management Learning* 52(2), 224–242.

The two process scholars discuss the performative, material and affect-sensitive frontier of non-representational organizational research on space. The 2012 paper addresses the necessity of going beyond words, paying attention to rhythms, emotions, and temporally embodied spatial experiences of everyday life, while the 2021 paper suggests specifically walking as a practice for “a pedagogy of affect” developed during an urban ethnography.

- (3) Hargadon AB and Wadhwani RD (2022) Theorizing with microhistory. *Academy of Management Review* (in press).

The paper proposes microhistory as an approach complementary to grounded and longitudinal studies, particularly suited to phenomena that remain elusive like exceptional normal actions, unintended consequences, non-linear and emergent processes, contingent processes and unobserved or inconceivable processes, all of which seem to participate to urban historical and everyday practices of planning and remembering. The paper argues that microhistory’s reflexive temporality offers management research the possibility to situate scholars and their theorizing in time, and to account for evolving consequences over time.

- (4) Pink S (2012) *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places*. London: Sage.

The book illustrates ethnography and qualitative methods at their best in the study of urban spaces and places; her focus on materialities, bodies, politics, rhythms and affect in everyday practices is a major inspiration for our chapter. Chapter 3, titled “Researching Practices, Places and Representations: Methodologies and Methods” and its subsections “interdisciplinary methodological concerns”, “encountering everyday place”, “researching practices/in practice”, “researching representations in movement”, is perhaps the best introduction for any organizational scholar wanting to grasp the challenges (and interdisciplinary history) of the study of space in the social sciences.

- (5) Vergunst J (2010) Rhythms of walking: History and presence in a city street. *Space and Culture* 13(4), 376–388.

The paper explains how Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythmanalysis may apply to walking in the city, theorizing how space is embodied in urban experience, and thus providing insights on how to adopt such a spatial and body-sensitive method to study the city starting from a street.

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26. Narrating rhetorical history to present an appearance of organizational authenticity

Kai Lamertz

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines how claims of authenticity are an integral part of using rhetorical history for organizational impression management. Many organizations strategically manage their appearance in order to shape stakeholder audience impressions (Elsbach, 1994; Ginzel et al., 2004). To do so, the organization presents information about its identity and about the social context that frames the appearance of identity (Lamertz, 2022). The basic argument of this chapter is that organizations present select facets of the past to create a contextual frame of reference for their organizational identity that encourages stakeholder audiences to interpret the identity as authentic (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009). The appearance of identity that results from that framing attains its credibility in reference to historical knowledge shared in the collective identity of stakeholders and the social connections forged by historically informed rhetoric about organizational identity (Suddaby et al., 2016).

My starting point is that history is not factual but a rhetorical claim, made by the formal organization to foment impressions among a target stakeholder audience that encourage acceptance of the claim in line with organizational interests (Suddaby et al., 2010). Rhetoric derives from a body of discourse in a community or in society, which enables the use of language to manage impressions within the malleable constraints of that community's, or society's, taken-for-granted social memories, valued identities, and legitimate social relations (Hartelius & Browning, 2008; Puyou & Quattrone, 2018). In line with this idea, I view history as a symbolic resource deployed to cultivate impressions of the organization in reference to the past that resonate with stakeholders and motivate them to identify with the organization (Foster et al., 2017; Suddaby et al., 2010, 2016).

Authenticity is also a rhetorical claim, a claim wherein an organization characterizes what it is and what it does in reference to community standards of genuineness and truthfulness (Lehman et al., 2019; Peterson, 2005). Suddaby et al. (2016) have argued that formal rhetorical history narration constructs collective identity by explicitly recalling artifacts, events, experiences, or other historical traces that are also recalled in the valued, idealized, or imagined pasts of present-day stakeholder audiences. Claiming rhetorical history thus works as an "overt technique" of impression management, in part, by appealing to a collective identity narrative that "re-members" the past for a focal stakeholder audience (Suddaby et al., 2016: 309). Authenticity works in conjunction with rhetorical history by explicitly "re-membering" the present-day organization's association with that same narrative. Association with a collectivity is established by identifying the organization in a temporal frame of reference to authenticity standards of consistency, compliance, or connection over time (Lehman et al., 2019). It is in this sense that I discuss here the appearance of organizational identity: an authenticity claim gives meaning to the way present-day organizational identity relates to the past, thus fostering

impressions of authenticity *because* today's history-narrating organization appears as a credible narrator. This idea complements rhetorical history's other foci on the meaning of the past in the present, in the past, and over time (Lubinski, 2023).

The aim of this chapter is to develop some basic guidelines for analyzing how organizations use historical references in their formal voice to claim a link of authenticity between their own identity and the collective identity shared with their audiences. Depending on the audience and depending on the organization's objectives, rhetorical claims about the past or about organizational authenticity may vary because audiences have diverse expectations and because organizational objectives change (Foster et al., 2017; Suddaby et al., 2016) while authenticity standards are constantly re-negotiated over time (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009; Peterson, 2005). This creates unique challenges that demand contextual awareness and reflectiveness on the part of the researcher by blending methods informed by history and organization theories (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

My approach to navigating this difficult terrain involves using organizationally narrated history as an object of study, not writing the history of organizations based on narratives by or about them. Empirical guidance is based on website-based self-presentations by two Canadian breweries as the corporate voice of narration about craft identity. The analysis showcases different histories, target audience separation, and changes in authenticity standards over time. As I focus on authenticity claims made, I deal with epistemological concerns about audience authentication by adopting an auto-ethnographic practice (Ellis et al., 2011): as a researcher with extensive contextual expertise in the craft beer brewing industry and three decades of personal experience as a participant in the craft beer social movement, I use a combination of theoretical perspective (Rowlinson et al., 2014) and my own social memory (Lubinski, 2023) to analyze authenticity claims for different audiences and over time.

RHETORICAL HISTORY

Rhetorical history focuses on the ways organizations appropriate facets of the past and stage a particular interpretation of that past to manage organizational identity in the eyes of present-day stakeholder audiences (Giovannoni and Ruggiero, 2023; Lubinski, 2023; Suddaby et al., 2010). History is thus seen as strategically produced by organizations in the form of historical narratives that are intended to foment organizational identification by stakeholders (Foster et al., 2017). A key idea underlying this premise is the malleability of interpretations. Although rhetorical history is often grounded in objective artifacts and events or real people from the past, the meanings attributed to those artifacts, events or people can change in line with the organization's contemporary concerns or future ambition (Lubinski, 2023; Rowlinson and Hassard, 1993). One important historical source of information to represent the organization's identity is its own internal past, such as stories about founders (Basque and Langley, 2018), material displays in corporate museums (Schultz and Hernes, 2013), and traces of routine company communications (Anteby and Molnár, 2010). Ravasi et al. (2019) have identified three processes that organizations use to lift interpretations of their past and construct Albert and Whetten's (1985) three defining identity characteristics: (1) Stewardship lifts a consistent interpretation from multiple facets of the past to project an *enduring* present-day identity; (2) Evangelizing lifts a coherent and atemporal interpretation of multiple facets of the

past to project an identity that is *central* to contemporaneous interests; (3) Heritage Mining lifts selected facets of the past to project a *distinctive* identity relevant to the present.

In addition, organizations make rhetorical use of the past related to broader values, social institutions, social history, and cultural traditions that reside in the collective social memories of stakeholder audiences (Foster et al., 2011). In this rhetoric, the organization links its identity to that of stakeholder audiences by narrating stories about the past that resonate with them in the present. For example, Aeon and Lamertz (2019) have shown how a dairy company in the Canadian province Quebec narrated its past as a key player in the economic development of the local town, thereby reducing the social distance employees experienced to the organization in the present and encouraging identification with it. Foster et al. (2011) showed how the Canadian Quick Server restaurant chain Tim Hortons drew on Canadian cultural traditions to tell identity stories about its contemporary involvement in professional NHL hockey and amateur youth hockey development. Organizations not only appropriate their stakeholders' histories to narrate their contemporary identities, their historically informed identity narratives can also mirror back onto evolving societal identities, for example as the organizational form a legitimate agricultural firm should have in Denmark (Mordhorst, 2014).

Rhetorical history works because the organization is able to use a narrative schema that identifies with its stakeholder audiences by espousing values or beliefs shared with them (Foster et al., 2017). As Suddaby et al. (2016) have explained, rhetoric is used to establish social bonds. An organization can thus influence stakeholder impressions and encourage identification when narratives about the past appeal to social memories or imaginaries that are constitutive of knowledge about who the organization and its stakeholders collectively are *as a community* (Ginzel, et al., 2004; Suddaby et al., 2016; Wadhvani et al., 2018). Having experienced the same past and developed a common interpretation of it in social memory is one way for a community to share history (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013). In addition, imagined communities may develop when events, persons, practices, and other facets of an objective past become the subject of collective identity narration in a community to counteract alienation or disenchantment in the present (Bell et al., 2021; Suddaby et al., 2017).

The strength of rhetorical history as an approach to organizational research is thus its capacity to bridge objectivist and constructivist ontological conceptions of history (Suddaby, 2016). Such research examines how organizations narrate their identity by referencing aspects of the past that rhetorically frame the organization in the context of a history as shared with a stakeholder community, thus producing symbolic value. The appearance of authenticity is one facet of such value (Foster et al., 2017).

ORGANIZATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

The rhetorical history literature (Foster et al., 2017) has narrowly interpreted authenticity and adopted one meaning of the concept, emphasizing a claim about the originality of past organizational events or stories that symbolize distinctiveness to outside stakeholders (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009). I will adopt a broader view that acknowledges the diverse meanings of authenticity and examine three types of rhetorical claims to authenticity.

It is common to think about authenticity as an essential property of objects or entities, such as the authenticity of a beer brewing kettle found at the site of a pioneer village and scientifically shown to date from the mid-19th century. Beyond this "museum"-type authenticity

(Lindholm, 2008), my focus will be on what an organization does to present the symbolism of that brewing kettle by constructing self-referential historical narratives. I conceptualize authenticity as a socially constructed rhetorical claim (Lehman et al., 2019; Peterson, 2005) that “encodes the expectation of truthful representation” (Theodossopoulos 2013: 339).

The rhetoric of the claim is intended to project an appearance of who the organization is and what it does as meeting audience expectations for what is considered genuine, real, sincere and so on in the socially defined reality the organization and its audience share with each other as members in a shared community (Hughes, 2000; Peterson, 2005). It is an appearance because authenticity rhetoric rests on the implicit assumption of *bona fide* intent about truthfulness on the part of the claimant (Hughes, 2000). Appearance of the organization’s identity is framed by cultural or historical information to answer the question “The organization is an authentic what?” (Carroll, 2015; Lehman et al., 2019). An authenticity claim thus asserts that the organization is what it appears to be in reference to the context of what is considered authentic in a given community.

In trying to commensurate a polyphony of authenticity meanings (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Leigh et al., 2006) and typologies (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009; Grayson and Martinec, 2004), Lehman et al. (2019) have noted that the generic concept involves some form of rhetorical contextualization to represent the object of the claim as authentic. Specifically, they argued that a claim of authenticity by or about some entity always implies a standard that provides a reference context against which the truthfulness of the claim is framed for audience assessment. They also identified three umbrella types of authenticity meaning that apply different contextual references as consistency, conformity, and connection.

According to authenticity as consistency, a claim establishes an organization as genuine when its self-presentations express consistency with internal culture and values, the referent standard of this claim thus being “is the organization true to itself?” For example, Hatch and Schultz (2017) report how the Carlsberg brewery revived a century-old motto that had been carved into one of its historic buildings to name a new product line, thus ascribing an intrinsic value formerly commemorated on physical architecture onto a new public brand. Van Rekom et al. (2014) have shown that stakeholder perceptions of organizational authenticity were bolstered when communications about the firm’s socially responsibility provided rhetorical evidence of consistency with its official and formal identity attributes.

Second, a claim of authenticity as conformity establishes an organization as genuine if it meets the conventions and idealized expectations for inclusion in an organizational category, such as a collective organizational identity (Lamertz et al., 2016). The referent standard of conformity asks “is the organization a true exemplar of its type?” For example, Glynn and Lounsbury (2005) have shown that critics assess classical musical performances as authentic if they adhere to the conventions of traditional masterworks and if the performance resonated with the occasion at which it was experienced (e.g., a performance of Handel’s *Messiah* at Christmas time). Note that consistency thus emphasizes the appearance of a singular organizational identity while conformity emphasizes the appearance of a prototypical organizational identity.

Finally, a claim of authenticity as connection establishes the organization as genuine if it symbolizes a spatiotemporal linkage to a person, place, or time through provenance, transference, or verisimilitude. The referent standard of connection asks if there is “a true or credible representation about the organization’s link to a focal person, place, or time.” For example, Howard-Grenville et al. (2013) showed how a community sporting event staged in its original

location after years of hiatus evoked a sense of authenticity among participants and audiences because it credibly recreated the experiences and feel in existing social memories. Leigh et al. (2006) provided evidence that participants in vintage car meetings experienced a sense of authenticity for their vehicle if it credibly reproduced a vintage image. They experienced performing an authentic role as a member in the vintage car owner community if the performance symbolized the nostalgic identity of the community, thereby “re-membering” a community bond (Foster et al., 2017). This type of experience thus accounts for the notion that authenticity can be claimed when a social actor credibly reproduces or signals a linkage to an idealized or imagined conception that key stakeholders have of the past. As a separate class of authenticity claims, it most directly captures the idea that organizations strategically present a linkage with the past to create an appearance of authenticity. As we will see below, however, all three types are used simultaneously to project facets of the past with the apparent aim of appearing authentic in the contemporary gaze of stakeholder audiences.

RHETORICAL HISTORY TO FRAME THE APPEARANCE OF AUTHENTICITY

The argument for integrating rhetorical history and authenticity rests on the premise that when an organization self-presents by communicating about its own past or about a past relevant to its external stakeholder community, rhetorical history provides a contextual frame of reference that encourages audiences to accept the present-day organization as authentic. Using rhetorical history to claim an aura of authenticity for the present-day organization thus involves narrating a link between organizational identity and the past via a standard of consistency, compliance, or connection that appeals to the beliefs and values shared with stakeholders or is salient to their identification needs. The ensuing investigation of those ideas comprises two key procedural steps – selecting a voice and practicing context – and focuses on three substantive themes – using historical artifacts, identifying target audiences, and tracking evolving authenticity standards.

Choosing the Voice of Authenticity Claims

As Carroll and Wheaton (2009) have argued, authenticity is most convincingly and effectively constructed through the official voice of a formal organization because it signals legitimacy and accountability. There are a number of sources organizational researchers can access to operationalize that voice, such as corporate websites (Oertel and Thommes, 2018), corporate museum displays (Mai, 2015; Ravasi et al., 2019), organizational artifacts (Hatch and Schultz, 2017), organizational stories and rituals (Aeon and Lamertz, 2021), and products or promotional materials (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009). For some of these choices, and especially those involving material objects, interpretive data from informants or interviews provide important supplementary information (Aeon and Lamertz, 2021; Howard-Grenville et al., 2013).

Websites offer a stand-alone source of narrative data for the voice of official organizational history through written narrative and images. Websites facilitate data identification by featuring specific links entitled “Our story,” “About us,” or “History,” in which organizations manage their identity by framing expressions of “who they are” in reference to information from or about the past (Oertel and Thommes, 2018). Key audiences of website communications are the

primary stakeholders of the organization, including customers and the communities in which they operate (Lamertz et al., 2005; Powell et al., 2016). Given the focus on claims and narration, I limit myself here to interpreting written texts, omitting any analysis of web layout and making only cursory use of images. It is important to recognize, however, that both layout and pictures constitute fruitful additional empirical data for historical analysis (Hepworth, 2016). The data for my investigation are the texts found on websites of two beer breweries, taken from a larger data base of historical narratives by Canadian craft breweries. I used interpretive techniques for coding natural language informed by content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018), anchored by my own prior research and personal experiences, as explained next.

Delineating Context for the Voice of Authenticity Claims

The rhetorical histories that organizations narrate to claim authenticity are rooted in various aspects of the industry's past and the contemporary cultural contexts of identities, interests, and values relevant to key stakeholder audiences. Given that my data comprise authenticity claims and the analysis focuses on exploring how those claims are apparent in rhetorical history, gauging audience reception is an obvious challenge. Choosing a voice thus requires also choosing reference points for recognizing acceptable claims of authenticity that are informed by situational and temporal context. As my background is in management and organization studies, not history, I dealt with this challenge by using an autoethnographic approach informed by both disciplines. Autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011) is a method that allows the researcher to combine data about a cultural phenomenon and his or her experiences with that phenomenon for retrospective analysis informed by theory.

In the spirit of autoethnographic inquiry, I therefore used my repertoire of industry knowledge and experiences to interpret the texts on the brewery websites. My practice of context (McLaren and Durepos, 2021) involved professional and personal investments, having researched craft breweries since the turn of the millennium and being an avid follower of the craft brewing scene throughout my entire adult life, starting in the mid-1980s when the first craft breweries emerged in Canada. My contextual expertise (Gümüşay & Amis, 2021) combines scholarly study of craft breweries, including their self-presentation on websites (Lamertz et al., 2005), the history of craft brewing in Canada's largest province Ontario (Lamertz et al., 2016), and authenticity (Lamertz, 2022), with practical knowledge and experiences gained over close to ten years as a home brewer during the 1990s, as well as visits to countless craft breweries over the past 30 years. Contextualizing authenticity claims involved briefly narrating a history about the Canadian craft brewing industry, in light of which rhetorical history claims can be explored. It also involved making judgments about the acceptability of those claims from the vantage point of the researcher as a member in the craft brewing collective identity community and explaining those judgments using theory.

The craft beer brewing industry is a useful context for studying authenticity claims in a historical context because the main narrative of craft production is told as tradition in opposition to the industrial mass production of the modern mainstream beer industry (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). It features an inherent appeal to historic production methods, symbolizes re-enchantment of the brewing business, and expresses nostalgia about an idealized identity community (Bell et al., 2021; Suddaby et al., 2017). Lamertz et al. (2016) have shown how craft brewing in Canada was born as an industrial renaissance that involved a resurrection of historic ideas about beer brewing and beer consumption practices typical of pre-confederation

Canada. As was the case in the US, this beer brewing renaissance took place during the 1980s in a market dominated by a few large national breweries that made nearly identical mainstream products, focused on production efficiency, and used life style advertising for product differentiation (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). The first so-called micro-breweries emerged in this highly concentrated mainstream industry by focusing on small batch technology, making beer styles other than mainstream lagers, and encouraging a return to pub drinking culture (Lamertz et al., 2016).

The original social movement was started by home brewers and beer aficionados and has grown since to become more diversified after several waves of brewery founding. What has kept the segment unified as a community is the collective identity of the craft brewery, which explicitly invokes brewing practices of the 19th century, such as hands-on production methods, dedication and commitment to the craft, traditional beer styles, the status of being the local brewery in what were then pioneer towns, the idea of beer as a staple used to celebrate community togetherness, as well as other facets of beer brewing culture in the past (Lamertz et al., 2016). The main question that drives the ensuing empirical illustrations is: what historical information is presented to create the appearance of an authentic craft brewery identity?

Embedding Rhetorical History in Objective Artifacts

Let's start by considering what kind of authenticity claims can be made in reference to objective historical artifacts and how craft breweries construct narratives around such artifacts to present themselves as authentic. In line with the theoretical materials presented earlier in this chapter, artifacts can present an organization as authentic either in reference to its own internal culture or in reference to external stakeholder culture, and I first consider the former. Founded by John Sleeman in 1988, *Sleeman Brewing* was among the pioneers of the Canadian craft-brewing renaissance. One way the company solidified its position in the market at that time was, and to this day is, by narrating historical legacy, a concept I define as the rhetorical construction of past organizational achievement and resilience (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). The company used various artifacts to weave a lineage between the present-day CEO and his family's past in beer brewing, which dates to 1834. Specifically, Sleeman claimed that its beer was based on an "original" recipe found in the personal notebook of the CEO's great-grandfather; an image of which recipe I recall seeing depicted in various stories by and about Sleeman over the years. In addition, Sleeman named its flagship brand after a brewery operated by Sleeman ancestors in the mid-19th century and packaged it in clear bottles, similar to those in use at that time. Finally, the town in which the Sleeman brewery re-established itself in 1988, and where its headquarters is located to this day, is also where the former Sleeman brewery was founded in the 19th century. This version of the Sleeman story is narrated on the company website in 2003, supplemented with images of old photographs to give it a historic feel.¹

The web-based narrative thus claims authenticity through the legacy of a family lineage that *connects* the present-day Sleeman name and occupation back into time by referencing historically validated artifacts and modern-day reproductions or re-enactments of historical artifacts (see Bruner, 1994). Rhetoric about Sleeman's internal history creates the appearance of an authentic craft identity because the brewery's origin in beer brewing dates back to before the

¹ See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20030627230408/http://www.sleeman.com/en/heritage/story.html>.

age of industrial beer. It imbues today's internal leadership and company values with an aura of historical continuity and legacy that reflect onto the internal identity (Lehman et al., 2019). Brewing a recipe from the late 19th century and filling it in bottles similar to those in use at that time further *connects* the brewery back in time as authentic by virtue of verisimilitude (Bruner, 1994; Grayson and Martinec, 2004). Altogether, a strategy of narrating stewardship for an enduring present-day craft identity is evident (Ravasi et al., 2019), as markedly expressed on Sleeman's contemporary webpage: "In the year 1834, John H. Sleeman began building his legacy based on his love of great beer. We've been thinking crafty ever since."²

A second empirical example comes from a later generation craft brewery, where authenticity is claimed in reference to an artifact of external company history, broader institutions, traditions, social history, and so on. Here, the appearance of organizational authenticity arises from the legacy a story about the founder's cultural origins impresses on audiences (Suddaby, 2016), thereby creating an aura of *conforming* with or *connection* to external cultural traditions (Foster et al., 2011; Mordhorst, 2014).

Located in the province of Alberta, "Brauerei Fahr" was founded in 2015 by a German immigrant, who is introduced on the company website as "Der Mann" (tr. "The man") and shown holding a filled traditional Bavarian beer mug (see Figure 26.1). The narrative establishes a German family history in beer brewing as an objective sign of authenticity, creating an appearance that exudes iconic authenticity (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). While the introduction appeals to the masculinity of beer brewing, the combination of equipment in the background, narrative text, and personal expression by the brewer convey craft brewing verisimilitude. For a Canadian craft brewery, a *connection* to and *consistency* with German brewing traditions creates an appearance of authentic identity given the prominence of those traditions in the history of global beer brewing and the ancestry of the owner. Notably, Fahr relies on a narrative about adherence to production methods as stipulated by the German *Reinheitsgebot*, a historical edict, issued by the Duchy of Bavaria in 1516, that beer be brewed only with barley, water, and hops (see Panel 2 in Figure 26.1). While an objective artifact of history, the *Reinheitsgebot* can be variably interpreted as intended to protect consumers, as a measure to safeguard the health and food supply of the public, or as a protectionist ploy to secure a tax base from farm production (Herrman, 2016). An authentic appearance is created because the rhetoric positions the Fahr brewery as *conforming* with the institutions of a historic brewing tradition: "Brauerei Fahr abides by this standard" (see Figure 26.2). For the purpose of constructing authentic identity, this claim evidences evangelizing (Ravasi et al., 2019) the *Reinheitsgebot* as a core claim among the wider craft beer brewing movement (Lamertz et al., 2016).

Referencing Stakeholder Audiences in the Contemporaneous Present

In the above analysis, I have used my contextual expertise (Gümüşay and Amis, 2021) and my memories of having lived through the Canadian craft beer renaissance (Ellis et al., 2011) to link present-day craft organizational identity with objective artifacts or biographic facts from the past. This raises the importance of matching the voice of self-presentation on the corporate website with the stakeholder audience who is to be the recipient of authenticity claims.

² See: <https://sleeman.ca/en/our-story>.



Jochen Fahr, Der Mann

The mastermind behind Fahr Beer is **Jochen Fahr**. Jochen was born and raised in Ebringen, Germany. His **passion for brewing** began early in his childhood when his father worked at the Fürstenberg Brewery in nearby Donaueschingen. Later in life and halfway around the globe, Jochen's passion for brewing and appreciation for local farming reconverged in Calgary when he started Brauerei Fahr. Jochen's goal was to provide the Canadian consumer with **authentic German Beer** made from recipes Fahr away.

Source: <https://www.fahr.ca/about/>, accessed 19 September 2021. Permission granted by personal email communication from Jochen Fahr, 03 November, 2022.

Figure 26.1 *Fahr Brewery “About us”*

German Purity Law

In 1516, Germany adopted Reinheitsgebot, which means “**German Purity Law**.” Today, it is the oldest provision still enforced to protect consumers in Germany. The original law stated that beer could only contain three ingredients: barley, hops, and water. In 1993, Germany added yeast as an allowable ingredient.

Brauerei Fahr abides by this standard, meaning we make our beers with only barley, hops, water, and yeast! We only brew “beer-flavoured” beer and that is our **promise**.

Learn more about the **500 years of tradition** born from the German Purity Law by clicking the button below!

Learn More!



Source: <https://www.fahr.ca/about/>, accessed 19 September 2021. Permission granted by personal email communication from Jochen Fahr, 3 November, 2022.

Figure 26.2 *Fahr Brewery: German Purity Law*

Much of my previous discussions of Sleeman Brewery focused on the company's rhetorical history since its founding in 1988 but made use of website data published in 2003 and 2021. The earlier website is among the oldest to be found for the brewery in the public web archive (<https://archive.org/web/>). Prior to the dot com bubble at the end of the last millennium, corporate websites were a comparatively rarer form of public communication (Powell et al., 2016). Sleeman has evolved over the years, which permits taking a critical look at its website appearances over the past 20 years, focusing on its acquisition of other craft breweries and pivoting around its own acquisition in 2006 by global brewing giant Sapporo of Japan. Doing so will give insight into the shifting targets of authenticity claims depending on audience and contemporaneous standards.

An important observation at the time of writing this chapter is the brewery's use of two websites, *Sleeman.ca* and *Sleemanbreweries.ca*. The former self-presents a stand-alone domestic craft brewery and emphasizes its local roots with no detail about today's global identity. Presumably, this voice is targeted at an audience unaware of, or indifferent toward, the corporate reality. The latter website integrates foreign ownership into the appearance and explicitly claims Sleeman as Canada's “third largest brewer,” detailing acquisition of

Table 26.1 Historic website narratives about Sleeman's fate during prohibition

Year	www.sleemanbreweries.com	www.sleeman.ca/.com
2003	Inexistent	1933. George A. Sleeman is caught smuggling beer into Detroit, Michigan, USA. Authorities issued an ultimatum: pay the beer taxes and get out of the brewing business or lose possession of the brewery. Sleeman chooses to sell the brewery and pay the outstanding taxes.
2016	1933. The Canadian government shuts down the Sleeman family brewery for not paying taxes on the beer they bootlegged to the US; they also forbid them from brewing for 50 years	On the heels of the roaring twenties, prohibition set in. In their true rebellious nature, the Sleeman family kept their beer flowing, brokering deals with bootleggers and gangsters like Al Capone. Eventually their notorious ways caught up with them. In 1933 Sleeman lost their licence to brew for smuggling beer. The Sleeman family was banned from brewing or selling beer for 50 years.
2021	1933. The Candian government shuts down the Sleeman brewery for not paying taxes on the beer they bootlegged to the US. They also forbid them from brewing for 50 years.	The family tradition was passed down from generation to generation. That is, until Sleeman lost its license to brew in 1933 as a result of smuggling beer during prohibition. The Sleeman family was banned from brewing or selling beer for 50 years.

Sources: <https://web.archive.org/web/20030811113533/http://www.sleeman.com/en/heritage/family.html>, 26 September, 2021; <https://sleeman.ca/en/our-story>, 24 May, 2016, 24 September, 2021; <https://web.archive.org/web/20160328025502/http://www.sleemanbreweries.ca/our-story>, 24 September, 2021; <https://www.sleemanbreweries.ca/about>, 24 September, 2021.

several Canadian craft breweries between 1995 to 2004.³ We might speculate that the intended audiences for that website are international stakeholders and consumers who do not identify strongly with craft. On *Sleeman.ca*, the family legacy started in 1834 is presented as continuous with today's "spirit of craftiness". On *Sleemanbreweries.ca*, a family "history of quality brewing" is a preamble to the new starting point in 1988, from where the brewery "never lost sight of [its] *original vision*" of "merging Canada's best craft breweries." In 2003, before the Sapporo deal, previously acquired Canadian craft brewery Okanagan Springs is introduced on *Sleeman.ca* as a "sister company" operating "in strict observance of centuries-old German purity laws". In 2016 and today, the time line on *Sleemanbreweries.ca* refers to the "purchase" of that brewery, implying a different Sleeman identity and seemingly targeted at a different audience with a different standard of authenticity.

A related observation focuses on changes in the narrative about Sleeman's demise during Prohibition, when illegal sales to the US led to a 50-year ban on operations (see Table 26.1). A dispassionate narrative on *Sleeman.ca* in 2003, relaying mostly the behavioral facts, contrasts with a 2016 narrative about the company's "true rebellious nature" in a liaison with Al Capone. Today, the narrative on both company websites is once again a sober account of historic loss and punishment, although the tone is markedly different. The corporate identity website attributes blame directly to the Canadian government, while the craft identity website appears to assume responsibility. These observations are indicative of the idea that authenticity standards vary by audience and evolve over time (Peterson, 1997). On the Canadian craft brewery website, historic accomplishments narrated in 2003 and resilient Prohibition enterprising narrated in 2016 appear to leverage legacy as a badge of authenticity in the craft brewing social movement (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Lamertz et al., 2016). In contrast,

³ See: <https://www.sleemanbreweries.ca/about>.

the Prohibition story told by the voice of a global corporation depicts the appearance of an industry stalwart. Having helped to pioneer craft beer revival of the 1980s by strength of family legacy, Sleeman can now draw on an additional 40 years of history to claim authenticity in reference to its reputation as a heritage brand (Hudson and Balmer, 2013) and its expansion as a national company. Such heritage not only constructs a new legacy for the revived Sleeman company but also permits consumers to claim authenticity of their own in connection with nostalgia about the early days of craft revival and the mythology of craft as opposition to mainstream industrial brewing.

DISCUSSION

Wadhvani et al. (2018: 1666) have argued that narrating an organization's history brings "the past into the present" and thus has the potential to shape the kind of judgements stakeholders make about organizational reality. Canadian craft breweries appeared to strive for such narration on their company websites, lifting different facets of the past into their present-day self-presentations. This chapter has shown that rhetorical history claims also have a potential to bring the organization into the past by creating the appearance that present-day organizational identity is linked to the past through authenticity as consistency, compliance, or connection. A mutuality between authenticity and rhetorical history is implicit in the continuity of extant identity, expressed through present-day claims about consistency. Inherent in this consistency are assumptions about the organization's unique identity and the subjective nature of audience interpretation that historical lineage is a *bona fide* indicator of internal cultural provenance (see Lehman et al., 2019).

Key decisions for the researcher revolve around finding a voice of rhetorical history narration and defining the contextual frame that serves as a standard for authenticity claimed by that voice. Websites are useful for exploring the way organizations connect past with the present because organizations use them to project an evolving public identity that features not only text but also images, such as historic photos or photos that are intended to express a rhetoric of legacy (see Figure 26.1). Websites are thus a tool for combining analysis of objective historical elements with interpretations about them, creating rich opportunities for cross-disciplinary research by historians and organizational scholars (Suddaby, 2016).

Affinity between rhetorical history and authenticity is strengthened because historical artifacts can be presented to signify inter-temporal conformity to authentic membership in organizational categories. The case of Sleeman showed how such inter-temporal claims involve malleable criteria used for presenting variable claims to different audiences. In the 1980s, a recipe and name from the 19th century created the appearance of an organizational identity with authentic heritage rooted in traditional craft. In 2021, an enduring vision to supply the entire nation with craft beer created the appearance of today's corporate identity through the authentic accomplishments by a pioneer of the 1980s craft renaissance. Conversely, the Fahr Brewery showed the rhetorical nature of ostensive timeless historical authenticity claims by invoking adherence to the *Reinheitsgebot*. Such a claim to authentic craft brewery membership works not only because it cites the authority of an iconic historic artifact (Grayson and Martinec, 2004) but also by summoning the spirit of the 1980s craft brewing revival in opposition to industrial beer brewed with cheap brewing adjuncts and chemical foam stabilizers. Curiously, yeast is an essential ingredient in beer brewing but was unknown at the historical

time of the *Reinheitsgebot* (see Figure 26.2), and today's craft brewers excel through innovation in the use of unorthodox ingredients. The legendary *Reinheitsgebot* as contextual reference for authenticity in today's craft brewing industry is thus both paradoxical and indicative of the rhetorical power that history can furnish.

Contextualization of authenticity claims through rhetorical history also points to one of the key challenges for doing this type of historical organizational research: the demands on the researcher are high. Contextualizing involves an effort to frame the who, where, when, and why of a study (Johns, 2006) so that trustworthy inferences can be made. Extensive knowledge is required about the industry of focal organizations, the culture of the locations where those organizations operate, as well as the history of the focal organizations and their industry. Moreover, reflexivity about how the researcher's motivations and experiences shape contextualizing each of these elements is an important challenge not only for empirical practice (e.g., Gümüşay and Amis, 2021; McLaren and Durepos, 2021) but also more generally for advancing the debates about ontology and epistemology in historical organizational research (Suddaby, 2016). For example, having myself lived through the craft brewing renaissance has been extremely valuable for making contextual linkages, and my own identification with the craft brewing scene is a source of what I will call contextual authenticity, as well as a potential cause for bias. Writing this chapter was tremendously satisfying in hindsight because it allowed me to use personal experience for analyzing and making the culture of craft brewing meaningful to the reader (Ellis et al., 2011). At the same time, the project seduced me to romanticize academically about craft brewing history. Hence, maintaining a critical eye was important for balancing nostalgia about researching the "craft show" with critical questions about the "corporate show". This balance emerged as I progressed through the research, adding a temporal layer to the process of producing contextually informed insight (see McLaren and Durepos, 2021).

Toward that end, I found that choosing the voice, context, and past artifacts for a present-day authenticity claim needed to be matched with an appropriate present time and focal audience. Sleeman's case was productive for analyzing authenticity claims in different presents because today's company no longer qualifies as a genuine craft brewery by "objective" standards and seeks to create appearances for different audiences by presenting two voices in two different web locations. In a fascinating demonstration of rhetorical self-presentation, the company narrates similar elements of its identity in past to create a different contextual frame of reference for those two voices, one of authentic craftsmanship since the 19th century and one as a pioneer and icon of Canadian craft brewing, now grown up and evolved into a corporate identity.

I used the "way back machine" (<https://archive.org/web/>), which is a public, "born-digital" archive (Nix et al., 2023) containing a rich collection of historical websites dating back to the mid-1990s. While the use of this archive poses challenges for large-scale sampling and systematic analysis (Arora et al., 2016), my modest aim in this chapter was to draw illustrative evidence from one company's website that featured narratives about its history over a period of 20 years. A traceable legacy of appearances over time thus allows exploring the intersection of objective and subjective past by tracking consistency and changes in self-presentation over time. This seems to be a fruitful avenue for future research to me. I have argued elsewhere (Lamertz, 2022) that authentication of organizational authenticity claims on websites involves the reproduction of those claims by employee audiences. A means of authentication for historical consistency could thus be operationalized as the reproduction of website claims over time.

I have built the idea that authenticity claims about an organization are made by explicitly referencing a historical context that identifies the socially constructed reality that is to serve as a standard for validating the claim. An obvious limitation of this approach is that it fails to collect direct information from audiences about that validation by instead assuming that the rhetoric of history appeals to their beliefs and expectations. I dealt with this limitation by adopting an autoethnographic stance and positioning my own view as a relevant audience that identifies with and is an experienced member of the craft beer brewing community in Canada.

Another way to approach this issue is in consideration of the social context where rhetorical history is presented and exploring the extent to which that context permits the performativity of historical narratives to exert persuasive impact (Suddaby et al., 2016). A website might be considered a legitimate forum, or zone of contact (Taylor, 2001), in which audiences can experience authenticity because they are willing to immerse themselves with the organization's rhetorical history claims as formal and official story in the public domain (Powell et al., 2016). More generally, audiences are likely to be receptive to rhetorical history because it is revealing of an organizational self, thus reducing social distance (Norman, 1991) and arousing emotional resonance (Hatch and Schultz, 2017). Beyond the website as a medium of communication, authenticity through rhetorical history could thus be explored in social contexts that furnish a legitimate stage, legitimate narrators, and opportunity for an audience to "live and feel" history (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013: 122) in such a way that they are willing to suspend their disbelief. Examples include live performances (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013), rituals and ceremonies (Dacin et al., 2010), as well as service encounters between organizations and their clients (Ashforth et al., 2008).

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Peterson RA (1997) *Creating country music: Fabricating authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Peterson tracks the social construction of authenticity among country music artists, producers, and audiences, paying attention to historical and cultural origins, temporal evolution and different conceptual meanings.

- (2) Lehman DW, O'Connor K, Kovacs B and Newman GE (2019) Authenticity. *Academy of Management Annals* 13(1): 1–42.

The authors cover a broad range of organizational research literature and identify common meanings of the authenticity construct. Throughout, they highlight temporal aspects as key areas for future research.

- (3) Grayson K and Martinec R (2004) Consumer perceptions of iconicity and indexicality and their influence on assessments of authentic market offerings. *Journal of Consumer Research* 31(2): 296–312.

The authors discuss specifically the ways in which audiences experience authenticity of objects and artifacts using a semiotic approach and focusing on tourism sites with significant connections to the past and its social constructions.

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27. The interview and researching collective memory

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INTRODUCTION

Collective memory refers to how the past is remembered by social groups, such as communities, organizations, societies – or other mnemonic communities (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996). Olick (1999) introduced a distinction between *collective* and *collected* memory. The former, he argues, rests on a conception of memory as residing within people's brains. This distinction has methodological implications as the study of collected memory is consequently often conceived of as an individual-level issue and approached through methods rooted in methodological individualism, usually aggregating different individual views into a compendium of a community's view of the past. This frequently includes oral histories (Giacomin, 2023) which study social phenomena either through the individual analysis of specific events or through the aggregative analysis of data consisting of the memories of individuals (Hodgson, 2007).

While *collected* memory indicates the aggregation of individual “pieces of memory”, more complex *social* processes are involved in *collective* memory, indicating how memory is created, changed, or preserved, therefore drawing from “objective symbols or deep structures that transcend the individual” (Olick, 1999: 338). Whereas collected memories are the aggregates of individual memories, Rowlinson et al. (2010) suggest that collective memory was developed in opposition to such an individual-psychological notion of the self. Collective memory refers to social frameworks of memory; how we remember and forget our pasts as members of groups or communities (Olick & Robbins, 1998). This again has methodological implications as it suggests, in particular, that interviews, which have for a long time been a staple method in business and management research while adequate for *collected* memory studies, are individualistically limited and therefore of much less use for attempts at studying *collective* forms of memory. Much has since been made of the “*collected* memory” problem in management and organization studies (Rowlinson et al., 2010), especially as a justification against the use of interviews as data for studying *collective* memory as they are only able to capture concurrent sentiments instead of the process that characterizes *collective* memory (i.e., Anteby and Molnár, 2012). Against this trend, our chapter explores whether and how interviews can still be useful for the study of collective memory, and more specifically if the individualist problem may be exaggerated or be overcome when interviews are designed differently, for example when involving groups of interviewees or when allowing for free-flowing discussion.

The chapter is structured as follows. We begin by briefly recounting the relevant theories regarding the ontology and epistemology of collective memory and how it might be studied. Next, we move on to arguing why and how the collective interview is a useful approach to

studying collective memory. Following that, we suggest a few guidelines for conducting interviews – both collective and individual – in the study of collective memory. Based on our analysis of relationality between the interviewer and the interviewees we suggest six practices that support using interviews to study collective memory: focusing on the present, asking questions that facilitate remembering relationally, using supporting analytical techniques, combining different types of data, serial interviewing, and encouraging collective conversations.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY STUDIES

There are various perspectives on collective memory in management and organization studies (e.g., Foroughi et al., 2020). Most approaches understand collective memory as an ongoing cultural process by which the past is represented and commemorated socially. Collective memory has important social functions in relation to a group's identity, its visions, or its assessment of its current situation. Although collective memory is related to, and sometimes conflated with the study of (organizational) history, the examination of collective memory differs from studies of history. The most pronounced difference is that studies of collective memory do not strive for an objective account of what happened. Instead, of importance are the social influences that unfold in the process of joint remembering (Rowlinson et al., 2010). Collective memory is a cultural process that, although only a part of individuals' and groups' culture, relates to the past (Foster et al., 2011) and is carried forward into the present, and it is therefore subject to continuous re-evaluation and change.

Decker et al. (2020), for example, illustrate how history and memory differ, but rather than seeing both as incommensurate as a consequence, they suggest that reflexive engagement with history written in verbal images and discourse (*historiography*) can bridge both domains in the pursuit of organizational theory generation. This involves recognition of the intellectual origins of historical concepts. Engaging with the history of history, so to speak, generates a hermeneutic loop between objectivity and subjectivity, giving voice to both historical facts as written (*'graphe'*), as well as their social production and continued reproduction.

Studying Collective Memory

Decker et al. (2020) distinguish between: (1) *retrospective organizational history*, that is, research that reconstructs the past principally from retrospective accounts, such as oral history, and (2) *retrospective organizational memory*, which often draws on ethnography and interviews to explore the role of memory in the present. These two approaches to the past will help inform our discussion as to how interviews, particularly the collective interview, can be employed to understand the working of collective memory.

Fine and Beim (2007), for example, note the difficulty with *retrospective organizational history*, in particular relating to the assessment of long-past, or long-evolving collective memories. Methodologically, they rely on sources of data that reflect public opinion, such as newspaper articles, to assess such collective memories while acknowledging the imperfection of such proxies (see also Fine, 2012). While important to understand these often broad and culturally significant events and understandings, the limitations of reproducing the past from these two perspectives are two-fold. First, a retrospective organizational history is an aggregation of curated sources. Archives and newspapers, although invaluable to accessing the

past, are not neutral (Barros, 2023). And, unless there is a deliberate attempt to further one's historical consciousness (Tennent et al., 2020), these events can be sedimented and canonized. Second, *retrospective organizational memory*, although encouraging interviews as a vehicle to study the past, assumes that interviews are the domain of the manager and are collected for instrumental purposes and not as a way to understand the social processes of the past.

Thus, individual memories can and do differ; yet, what matters from a collective memory perspective is how community members share their common past with one another, and not necessarily the canonical view of the past or how it is and can be used. The concept of culture involves aspects of knowledge, schemas, routines or beliefs used to "interpret experience and generate social behavior" (Spradley, 1979: 5). Spradley (1979) therefore implies that, as collective memory is embedded in cultural processes it can be studied through in the context of ethnographic interviews if these manage to uncover meanings and interpretations of different mnemonic communities.

Here, Olick (1999) also comments about the possible difficulty of empirically studying long-past collective memory. His primary concern is with attempting to study any notion of collective memory through surveys. While he refers to in-depth interviews only in a footnote, he notes how "[h]istorians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen ... also use survey research as well as depth interviewing to produce an aggregate picture of what I am calling American 'collected' memory" (Olick, 1999: 338).

Despite the indication that collective memory can be studied through interview(s), the hesitation to employ this method is focused on the content of the interview and not the process or relations that occur when interviewing. The primary critique is that the interview does not unlock an accurate or collective understanding of the past. In contrast, our position is that the use of interviews to study collective memory can similarly resemble empirically grounded studies of celebrations (Zerubavel, 1982), commemorations (Spillman, 1998), or the curation of monuments and museums (Nora, 1989). That is, understanding the processes of how collective memory develops from recollections of the past is the ultimate goal and not just understanding what has been said by the interviewee.

RECONSIDERING THE COLLECTED–COLLECTIVE DISTINCTION

In considering the methodological implications of Olick's (1999) influential distinction, it is worth pausing for a moment to ask whether the distinction itself is as clear as it seems; whether it veils other aspects of memory; and whether the methodological implications follow as naturally as it is often assumed. Some organization studies scholars have seemingly made the interpretation that Olick's distinction (as well as the footnote in his book on individualism specifically) implies in-depth interviews are an entirely flawed approach to studying collective memory. Using this argument, Rowlinson and colleagues (2010) argue for the study of museums as a way to avoid the collected memory problem, while Anteby and Molnár (2012) use the same claim to justify their study of corporate archives as a way to capture the collective memory of the organization as it has unfolded over time.

In terms of Olick's (1999) collected–collective distinction, the argument was specifically that there is an ontological mismatch between methodological individualism and collective memory. Olick's collective/collected distinction is therefore animated by a concern for a static form of knowledge which resides in individuals' memories, and which is merely recollected –

versus a more performative form of “memory”, the memory work (Coraiola et al., 2023; Foster et al., 2020) which is not merely an act of recounting what happened, but which is shaped in the moment of recollecting. “Collective” therefore indicates the double influence of static memory and social intermediation of memory which is now performed or produced rather than merely recounted.

This distinction is helpful in acknowledging the influence of social elements in the production of continually changing accounts of the “past”. Yet, despite the utility of the distinction between collected and collective memory, it can also be questioned in at least two key regards. The first is that even the most solitary individual cannot remember in solitude as there would be no social framework for memory where “our individual thought places itself ... and participates in this memory” (Halbwachs, 2001: 38). This is not just a matter of skepticism about the (un-) trustworthiness of someone’s memory, but the more basic problem that it is impossible to know whether a recollection is wrong because there is no outside referent by which correctness itself can be judged. This is to say that language is not merely representative of things but is, itself, subject to interpretations and in need of establishing meaning which is necessarily a social process – otherwise anything (however changing) remembered would be remembered as “correct”. Purely private memory is therefore not a question of “each person possess[ing] [their] own exemplar [of a recollection], but that nobody knows whether people also have *this* or something else” (Wittgenstein, 1958: 272). The establishment of meaning – even of something seemingly private – is therefore subject to social, shared backgrounds or frames.

A second, and related, limitation of Olick’s distinction refers to the “content” of memory itself. Remembering described here appears to liken memory to things which can be transported across time and space without altering their appearance or nature. It is a conception that maintains the idea of the content of memory as constituted of more-or-less discrete parts; “objects of attention appear as bounded entities which exist against a background whose main purpose seems to conceal itself from conscious viewing” (Cooper, 2005: 1689). The problem is therefore not only the potential malleability of instances of memory in and through the process of remembering (a process more like a reproduction), but also that instances of memory seem to be disentangled from their surroundings, therefore containing meaning and significance that is not contextualized because they are ripped out of their situationally-specific contexts.

Yet, constructivist and phenomenological accounts, in particular, have posited that shared backgrounds are essential to meaning making, establishing not just *which* elements are related but *how* they relate. Anything that “is”, a person, an organization, a physical building or a memory, is only so against a background of what it “is not”: “*You are you because you are not me. Today is today because it is not yesterday or tomorrow*” (Cooper, 2005: 1691, original italics). This means that all the objects of the world (people, days, memories) are only identifiable by virtue of being different from what they are not. It also means that what “is” – what stands out for perception and understanding – is only ever an infinitesimally small number of noticeable aspects vis-à-vis the infinite potential of the negative, absent or latent, which provides their necessary (and necessarily hidden) other. This means that remembering is dependent on not just what is being remembered, but also what is not and the context where the memories occur.

Cooper refers to this as a pre-objective space, which

cannot be objectified or grasped as an object of thought. And yet it is the source or reserve of all our ideas, objects and forms; it is like an infinite womb which can receive and generate the multiple seeds

of human agency as well as accommodating their complex developments and perpetual movement. (Cooper, 2005, 1692)

Neither collective nor collected explanations of memory pay heed to this latent, backgrounded in-betweenness which first gives rise for the meaning (i.e. the connection of sensations and signs) to be formed. Sitting outside Olick's (1999) distinction are therefore relational approaches to collective memory that recalibrate how collective memory can be investigated.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a staple in the management scholar's toolbox. As their name suggests, interviews are a coming together of views. These are typically in form of two or more individuals communicating vocally or in writing, in person or at a distance, done on a specific site or whilst moving, frequently recorded and transcribed, and often being combined with other modalities of research. Even in a qualitative and open form, interviews are often a time-efficient way of gathering data quickly and they are typically non-invasive, requiring little resource or negotiation for access. Interviews also allow research subjects voice. In making the research process apparent (the "interview" situation) research subjects may allow interviewees to prepare themselves, as well as guard against, explain or defend their reasoning.

Despite their ubiquity and utility there are, still, criticisms around the use of interviews. These critiques (e.g., Silverman, 2015) range from the inherently selective and staged nature; the priority, typically, of the spoken word; the artificial nature of the mode of inquiry over observations of organizational practice; bodily, spatial, audial and other non-verbal aspects; and the concern for peripheral and novel insights which may not surface, especially in scripted interviews which may be guided and influenced by the researchers' preconceptions. Further, there are wider concerns about voice, for example, when organizations nominate interviewees versus a researcher encountering employees freely and being able to build rapport, especially as part of more longitudinal research designs.

Various types of interview methods have been commonly applied in exploring memory in organizations (e.g. Aeon & Lamertz, 2021; Foroughi, 2020; Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020; Mahalingam et al., 2019; Petani & Mengis, 2016; Sierra-Arévalo, 2019). In these studies, interviews have been used as ways to collect data for oral histories or to add to a deep ethnographic understanding of a particular historical period. Yet, as noted above, interviews are usually associated with the production of collected memory. That is, these interviews are thought to be only useful for the collection of memories of individuals at a particular point in time.

However, interviews are not just methods of extracting data, but themselves "complex cultural, social and psychological products, which construct a particular version of those experiences" (Moisander et al., 2009: 337). In other words, individuals, when interviewed, draw on the cultural and social currents around them to inform (as they are informed by) collective memory. This makes for a curious conundrum for management researchers studying the past. The researcher may be after a particular constellation of collective memory at some historical point in time. To do so they ask interviewees questions and, in response, they get interview answers which are the products of more recent and current processes of collective memory, namely those which shape the ways in which interviewees remember in the present.

The relational aspect of the interview and memory is also discounted when interviews are seen only as uncovering collected memory. Collective remembering occurs not only in a specific context, but also within a specific culturally bounded group. As mentioned previously, it is not possible to remember the collective as if outside the collective. There is always a need to formulate memories in relation to the world where the memories occurred or are recollected. Moreover, it is not possible to remember the group without reference to the relationship that the remembering individual has to the group. Collective memory generated through interviews, is, therefore, always a product of the person's connection to that which is "not". In other words, the memories remembered through interviews are always part of "social frameworks for memory" (Halbwachs, 2001: 38).

A qualitative interview, for the basis of our argument, is a site for the co-construction of knowledge (Alvesson, 2003; Kvale, 2012). It is at this site of knowledge where two or more people have a conversation about an agreed upon topic. Throughout this conversation the interviewer will address key issues of interest with the hopes of eliciting insightful and meaningful answers from the interviewee. As the interviewer makes these inquiries about the past and what is remembered, they are creating a rapport with the interviewee. This relationship helps direct and develop the process such that what is remembered is imbued with a context and is guided through the relationship developed by the interviewee and interviewer.

This raises questions about more general understandings of the interview as eliciting objective information because of the epistemological assumptions that are usually ascribed to interviewing and the data that is collected. The assumption that interviews are only useful at mining individual memory tends to ignore that memory is time bound and contextual (Halbwachs, 2001). Although individual memories do reside within the person, collective memory is contextualized not just within the period where these individual memories occurred, but also within the collective, contemporary, context in which they are being recalled and recollected. The pre-objective condition of each interview configures what is remembered and recollected.

STUDYING COLLECTIVE MEMORY THROUGH INTERVIEWS

We have suggested that interviews can have significant utility for studying collective memory because this method allows researchers access to understand cultural processes that are necessary for studying collective memory. On one hand, conducting and drawing on interviews does not (necessarily) constitute methodological individualism. On the other hand, the relationality of collective memory, the collective nature of remembering, and the importance of context when remembering all indicate that collective memory is in fact present in interview situations, even when interviewing individuals. Below we suggest five practices to support the use of interviews in the study of collective memory: focusing on collective memory in the present, using proper analytical techniques, combining different types of data, interviewing serially, and conducting collective interviews.

Focusing on the Present

Archival research (Tennent and Gillett, 2023) has been identified as the best available option for understanding how collective memory has evolved over time. We suggest, however, that interviews still have a role to play because, first, they provide access to retrospective organi-

zational memory that typically cannot be accessed through archives which themselves are not neutral or objective repositories of knowledge but created and curated by someone for some purpose. Second, interviews are not merely processes of mining information but active sites of the production of memories. This opens up a number of research avenues, including how currently held assumptions (partly informed by collective memories) shape what is remembered and how. Third, as the process of interviewing is a performative practice, different ways of engaging with interviewees can yield different ways of remembering. As such, devising an appropriate research design and corresponding research questions become key.

Ask Questions that Facilitate Remembering Relationally

To research collective memory using interviews requires not just that the proper question(s) are asked, but that the context of the interview itself is considered. An interviewer may ask interviewees questions pertaining to issues, events, processes, norms, and practices that are *shared* by members of the community. Questions about the interviewee's personal background can be a good practice to establish rapport and an open and conversational atmosphere. This aims not at eliciting historical facts, but it represents an attempt at understanding how an interviewee relates to their community, its members and its past. For example, the researcher can ask questions to uncover how the interviewee thinks other members of the community relate to these shared issues. The researcher may also ask the interviewee for their view of the organization's founder of their workplace organization and how the interviewee thinks their colleagues might perceive the founder. Focusing on what is shared will facilitate the relational nature of remembering. The goal is to elicit, through the responses of the interviewee, an understanding of how the community constructs their perceptions of its past, thus investigating the discernible parts of the mnemonic framework they draw upon in their remembering.

It is worth mentioning that, as with any research process, it is useful to begin with familiarizing oneself with the research context. This could involve, for instance, using publicly available sources to research the focal organization. Doing so will help the researcher develop an understanding of the official history of the community in question. This will help the researcher identify pivotal events, important individuals, key premises, and other relevant issues that tend to have a bearing on collective memories.

Use Supporting Analytical Techniques

The atomistic focus of the interview can be mitigated through diverse, analytical techniques, such as narrative analysis which do not veil the 'context' in which an inquiry is set. Narrative analysis – the examination of form, structure, and content of stories (Feldman et al., 2004) – has been noted for its usefulness in discerning meaning in texts and utterances (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Narratives are considered crucial practices of memory. In fact, memory practices are considered by some to be narrative practices (Brockmeier, 2002). Assmann, for one, has noted how “narrative is articulated and dispersed through a culture's countless discursive registers: from myth and fairy tales to literature, film, advertisement and everyday conversation” (Assmann, 1992, cited in Brockmeier, 2002: 27). Thus, Assmann highlights how collective memories are articulated through narratives, even when told by individuals. Similarly, Adorisio (2014) demonstrates how to access collective memory in organizations

through interviewing their members and how narrative analysis can be deployed to make sense of the collective memories of bank employees about their workplace.

Narrative approaches therefore differ from techniques that seek to elicit content, such as many forms of thematic analysis. Thematic analyses are widely used as a method for qualitative analysis and they are broadly used in connection with interview-based qualitative research, and the study of collective memory. Thematic approaches are commonly defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 80). Yet, thematic analyses can also retain contextual awareness, for example when they focus on patterns between participants across interviews. Foroughi and Al-Amoudi (2020), for example, offer an example of combining thematic analysis with a form of narrative analysis in their study of collective forgetting in a charitable organization. From their analysis they identify important changes and narratives at the case organization. In so doing, they make sense of the broader collective memory processes at work in the organization without treating interviews, and the data they collected through this process, as an aggregation of collected memory.

Combine Different Types of Data

Collective memory does not just reside in narratives (Brockmeier, 2002), but also in practices (Blagoev et al., 2018; Foroughi et al., 2020), physical spaces (Cutcher et al., 2019; Decker, 2014; Sanfuentes & Acuña, 2014), and more generally in ‘technics’ which preserve and transmit knowledge (Zundel et al., 2023). A collective memory researcher can further their investigation beyond narratives by augmenting their study with other types of data or vice versa. For example, interviews can be a very useful complement to observations when studying how collective memories are carried in organizational practices because interviews grant more detailed explanations, from the perspective of the members of the mnemonic community, regarding the observed practices. The collective memory researcher can, by observing the community, become sensitized to particular practices, rituals and turns of phrase that members of the community enact. In addition, the researcher may observe how their interviewees relate to the different people and objects they encounter. This may help identify previously unknown relationships and hierarchies in the community. These data may contain hints or insights of important issues about the community’s past. Utilizing different types of data may thus enable the researcher to ask better questions in the interviews. In the same vein, conducting interviews *in situ* – as per the importance of the materiality of collective memory (Eisenman & Frenkel, 2021; Nora, 1989) – could generate important additional mnemonic insights into how spaces and artifacts code and retain knowledge and identity.

Sanfuentes and Acuña (2014) provide an example of the value associated with augmenting interviews with other kinds of data. Their study of a Chilean geriatric hospital undergoing a decades-long transformation helps explain how the past and the present combine to haunt the community within the physical premises. The backbone of the study is an eight-month, on-site ethnography. The authors also conducted interviews to gain understanding on how the organizational community related to the physical premises and the continuous changes in the past. The interviews helped situate observations and construct meaning, in tandem with expressions gained from physical site visits, allowing them also to consider the ongoing and future impact of collective memory in the community.

Serial Interviews

Interviews can also be useful when studying changes in collective memory over time. Serial interviews allow for the study of how perceptions of the mnemonic community change over time and how these communities construct narratives across different periods (Soulsby, 2020). Interviews can also help develop deep understandings of a subject's life-history, their relationships with their communities and how these also change over time (Read, 2018). Serial interviewing is also a way of cultivating relationships between the researcher and the interviewees, enabling more open interview situations, which may yield richer, less scripted accounts. These are important outcomes for a reflexive qualitative researcher seeking to maximize their understanding of the research topic (Alvesson, 2003).

The serial interviews offer an avenue for studying collective memory over time because they provide insight on the changing perceptions around studied phenomena and the potentially richer interview data. Opportunities can be found, for instance, where an organization is embroiled in a scandal, or in the middle of a significant change process. In these types of situations, perceptions about the past may change relatively rapidly as evaluations of the present evolve. When complemented with an analytical technique such as narrative analysis, the serial interview and studying collective memory may become a natural fit.

The drawback of serial interviews is the challenge of scheduling repeat sessions (which requires for interviewees to be committed), as well as finding a balance between the number of interviewees to safeguard against drop-outs and the volume of work entailed in large numbers of participants.

The Collective Conversation

The consideration of social and contextual aspects of collective memory also invites us to reconsider group interviews and focus groups, which have somewhat fallen out of favour in organizational research or are limited to consumer studies. These approaches have utility because their research design actively includes processes of social negotiation, especially when their aim is not to merely collect much data in a speedy and efficient manner, but when attention is placed on the processes of negotiation and remembering that occur during the sessions.

For example, there is research that is emerging that demonstrates how group interviews can be used to explore and identify key aspects of a group's collective memory. Smith (2007) advocates for the use of group interview in his study of the post-war identities of women in the UK and suggests that:

observing remembering in groups provides a means to investigate the capacity of individuals, in the small social groups they remember in, to engage critically with inherited ideologies. Thus, we can become more receptive to the creation of common accounts that draw on and build group solidarity as well oppositional accounts that challenge existing assumptions. (2007: 88)

Similarly, Coupland (2019), in her study of the collective memory of open pit miners from Blaenavon, Wales, demonstrated the usefulness of group interviews as a means to unpack the process of remembering and how this process contributes to the development of collective understanding of the past. Crucially, these discussions are not merely collected memories, but showed that remembering happened in situ and in relation to others' utterances, and it allowed

for differences in memory to emerge and be debated. Here, memory was not just present and collected in a group session but the interview setting itself served as a catalyst for memory to be made and negotiated socially.

The collective interview opens new doors to the study of collective memory. Interviewing people with others present can lead to new memories being accessed and explored. This relational approach offers the potential for the iterative development of memory. That is, the collective frameworks of collective memory can, possibly, be further accessed and uncovered as the group co-constructs its memories of the past. Indeed, collective interviews such as focus groups are particularly suited to examine social interactions and processes of meaning-making (Morgan, 2012). When led by a skilled collective memory researcher, the group can have rich discussions about the past which may continually resurface elements or renegotiate meanings as the session unfolds, allowing the researcher not only to study the social processes involved in remembering but also to find out how aspects of the past relate to a group's current situation and collective understanding. Unlike previous research (e.g., Do et al., 2018) where the recollections of organizations were examined in silos, the group interview can become a site of investigation itself, and not just a means to study the past.

CONCLUSION

This chapter reflects on the potential for further discussions about interviews and the possibility of examining the process of collective remembering. Current discussions tend to focus on the individual, atomized version of memory that is extracted from interview. We have suggested that instead of trying to elicit content, social and contextual aspects may very well become subject to analysis in interview settings. We have pointed to a number of techniques which can aide such a focus on the production of memory, including but not being limited to ways of building relationships with interviewees, narrative analyses, the consideration of spaces and artifacts, serial interviews and, in particular, collective forms of interviews and focus groups. There are two specific examples that are particularly salient. First, the collective interview can be used to identify sites where the past is remembered differently by different groups (e.g., Kumar, 2023; Bastien and Coraiola, 2023). This means that this method can be employed to understand not just how different people remember different pasts, but how different groups remember the past. The value in this approach is that it might be possible to see why different groups see the past differently, such as ideology, organizational history, or circumstance. Second, another value of this approach is to study, in real time, how groups remember. The memories of past are not set and are ongoing accomplishments. There are few discussions about how groups remember and how specific memories become privileged over others. The collective interview offers an opportunity for management researchers to see the factors that contribute to one memory being accepted and remembered over other.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

- (1) Foroughi H and Al-Amoudi I (2020) Collective forgetting in a changing organization: When memories become unusable and uprooted. *Organization Studies* 41(4), 449–470. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840619830130>.

The authors study how collective memory changes in the process of organizational change, drawing on both interview and ethnographic data. They find that organizational collective memories lose their practical foundations and the social relations that underpin them are reorganized. The study is a first-rate example of using the interview method to generate understanding of collective memories within and of an organization at a specific point of time. As such, this article is closely related to several main themes in our book chapter, including how to select interview questions to study collective memory, how to combine interviews with other types of qualitative data, and how understanding of collective memory can be generated using interviews.

- (2) Morgan DL (2012) Focus groups and social interaction. In Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti and Karyn D. McKinney, *The Sage handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 161–176.

Morgan (2012) examines interactions in focus groups based on symbolic interactionism, in close relation to the relational aspects of collective memory we discuss in our chapter. The author examines research design decisions that will generate focus group interactions geared towards the goal of the research project, echoing some of the guidelines we provide in our chapter. These decisions include focus group composition, interview questions, moderation style, as well as the role of the researcher/facilitator.

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28. Taming the ‘mythical beast’: revisiting the myths of historical research in international business scholarship

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INTRODUCTION

Historical methods and studies employing the past are widespread in business studies (Wadhvani et al., 2018). International business (IB) has a long-standing tradition in practising with historical evidence, e.g., Buckley, Casson, Dunning, Vernon, Wilkins and others. Jones and Khanna (2006) note that history matters to IB research as it advances an understanding of inherent qualities of IB phenomena, such as temporal variation, dynamism, change, long-term orientation, contextuality and path dependencies. However, the emphasis of the IB discipline on quantitative, reductionist approaches and the scepticism towards historical methods have resulted in losing sight of the value of historical research (Buckley, 2016; Jones and Khanna, 2006). Indeed, suggestions for more historical research in IB ‘have gone unheeded, with this kind of research remaining rare in the major journals’ (Perchard et al., 2017, p. 904). Recent debates on contextualization and causality in IB have offered an opportune time for revisiting historical methods (Buckley, 2021; Burgelman, 2011; Jones and Khanna, 2006; Perchard et al., 2017; Welch et al., 2022). Nevertheless, historical methods and their applications are yet shrouded in a veil of myths for many IB scholars.

First, while IB in its early years was rooted in the historical tradition, over time, under the pressure of standardization to emulate the field of natural sciences, historical research (and qualitative research) came to be seen as non-rigorous (Jones and Khanna, 2006; Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014). Moreover, the fact that historians are generally theory-averse did not ease the situation (Buckley, 2016; Decker, 2013). Additionally, the lack of methodological guidance on ‘how this research should be conducted’ (Kipping et al., 2014, p. 305) has garnered growing criticism for the lack of disclosure when it comes to explaining the methodology (Decker, 2013; De Jong et al., 2015).

The purpose of this chapter is to enhance IB scholars’ current understanding of historical methods and challenge existing myths regarding the use of historical research in IB. In doing so, we draw on relevant methodological literature to identify deeply rooted myths about historical research in the IB discipline. We further engage in an analysis and comparison of examples of historical research published in the *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) and *Business History* (BH). In light of our ‘detective inquiry’, we reflect on the practice of historical research in the two journals, demystify expectations about business history and offer guidance on how to enhance its practice in IB.

Our chapter contributes to the calls for bridging historical research and IB scholarship (see Buckley, 2021; Burgelman, 2011; Perchard et al., 2017). We argue for a collaboration between

business historians and IB scholars, suggesting that historical research can enrich IB theories, concepts, and methods.

OUR (MYTHICAL) STORY OF OUR IB LEGACY AND HOW (IB) SCHOLARS VIEW HISTORICAL METHODS: A WALK AMONG 'MYTHICAL' CREATURES AND MYTHS

Several business history researchers (e.g., Decker et al., 2015; Suddaby et al., 2014; Wadhvani et al., 2018) and IB scholars (e.g., Buckley, 2009; Burgelman, 2011; Jones and Khanna, 2006) have worked during the last decades to bring social sciences, and IB research, closer to business history. For example, Burgelman (2011) creates connections between IB and business history research by addressing their philosophical underpinnings, namely reductionism in social sciences and narrative approach in history research. He suggests longitudinal qualitative research as a bridge-builder, encapsulating features from both disciplines, to overcome this philosophical caveat. Decker et al. (2015) and Suddaby et al. (2014), in turn, bridge the methodological gap between the social science positivist hypothesis-testing focus, and the traditionally implicitly and narrowly defined business history methods, by advocating nuanced pluralistic interpretive and constructivist qualitative research approaches; whereas Schultz and Hernes (2013), Wadhvani et al. (2018), as well as Ravasi et al. (2019) discuss how the broader historical contexts of the past can be used to understand the more micro-foundational business phenomena of the present, and also the future. Moreover, Da Silva Lopes et al. (2019) tried to empirically bridge the gap evidenced between IB and history research by offering a concrete example on how historical evidence can be used to challenge internationalization theory.

As these aforementioned examples indicate, IB and history research can study similar topics, but their established differing disciplinary conventions and traditions decide upon the applied approaches and intended contributions, hindering possibilities for cross-fertilization and bridge-building, and strengthening the 'mythical' barricade between the two disciplines. If we look at these differences more closely, we can trace a logical path from the used methodological approaches to the reached theoretical contributions in both streams of research. IB scholars prefer using clearly defined and established methods that employ unambiguous and clear procedures (Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Griffith et al., 2008). This builds up to the requirement of studies to produce contributions based on solid and rigorous analytical or theoretical evidence and aiming primarily for generalizable theorizing and proven theoretical deductions (Buckley, 2016, 2021; Gaddis, 2002). Business history research follows its conventions and procedures in assessing and analysing historical data, but instead of focusing on methods descriptions, which is more the norm in IB research, historical studies rather focus on convincing the reader by building plausible explanations based on a thorough assessment of broad historical evidence over time (Kipping et al., 2014; Lipartito, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Yates, 2014).

In line with this, historical studies do not attempt to give generalizable theoretical explanations to phenomena, but rather offer insights and exemplars of past events that could hold merit in understanding the events in the present and the future (Pierson, 2004; Welch et al., 2022). These differing foci give rise to IB scholars' scepticism towards historical methods: how could IB researchers convincingly engage in research where the focus is not primarily on transparent reporting of established methods and making undisputable theoretical contribution?

EMERGENCE OF OUR (MYTHICAL) EXPECTATIONS

Upon investigating the methodological literature on historical research, we identified three myths. These 'mythical' expectations were not only a consequence of what was being said in the scholarship but were also rooted in the disciplinary convention of IB to which we ascribe to (i.e., given our published work, PhD education, etc.). As such, it is this IB research tradition and methodological legacy that guided us in formulating the three mythical expectations. We now relay these three myths in more detail below.

Myth #1: Historical Research is about the Past

Cambridge dictionary defines 'historical' as 'connected with the study or representation of things from the past'. Therefore, in this regard, when we think of 'historical research' there is an explicit understanding that we are researching the 'past'. As such, history is the interpretation of the past done in the present (Wadhvani et al., 2020). Indeed, historical research is our 'primordial reckoning with time' (Godfrey et al., 2016, p. 602).

According to Kipping and Üsdiken (2014) this reckoning with the past can manifest in three ways. The first being 'history to theory', which uses historical evidence to either engage with theory building or theory testing. The second being 'history in theory', in which history is explicitly accommodated in the theoretical model. They go on to identify a third one, which they call 'historical cognizance'. While the third mode anchors itself in either of the two former approaches indicated, it, however, grounds them more explicitly in 'the historical context and its idiosyncrasies' (p. 542). In IB, Buckley (2021) sees the reckoning with the past on two levels: macro time and micro time. While the former focuses on temporal factors pertaining to the external environment of the firm (e.g., market cycles), the latter is more internally focused (e.g., management decisions).

Beyond this, what this reckoning with the past suggests is that researched phenomena are fraught with 'past-dependencies' (e.g., see Rodrigues and Child, 2003), as present 'organization structures' are a consequence of past decisions (Kieser, 1994). As such the 'past' becomes crucial to understand contemporary events. It is with this growing realization that we have seen a growing acknowledgement in management research (Godfrey et al., 2016), and also in IB to incorporate historical research to theorize IB phenomena (e.g., see Buckley, 2009, 2016, 2021; Burgelman, 2011; Jones and Khanna, 2006).

However, 'how' the past needs to be researched and theorized has garnered concerns. For example, a researcher can view the past as static and objective, which arises with one's fixation on 'presentism'. Presentism can be understood as trying to explain the past by using 'knowledge, concepts, and schema of the present period' (Godfrey et al., 2016, p. 596). As such, presentism can result in a distorted understanding of the past (e.g., by idolizing the present and diminishing the past). In fact, most historians would agree that the past and its meanings are ever changing and fluid. This is because the past is (re)interpreted and (re)negotiated, given the 'historical moment' from which it is being scrutinized (Godfrey et al., 2016). Consequently, history is 'malleable', and should not be seen as a mere static representation of the past (Suddaby et al., 2010) but is in fact 'in constant dialog with an ever-advancing present' (Brundage, 2017, p. 2).

Myth #2: Historical Research Relies on Archival Data

Historical research's 'hallmark' is its deep-rooted reliance on the relics of the past, namely archives or archival data (Bansal et al., 2018; Decker, 2013). For example, according to Decker (2013) historical sources are central when using any kind of historical approach. Similarly, Argyres et al. (2020) define historical research as 'the compilation, description, and critical analysis' (p. 345) of historical sources with the aim to provide context driven explanations. Given this embeddedness of historical sources in how historical research is viewed, it is not surprising to see that papers using a historical approach predominantly rely on archives (De Jong et al., 2015).

The emphasis of historical research on 'historical sources' is not unfounded. This is because it represents the story of the past that can provide a better understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, when archives 'speak' they can be a useful 'record of the stories and the sense-making of past actors' (Decker, 2013, p. 166). Archives are usually formed of survived records of past events and capture perceptions and interpretations of those who experienced or recorded the events in their historical context (Decker, 2013; Koselleck and Tribe, 2004; Wadhvani and Bucheli, 2014). As such, they are fragments of the past (Lipartito, 2014) that need to be weaved together for sensemaking (Barros, 2023).

In the context of IB, an organization's past records can be valuable for the organization to maintain agency on its past by preserving its memory. In this regard, there are many different types of historical sources that an organization can keep as an archival record. These archival records can come in many different forms (e.g., letters, speeches, reports, minutes of meetings, legal documents, organizational charts, correspondence, etc.), but an important common underlying characteristic is that these records hold information to make sense of past events. Now with 'digitization of archives', and the emergence of born-digital archives (Nix & Decker, 2021; Rosenzweig, 2008), accessibility to historical sources has increased, which opens up new opportunities regarding the use and analysis of historical data (Vaara and Lamberg, 2016) (Nix et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, historical research's overreliance on archives has also been criticized for generating 'bias' (De Jong et al., 2015; Sewell, 2005). This tension arises with the claim that archives preclude 'data generation', but instead are already generated (Buckley, 2016; Kipping et al., 2014; Strati, 2000). As such, any form of archival data can be seen as 'selective' data, generated from the inclusion of certain data (or voices) whilst the exclusion of others. In short, the 'powerful' is heard and the 'powerless' is silenced, and this dilemma has been highlighted at great length, for example, in archives related to colonial rule (Buckley, 2016; Cohn and Dirks, 1988; Spivak, 1988). Consequently, this 'selection process' creates an inherent bias towards certain nations, regions, races, classes, genders, creeds, political groupings or belief systems (Buckley, 2016). Whilst the nature of this 'silencing' may differ from state-related archives that historians rely on than organizational-related archives that IB scholars investigate, parallels nonetheless can be drawn. One way to address this issue is to undertake 'source criticism', in which archives are also seen for what they do not have instead of just looking at what they contain (Buckley, 2016; Stoler, 2009).

Myth #3: Historical Research is Narrative

Historical research is known for its reliance on narrative explanations (Burgelman, 2011; McCullagh, 2000; Rowlinson et al., 2014) that are context embedded and plausible under certain conditions. This emanates from the need to contextualize information present in archival sources (Kipping et al., 2014). As such this narrative style of explanation tends to be rich. Consequently, it is not difficult to see why 'historians' in general tend to be 'theory averse' (Buckley, 2016; Decker, 2013), because detailed accounts presented in historical narratives violate theory building's fundamental tenant of 'parsimony' (Bacharach, 1989; Whetten, 1989). In fact, we see historical narratives as embodying what Tsoukas (2017) calls 'conjunctive theorizing', a style of theorizing that embraces complexifying explanations instead of simplifying them. As such it is a craft, which White (1995, p. 243) very succinctly explains in the following quote:

History is rather a craftlike discipline, which means that it tends to be governed by convention and custom rather than by methodology and theory and to utilize ordinary or natural languages for the description of its objects of study and representation of the historian's thought about those objects, based on 'research' of the 'primary sources' and efforts to co-ordinate these with 'secondary sources'.

While the above quote illustrates well the nature of historical research, it also provides a deeper understanding of why there are methodological asymmetries present between historical researchers and social science researchers. The fundamental difference is the lack of reliance of historical research on 'methodology' and 'theory'. As Decker et al. (2020) point out that 'only rarely do historians discuss how their analysis of sources leads to the development of argument and narrativization (Megill, 2007; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2009; White, 1984)' (p. 1131).

Therefore, this has led to a common accusation that historical research lacks reporting standards and transparency (Decker, 2013; De Jong et al., 2015). In fact, much of the reporting (e.g., on sources) is often relegated to footnotes (Kipping et al., 2014). Nonetheless, in spite of this criticism, there are well founded reasons for the lack of methodological discussion in historical narrative. As Rowlinson et al. (2014) indicate, adherence of historical narratives to 'rigorous logic' can risk the very spirit of narrative explanations, a bit 'like a comedian trying to explain why a joke is funny before actually telling the joke' (p. 254). On the other hand, narratives can explain how historical events embed generalizations that indicate how processes in the past have produced the structures of the present (Gaddis, 2002), as well as historical narratives can give rise to theories explaining present phenomena (Mordhorst and Schwarzkopf, 2017).

DEMYSTIFYING OUR EXPECTATIONS THROUGH AN INQUIRY INTO *JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS STUDIES* AND *BUSINESS HISTORY*: OUR REVIEW

We engaged in 'detective work' to confront our 'mythical' expectations and conducted a thorough inquiry of a small sample of historical papers with an IB focus published in the *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) and *Business History* (BH). The selection of the two journals was driven by the principles of purposeful sampling. In particular, we

sought to capture best practises of historical research in a top tier IB outlet, namely JIBS and a corresponding top tier outlet that aims to promote business history as a scholarly discipline, that is, BH.

We searched the ‘Publish or Perish’ database for academic articles using the keywords of ‘time’, ‘history’, ‘process’, ‘longitudinal’ and their derivatives for JIBS and the keyword ‘internationalization’ (or ‘internationalisation’) and its derivatives for BH. Our search covered the period 2000–2021 and generated $n=155$ articles for JIBS and $n=39$ articles for BH. This temporal window captures signs of a tentative shift in attitudes towards historical scholarship in IB (see Burgelman, 2011; Jones and Khanna, 2006; Welch et al., 2022). We reviewed all articles considering their temporality and internationalization focus. We excluded conceptual and methodological papers and selected examples that brought together aspects of historical research (e.g., historical evidence, temporal or chronological focus) and IB phenomena following the author’s statements. The selection process was undertaken jointly by the three authors and pointed to six information-rich articles per journal that manifested notable aspects of historical scholarship.

We thoroughly scrutinized the 12 selected articles following an interpretive approach that concentrated on making sense of the methodological choices: the role of time, the appreciation of context and role of theory and theorizing practices of each study. Table 28.1 presents the papers of our sample and offers a comparative view of the two journals. The review process helped us challenge our expectations about historical research in the study of IB phenomena. Most importantly, it offered nuances on breaking myths about historical research in IB scholarship, which are discussed below.

BREAKING MYTHS (OR MYTH BUSTERS)

In this section we demystify the three myths indicated earlier. We confront our ‘mythical’ expectations drawing on the aforementioned sample of historical papers published in the JIBS and BH. We now discuss in more detail below ‘how’ our three ‘mythical’ expectations were busted (also see Figure 28.1).

Myth Buster #1: Historical Research is about the Past, as well as the Present and the Future

While historical research is surely about the past it is not only about the past. In fact, historical research acknowledges that the past is very much intertwined with the present and the future (Wadhvani et al., 2018). As Pettigrew (1992) rightly said that ‘the past is alive in the present and may shape the emerging future’ (p. 10). This, therefore, leads to an ‘additional temporal dimension’ (Yates, 2014, p. 274), in which the ‘previous history’ is not the only object of inquiry but also the ‘subsequent history’ (Yates, 2014, p. 274). However, this relationship of the present and future is simply not ‘past’ dependent. In fact, the past is very much construed, interpreted and understood with the lens of the present. This means that our ‘subjective’ understanding of the ‘past’ very much depends on the ever-evolving present (Ericson et al., 2015). As such historical research can accommodate not only the past, but also the present and future, which also broadens the scope for making a ‘meaningful contribution’ (Maclean et al., 2021).

Table 28.1 *Comparing and contrasting Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS) with Business History (BH)*

	Current state of <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> (JIBS)	Sources of learning for IB scholars from <i>Business History</i> (BH)	Key takeaways for IB scholars from business history
Methodology	– All used typical case study methodology with contextualized explanation – Case studies used because of theoretical context (theory-driven) – Data sources: – Semi-structured interviews – Archives – Field observations – Photographs – Videos (TV commercials, documentaries) – Methodological decisions are reported in the 'methodology' section of article. The emphasis is on methodology, and can be seen as a signal of reliable and rigorous research – Time used historically to explain process from beginning to end (longitudinal)	– Uses case studies for historical approach – Case studies primarily used because of empirical context (phenomenon-driven) – Data sources: – Archives – Interviews – Methodological decisions are reported throughout the article. However, the emphasis for BH articles is not on methods and thus they don't report the methodological considerations with similar detail as JIBS articles	– Broadening the perspectives of case studies from contemporary cases to historical settings – Considering the opportunities of induction and abduction for theorizing – Increasing the scope of data sources: – Digitalized archives – Born digital archives – Methodological rigor in conducting studies does not solely reside on the reporting of the methodology, but rather how the methods are convincingly and reliably applied – Topics can be studied in and on time
Role of Time	– Time used historically to explain process from beginning to end (longitudinal)	– Time is embedded in the historical analysis of the case/internationalization phenomenon – Temporal complexity: the past, present and future are part of the historical account	– Addressing context as an inseparable part of the studied topic – Analysing and treating context richly without reductionism
The Appreciation of Context	– Context used to explain theoretical relevance of case company and its environment – Using separate section to introduce context and case company	– Some articles distinguished between introducing case and discussing findings, while for others context was embedded in the historical narrative/explanations	– Putting more emphasis on presenting relevant (new) data and empirical insights and evidence, than reviewing existing (repeating) literature and theories in studies
Role of Theory	– All included a literature review on the specific IB phenomenon discussing and connecting research gap to methodology – Findings discussed against specific theories/concepts	– No literature included or only very briefly, less of a focus on theory and more on storytelling through findings from the case studies – Only one study thoroughly compared findings to IB theory (RBV), others either ignored or solely referred to theory without clear references	

	Current state of <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> (JIBS)	Sources of learning for IB scholars from <i>Business History</i> (BH)	Key takeaways for IB scholars from business history
Theorizing Practices	– Theory building through propositions/pointing out differences to existing theory and significant theoretical contributions, or – Process/model generated as output challenging existing theories or adding contributions	– Analytical narrative of cases and/or visualization of internationalization strategies – No ‘conventional’ theorizing output. The stress is on addressing a gap as opposed to building a new theory	– Moving the IB theorizing focus increasingly from theory testing towards theory building – Focusing in producing theories that can explain a process rather than just describing its outcome
Selected articles	Berns et al. (2021); Haley and Boje (2014); Mecs-Buss et al. (2019); Minefee and Bucheli (2021); Pant and Ramachandran (2017); Sidki Darendeli and Hill (2016)	Amdam (2009); Amdam et al. (2020); Boldt-Christmas et al. (2001); Cheong et al. (2015); Quek (2012); Strandkov and Pedersen (2008)	Berns et al. (2021); Bucheli and Salvaj (2018)

This conversation between the past, present and the future was very much apparent in Haley and Boje's (2014) paper. The paper's aim was to understand 'how multinational enterprises (MNEs) create narratives of internationalization to mitigate the risks of FDI' (p. 1115). For this they unpack nine narratives of McDonald's internationalization that differ on space-time conception. In fact, the paper is very forthcoming in stating that among one of the paper's contributions is the 'multiple sensemakings of time in the storytelling of internationalization' (p. 1116) and contend that 'the dialogic process of storytelling involves nonlinear time where the past and future can collide in the present' (p. 1118).

However, the engagement with the past, present and future is deliberate. It rests on the premise that in order to understand a phenomenon its temporality needs to be studied in its full richness, which not only includes the past, but also the present and future. In fact, such an understanding also helps in acknowledging the complexity of time. In fact, Haley and Boje (2014, p. 1128) go on to explain this complexity very vividly in the following quote:

We presented internationalization through the lens of McDonald's international storytelling. We showed how dominant narratives may fall into crisis, disrupting rhythms of space-time. Rather than a simple search for locational advantages, internationalization then becomes a nonlinear combination of mundane and strategic repetitions of storytelling events. Shadows of past, present and future offer alternatives that could have been, or in the future still might emerge as options for stakeholders, all in dialogic relationships to one another, and as alternative temporalities. This view challenges the dominant IB paradigm of MNEs as hierarchies with omniscient managers narrating for other stakeholders; instead, the saturated space around the process of internationalization becomes pluralistic, polyphonic, local-global environments that include multiple points of view that emerge in successful narratives.

As such this paper was a great moment of reckoning of how historical research can pave the way to unpack these temporal intricacies and complexities that go beyond past dependencies. In fact, historical research can lead to a conversation between the past, present, and future, which was very evident in Haley and Boje's (2014) nine space-time conceptions on McDonald's storytelling.

In fact, this complexity of the past, present and future unravels in our Universe that we live in every day. For example, the stars that we see each night represent the distant past that we get to experience today. To put this into perspective, let us be a little imaginative in our explanation. Beta Centauri (also known as Hadar) is a star system that is 390 light years away. If, somehow, someone was looking today at our planet Earth from Beta Centauri, what would they see? Well, they would likely see events that unfolded 390 years ago. In short, time is complex both in nature and the phenomenon we experience.

However, historical research is not merely about the past, but equally about the present and the future. As Yates (2014) points out historical studies embrace temporal complexity. Historical researchers 'interpret the temporal period being studied from a later point in time', considering subsequent events in the interpretation (Yates, 2014, p. 275). Therefore, focal events are understood from the past ('previous history') as well as from the historian's present ('subsequent history') (Yates, 2014, p. 274). Additionally, historical accounts serve as valuable aids in coping with future concerns (Commager et al., 1965). The quicker we come to terms with this temporal complexity the better we can understand IB-related phenomenon.

Myth Buster #2: Historical Research Relies on Archival Data, as well as on Other Data Collection Techniques

A distinctive feature of historical research is its primary reliance on archives (Buckley, 2009; Wadhvani and Decker, 2017). Nonetheless, as our small sample of IB related historical papers showed, researchers did get ‘creative’ in considering different types of data.

For example, Cheong et al. (2015) wanted to understand internationalization using two successful Malaysian Chinese family firms to explain ‘why context as well as structural factors matter for success’ (p. 842). In doing so, they employ the case history approach and collect data in the form of in-depth interviews of family members conducted by the authors and secondary interviews in media.

Likewise, Mees-Buss et al. (2019) use a single case study to understand ‘historical chain of events’ (p. 1520) regarding Unilever’s transformation of organizational form into a ‘neoglobal corporation’. They capture this via a multi-cyclical process that captures the evolution of the MNC for the period from 2000 to 2012. As they go on to say that while their analysis was confined to 2000–2012, they also ‘examined Unilever’s earlier transformation in the late 1960s–1980s from a multidomestic organization to a transnational organization, using historical data (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Jones, 2005; Wilson, 1968)’ (Mees-Buss et al., 2019, p. 1522). However, beyond historical data they also make use of interviews. In fact, they explain ‘how’ interviews helped them to capture multiple perspectives, and as such they interviewed from top executives to managers that led to a total of 68 interviews. They go on to further elaborate that ‘the large number of interviews, in combination with secondary data sources, allowed for sufficient triangulation to make sure our reconstruction of the events is as accurate as possible’ (Mees-Buss et al., 2019, p. 1521).

Similarly, Berns et al. (2021) are interested in ‘how do whole networks develop’ (p. 480), and ‘how do they facilitate the internationalization process?’ (p. 480). To develop this understanding, they go on to use historical interpretive case studies by selecting two clusters of Italian firms outside of Italy. They (Berns et al., 2021, p. 483) go on to collect data using interviews, as the following quote illustrates:

The first wave of data collection occurred in 2006 in Timisoara, Romania, and consisted of 17 interviews, while the second wave of data collection took place in 2013–2015 in Shanghai/Suzhou, China, and consisted of 27 interviews. The timing of our data collection was motivated, in part, by observations of increasing Italian investment in these regions and our resulting desire to better understand this phenomenon.

They then go on to indicate that detailed archival data were used to ‘supplement and verify the data from our interviews’ (p. 484).

What the above examples illustrate is that researchers can use an historical lens and supplement archives with other data, such as interviews. Nonetheless, what this also illustrates is the issue of ‘how’ distant in the past is the IB phenomenon that is being investigated? For example, Amdam (2009) looks at the internationalization of Norwegian organizations from 1945 until 1980. The focal period is quite distant (i.e., 29 years ago) given that the paper was published in 2009. Similarly, Quek (2012) ‘examines the growth of the Intercontinental Hotel Corporation (IHC) between 1946 and 1968’ (p. 201). Again, the researcher is interested in examining a period that is distant from the time (we assume) the researcher conducted this research. This focal period is even more distant than the focal period analysed by Amdam

(2009). It is when the past that wants to be investigated becomes so 'distant' that adds to the eventual practical problem of being able to supplement archives with other data collection techniques (e.g., interviews).

Another pertinent question here is whether the organization that is being analysed is still 'around'? As for the examples (i.e., Berns et al., 2021; Cheong et al., 2015; Mees-Buss et al., 2019) given above, these organizations were very much present. However, this kind of luxury of having the organization around may not always be the case, which may also lead to the issue of 'survival bias'. This means that organizational records are likely to be accessible if the organization survives or if it is absorbed by another organization (Yates, 2014). As such before the digital era for many 'historical' related phenomena, being able to supplement additional data with archives may not only be a luxury but also impossible. Nonetheless, what this recent emerging trend suggests is that if an 'organization' is around, archival data can be supplemented with interviews, which can add more richness to our understanding of the IB phenomenon.

Moreover, the nature of 'survival bias' may also change given the digital age, and emergence of digital archives. As Yates (2014) rightly said, 'a creative approach to discovering data beyond corporate records (e.g., consulting personal diaries, trade publications) can broaden what is discovered' (p. 6). While Yates indicates archival sources beyond corporate archives, we also see the digital era offering 'creative' avenues to collect data beyond company archives. For example, a lot of digital information is now present on organizations that are around (or not even around) in the form of videos (e.g., on YouTube), or tweets or posts on different social platforms (e.g., Facebook), or in digital news. In fact, there are now companies that were born and have seen their demise in this digital era (e.g., Theranos). Therefore, the presence of these digital archives/data may very well change, likely in the future, the way researchers will undertake historical research.

Myth Buster #3: Historical Research is about Narratives, but is also about Process and Variational Theorizing

Historical research is indeed narrative in nature (Rowlinson et al., 2023). However, as evident in the papers we analysed it does not always have to be narrative. In fact, this has been highlighted by Rowlinson et al. (2014) as one of the key epistemological dualisms present in history, termed as 'dualism of explanation' (p. 251). This dualism highlights how on one hand historians focus on narratives, whereas organizational researchers would 'subordinate narrative to analysis' (p. 251, also see Maclean et al., 2016). This comes across very evidently in our own analysis, where we come to the realization that indeed historical research is capable of engaging with different theorizing styles. This includes process and variance perspectives of theorizing.

For example, Pant and Ramachandran (2017) are interested in understanding 'how do multinational subsidiaries navigate identity duality?' (p. 665). For this they select the case of Hindustan Unilever, which is Unilever's Indian subsidiary. They employ historical research by analysing archival data of annual speeches given by the Chairman to Hindustan Unilever's shareholders from 1959 until 2015. They go on to propose a process on navigating identity duality. Moreover, they go on to indicate the benefit of using a historical lens in IB with the following quote:

As Buckley (2016: 18) argues, ‘Historical research methods can help international business researchers to be more questioning, analytical and critical and to think laterally in terms of alternative states of the world, different choices and outcomes.’ If we had responded to our research question – how do subsidiaries navigate identity duality? – by engaging solely with specific identity threats or with short periods of institutional stability, it could have yielded an incomplete picture. The dynamics of identity duality and institutional duality unfold over a long span of time and require what Gioia and Patvardhan (2012) call the viewing of the full motion picture and not just that of a frame within that motion picture. (p. 689)

As such they make the case regarding the necessity of coupling a historical lens with process; because ‘even a process study might elicit a false conceptualization if an appropriate historical span is not covered’ (Pant and Ramachandran, 2017, p. 689) thereby leading to wrong conclusions.

Likewise, there were papers that also employed variance thinking in their historical research; for example, while Haley and Boje (2014, p. 1126), to understand McDonald’s internationalization, unpack different narratives and propose five variational-style propositions using variational language, namely ‘the more, ...the more’ and ‘the greater..., the greater’.

These examples illustrate that historical research produces rich narratives but also process models and variance-based thinking. As stated by Burgelman (2011), historical methods allow to make sense of extensive narratives to particularize the general or generalize the particular (Burgelman, 2011). It has the capacity not only to ‘test theories’ but to also ‘develop and extend existing theory and to produce new or improved theory’ (Buckley, 2009, p. 326).

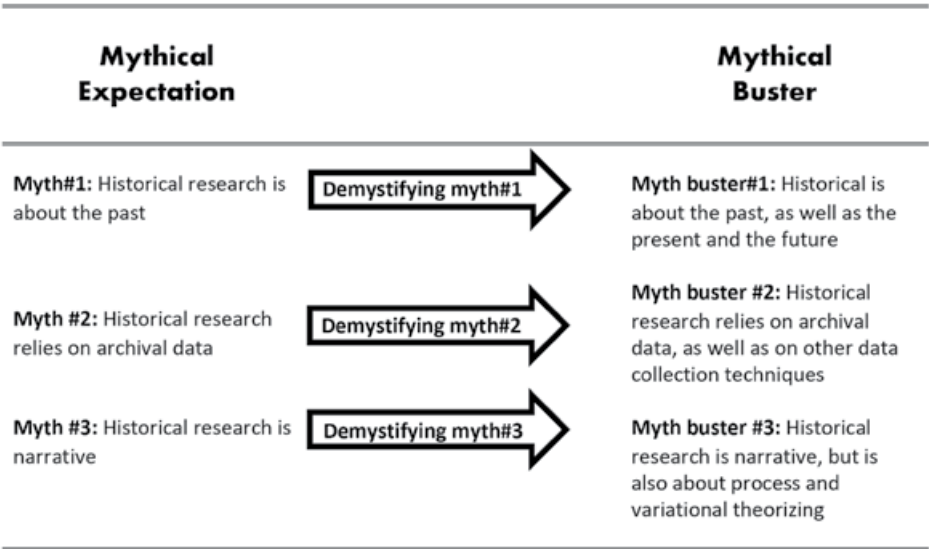


Figure 28.1 *Demystifying our ‘mythical’ expectations on historical research*

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

In the recent years, historical research has been reclaimed by IB scholars as a promising lens to advance new understandings of IB phenomena by allowing for contextualized explanation, thick description, and temporal sensitivity. Historical scholarship has been approached as a theorizing alternative to reductionist or decontextualized types of theory development and as a means to account for complex social systems and non-linear, multiple causality (Burgelman, 2011; Welch et al., 2022). We further highlight the potential of historical scholarship not only in informing the understanding of IB scholars but also in bridging the divide between academia and practice. To illustrate historical research appeals to non-expert audiences, practitioners and policymakers who find rich narratives on (unique) IB phenomena easily understandable and transferable to their own realities.

However, the lack of procedural transparency and 'formal' theoretical grounding has proliferated scepticism towards historical methods. The 'reliability' of historical evidence is questioned and hence its ability to produce inferences that draw on the past to understand the present and future has remained largely untapped by IB scholars. This criticism, that does not allow the potential of historical methods to be fully realized, emerges from 'mythical' expectations or misconceptions that IB scholars hold about historical methods.

Our chapter contributes to the discourse on historical scholarship in IB research by identifying and challenging 'mythical' expectations about historical research. We reflect critically upon our IB legacy and preconceived views of historical research as referring only to the past, relying on archival data and producing narrative accounts. We challenged these expectations by means of a brief review of historical research in JIBS and BH. We show that IB scholars can benefit from historical methods, which are meaningful for understanding the past, present and future; utilize a wealth of data beyond company archives and engage in process and variance-oriented theorizing. On the other hand, we also see historical researchers learning from IB scholars. In particular, historical researchers can engage with more 'source diversity' that is by supplementing archival data with field observations and interviews. Moreover, historical researchers can engage with IB researchers by incorporating 'theory' sections in their article (also see Yates, 2014).

Hence, in this regard we see our book chapter contributing to the bridging of two different disciplinary conventions by explicitly articulating ways from which both IB and historical scholars can hopefully benefit.

ANNOTATED FURTHER READING

For readers that are new to the International Business (IB) discipline and wish to learn more about the recent calls from IB scholars to incorporate historical research in IB research, we recommend the following three journal articles. As you will note that authors of these articles justify the usefulness of historical methods by appealing to the IB disciplinary convention of focusing on theory.

- (1) Burgelman, R.A. (2011) 'Bridging History and Reductionism: A Key Role for Longitudinal Qualitative Research', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(5), pp. 591–601. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2011.12>.

In this essay article the author suggests the usefulness of theory bridging role by combining both historical methods and grounded theorizing for IB scholars.

- (2) Buckley, P.J. (2016) 'Historical Research Approaches to the Analysis of Internationalisation', *Management International Review*, 56(6), pp. 879–900. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-016-0300-0>.

Like item (1), this article also highlights the usefulness of historical methods for better sensemaking in internationalization research. For a more recent discussion also look at item (3).

- (3) Buckley, P.J. (2021) 'The Role of History in International Business: Evidence, Research Practices, Methods and Theory', *British Journal of Management*, 32(3), pp. 797–811. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12446>.

This review suggests the different ways that historical methods can contribute to international business theory.

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