

## *Unplugged* - "Carte blanche"

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# Toward a Historical Consciousness: Following the Historic Turn in Management Thought

by Roy SUDDABY

In the original tradition of the "Unplugged" section, "carte blanche" grants a wild card to world-class scholars to share their own perspective on novel ways to conceive of management today. They may offer new avenues and draw up an agenda for a specific research question. Authors have to be invited to submit to the "carte blanche" series by one of the editors.

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the emerging "historic turn" in management theory by identifying epistemological and ontological areas of correspondence between business historians and organizational theorists. Three emerging constructs that hold high potential for bridging business history and management theory are identified: rhetorical history, organizational legacy, and ANTi-History. The paper concludes with a discussion of the need to nurture a broad-based and more inclusive "historical consciousness" in business history that expands our collective assumptions about the nature and function of historical knowledge.

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The purpose of this essay is to explore the massive intellectual opportunity that exists in bringing together management scholars and historians. Part of this conversation must inevitably address the equally massive intellectual chasm that exists between historians and management theorists; I want to understand why it exists, why it persists, and what can be done to bridge it.

Since many business historians are based in business schools, I suspect they are faced with the task of bridging this gap every day in their teaching, research, and service to the community. However, over the past few years I have been given some clues as to the breadth of the chasm and what a tremendous challenge it will be to bridge it. Let me give you a couple of examples drawn from my personal experience to illustrate the depth of the problem.

When I became the editor of the *Academy of Management Review*, I received a manuscript from a couple of prominent business historians. The manuscript was extremely well written and offered a thoughtful and detailed historical case study. It was a lovely paper, but I could not publish it because it contained empirical data—the data were carefully collected, detailed, primary

sourced, and rigorously analyzed, but it was an empirical paper nonetheless and I had to desk-reject it. When I asked the authors why they would send an empirical paper to a journal clearly mandated to publish only theory, they informed me that they had sent the paper to our companion outlet designed for empirical studies, *the Academy of Management Journal*, but it had been rejected because it contained no data!

One clear element of the gap between management theory and business historians is therefore that we do not share common assumptions about what constitutes data. That is, there is a clear disagreement over what comprises historical fact on the one hand and social fact on the other, and no mutual understanding of how each contributes to evidentiary proof. This is a difference of epistemology—in other words, a difference in the two factions' understanding of what constitutes historical fact and how we might use that fact to construct knowledge about the world.

Let me offer another example, drawn from my experience in the business historian's world. While editor of the *Academy of Management Review*, I was invited to present my thoughts on how we might better bridge management and business history scholarship to an annual meeting of US business historians. I spoke about my current research, which explores the various ways in which large multinational corporations use history strategically to market products, manage their brand, improve stakeholder affiliation, and enhance their human resource practices. I suggested, somewhat flippantly perhaps, that for the corporate historian, history was more than brute facts; it was a rhetorical resource used to construct meaning, identity, legitimacy, and authenticity in the corporation. History, I suggested, was a powerful and largely unexplored symbolic asset of the firm.

The reaction was not positive. I made the clearly naïve error of citing the American critical historian Hayden White's 1975 book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. The crowd seethed. "That was not history," I was told, "and Hayden White was not a 'real' historian." I think I saw pitchforks.

A second clear component of the gap between management theory and business history is therefore a disagreement over what history is and how it is constituted. This is a difference of ontology, or fundamental assumptions about the nature of the subject matter of history.

Combined, the two incidents usefully describe the philosophical geography of the challenge we face: the chasm between us is based on basic differences in assumptions about the nature of history and how historical knowledge is constructed. The existence and depth of this gap is particularly notable because, ostensibly, management theorists and business historians study the same empirical phenomenon, namely managers and organizations.

While these differences seem incommensurable, some hopeful indications of a new zeitgeist in both academia and the "real" world suggest they are overstated. In the next section I describe the efforts to bridge the gap between business history and management and the huge intellectual opportunity available for those who can accomplish this.

## THE HISTORIC TURN

In fact, it is an exceptionally good time to be a business historian. To paraphrase Clark and Rowlinson (2004), there appears to be an emerging "historic turn" in management scholarship. Let me give you a few examples. The *Academy of Management Review*, currently the highest-ranked management journal by citation impact, has just published a Special Topic Forum titled "History

and Organizational Studies: Toward a Creative Synthesis" (Godfrey, Hassard, O'Conner, Rowlinson & Reuf (2014). This is complemented by a recent publication by Rowlinson, Hassard and Decker (2014) that highlights the fundamental philosophical differences that exist between historians and management scholars.

Similar special issues on management and history have recently been published in *Organization* (Rowlinson, Casey, Hansen & Mills, 2014) and are forthcoming in *Management and Organizational History* (Mills, Durepos, Foster & Suddaby, 2015), *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* (Wadhvani, Kirsch, Gartner, Welter & Jones (2015), and *Organization Studies* (Mordhorst, Popp, Suddaby & Wadhvani, 2015). A recent book edited by Marcelo Bucheli and Daniel Wadhvani titled *Organizations in Time* and published by Oxford University Press (Buchelli & Wadhvani, 2014) combines leading management scholars and business historians in an exploration of using historically grounded research in analyzing organizations. Another collection recently published by Routledge and edited by MacLaren, Mills and Weatherbee (2015) brings together leading management historians in a focused conversation about theorizing the past. Collectively, these activities suggest a high degree of activity in the borderland between history and management theory.

The historic turn is not confined to academics. A recent report in *The Economist* (2013) indicates that the general public shares a fascination with history and the organizational context within which it is preserved. The true effect of this new sensitivity to history is perhaps best captured in museums that, as an organizational form, are experiencing their own form of renaissance: *The Economist* reports that, globally, the number of museums has doubled over the past two decades, rising from 23,000 to 55,000. Meanwhile, in 2012, attendance at museums in the United States exceeded 850 million visitors—more than the attendance at professional baseball, basketball, and football combined. China, a relative latecomer to the museum industry, opened 451 new museums last year alone.

What is perhaps more interesting is how the public is using museums. Yes, they look at artefacts and host academic lectures. Increasingly, however, they are more likely to use museums as a backdrop for a political announcement or corporate event, to unveil an artist, or to announce a philanthropic project. It seems that, in addition to displaying the "brute facts" of history, museums also serve a latent function of lending gravitas and legitimacy to events. As the director of the Tate Galleries, Sir Nicholas Serota, observes, the modern museum has evolved to become a "forum as much as a treasure box" (*Economist*, 2013). The renaissance of museums suggests that the "historic turn" extends far beyond academia. Not only does the historic turn imply a growing awareness of history as a substantive subject of intellectual inquiry, it also implies a growing awareness of history as an important context within which a mysterious range of social and symbolic interaction occurs. Actions are given legitimacy, authenticity, status, or social capital simply by being viewed through the lens of the past.

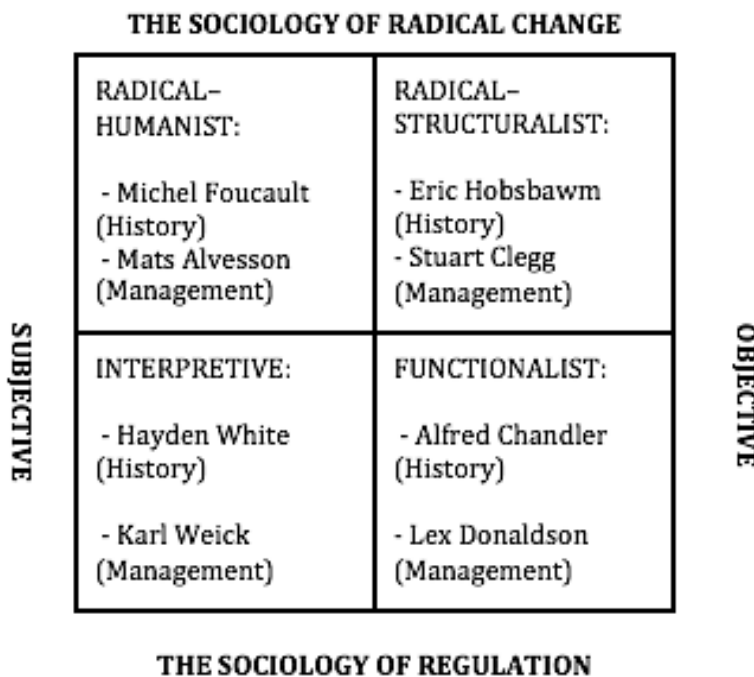
The historic turn seems to include an interesting distinction between history as manifest knowledge (i.e., "brute facts") and history as latent knowledge (i.e., a lens through which we view the present). In postmodern language, the former sees history as text and the latter as subtext. This potential distinction is important and may help us understand the difference between historians and management scholars. I will return to this distinction, but first we must establish a more rigorous description of how the ontological and epistemological distinctions both separate us and identify the spaces we might potentially agree upon. To accomplish this, I extend the bounds of my analysis beyond the somewhat narrow confines of business history to include a broader range of sub-topics of history, including cultural and social history, Marxist history, and even literary approaches to history.

**PARADIGMS: SOCIAL FACTS AND HISTORICAL FACTS**

In 1979, two organizational sociologists devised a highly influential typology for making sense of the broad range of theoretical perspectives that were starting to populate organizational theory. Burrell and Morgan (1979) carved the theoretical space of organizational analysis into four quadrants based on two dimensions: assumptions researchers held about the nature of the world (ontology) and assumptions researchers held about the way in which we can construct knowledge about the world (epistemology). The epistemological continuum runs from assumptions that our knowledge of the world is largely objective—that is, based on empirical observations of a concrete reality or largely socially constructed—or based on subjective perceptions of a shared social reality. The ontological assumptions vary depending on whether the world is viewed as both stable and “real” (the regulation, consensus, integration point of view) or tends more toward entropy (i.e., assumptions of change, conflict, and domination).

Their resultant two-by-two diagram (reproduced in Figure 1) describes four basic paradigms in management theory. The first, functionalism, is characterized by assumptions of organizations as comprising a stable and objective reality that is knowable through empirical observation. This highly positivist sphere, perhaps best exemplified by contingency theory in organizations, which assumes that organizations have discernable and stable functions that are reflected in human action, was then, and continues to be, the dominant paradigm in management theory (Donaldson, 2001).

**Figure 1.**Applying Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) Framework to History



The second quadrant is the interpretive paradigm in which researchers assume a world that tends toward stability but one that is largely the product of the shared subjectivities of its participants—that is to say a world that is largely

socially constructed or resides within widely shared assumptions about the world. This sphere is perhaps best illustrated by the pioneering work of Karl Weick (1995) on sensemaking. While significantly less widely espoused than functionalism, this paradigm has enjoyed increasing popularity in management research over the past decades.

The third quadrant, radical structuralism, assumes an objective reality but one in which the world tends toward entropy, conflict, and change. This view sees the social world as the product of ideologically rooted socio-economic contradictions. Marxist-inspired critical theory in management such as the work of Stewart Clegg best illustrates this paradigm (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). The fourth quadrant is radical humanism and captures theory in which the world is assumed to tend toward radical change and where our knowledge of that world is largely subjective. Here, social structures are the result of ideology promulgated by powerful social actors. The radical-humanist approach to management scholarship is perhaps best exemplified by the work of Alvesson and Willmott (1992) or Aktouf (1992), whose research has focused on understanding how work and organizations can be restructured so that workers are seen as more than mere instruments of economic productivity. Indeed, most current critical theory approaches to management theory fall into this category. Both of these latter two categories comprise the least popular approaches to management research, particularly in the North American context.

When one sees the landscape of management research dissected on these dimensions, it is easy to conclude that management theory is not a particularly unified scholarly community. Moreover, it is a short intellectual leap from there to see that it is a similar mistake to assume that historians comprise a unified scholarly community. Indeed, one could easily apply Burrell and Morgan's framework to business history and identify leading theorists in each of these quadrants. One might, for example, be able to support the argument that Alfred Chandler (1962) represents the functionalist view, noted Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1997) reflects a radical-structuralist point of view, Hayden White (1975) articulates an interpretive perspective, and Michel Foucault (1975) illustrates the radical-humanist paradigm.

Two important observations flow from applying the Burrell and Morgan framework to both history and management scholarship. First, the chasm that we see between management and history occurs largely between the functionalists of both camps. That is, it is the hard-nosed scientists of both history and management that seem to be engaged in a war over what constitutes persuasive social versus historical knowledge. Functionalist historians see functionalist management theory as ahistorical and, conversely, functionalist management scholars see business historians as atheoretical (Zaret, 1978).

Second, and perhaps more important, the epistemological and ontological differences between historians and management scholars seem to be much smaller in each of the other quadrants. As a result, the work of Michel Foucault is well represented in critical management theory (i.e., Townley, 2002), Hayden White's work is popular in interpretive and hermeneutic-inspired business scholarship (O'Conner, Hatch, White & Zald, 1995), and, as I will demonstrate below, Eric Hobsbawm's (1987) writing has inspired a promising new stream of management research on rhetorical history.

Therefore, the options for bridging the gap between management and history are much more promising in the periphery than in the core of each discipline. The key reason for this, which I alluded to earlier and will elaborate on below, relates to how the construct of "history" is understood. If history is understood as a method for uncovering "truth," which is an assumption that functionalists in both history and management share, they both must agree on the best methods for uncovering that truth. That is, their shared epistemological and ontological assumptions must also converge on a consistent methodology. In

the following section, I explain why this convergence will never occur amongst the functionalists in both camps, largely due to how their epistemological and ontological assumptions become subsumed in methodology. However, not all hope is lost, as I then turn to a discussion of how the hinterlands of both organization theory and history provide a roadmap forward.

## **METHODOLOGY: RATIONALISM VERSUS EMPIRICISM**

It is important to note that functionalist historians and economic theorists did not always disagree. In his Marshall lectures to the Faculty of Economics at Cambridge University in 1980, Eric Hobsbawm (1997) pointed out that, early in their collective projects, economics and history “grew up together.” He observed that the great economic theorists Karl Marx and Adam Smith leaned heavily on history to construct sweeping social theories that permeate and inform economic theory to this day. The same argument could be made for the rest of management theory. Institutionalism, which informs a considerable component of organizational sociology today, draws largely from the German sociologist Max Weber, whose core theoretical argument is constructed from a historical analysis of Protestantism.

Over time, however, socio-economic theory and history have diverged dramatically. Hobsbawm blames this divergence on methodology and points to the now-obscure war on methods in history—the *Methodenstreit*—between the Austrian School of history and the German Historical School (Hobsbawm, 1997) in the late 1880s. Led by Carl Menger, the Austrian School argued that economics could develop only by focusing on “first principles” or universally valid assumptions about human nature (or ontological “givens”) from which one could deduce theoretical models that would explain historical and economic change (Perlman, 2003).

This argument was in opposition to the German Historical School, which, led by Gustav von Schmoller, argued for a more scientific inductive approach to economic theory in which the compilation of increasingly detailed data, combined with an increasing scientific understanding of human nature, would allow researchers to construct theories based on historical data or experience. The debate over the value of inductive empiricism (German Historical School) versus deductive rationalism (Austrian Economics) devolved to methods and generated the schism that we see today, in which historians emphasize empirical data and are highly sceptical of theory and, conversely, economists and, to a lesser extent, management scholars over-emphasize theory and are critical of “dustbowl empiricism.” This debate continues in management theory today, where key scholars argue both for (Suddaby, 2014) and against (Pfeffer, 2014; Marquis & Davis, 2005) the value of theory and empiricists continue to push toward abandoning theory entirely (Hambrick, 2007).

However, as noted above, this debate is largely between functionalist researchers in management (and economics) and history. Moreover, they use this argument to focus attention on methods and to avoid any serious discussion about transparency in epistemological or ontological assumptions. As a result, they end up in somewhat sterile debates over minute differences between what constitutes “social facts” versus what constitutes “historical facts” (Hayek, 1943). Sadly, these debates will not be easily resolved because they often have more to do with the protection of professional jurisdiction than with any serious interest in understanding the foundations of historical knowledge.

## BUILDING BRIDGES ON THE PERIPHERY: INSTITUTIONS AND HISTORY

Fortunately, not all management or historical knowledge is functionalist. Powerful ideas and highly influential research programs continue to emerge from other paradigms. Indeed, it is the interpretive, humanist, and radical paradigms that offer a productive counterbalance to the overly rational and functional explanations for organizational and economic behavior that permeate the functionalist viewpoint. In the balance of this essay, thus, I explore the spaces in which history and management theory can opportunistically inform and enrich each other. I focus my attention on institutional theory, as it is not only a powerful theoretical perspective in contemporary management thought but also a theoretical perspective that has emerged in reaction to the dominant functionalist perspective in economic theory. As such, it offers the most fertile ground for hybridized approaches that combine history and organization theory.

I conclude by sketching out three emerging constructs from institutional theory that usefully integrate history and management. Each construct is drawn from one of the peripheral paradigms in Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework. The first, "rhetorical history," reflects an interpretivist bridge. The second, "organizational legacy," is derived from radical change. The third, "ANTI-History," is based on humanist assumptions.

Institutional theory is an approach to understanding organizations as the product of social rather than economic pressures (Suddaby, 2013). It has become particularly popular in management theory because of its ability to explain organizational behavior that defies economic logic; why, for example, do organizations adopt practices that actually reduce efficiency? The answer is that they do so in order to look like other, more successful organizations. Institutional theory suggests that social pressures to conform and appear legitimate often outweigh technical pressures to perform economically (Scott, 2001).

Institutional theory<sup>1</sup> draws from the observation that organizations are subject to broader social pressures and taken-for-granted assumptions that emanate from larger societal institutions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It is also based on the observation that, over long periods of time, organizations become infused with meaning and value or symbolic significance that extends beyond their original technical or economic purpose. The origins of these ideas emanate from early research done by the American sociologist Philip Selznick (1949), who published a fascinating and profoundly influential study of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The study outlined how partisan individual interests diverted the original collective economic intent of the TVA. His key insight was that just as individuals never completely comply with their formal roles in organizations, neither do organizations ever completely comply with their formal structures. As a result, organizations are often more responsive to social pressures and objectives than they are to economic or technical pressures and goals.

While Selznick's original study was highly attentive to history and historiography, subsequent research in the paradigm has shifted quite significantly away from historical case studies to adopt a more quantitatively driven methodology that is markedly less attentive to history. Elsewhere, I have been highly critical of the way in which institutionalism has ignored history (Suddaby, Foster & Mills, 2014) as well as the way in which the term "institution" has been trivialized in institutional theory (Suddaby, 2010). The term "institution" has been applied, variously, to such things as bottle recycling programs (Lounsbury, 2001), the emergence of nouvelle cuisine (Rao, Monin & Durand, 2003), and the constitution of professional firms (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). While these are interesting examples of organizational change, I doubt that many historians would consider these events to be illustrative instances of a change in

1. It is important to note that here I am talking of sociological institutional theory which draws from seminal work by Meyer, J.W. and Rowan, B. 'Institutionalized organizations' and DiMaggio, P.J. and Powell, W.W. 'The Iron Cage Revisited'. This sociologically inspired strand of institutional theory is distinct from the more economically oriented strand of institutional theory described by North, D. *Institutions: Institutional Change and Economic Performance*.

institutions. Indeed, organizational scholars who study institutions often struggle to define what an institution is.

Historians, by contrast, have a pretty clear understanding of what an institution is: an enduring and powerful social structure. They therefore see institutions as more substantial social structures than organization theorists in terms of both time and space. Institutions exist and exert social influence over decades, if not centuries, affecting multiple generations. Similarly, institutions extend their influence more broadly than mere organizational networks, but extend deeply into the core fabric of society. The Church, the university, the family, guilds and professions, and the nation state clearly qualify as institutions from the point of view of historians. Indeed, there are some historians who would argue that there are only a handful of true institutions in the history of civilization (Hall, 1982). Moreover, historians tend to understand very well the degree of effort and work and the confluence of circumstance and agency required to successfully change an institution.

## **HISTORIANS TO THE RESCUE: THE 'PARADOX' OF EMBEDDED AGENCY**

Historians, therefore, have the capacity to enrich our understanding of what institutions are and how they change. Many historians would argue that explaining institutional change is the core project of most historical analyses. Let me offer but one example of how adopting a historical sensibility might help resolve one of the key intellectual problems in neo-institutional theory: the paradox of embedded agency.

A key issue for neo-institutionalism is explaining how institutional change occurs. The theory is premised on the notion that social pressures for conformity become so reified in an organizational field that it often becomes difficult if not impossible for actors (individuals, organizations) even to conceive of alternative ways of organizing (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009). As a result, explaining how profound change occurs in organizations or organizational fields has become problematic for the theory. Most explanations revolve around either allowing for highly incremental or evolutionary change in the field that manifests itself over very long time frames or, alternatively, revolutionary change facilitated by extremely powerful actors who bridge multiple fields and are therefore less subject to the totalizing cognitive effects of institutional pressures to conform.

While this mode of explaining institutional change has become common in management theory, it is subject to intense criticism because it relies on the unique presence of a "hyper-muscular" actor and involves a somewhat cumbersome notion of agency (Suddaby, 2010; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). In fact, like most positivist notions of agency, institutional theory suffers from a clear lack of nuance in how it constructs agency. This arises, one suspects, because of positivist assumptions, drawn from the physical sciences, of the need to identify single causes of change that can be attributed to an independent variable such as an "actor" or an "agent."

Unfortunately, processes of social, political, and economic change rarely conform to the causal logic of the physical sciences. Historians understand that social causality is messy and complex and typically cannot be traced back to a single source. Agency in history is situated and diffuse; that is, it occurs in response to unique and specific historical conditions. Moreover, historians are reluctant to attribute change to a single agent or a single process. Instead, they look for "multiple sufficient" causal explanations, or holistic narratives of change that seek parsimonious explanations acknowledging the convergence of multiple causal factors at a given place and time (Goertz & Levy, 2007). See, for example,



the messy causality of organizational design that business historians present to capture the emergence of the modern corporation (Gelderblom, de Jong & Jonker, 2013) and contrast that with the more rational and path-dependent accounts offered by management theorists (Williamson, 1981).

Were institutional theorists to adopt this more nuanced, sophisticated, and, ultimately, more realistic view of causation, not only would the paradox of embeddedness disappear, it would seem naïve to even raise it as an issue. Indeed, the kernel of my argument is that the collaborative potential of historians and organizational theorists has been compromised by the inability of each group to relax its ideological assumptions about ontology and epistemology. A more pragmatic approach would be to encourage the development of constructs that usefully combine the manifest objective function of history (i.e., history as truth) and its latent interpretive elements (i.e., history as interpretive context). In the balance of this essay I propose three such constructs, each drawn from one of the peripheral paradigms of social knowledge described by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and each of which appears to be generating some interest by scholars in both business history and management theory.

## **BRIDGING CONSTRUCTS: RHETORICAL HISTORY, ORGANIZATIONAL LEGACY AND ANTI-HISTORY**

**Rhetorical History.** A number of management scholars are analyzing the ways in which history is used strategically as a symbolic resource in large organizations (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; McGaughy, 2013; Shultz & Hernes, 2012; Suddaby, Foster & Quinn-Trank, 2010). Rhetorical history is defined as “the strategic use of the past as a persuasive strategy to manage key stakeholders of the firm” (Suddaby, Foster & Quinn-Trank, 2010: 157). The construct draws from prior historiography, and particularly the work of Eric Hobsbawm (1987), that suggests a powerful interpretive influence in how the “brute facts” of history are presented and often misrepresented for social and political purposes.

The construct of rhetorical history accurately captures an emerging phenomenon in contemporary business in which history is, increasingly, identified as an important but underutilized asset of the firm. An expanding stream of research has started to explore how corporations use history, sometimes invented history, to promote consumer products (Ooi, 2002; Holt, 2006; Foster, Suddaby, Minkus & Wiebe, 2010), to manage strategic change (Brunninge, 2002; Linde, 2009; Schultz & Hernes, 2012), and to construct identity (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011; Suddaby & Foster, 2015). It also draws from the emerging phenomenon of private history consulting firms such as History Associates, The History Factory and other organizations whose purpose is to engage in “heritage management” in which history is used to leverage “the collective memory of organizations—the stories told, the words used, and their commonly understood meanings—to help implement strategies and tactics that shape the future” (Suddaby & Foster, 2015).

Rhetorical history is a useful bridging construct because it is based on two key components of history. Foremost, it draws from the “subtext” component of history as a sensitizing rhetorical device. Its ontological position is clearly constructivist, and it skilfully demonstrates the mechanisms by which history can be used to convey social and symbolic capital—that is, authenticity, legitimacy, and reputation—to the corporation. In this regard it is clearly an important theoretical construct for management scholars. But its capacity to perform these functions is directly linked to the structural objective elements of history as fact. That is, the objective elements of history as truth place clear limits on what can

and cannot be done in the social-symbolic realm. Indeed, it is the largely unexplored interaction between the structural-objective-positivist elements of historical truth and the constructivist-interpretive-subjective elements of historical narrative that allow rhetorical history to accomplish its goals. It is also this duality that makes the construct so important for cooperative investigation by bi-disciplinary teams of historians and organizational scholars.

**Organizational Legacy.** A second bridging construct for historians and organizational theorists is the concept of "organizational legacy." The construct is based not on positivist assumptions of an objective reality but one in which the nature of the world tends toward dynamism, if not outright entropy. As a result, the theoretical focus is on identifying constructs that explain endurance and stability in a world that tends toward change. The construct of organizational legacy offers one such explanation.

Organizational legacy focuses attention on particular and localized elements of the history of an individual, an organization, or an economic region that explain unique elements of competitive behavior. The research shares a common assumption that the entities' unique historical heritage is a critical variable in explaining economic outcomes. One stream of research, for example, focuses on how local histories explain variation in economic activity. So, for example, some researchers point to the unique history of a particular region to explain its economic success. Porter (1998) thus uses the long maritime history of Holland to explain the contemporary dominance of the Netherlands in sea transportation. Saxenian (1996), similarly, draws a comparative analysis of the local histories of Silicon Valley and Boston to account for the relative success of the former over the latter in supporting high technology. The unique experiences of local regions construct distinctive cultural and economic histories—legacies—that imprint local organizations and individual entrepreneurs with historically specific identities and world views that can inhibit or enhance economic opportunity.

Related streams of research that rely on the notion of "legacy" focus not on local history but rather on individual or organizational history. Feldman and Romanelli (2013), for example, use the term "organizational legacy" to describe how some individuals become gifted entrepreneurs because of their unique histories. Variation in the success of individual entrepreneurs, they argue, is best explained by analyzing their prior organizational or professional "imprints." This research draws from the foundational work of Stinchcombe (1965), who argued that the core values of a powerful founder could be "imprinted" on an organization and shape its character in ways that delimit choices and create a degree of path-dependant outcomes for the firm. This argument bears familiarity with early institutional theory arguments, particularly those of Selznick (1956) that suggested the founding conditions of some organizations infused core values and meanings that came to define the essential "character" of an organization.

Organizational legacy is also a useful boundary construct because it draws on key elements of positivist organizational theory and functionalist history. However, because it is based on ontological assumptions of dynamism and entropy, its focus is less on grand theories of historical evolution and attends, instead, to particularistic and localized historical influences. Its primary methodology is prosopography (Stone, 1971)—unique even for modern historians—and suggests a point of collaboration between management theorists interested in individual differences as a causal explanation and historians who are interested in micro-history.

**ANTI-History.** A final bridging construct for history and organizational theory is the concept of ANTi-History. This view of history is derived from the radical-humanist sphere in which our knowledge of history is assumed to be socially constructed in a world that tends toward ongoing and radical change. The construct emerges from the application of key elements of Actor Network Theory

to historiography (Durepos, 2009). It argues that not only is history a socially constructed product, but it is produced by ever-expanding networks of actors. As a result, the specific manner in which history should be read depends critically upon developing a clear understanding of the ideological, spatial, and temporal situatedness of the actor network within which that specific history has been constructed (Durepos & Mills, 2009). In contrast with the assumptions of objective truth in functionalist views of history, thus, ANTi-History assumes that history has no fixed meaning but, rather, is "constantly being extended, reinterpreted, and retranslated by ever changing networks of actors" (Durepos & Mills, 2009: 12-13).

This view of history is perhaps the most distant from functionalist views of history, but arguably offers the greatest potential for communion between historians and organizational theorists. In fact, it is already popular in several strands of critical management studies. ANTi-History, Durepos and Mills observe, draws on the historical work of Michel Foucault, which has been extensively used by a broad range of organizational scholars (Ahl, 2006; Burrell, 1984; Calas & Smirchich, 1999; Clegg, 1990; Corbett, 2010) and combines it with the theoretical work of sociologists such as Bruno Latour (1987) and Michel Callon (1990).

ANTi-History also offers many points of potential overlap with institutional theory. While more functionalist business historians have criticized neo-institutional theory for not taking history seriously (Keiser, 1994; Usdiken & Keiser, 2004), ANTi-History is uniquely positioned to direct researchers to analyzing institutions not as reified social structures but rather as processes of network interactions through which those social structures are produced. That is, ANTi-History is unique in understanding history as both subject and object: history is both an objective outcome of processes of social construction, but inasmuch as different histories constitute different networks of actors, it also plays the role of an agent. This is a very useful insight for institutional theorists who are sensitive to the fact that much of what constitutes objective management knowledge—that is, our definitions of technical efficiency and productivity—are really socially constructed assumptions that are historically contingent on the range of institutional actors (government, military, corporations, universities, family businesses, etc.) engaged with and interested in the outcome.

## **AFTER THE HISTORICAL TURN: TOWARD A HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

Each of the three bridging constructs identified above holds the potential to encourage greater collaboration between management theorists and historians. In part, the constructs serve a bridging function because each relies on a distinct tension between a positivist view of history as "truth" and a countervailing notion of history as a contextual sensitizing trope. As a result, the boundaries that define the subject matter of history are expanded and become more inclusive, allowing management theorists the opportunity to see history as a useful context, method, or explanation for a broad variety of organizational phenomena.

More importantly, the tension between history as fact and history as context creates the opportunity for both historians and management theorists to see the incredible potential for using history to construct new theories of management. Traditionally, history—or, more specifically, positivist history—was used largely to "police" the overly ambitious empirical and theoretical claims of management theorists (Gourvish, 2006). Thus Ellen O'Conner's (1999) masterful historical analysis of Elton Mayo and the Human Relations School, for example, demonstrates that, contrary to claims by management theorists that the School offered a humanist counterpoint to Taylorism, it was actually premised on a negative view of the individual and reflected a compact between industry,

government, and the Harvard Business School to shift labor control away from unions and move it to human resource experts and administrative elites.

The bridging constructs identified above, however, demonstrate a range of possibilities for theorizing organizations from a historical perspective. So, for example, the notion of organizational legacy nudges both management scholars and historians to understanding how elements of history—individual, organizational, or local geographical history—can be used to explain stability in a world that tends toward entropy and change. Similarly, the construct of rhetorical history encourages researchers to analyze the important role of historical narrative in constructing mnemonic communities at various levels of organization (micro, meso, and macro). And, finally, ANTI-History focuses our attention on how our understanding of history is a sedimentary product of ecologies of interconnected institutions, each of which have the potential to use history itself as an object of social control.

The three constructs, each drawn from a different combination of epistemological and ontological assumptions, collectively serves to provide us with a historical consciousness or a sensitivity and awareness of the degree to which history is both a product and a source of human reflexivity. That is, history both enables us and constrains our ability to organize, to engage in productive economic activity, and to create institutions of social control and economic order. As a result, management scholars need to develop a more powerful literacy and facility with history, historiography, and historical theory.

To develop a historical consciousness means more than simply engaging with the functionalist paradigm of history as objective truth, although that is clearly an important part of the historical turn. It also means that both historians and management scholars need to explore the borders of what constitutes history. History must be both text and sub-text in our inquiries. We must attract scholars who are interested in objective history, but also those who are interested in memory studies, narrative history, local history, people's history, and literary and postmodern history. A historical consciousness can emerge only from the tension that builds across different understandings of what might constitute the subject matter of history.

Similarly, a historical consciousness in management will require particular attention to techniques or practices of history. Academic historians have vigorously and successfully fought various jurisdictional battles to maintain the illusion that they are uniquely qualified to study and interpret history. However, as various marginalized actors have shown, academic historians have often excluded large swaths of history that are not reflected in their own social and economic composition—that is, the history of gender, homosexuality, and micro-history (Appleby, Hunt & Jacob (1995); Lerner (1982)). Even though contemporary historians have become much more open to "public" and "popular" history as a legitimate academic branch of historical inquiry (Trouillot 1997; Kean & Martin (2013), little analytic attention is paid to the role of corporations as producers, consumers, and, most importantly, users of history.

To avoid this artificially narrow construction of the subject domain of history, we must be particularly attentive to techniques and practices of history that originate outside the university and beyond the influence of professional historians. In particular, we must pay close attention to how history is being used by corporate actors, advertisers, governments (both established and nascent), and any other institutional entity that engages with history as a technical and instrumental practice. Critically, we must no longer assume that history is exclusively produced by and for historians. Rather, it is a widely distributed social product with a growing awareness of its technical, economic, and political utility.

An important extension of attending to how history is used in practice is an equivalent awareness of the importance of the past, not simply in its own right but also as a lens for understanding the present and the future. Note that I am not,

for a moment, entertaining the positivist assumption of using the past to predict the future. Rather, I am suggesting that the various practitioners of history who work outside of academia see a present value in the past, not as a tool for prediction but rather as a tool for constructing trust, legitimacy, authenticity, and reputation. This has little or nothing to do with structural or functionalist notions of history and everything to do with adopting a broader epistemological and ontological notion of history as a lens within which we can use the past to create meaning in the present (Kosseleck & Tribe, 2004). Most critically, we must understand history as but one process of constructing knowledge, a social form of knowledge (Samuel, 2012; Veyne, 1971), instead of an additional claim to objectivity and universal truth.

As Thomas Kuhn (1977) observed, advances in knowledge rarely occur within a single paradigm but, rather, occur as a result of tensions, debates, and challenges that occur across paradigms. Knowledge stagnates when a single world view becomes so dominant that it excludes all other possible perspectives. If the historic turn in management is to fulfill its promise, it needs to turn toward a horizon full of theoretical opportunity inspired by a broad awareness of the range and possibility for new learning, insight, and understanding that can emerge from vibrant and interdisciplinary conversations about the role of history in contemporary society. Achieving this involves nurturing the nascent historical consciousness that first inspired the historical turn in management thought.

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