Re-Imagining History in Unsettled Times

EGOS Sub-Plenary 5

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The current “Historic Turn” in Organization Studies


Leading up to the "Historic Turn"


History in Organization and Management Theorizing

0 History *to* theory
   0 The use of historical data (both quantitative and qualitative) to develop new or modify or test extant theories.

0 History *in* theory
   0 The use of the past as an integral part of the theoretical model itself

0 Historical *cognizance*
   0 In “history *to* theory”, developing new or modifying extant theories not in a timeless and universal manner, but trying to explicitly identify and conceptualize the influence of specific historical time periods—as a kind of boundary condition. And in “history *in* theory”, not just considering a kind of generalized past, but being concerned more explicitly with, “a theorized understanding of the historical particularities and contingencies of the relationships under analysis” (Isaac and Griffin, 1989, p. 886)
Three Epistemological Dualisms

Dualism 1 *Explanation (Narrative and Analysis)*
- Historians are preoccupied with the epistemological problems of narrative construction, whereas organization theory subordinates narrative to analysis.

Dualism 2 *Evidence (Sources and Data)*
- History is derived from eclectic but verifiable documentary sources, but organization theorists prefer data constructed from replicable procedures.

Dualism 3 *Temporality (Periodization and Chronology)*
- Historians continually construct periodization from sources and historical contexts, but organization theorists treat time as a constant, or import periodization as given from historiography.
Three Epistemological Dualisms

From these three epistemological dualisms organization theorists will be able to answer questions such as:

- “What kind of history matters?”
- “What kind of history am I writing?”
- “What kind of history am I reading?”
Dualism 1 *Explanation*

0 Analysis lends itself to the standard format for a social science article
0 “Analytic narratives” proposed by rational choice theorists, and other forms of “narrative positivism”, are attenuated narratives
0 Historical narratives are different, as they present a “causal explanation of a *singular* event” as it unfolds in time, retrospectively
0 Whereas for “theoretical sciences, such causal explanations are mainly means to a different end — the testing of universal laws” (Popper 1957)
0 Meaning of narrative (and causation) are different
Dualism 1 *Explanation*

But does narrative impose a false structure on a messy reality?

0 Known as the “impositionalist objection to narrative”

0 Narrative *analysis*: stories are the “object of investigation”

=> reinforced impositionalist objection to narrative *construction* in organization theory

0 Organization theorists and historical theorists share a minimal definition of narrative:

0 A sequence of logically and chronologically related events organized by a coherent plot

0 Plot: chain of causation which links events

0 “Emplotment” in historical theory:

0 Plot determines the selection of “facts” & construction of events from the archives.

0 Acceptance that the same “historical facts” can be emplotted in different forms of narrative.
Dualism 2 Evidence

Organization theorists prefer primary data over secondary (or historical) data.

Organization theorists’ reservations regarding use of “organizational archives” (Rojas AMJ 2010):

- Organizations vary in what is saved and when it is saved.
- Archives tend to be rich in documents from leaders, but they have fewer materials about other actors.
- Actors can selectively record what transpires in an organization, e.g. Meeting minutes may address major points and omit contextualizing discussions.
- As a result, “archival sources should be supplemented, when possible, with newspaper accounts, interviews, memoirs, and other materials.”

Historians prefer primary sources over secondary sources.

Organization theorists’ secondary (or historical) data correspond to the historian’s primary sources.
Dualism 2 Evidence

0 Historians’ reservations regarding use of interviews:
  0 Without archival research it is easy to accept interviewees’ statements at face value (Dellheim *Public Historian* 1986)
  0 History is equated with the use of *primary* sources, writings *from* the past produced at the time of events being researched
  0 Retrospective interviews count as “testimony,” which almost by definition cannot constitute a primary source

0 Epistemologically historians can be seen as “explaining the evidence” (Megill 2005)

0 Therefore historians need to explain the “historiographical operation” (de Certeau 1988)
  0 How the bureaucratic files of organizations are set aside and transformed into historical “documents”
  0 Or as archivists would put it, how certain “records” are selected for preservation as “archives”
To say that time matters is not the same as saying that “history matters”:

- Time matters for social science for specifying the chronological order of events, e.g. path dependence
- Time matters for history for understanding events in historical context

Periodisation, and historical contextualization, are constitutive of how theory is applied and developed in history
## Epistemological Dualisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Stylized narrative organizational history</th>
<th>Stylized historical organization theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative of logically and chronologically related events organized by a coherent plot</td>
<td>Analysis of relationships between variables in the past e.g. 2 x 2 matrix</td>
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</table>

| Evidence | Sources cited from an extensive search of multiple documents and texts with verifiable locations in archives. Verisimilitude through verification logic. | Data constructed from specified replicable procedure for analyzing a pre-defined delimited set of sources. Verisimilitude through replication logic. |

| Temporality | Periodization of events as defined by actors or historiography in historical time derived from historical context and sources | Chronology of predefined regular occurrences, with sequences measured against clock/analytic time, e.g. event history analysis |

So does history have theory?
Theory in History

Addition to knowledge in history is based on developing a “causal explanation of a singular event” (Popper 1957) by “explaining the evidence” (Megill 2005) with the best fit account.

RG Collingwood changed understanding of function of Hadrian’s Wall by examining the evidence:
- Not a fortification, but an elevated sentry line for look-out
- His account fits the evidence better

Collingwood and others like Carlo Ginzburg use metaphor of ‘detective work’:
- Ginzburg’s “method of clues”

Exploring the evidence to find an explanation that accounts for the “totality of evidence” (Megill 2005)
Theory in History

0 Reasoning to the best explanation = abduction
0 Peirce’s description of abduction:
   0 A surprising fact, F, is discovered.
   0 But if assumption A were true, F would be a matter of course.
   0 There is prima facie evidence that A may be true.

0 Further evidence to support A needs to be found.
0 Rival accounts need to be tested against the evidence.
0 These explanatory accounts of evidence and events are emplotted in the narrative.
0 Different types of narrative strategies are the result of different theoretical positions in history.
Strategies for Organizational History

- Corporate history, a holistic, objectivist narrative of a corporate entity
- Analytically structured history, narrating theoretically conceptualized structures and events
- Serial history, using replicable techniques to analyze repeatable facts
- Ethnographic history, reading documentary sources “against the grain”
Corporate History

0 Holistic
  0 Encompasses the whole history of an entity
  0 Conceptualized as a contribution to the totality of history

0 Objectivist narrative literary form
  0 Objectivist because readers are sceptical about objectivity and balance in commissioned history
  0 Objectivism constrains corporate history from reflecting on the imposition of a narrative
Ethnographic History

0 Sources found in organizational archives read as texts to interpret cultures
0 Requires a self consciously “angular” theoretical perspective
0 A conscious refusal to impose a plot in a move towards a “non-event worthy history”
0 Relies on the serendipity of finding sources in organizational archives and recognizing the significance of sources when found
Exemplars of Strategies for Organizational History

Narrative history

Analytically structured history

Serial history

Ethnographic history
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Exemplars</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Temporality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate history</td>
<td>Cheape (1988)</td>
<td>Narrative of Norton company in Germany during Third Reich</td>
<td>Primary documentary and narrative sources, company letters and reports, interviews</td>
<td>Stated periodization 1933-1945 derived from historical context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jones (2002)</td>
<td>Narrative of Unilever’s performance as foreign MNC in USA</td>
<td>Primary documentary sources, internal company committee minutes and reports</td>
<td>Stated periodization 1945-1980 derived from sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytically structured history</td>
<td>Chandler (1962) ch. 3</td>
<td>Narrative of strategy and structural reorganization at GM, emergence of M-form</td>
<td>Selected primary documentary sources for structure, secondary or narrative sources for strategy</td>
<td>1920-21 (periodization not stated) derived from sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freeland (1996)</td>
<td>Narrative of successive organizational structures at GM as corrupted M-form</td>
<td>Primary documentary and narrative sources, letters from executives to shareholders</td>
<td>Stated periodization 1924-1958 derived from sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial history</td>
<td>Chuang &amp; Baum (2003)</td>
<td>Analysis of name changes for nursing homes in multiunit chains</td>
<td>Data compiled from archives of licensing organization and associations of nursing homes</td>
<td>Stated chronology 1971-1996 derived from complete data set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic history</td>
<td>Childs (2002)</td>
<td>Analysis of slaves’ routines and rituals of power at Brazilian gold mine</td>
<td>Primary documentary and narrative sources, e.g. board minutes, circular to shareholders</td>
<td>1834-1879 derived from sources (periodization not stated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McKinlay (2002)</td>
<td>Analysis of Scottish bank clerks’ careers with illustrative micro stories</td>
<td>Primary documentary and narrative sources, internal bank staff ledgers and published texts</td>
<td>Stated periodization 1894-1913 derived from sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of Strategies for Organizational History

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Dualisms</th>
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<th>Temporality</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate history</td>
<td>Narrative (corporate entity)</td>
<td>Periodization</td>
<td>Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analytically structured history</td>
<td>Narrative (conceptual construct)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serial history</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnographic history</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Periodization</td>
<td>Sources</td>
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</table>
Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods

- Group of historians and org theorists
- Emerged out of EGOS (Standing Working Group 8), PDWs at AoM, & sessions at the Business History Conference
- Examining value and possibilities for historical approaches to org studies
- Central theme: epistemic differences between historical & social scientific perspectives on organization & how to handle them
- Examining organizations in *historical time*, not *clock time*
Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods

**Org Theorists**
- Howard Aldrich
- William Foster
- John Hassard
- Jin Uk Kim
- Huseyin Leblebici
- Steven Lippmann
- Albert Mills
- Mahka Moeen
- Michael Rowlinson
- Roy Suddaby
- Behlül Üsdiken

**Historians**
- Marcelo Bucheli
- Jeffrey Fear
- Geoffrey Jones
- Matthias Kipping
- David Kirsch
- Michael Rowlinson
- Daniel Wadhwani
- JoAnne Yates
Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods

Introduction: The Future of the Past in Management & Org Studies

Part 1: History & Theory (Epistemology)

Part 2: Actors & Markets (Concepts)

Part 3: Sources & Methods (Methods)
Differences in temporal perspective underlie many of the differences between historical explanations and social scientific ones.

Fundamentally history makes sense of actions and events from the vantage point of the present looking backward. Historical accounts hence able to assign significance (eg cause, effect, meaning) by ‘grasping together’ (Ricoeur, 1985) or ‘seeing together’ (Danto, 1965) actions/events at different moments in time.

Significance of an action/event interpreted both from antecedents and consequences.

This perspective helps explain the reasons for the epistemic dualisms mentioned in Rowlinson, Hassard, and Decker (2014).

Hence, Organizations in Time is not about Organizations in Clock Time but Organizations in Historical Time.

Not longitudinal

Not chronological (i.e. sequence of events on a time line)
What History is Not: Cross-Sectional

Observations

Clock Time

Researcher

O O O O O O O O O O O

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22
What History is Not: Longitudinal
(at least, not exactly)
What is Historical Perspective?
(“Seeing together”)
What is Historical Perspective?
(hence talk of sources, not observations)
Part 1: History & Theory

0 Limits of the value of using history to “test” or build “general theory”

0 Helps account for evolving role of history in organization studies over the twentieth century (Üsdiken & Kipping)

0 Alternative 1: Trans-disciplinary research (Leblebici)

0 Alternative 2: Implicitly historical theories
  0 Institutional Theory (Suddaby, Foste & Mills)
  0 Evolutionary Theory (Lippmann & Aldrich)

0 Alternative 3: Critical organization theory (Rowlinson & Hassard)
Part 2: Actors & Markets

0 What can history do? How can it provide unique insights into organization?

0 Variety of forms of insights depending on how one uses historical perspective

0 Chapters explore these varieties & apply them to domains of org research
‘Constructive’ Temporality

0 Plotting relationship between action(s) at one point in time & choice/behavior at another point

0 Examples: path dependence, institutionalism, imprinting, historical structuralism
‘Constitutive’ Temporality

0 Understandings why, how, and with what effects historical actors narrate their own histories

0 Examples: uses of history, rhetorical history, social memory
‘Critical’ Temporality

0 Taking new perspectives on accepted historical claims (by for instance seeking prior or under-represented perspectives)

0 Examples: critical histories of Scientific Management & Human Resources, slavery & origins of management
Part 2: Application to the Study of Actors & Markets

- Organizations and Organizational Change (Fear)
- Entrepreneurial Processes (Wadhwani & Jones)
- Industries and Organizational Fields (Kirsch, et al)
- States and State-organization relationships (Bucheli & Kim)
Example: Historical Approaches to Entrepreneurship Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Temporality:</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Sequence/Process</th>
<th>Constitutive/Cognitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructs</td>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Path dependence</td>
<td>Historicity of actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contingency &amp; change</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Part 3: Sources and Methods

It is the temporal perspective from the future looking back that shapes many of the central methodological concerns of history (Yates)

- Sources & source criticism (Lipartito)
- Triangulation (Kipping, et al)
- Hermeneutics (Kipping, et al)

BUT, more work needs to be done on this to allow historical methods to address organizational research questions
What’s Needed

0 Range of methodological tools for historical interpretation that match research questions
0 Extension and application of historical approaches in particular research domains (entrepreneurship, strategy, etc)
0 Rethinking the role of history within business schools (both different from History Departments & traditional ‘business history’)
0 Uses of the Past a particularly important and fertile area for new contributions
“In a world that is growing ever more complex, we realize the shortcomings of the decontextualized tools associated with mainstream management knowledge and practice. As we stand in the midst of an economic and financial crisis with potentially major consequences, it is clear that we need other lenses to understand and navigate our stormy world. Bringing history back in is one of the most promising paths to follow.”

--Marie Laure Djelic