Part I

The historic turn in management and organization studies: critical responses
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Introduction

The historic turn in management and organizational studies: a companion reading

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Whether the beginning of the ‘historic turn’ in management and organizational studies (MOS) is marked at 1994 (Kieser, 1994), 2004 (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004), or earlier (Zald, 1993) is more a matter of choice in the tropics of narrative emplotment (White, 1985, 1987) than any signal of the primacy of a particular event. However, the benefit of two decades of hindsight does permit us to say – and without worry of compromise – that in the intervening period we have seen a veritable explosion of interest in history-work undertaken in MOS. Engagements with history in MOS have since spread from few to many, from the margins to the mainstream and back again, and are now established throughout a wide range of conference activities and journals, and in a growing number of texts. All of this work stems from, and is constitutive of, a deep richness to be found in the debates surrounding the various approaches used to interrogate where and how history is to be used (or not) for the study of organizations (Rowlinson, Stager Jacques & Booth, 2009; Weatherbee et al., 2012). From our own position within the turn we now assess this sub-field as having matured sufficiently to warrant a survey of its state. Our survey is designed to provide management scholars and students an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the leading-edge and emergent thinking of scholars working within the turn as they engage in discussion and debate which collectively focuses on the problems, challenges, and potentials associated with doing history-work in MOS.

While we are collectively embedded within the varied interests and efforts comprising the historic turn, the story of this particular project starts with one of us. In 2012 Routledge decided that it was time for a Routledge Companion to Management and Organizational History. Our editor contacted Patricia Genoe McLaren and invited her to edit the companion. Trish immediately contacted Albert (Mills), who jumped at the opportunity to be involved, and Albert recommended bringing Terrance (Weatherbee) on board as well. Albert quickly drafted the first version of the proposal for this volume he had been thinking about for years, and after input from Trish and Terry the proposal was sent to Routledge, where it was quickly accepted. With the publisher having successfully enrolled the editors, it became time to put into practice what we had been preaching to ourselves in the proposal.

In order to publish a quality work that would capture our belief in the importance of history to MOS and engage a broad and diverse group of scholars, our small network needed to grow...
substantially. We needed scholars whose work in MOS is emblematic of the ‘historic turn’ and whose thinking could further inform us as to the many potentials to be found across the wide span of approaches to theory, methods, and purposes for doing history-work. Fortunately, each of us knew several like-minded researchers, some personally and others only by their scholarly reputation, whom we hoped would be interested enough in the project that they would be willing to commit the time and effort to work with us and create this companion.

As in all complex endeavours some of these efforts at enrolment into the project were successful on the first attempt, some on the second, and some not at all. However, between the merits of the idea and the persistence of our appeals – and with due accord given to the roles and effects of contingency, happenstance, and the odd dose of luck (of both kinds) – over the span of a year the network took shape. While its formation was to wax and wane through a series of welcome ‘yes’s’ and regretfully accepted and usually apologetic ‘no’s’, we endeavoured to remain true to our original aims. We envisioned our text as a somewhat authoritative reference that would be considered relevant to a wide audience across a number of overlapping academic areas (e.g. general management, organizational behaviour, organizational theory, organizational communication, international management, sociology of organizations, and the sociology of work, as well as business history, historiography, and business research methods). Our companion would be inclusive of multiple paradigmatic perspectives representative of the wealth of effort(s) taken and under way in the area (e.g. positivist, Marxist, poststructuralist postcolonial, etc.), reflecting the widest set of scholarly geographies possible (east, west, north, and south), and possessing a variety of ends, ways, and means in the doing of history-work (theoretical, methodological, historiographic).

While we believe that we have been faithful to our intent and remain hopeful that readers will agree with us, we also know that the true utility and value of the companion can only be found in its use. Value is located in the relationships to be established between the reader and the works of the individual contributors. Value is located within the interstitial spaces created by the act of assemblage of such a diverse array of work. Value is to be found in the questions raised and the reflexivity invoked in the space between each reader’s historiographic position and those of each contribution or the collection as a whole. So rather than engaging in obligatory convention for texts of this form – that is, a summary introduction of the chapters or sections accompanied by an appropriately sagacious and instructive detailing of how the various contributions interrelate to form a coherent whole – we thought it would be of more interest to briefly present some of our own thoughts and reactions (surprises, lessons learned, reminders, etc.) to our reading(s).

In the first contribution we see a unique blend of citation analysis and biography, sourced through both academic (journal articles) and personal accounts (letters) as method. Milorad M. Novicevic, J. Logan Jones, and Shawn Carraher provide us with an intellectual portrait of Daniel Wren and his signature work *The Evolution of Management Thought* (Wren, 1972; Wren & Bedeian, 2009). While they rightfully acknowledge Wren’s role as one of the first progenitors of a canonical history of MOS and showcase the significant contribution he has made, through their decentering they also reveal to us how orthodox representations of the past may constrain our efforts to understand our discipline and the management and organizational phenomenon. We see their post-foundational surfacing of the construction of the disciplinary frames used in the dominant canonical history creating a space to displace the orthodox and the freedom to revise our history under different terms.

A canonical text of a different kind is the 1994 *Organizational Science* piece by Alfred Kieser that we have reprinted as a testament to our belief in its value – namely its oft-cited call for the launch of the historic turn in MOS and its contribution to the growth of management and organizational history (MOH) as a field. To that end, it is an understatement to say that we were
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surprised by the retrospective that he contributed to this edited collection. In our reading of Kieser's retrospective we are vaguely reminded (albeit for very different reasons) of the work of historian Keith Jenkins who began by 're-thinking history' (1991) and ended by 'rejecting history' (Jenkins, 2009). Kieser presents not so much a walking away from history as a somewhat ironic lament on the evolving homogeny of explanation in organizational theorizing. The lament comes at the beginning, where he states, “a historical turn is still not identifiable [in organization theory] and likely never will.” He goes on to suggest that perhaps his call for a historical turn was “naïve”. While this may be read as a rejection of his earlier call for a historic turn in MOS, it seems to us that there is an underlying disappointment in the direction that MOS has taken that makes its scholars less likely to be attracted to (or enrolled by) the need for historical analyses. That, at least, is our translation. Other readers may take something else away. That is always the issue of textual analysis.

The second reprinted article – by Charles Booth and Michael Rowlinson (2006) – is, metaphorically as well as literally, our reproduction of another work that has been widely cited as canonical in the field of MOH (see the many chapters throughout this collection that cite it). If there are any surprises here it is that (a) it continues to be cited as a critical starting point for a renewed call for the historical turn – despite the fact that in an earlier article Peter Clark and Mick Rowlinson (2004) made a much more explicit call – and (b) the call for greater methodological and philosophical debates inadvertently served to freeze debates around what Clark and Rowlinson had earlier problematized as a ‘historic turn’.

Mick undertakes a personal reflection in relation to the way the historic turn unfolded. It is one that emotively resonates with us and his accounting of the circumstances by which the title of the article he co-authored with Peter Clarke (2004) became constructed strikes us an instructive in several ways. The use of his(own)story emphasizes for us the importance of the humanness of knowledge of the past and of the process nature of the interactions that lead to its co-creation. It sensitizes us to the networked nature of knowledge work and disciplinary projects comprised of authors, editors, and reviewers. In an academic world wracked by the pressures of publishing, author order, and evaluation exercises, this is sometimes easy to forget, as quite often in our individual life projects we forget that ours is a collective discipline rather than an individual one. Mick’s recounting also highlights the oftentimes contingent nature of this process, revealing a case of the power of words. Power that was located in what was the right phrase at the right time, that is, the ‘historic turn’ – an ironic expression that became a symbolic rallying cry (a claim which is easily substantiated with citations).

Richard Marens’ somewhat subdued polemic on how Marx and the intellectual corpus derived from his work has been marginalized, written out, and largely ignored by business and management scholars served us with notice that there are many differences between the approaches to the construction of history. These differences have historicity, arising as they do from the practices underwritten by politics, ideology, and geography over time. We find it ironic, as does he, that while the Marxian traditions have extensively informed the discipline of history, they have failed to do so for MOS. We agree that this is an unusual circumstance given that the large body of work on business and capitalism from a Marxian perspective represents a wealth of knowledge that we have eschewed for political rather than empirical reasons.

We read Roy Jacques and Gabrielle Durepos’ review of textbook histories and the emplotment used by textbook authors as a clarion call that there is still much to be accomplished within the overall arc of the historic turn. The simplistic narratives of the historical orthodoxies found in chapter 2 (when there is one!) of our general and introductory texts are counted as failures in both historical and pedagogical terms. In historical terms they are so partial in their construction that they collapse into bowdlerized stories of the past that have little to no educational purpose.
This is a point Terrance Weatherbee also takes up in his chapter where he argues that simply adding in or transforming the form(s) of history in textbooks, though necessary, is insufficient if we wish to rid ourselves of the pedagogical history deficit. The work of all three – Jacques & Durepos and Weatherbee – reminds us that much of our pedagogical responsibility suffers from being ahistorical. Despite over a decade and a half of collective observations we still cannot seem to get it right in our teaching. The intersection of history and management pedagogy as pointed out almost a decade ago (Stager Jacques, 2006) seems to us to be rich with still untapped potential. Perhaps there is something in Alfred Kieser’s lament after all!

Alun Munslow’s observation that we all use and construct histories in our day-to-day practices stresses for us that our sense of the past is constructed in many ways – in speech, in writing, and in our use of other sense-making tools such as spreadsheets and PowerPoint slides. His perspicacious view reveals for us that it is history, rather than the past, which inheres strongly with our lived experiences. The relationship of organizing, business, and the past is an intimate one actively expressed in history-work. This reminds us that those working in organizations reconstruct history anew each day and that the continuity of action seen within them is a constructed one – a sense of pastness constructed on the basis of interpretation and meaning when articulated as histories (not the past!).

Scott Taylor exposed for us how hermeneutic approaches have moved far beyond their truth-in-text purposes and now represent a neglected method of interpretation of the past. He positions critical hermeneutics as an approach and method that, while underutilized, has significant potential for understanding the creation of historical narratives in the present. Given the textual nature of much of history in MOS (not to discount text in the broader sense, but used here in the sense of the textual presentation of history in journals and books), his observations draw our attention to different ways of seeing the textual and understanding its production.

Gabrielle Durepos’ project, while still nascent, we see as being ripe with fruitful potential. She maps a way out of the divisive and intellectually sticky trap represented by the modern–postmodern duality that has consumed much effort in MOS over the last decades. Her explication of the dynamics of each of these positions with regard to history not only serves as a map of the intellectual terrain for each, but it provides a peek over the horizon of the possible. We are intellectually attracted to a way of seeing history as process, practice, and enactment, and her carefully constructed notions of ‘amodern’ historical approaches resolve to some extent the tensions we see in the either/or nature of singular and relational or unitary and relative. We can see openings for investigating and understanding how we can approach the historical as co-participants in the history we produce.

Somewhat shockingly, and wholly naively for us, Adam Rostis’ powerful argument for a second look at humanitarianism has overturned our taken-for-granted conceptualizations of what we see as the ‘good’ in the humanitarian impulse. His use of Foucauldian genealogy uncovers the logics and orderings of organized humanitarianism and positions them as a colonizing discourse, a discourse which privileges a managerial ethos of efficiency and which treats the individual in economic terms. Humanitarianism has now become for us a history-laden and potentially repressive instrument that, when engaged in the recovery from hazard and disaster in failed/failing states, operates in the absence of countervailing factors. So when working in concert with private enterprise, humanitarianism can privilege the economic under the guise of doing good. It has, for us, radically signalled the need for expanding our attention to the intersection of history and organizing beyond simply the economic affairs of just business.

David Boje and Rohny Saylors have rewritten the story of the end of history. Their chapter crafts for us another potential ending – an ending heralded by the destruction
of humanity. A self-imposed ending and concluding narrative brought about through the actions of the capitalist project(s) writ in its largest sense. A project that has become so vast in its longue durée that it may yet lay waste to our planet as it has made humanity a, if not the, dominant geologic force upon it. Theirs is a manifesto which we see as urging us to move beyond the modern and into a posthumanist historical space. A reminder that we can rewrite and recraft histories that do not artificially separate out human-centred histories from non-human-centred ones and which can refocus our attention upon our own selves living in an historically based world.

Diego M. Coraiola, William M. Foster, and Roy Suddaby resituate for us the critique of an ahistorical MOS. Drawing upon the work of Alun Munslow they investigate and categorize the approach to history in their analysis of the work of New Institutional scholars. Their study reveals that reconstructionist and constructionist approaches to historical understanding dominate that work and that rather than ignoring history, history is very much present. However, they also observe that this use of history is neither acknowledged nor problematized, nor is the relationship between the past and history questioned. They reinforce that MOS is historical and not unhistorical, a lesson which informs us that we must be cognizant that our own theoretical and methodological choices commit us to a particular worldview and our disciplinary work is also a form of history-work (Weatherbee & Durepos, 2010).

While we saw Boje and Saylor’s work as vast in both scale and scope, Stephanie Decker shows us that the ‘small’ is just as important in history-work as well. She reveals how microhistorians and those engaged in institutional perspectives often interrogate the same subjects – just from different scales. Consequently, her call for a more historiographic turn rather than a historic turn reminds us that there are many intellectual and methodological resources available to us in the discipline of history, an untapped stock of insight for doing history-work in MOS.

Tuomo Peltonen has abruptly shifted our own understanding of a canonical figure in MOS. Similar to the decentring of Wren’s work by Novicevic, Jones, and Carraher, Peltonen has succeeded in changing how we now interpret the contributions of Elton Mayo as Peltonen’s work both displaces and renews Mayo and his contributions in historical terms. This draws our attention to the tripartite dangers of unitary historical representations: histories which portray persons as one-dimensional in historiographic terms, that are essentialist in their treatments of persons, and which write-out the effects of the socio-political upon ourselves as scholars in the world (Cooke, 1999).

Using Fordism as their analytic framework, Ali Mir and Raza Mir reinforce for us the benefits of taking a longer historical view of management as practice. Their highlighting of the historically cyclical nature of managerial practices within the broader domain of the evolution of capitalism surfaces the strains experienced by management practices when engaged in the perennial search for solutions. It suggests to us that the dynamism of management and organizations may be the result of unreflexive practices passed on from one ‘generation’ of management to the next. For us this signals the trap of reading capitalism as a homogeneous economic form and managerial practice as tradition.

In a similar vein, Albert J. Mills, Terrance Weatherbee, Jason Foster, and Jean Helms Mills provide a rebuke to the way(s) in which we have constructed our own disciplinary history. They reveal for us that while socio-political activities operating within the contexts of what we know as the New Deal and the Cold War worked in tension to set the disciplinary boundaries of MOS, their import is conventionally absented from our renderings of our own past. Indeed, and not unsurprisingly, we are very much sympathetic to the problematic which they highlight for us. Any selections of what to include in representations of the past are also choices of what to exclude. Once taken and rendered into history these choices may become the normative discourse which signals what is a permissive activity within a disciplinary domain. Thus, for us, the
revisiting of our disciplinary history permits new insights, new questions to be asked, and new frames for interpreting where our discipline has been and is or could be going.

Bert Spector’s analysis of over 500 articles in the Harvard Business Review during the first two decades of the Cold War serves as a poke in our collective (and parochial) scholarly eye. His study re-emphasizes for us that the phenomenon we study is as much the result of practice as it is of scholarly study. His observation that the polishing of the foundations of a uniquely American notion of Liberal Market Capitalism was developed as a counter-ideology expressed in the pages of the business press brings new insights into stark relief, not only the heretofore unknown element of our collective past, but also the interrelationship between the formation of ideology and history-work by management in organizations. His study also drew our attention to the inherently dialectical nature of management development in the Cold War and raised for us a question of what was the dialectic that followed and what is it now?

Amy Thurlow’s use of critical discourse analysis in her historical investigation into the development of public relations (PR) draws for us some stark similarities and parallels between the professionalization of both PR and MOS as academic fields. Her work reveals that the development of PR was subject to many of the same processes which have been observed in the formation of MOS. For us in particular, her observations of the unitary and US-centric origin from which PR developed its historiography are particularly germane. These saw a process of development which totalized the theoretical dimensions in that academic field from an American standpoint. A standpoint from which non-American – in her case Canadian – scholars find themselves just now debating in historiographic terms.

This is a condition observed throughout many of the works in this companion, and in particular in the efforts of Patricia Genoe McLaren and Albert J. Mills in their exploration of Canadian management theory. Similar to the observations Thurlow has made concerning the default Americanization of the PR field, they argue that the history of MOS has never been Canadian either. This has, of course, a great deal of resonance for us, not just in terms of our professional interest in historiography and history-work in MOS, but also personally as situated Canadian scholars.

These concerns are also shared by Kristene E. Collier, Corinne McNally, and Albert J. Mills who surface a demonstrably Canadian contribution to management theory. Their study of the scholarly contributions and theoretical influence of Canadians working in New Institutional Theory reiterates for us that the conjunction of theory development with history as written in our journals and texts does tend to assume the universal. If the Americanization of Canadian management theory could be explained solely as a function of the geographic, cultural, and political proximities shared between Canada and the United States it would be far less worrisome to us as Canadians. However, for us as scholars the evidence which is accumulating to the contrary would seem to suggest otherwise.

Our third reprinted article is by Eduardo Ibarra-Colado. Originally, Eduardo had agreed to contribute a new piece written especially for this edited collection. Sadly his untimely death left us with an important intellectual void in the book. We wanted to bring his very different perspective and challenging voice to the debate because it held the promise of a rethink of – rather than an extension to – the historic turn by reminding/informing us of the embedded (Western) knowledge work contained within our attempts to make that historic turn happen. To retain his voice and the challenge he posed to us we chose to reprint one of his earlier works where he first develops this argument. As we wanted to do more than simply add this as a chapter we asked several like-minded scholars and friends – Nidhi Srinivas, Ana Guedes, and Alex Faria – to reflect on the contributions made by Eduardo Ibarra-Colado. Eduardo’s contributions problematizes our understanding of the practices of management knowledge in terms of research and
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Education across national and cultural boundaries; especially when embedded in the knowledges of the so-called Other and the spaces in between. In their tribute to Eduardo as colleague, mentor, and friend, they reproblematize for us his project on epistemic coloniality and question a good part of the (Western/Northern) history project on which we are all embarked.

Beyond the richly detailed and highly informative discussions concerning where the historic turn has been and where it is going found in the contributions of William M. Foster and Roy Suddaby and Matthias Kipping and Behlül Üsükken, our own reading of the collective contributions to this companion has allowed us to sketch for ourselves a ‘historical’ arc of history-work in MOS. We find a trajectory which has seen movement(s) away from our singular and common-sense notions of the past – notions founded on a pragmatic realism where history was conceived as unitary and universal. We see movement towards multiple forms of history and history-work to arrive at relational amodern forms of co-construction. The in-between has, and still is, composed of a variety of theoretical and methodological choice. In this respect we see ‘fragmentation’ as richness and choice as freedom from the orthodox. If we are to grow our knowledge of that which we study, we need to continue to revisit what we know and how we have come to know it.

Finally, in closing this introduction, we would like to make especial mention of three individuals: Alun Munslow, Stewart Clegg, and Eduardo Ibarra-Colado. Alun Munslow very kindly responded to an unsolicited email from someone he had never met; one which asked him if he would be interested in bringing his unique perspective to a companion text to be published in a discipline that was not his own. Alun’s theorizing in his own discipline is of world renown, and as many of us have drawn inspiration from his work we were more than pleased when he graciously accepted. To Alun, our most grateful thanks. As many of you know, Stewart Clegg is an éminence grise in MOS, and his stature and reputation keep him extremely busy as teacher, mentor, and scholar. With many persons and projects around the world seeking his attention and asking of his time, we were very pleased he agreed to provide our closing commentary. We are also appreciative that he has indeed held our individual and collective intellectual feet to the fires of critical observation. Thank you. Finally, and most sadly, we would like to remember Eduardo Ibarra-Colado who wished to contribute anew to our discussion and debate. You are missed.

References


