Management and organizational history

Prospects

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Our purpose in this article is to discuss the prospects as we see them for the new journal *Management & Organizational History*. The paper is set out in the form of a 10-point agenda with proposals for future directions in management and organizational history. Our intention is to stimulate debate, not to define boundaries or exclude other possibilities.

1. The ‘historic turn’ in organization theory

Our starting point is the ‘historic turn’ that is arguably taking place in management and organization theory (Clark and Rowlinson 2004), akin to that which has transformed other branches of the social sciences and humanities (Down 2001, 394–96; McDonald 1996). There have been repeated calls for a more historical approach to the study of management and organizations from leading organization theorists such as Mayer Zald (1993, 2002), Alfred Kieser (1994), Gibson Burrell (1997) and Stewart Clegg (2001). Zald (2002, 381) contends that the approach to problems in business school social science is ‘universalist and presentist’. In ‘the search for general and abstracted laws’, he maintains, ‘social science cut itself off from history’. Universalism leads to a view that contemporary organization theory applies to organizational phenomena in all societies at all times. Presentism results in research being reported as if it occurred in a decontextualized, extended present. Presentism contradicts universalism to the extent that the present is often assumed to be a period of unprecedented change, heralding the dawning of a new age. But this is usually done without proper consideration of possible historical precedents. It is largely a rhetorical device for privileging an unbounded, extended present, and it is a claim that has been made for at least as long as either of us can remember.

Universalism and presentism can be seen as the Flintstones and the Simpsons approaches to history. The Flintstones cartoon was ‘set in a town called Bedrock, in the Stone Age era, but with a society identical to that of the United States in the mid-20th century’ (Wikipedia 2005). The cartoon series revelled in its anachronisms, as when the characters appeared in a Christmas special, even though they must have lived long before Christ was born. The ‘Flintstones method’ assumes that any society, from the prehistoric to the present, faces the same organizational problems as our own (Steel 1999). As Jacques (1996, 14) observes, universalism means that ‘management is presented as a continuous thread running through civilization’, and even the Bible
is cited by universalist organization theorists as addressing issues of organization. Universalism often ‘emphasizes continuity over change’ (Down 2001, 402). It proceeds from the saying, ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ (Moore and Lewis 1999, 2, 269; cited in Down 2001, 402), which, as Milton Friedman pointed out, is just as much a half-truth as the saying ‘history never repeats itself’ (1966, 25). Universalism can serve as a useful counter to claims for discontinuity between the present and the past. But Simon Down (2001, 402) argues that to describe ancient Greek enterprises as multinational enterprises (e.g. Moore and Lewis 1999), from the perspective of contemporary international business studies, and using ‘the language of corporate capitalism’ is to imply ‘that most, if not all, economic organizations are forms of capitalism’. According to Down (2001, 403–4), the claim that multinational enterprises existed in antiquity, in a form amenable to analysis using concepts from Michael Porter (1990), is indefensible. It can only be made by assuming that market rationality has always existed, ignoring broader intellectual history and the historiography of the ancient world. Of course, we need, similarly, to be wary of Marxist inspired critiques of universal market rationality because Marxism makes the competing assumption of a universal class struggle.

Although it may be untenable to suggest that the ancient Phoenicians developed multinational enterprises, a convincing case can be made that there are historical precedents for developments in contemporary capitalism. For example, most economic historians are now agreed that globalization in the late 20th century is not unprecedented, and that the first period of globalization occurred between 1896 and 1914 (Eichengreen 1996). According to a leading economic historian:

> the most impressive episode of international economic integration which the world has seen to date was not the second half of the 20th century, but the years between 1870 and the Great War. The nineteenth century, and in particular the late nineteenth century, was the period that saw the largest decline ever in international barriers to trade and factor mobility. *(O’Rourke 2002, 65)*

The economy was even more globalized than the late 20th century in part because there was mobility of both capital and labour, whereas in the current period the mobility of labour is more restricted. The first age of globalization was undone by the First World War, a war that was seen as impossible by many commentators at the time due to the extent of global integration (Ferguson 1998a). Where historians disagree is over the role of imperialism in the first age of globalization.

The Simpsons is set in Springfield, which is ‘a classic postmodern pastiche. The series systematically conceals the State in which Springfield is located’, although many elements of it remind viewers of a typical, large American metropolitan area (Miani 2004, 17). Springfield is fictionalized in the same way that an organization is often fictionalized in organization studies; it ‘may not exist, and yet everything that is said about it may be true’, in the sense that ‘it may be credible in the light of other texts’ (Czarniawska 1999, 38). Bart Simpson never grows up, and no matter how many episodes he appears in, he always appears in the present. The Simpsons method presents fictionalized organizations in a non-dated, extended present. The historic turn problematizes universalism and presentism. It raises the question of the extent to which organizations, and organizational research, need to be historicized, that is, located in a specific historical context. For example, was the multinational enterprise born in ancient Greece? Or is it a form of organization that is specific to a globalized, capitalist economy? In which case, were the forms of foreign direct investment during the first age of globalization comparable to those of the late 20th century? And in terms of the present, how generalizable across time and space are the findings of an ethnographer from a fictionalized and supposedly typical organization?
Calls for more historical awareness are often aligned with critical management studies. Zald (2002, 381) contends that business schools have been ‘cut off from humanistic thinking’ and, according to Burrell, business school faculty have been allowed to escape from ‘any real sensitivity to the issues raised by the humanities’, including history (1997, 528). From a similar Foucauldian perspective Jacques claims that ‘an historical perspective’ can ‘provide a critically reflective vision of the good society’ (1996, viii, 190). So the historic turn also involves more critical and ethical reflection. Rewriting race (Nkomo 1992), gender (Aaltio-Marjosola, Mills, and Helms Mills 2002; Mills 2002, 2006; Thomas, Mills, and Helms Mills 2004), and sexuality (Mills 1997) into organization theory should also entail historical contextualization. For example, Anshuman Prasad ‘seeks to theorize workplace diversity within the wider context of the (continuing?) history and experience of Euro-American imperialism and colonialism’, and draws on postcolonial theory (Prasad 1997, 286).

As to how management and organization theory can respond to the calls for more engagement with history, Behlül Üsdiken and Alfred Kieser (2004) have identified three positions, which they label supplementarist, integrationist, and reorientationist. The supplementarist position adheres to the view of organization theory as social scientistic, and merely adds history as another contextual variable, alongside other variables such as national cultures. The integrationist position, which Kieser (1994) himself prefers, seeks to enrich organization theory by developing links with the humanities, including history, literary theory and philosophy, without completely abandoning a social scientistic orientation. The reorientationist agenda, which is very much our own (Clark and Rowlinson 2004), involves a thoroughgoing critique of existing theories of organization for their ahistorical orientation. There is scope for more debate about the extent to which history should merely supplement existing theories of organization, or be integrated with them, or whether a proper ‘historic turn’ requires a reorientation of organization theory along the lines of the reorientation called for from critical management studies or gender studies.

2. Historical methods and styles of writing

The historic turn in management and organization theory raises questions about methods and appropriate styles of writing for more historically oriented research. Management and organization theorists are often wary of both documentary historical research and narrative accounts of organizations (e.g. Barrett and Srivastava 1991; Strati 2000; Martin 2002). On the other hand, while business historians generally keep to documentary research and chronological narratives of individual organizations, they rarely engage with the epistemological questions concerning sources and historical narratives raised by organization theorists. This means that when management and organization theorists venture into historical research they have to tackle questions concerning historical methods, the status of sources and styles of writing (Rowlinson 2004). Here we mention just a few examples of the challenges raised by such writing. Pettigrew’s (1985) longitudinal study of ICI’s corporate strategy is highly regarded by business historians (e.g. Coleman 1987; Warren and Tweedale 2002, 212). But as Pettigrew admits, the combination of ‘retrospective and real-time analysis of social and organizational processes’ presents particular advantages and disadvantages (Pettigrew 1985, 40), and these are different to those usually encountered by business historians. Pettigrew’s data consist of company documents, i.e. conventional historical data, as well as retrospective data from long semi-structured interviews. His main sources, however, were real-time observations and interviews conducted during his long stay in the organization. This combination led Pettigrew to a presentation of findings that repeatedly traverses the same period of time and departs from conventional chronological business history (Clark and Rowlinson 2002). Alongside Pettigrew’s research, the strategic choice
perspective (Child 1972) licensed several forays into business archives by organization theorists. These studies (e.g. Whipp and Clark 1986; Smith, Child and Rowlinson, 1990) incorporate the tension between action and structure in ‘analytically structured narratives’ (Clark 2000, 113). They are self-consciously situated ‘on the bridge between narrative and analytic schemas’ (Whipp and Clark 1986, 18). In other words they attempt to strike a balance between atheoretical, common-sense, empirical historical accounts of what actually happened, and overtheorized, sociological or economic accounts which explain the structural or economic necessity underlying events that have already been recounted by historians. Whipp and Clark (1986) are also notable as an example of organizational researchers who managed to secure possession of a large portion of historical records from a then extant company in order to carry out an historical case study without corporate sponsorship. Their study of innovations in work organization at Rover up until the early 1980s grants anonymity through pseudonyms for interviewees who gave retrospective accounts of events. These retrospective accounts are combined with liberal citation from company documents, including the directors’ minutes, in order to construct a detailed narrative of the company’s recent history. This allows for a historicized account of Rover, countering more universalist structural accounts of work organization derived from labour process theory (Braverman 1974). Whipp and Clark also demonstrate that anonymity for interviewees does not require the complete fictionalization of an organization, abstracted from time and place and as if existing in an extended present. Burrell’s (1997) excursion in Pandemonium represents more of a challenge to both historical research and organization theory. Burrell eschews the aura of realism and objectivity that is normally found in historical writing, avoiding anything resembling a conventional chronological narrative. Instead he presents organization theory with an invitation to an odd and occasionally disturbing set of historiographical debates, from witchcraft to the Holocaust.

Historians, and especially business historians, are not usually expected to produce a methodological justification for their work. The copious notes detailing the location of sources in the archive are usually seen as sufficient methodological justification in their own right. On the other hand, for social science research in general, and for qualitative researchers in organization studies in particular, it is expected that there will be a detailed methodological justification of the research conducted. But while contributors to management and organization theory journals are expected to provide a detailed account of their methodology, they are usually discouraged from listing archival sources in endnotes. We would therefore expect the historic turn to lead to greater reflection on the historical methods appropriate for studying organizations. We also believe that if experiments in historical styles of writing using multiple methods are to be encouraged, then both methodological essays and detailed empirical, historical, archive-based research with copious notes listing documentary sources need to be accommodated. We aim to promote both historically informed writing in organization theory and historical research informed by organization theory.

3. The philosophy of history and historical theorists

If there is to be methodological reflection and experimentation in historical writing, then this will involve further engagement with the philosophy of history and historical theorists such as Hayden White (1973, 1987), Michel Foucault (1970, 1972), Paul Ricoeur (1984), David Carr (1986) and Deirdre McCloskey (1994). Carr’s defence of narrative as the essence of human existence and consciousness in time stands at odds with the views of White or Foucault, that narrative is an imposition on the part of the historian as narrator. This impositionalist view of narrative in history is generally accepted within organization theory, as it is more broadly, so much so that Carr
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(1998) describes it as the received wisdom. This is largely because, amongst the historical theorists we have mentioned above, it is Foucault who has attracted most attention in organization theory (Carter, McKinlay and Rowlinson 2002). The interest in Foucault has inspired historical research on organizations from management and organization theorists (e.g. Jacques 1996), as well as accounting researchers (Hoskin and Macve 1988) and sociologists (Savage 1998). McKinlay (2002), who is an accomplished historian as well as a management academic, demonstrates how a Foucauldian conceptualization of a phenomenon such as the modern career can lead to a researcher entering an archive with a completely different approach to a conventional business historian. McKinlay focuses on the cartoons he found in the margins of a bank ledger from the early 20th century. Foucault’s Discipline and Punish (1977) was also the inspiration for Hassard, an organization theorist venturing into the archive of the Lancaster Monitorial Schools (Hassard and Rowlinson 2002). However, it seems to have gone unnoticed in management and organization theory that the impositionalist perspective is not completely accepted within the philosophy of history. Even as an impositionalist, White provides a licence for narrative historical writing, while Ricoeur appears to advocate narrative writing on the grounds that it is the only way to reconstruct the past in which people constructed their lives as narratives with plots.

In addition to Foucault, there has been increasing attention in management and organization theory to social theorists with a historical dimension. For example, Burrell (1997) relies heavily on Zygmunt Bauman’s (1989) analysis of the Holocaust. Kieser (1998) and Newton (2001) have championed the work of Norbert Elias (1994). du Gay has also reclaimed Max Weber as a historical theorist, countering the ahistorical image of Weber that is found in organizational behaviour textbooks, where he is presented as ‘the purveyor of a view of human history as a process of unrelenting rationalization’ (du Gay 2000, 73). In other words, du Gay has contested the view of Weber’s theorizing as universalist. The theoretical and philosophical status of narrative in history has relevance for narrative and storytelling in organizational ethnography. Boje (2001) in particular makes extensive reference to philosophers of history such as Deirdre McCloskey, Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White in his discussion of narrative. Newton (2004) maintains that if we accept McCloskey’s point that history ‘is a story we tell’, and that ‘continuity and discontinuity are narrative devices, to be chosen for their storytelling virtues’ (McCloskey 1990, 22), then we are not compelled to choose between polarized positions that emphasize continuity or discontinuity.

4. Corporate culture and social memory

Business historians (e.g. Dellheim 1986) realized early on that the corporate culture boom of the 1980s could ‘help the practice of business history’ (Lipartito 1995, 5), and draw it to ‘the centre of the study of management’ (Westall 1996, 21; Rowlinson and Procter 1999). The more practitioner-oriented corporate culture literature attaches particular importance to history. According to Deal and Kennedy, for example, ‘Good companies … understand that it is from history that the symbolic glue congeals to hold a group of people together’ (2000, 4). Collins and Porras (1996) famously argue that ‘visionary companies’ are ‘built to last’. They maintain that vision and longevity are linked. In the knowledge management field, Brown and Duguid’s (2000) attention to narrative as a means of transferring knowledge in organizations is deeply informed by history. Kransdorff (1998, 158), a corporate historian, argues that if the precepts of knowledge management are accepted, then corporate history is ‘the most efficient and portable repository’ of organizational memory. This is supported by Weick’s wry contention that every manager is a historian, and ‘any decision maker is only as good as his or her memory’ (1995, 184–85). On the other hand, it can be argued that corporate cultures are ‘invented traditions’
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(Rowlinson and Hassard 1993), analogous to the traditions invented by nations (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Gabriel (2000, 170–77) suggests that although ‘organizational nostalgia’ is a pervasive phenomenon, the mythologized past that it celebrates is ‘generally idealized’ and bears little relation to ‘documented history’.

History also features in the field of organizational memory. According to Walsh and Ungson’s basic definition, ‘organizational memory refers to stored information from an organization’s history that can be brought to bear on present decisions’ (Walsh and Ungson 1991, : 61). However, Nisley and Casey (2002, S37) have argued that Walsh and Ungson present a ‘repository image’ of organizational memory. This reflects Walsh and Ungson’s managerialist preoccupation with the usefulness of information retrieved from memory (Olivera 2000). The repository image is also prevalent in the emerging research programme on organizational forgetting (Martin de Holan and Phillips 2003a; Martin de Holan and Phillips 2003b; Martin de Holan and Phillips 2004; and Martin de Holan, Phillips, and Lawrence 2004), which explicitly connects memory, forgetting, and organizational learning.

Following on from Casey’s (1997) previous work on collective memory in organizations, Nisley and Casey contest ‘the static repository model of organizational memory’ as a store for ‘objectified truth’, arguing instead that organizational memory is politicized (Nisley and Casey 2002, S44). They use the example of corporate museums to illustrate the way in which organizations can choose to ‘selectively remember or forget’, and that ‘what is remembered or what is forgotten shapes an organization’s identity and image’ (Nisley and Casey 2002, S44). Whereas the organizational memory literature is predominantly psychological in its orientation, Nisley and Casey refer to the sociology of memory ‘as a socially constructed process (collective memory)’ (Nisley and Casey 2002, S38–40). Similarly, in a study of corporate war memorials, Gough argues that the repository model often strips ‘memory’ of ‘any historical context, or, indeed, of much meaning: other, that is, than in a normative way that suggests organizations might lose something of possible future use to them if they do not maintain an archival memory’ (Gough 2004, 444).

Casey (1997) hints at the connection between organizations and the ‘politics of memory’, which entails the recognition that as ‘a cultural construction’, memory is ‘subject to the influence of powerful organizational actors who interpret and construe history in the service of their present interests’ (Glynn 1997, 149). This is developed in Nisley and Casey’s (2002) analysis of corporate museums and organizational memory. In a similar vein, but without an explicit connection to the politics of memory, is Hegele and Kieser’s (2001) analysis of texts through which Jack Welch’s legend has been constructed, and Rowlinson’s (2002) essay on Cadbury World, which highlights the way in which corporate representations of heritage ignore controversial episodes in a company’s history (see Satre 2005). Casey’s work (1997; see Nisley and Casey 2002) also raises the prospect of an engagement with the growing field of social memory studies derived from Halbwachs (1950/1980; see Misztal 2003). Booth et al. (2005) make the connection between social memory and organizational symbolism, arguing that the symbolic life of an organization includes the symbolism of the past and the practices whereby the past is remembered. We feel that there is great potential to link the concepts of organizational culture and identity with social and collective memory studies.

5. Organizational history

Given the historic turn, the increasing reflection on appropriate styles of writing about organizations historically, the increasing attention to philosophers of history in organization studies, and the potential connections between organizational culture and collective memory, we feel
that it is now possible to speak of ‘organizational history’ as a distinctive field, as proposed by Carroll (2002). According to Carroll, organizational history draws upon concepts from organization theory and the wider social sciences and humanities. Carroll’s special issue of the Journal of Organizational Change Management on ‘the strategic use of the past and future in organizations’ includes ethnographic examinations of the meaning of an organization’s past to its members in the present (Parker 2002), studies of the organizational processes behind official corporate histories (Taylor and Freer 2002), and the reasons for such histories being undertaken in the first place (Ooi 2002). We would count Boje’s (1995) innovative dramaturgical analogy for analysing Disney’s corporate culture as an indicative example of a distinctive approach to organizational history. By historicizing organization itself, Kieser’s (1989, 1998) accounts of the genesis of formal organizations, and the evolution of rational organizational design in 18th-century German associations has opened a field of debate over ‘the historical context in which organizing has developed’ (Newton 2004, 1380). Organizational history also encompasses the historicization of subjectivity. Newton’s historicization of stress counters the popular ‘idea of Stone Age man suffering in the modern-day office’, in which stress is attributed to the failure of our natural animal instincts to keep up with technological and social developments (Newton 1995, 22, 136–40). More broadly, Jacques (1996) has traced the hidden history of management knowledge, while Shenhav (1995, 1999) provides a cultural and political account of the evolution of rationality in management thought, identifying the role of engineers in particular. Townley (2002) historicizes the all-pervasive advocacy of abstract management concepts as the solution to all contemporary problems, locating its foundations in modernity itself. In addition to Shenhav (1995, 1999), Abrahamson (1997), Barley and Kunda (1992) and Guillén (1994), have conducted bibliometric research that provides periodizations for managerial and organizational discourse. These methodologically rigorous studies extend the influential historiographical surveys by authors such as Bendix (1956), Clegg and Dunkerley (1980) and Perrow (1986), which we would identify as contributions to the development of organizational history as a distinct field. In the closing pages of his classic, Complex Organizations (1986), Perrow invited readers to join him in the ‘task of rewriting the history of bureaucracy’. Twenty years on we would say that the field of organizational history is tackling that task.

6. Business history and theory

Business history is already an established field in its own right, with its own well-regarded, long-standing journals, namely Business History and Business History Review. Narrowly defined, business history consists of ‘the systematic study of individual firms on the basis of their business records’ (Tosh 1991, 95). According to Chandler (1988, 302) the ‘discipline’s traditional sources’ consist of ‘letters, memoranda, periodicals and general accounts’. A distinction can be made between corporate, or company, history, which represents narrative accounts of individual businesses, often commissioned by companies themselves, and business history, which explores themes in the history of business organizations as institutions (Jones 1999). However, at the same time as the historic turn has been underway in organization studies, a consensus has emerged among business historians that they need to engage with the theoretical concerns from related fields if they are to refute the familiar criticism that they are “‘inveterate empiricists’, obsessed with setting the record straight, telling the story as it really was’ (Hannah 1984, 219). This engagement is also part of an effort by business historians to realize the potential of their work ‘to inform contemporary managerial decision-making, [and] influence public opinion’ (Jones 1999, 14). Another reason for business historians to seek a more theoretical orientation is that they are under increasing pressure to find a home in business schools (Rowlinson 2001). Conferences of business historians
in the USA (Scranton and Horowitz 1997) and UK (Slaven 2000) have specifically addressed the relation between business history and theory. Many business historians limit their engagement with theory to economics, on the grounds that various developments in the theory of the firm, especially the resource-based view, mean that economics now has ‘more to offer business historians’ (Casson and Rose 1997; Lamoreaux, Raff and Temin 1997). But others are more critical of economics and its inability to deal with process in history (e.g. Jones 1997). Prominent business historians such as Yates (1997) and Kipping (2003) have looked to other academic disciplines, principally historical and organizational sociology, and sociological concepts such as structuration, as an alternative to economic ‘efficiency’ theories of organization.

It is clear from Amatori and Jones’s important survey of the field, *Business History Around the World* (2003), that Alfred Chandler (1962, 1977, 1990) remains the essential reference point for business historians. In following the work of Chandler, business history has tended to focus on entrepreneurship, corporate structures, competitive advantage and technological innovation (Wilson 1995). Hausman (2003) explores the influence of Chandler in US business history, focusing on the tension between Chandlerian business history and cultural studies. He suggests that even as business history becomes increasingly contested by ‘“cultural criticism”’ – business historians continue to define themselves in accordance with, in defiance of, but always in relation to Chandler’s paradigm’ (Hausman 2003, 97). Galambos (2003) traces the conservative political origins of business history and the increasing hostility towards it from the paradigm of neoclassical economics. According to Galambos, although Chandler is credited with moving business history away from political controversy, there could be little doubt about Chandler’s benign view of big business. While Amatori and Jones praise Chandler for ‘taking business history beyond the lurches of ideological disputes’ (2003, 3), Galambos warns against the danger of consensus. He points out that under Chandler’s influence ‘the Harvard business school was and still is a powerfully consensus-oriented institution’, which ‘encouraged elaboration, not dissent’ (2003, 18). In his own work on innovation, Galambos claims to have built on Chandler, while also looking ‘beyond the firm to its political context, power relations, and links to the professions’ (2003, 24). Galambos highlights alternatives to the Chandler-inspired ‘conservative historical synthesis’, from sociology and political science, as well as from the versions of postmodernism that hold sway in the history profession, which increasingly focuses on class, gender and race. He foresees fruitful ‘turmoil in business history’ (Galambos 2003, 29). Lazonick (2003) calls for the integration of business history with economic theory, even though he is critical of neoclassical economics and draws upon Penrose (1959), as well as Chandler, to make a strong case that economists should take more account of ‘historical reality’. In common with most other contributors to Amatori and Jones’s collection, Lazonick assumes that if theory and history are to be integrated, then business history should be integrated with economic theory, albeit in a modified form. He takes it for granted that business historians require the ‘analytical tools’ that only economists can supply. Thus Kipping (2003) admits that he is being provocative in criticizing business historians for their preoccupation with economic performance at the expense of understanding historical decision-making processes. Kipping attributes this preoccupation to the influence of mainstream economic theories and the ‘dominant discourse’ of economic efficiency derived from Chandler. Chandler himself gives short shrift to those who ‘write business history as cultural history’ (2003, 405), just as he previously dismissed ‘psychological history’ which focused on ‘historical myths, symbols, images, and the like’ (Chandler 1988, 302; quoting Higham and Gilbert 1965). He maintains that there are new opportunities for business historians to produce economic history as history again, as opposed to economic history as economics.

As more business historians question the Chandlerian consensus and the deference to economic theory that prevails in mainstream business history, we expect that there will be much
greater engagement between business history and organizational history. A version of business history that is consciously informed by sociology and cultural studies may be virtually indistinguishable from organizational history, apart from its style and attention to sources.

7. Business ethics in history

Conventional business history has tended to neglect questions of meaning and ethics (Tweedale 1999, 93). However, historians contend that if the current business school preoccupation with ethics and corporate social responsibility is to be more than a passing fad, then it needs to be informed by history (Marens 1998; Marens and Wicks 1999; Warren and Tweedale 2002; Litvin 2003). What is more, companies are increasingly being held to account for their past ethical conduct. Probably the most extreme example of this is the pressure on German companies to account for their conduct during the Nazi era. It is notable that in their efforts to counter or pre-empt Holocaust-related lawsuits or public relations disasters, companies have commissioned historians who are expert in Holocaust history, rather than business historians, to lead ‘independent critical reviews’ of their records during the Nazi era (Pinto-Duschinsky 1998; Feldman 1999). A recent example is Bertelsmann, the German publishing company. In 1998 Bertelsmann was in the process of taking over Random House, the American publisher. Bertelsmann’s then chairman made much of the company’s history, claiming that in 1944 it had become ‘one of the few non-Jewish media companies closed down by the Nazi regime’, due to its continued publication of books that were banned by the Third Reich. But this company legend was challenged and proved to be false. Far from opposing the Nazi regime, Bertelsmann had published literature with anti-Semitic content. In response, Middelhoff contacted Saul Friedländer, the renowned historian of Nazi anti-semitism, and asked him to direct an Independent Historical Commission for Investigating the History of the Bertelsmann Firm during the Third Reich (IHC) (Friedländer et al. 2002). Friedländer was joined by Norbert Frei, a social and political historian, Trutz Rendtorff, a theologian, and Reinhard Wittmann, a specialist in the history of literature and the book trade (Friedländer et al. 2002). The IHC’s final report, Bertelsmann im Dritten Reich [Bertelsmann in the Third Reich] (Friedländer et al. 2002), was presented in October 2002.

Non-German companies have also had their histories re-examined, although unlike the German companies, such accounts have not usually been commissioned by the companies concerned. Recent examples include Edwin Black’s IBM and the Holocaust (2002) and Lowell J. Satre’s Chocolate on Trial (2005), which tells the story of Cadbury’s response to its discovery in 1901 that it had been purchasing cocoa beans from plantations in Portuguese colonies that used slave labour. The dilemmas that the company faced in the early 20th century resonate with contemporary issues of business ethics, corporate social responsibility and globalization. The darker side of corporate history, and how companies respond to revelations of their unsavoury past, raises interesting questions about the meaning and ethics of past business behaviour, and whether it can be studied for insights into contemporary dilemmas. On the one hand there is the obvious danger of judging past behaviour by today’s standards, but there is also the risk that by historicizing past behaviour and explaining it in context, past wrongs are thereby excused, allowing organizations to celebrate a glorious past regardless of their involvement in war, racism, slavery and repression, or a disregard for human health and welfare.

8. Metanarratives of corporate capitalism

Chandler’s monumental work, The Visible Hand (1977), while open to criticism (e.g. du Boff and Herman 1980; Roy 1990), has stood as virtually the only empirically researched historical
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metanarrative of the American industrial corporation, while his study of the USA, Britain, and Germany in *Scale and Scope* (1990) set the standard for comparative business history. But Chandler’s interpretation has been challenged by several competing metanarratives of American capitalism, such as those of Fligstein (1990), Roy (1997) and Prechel (2000). In addition, the applicability of the American corporate model in Europe has been questioned (Djelic 1998; Kipping and Bjarnar 1998), as has Chandler’s critique of family firms in the UK and other national contexts (Cassis 1997). Fligstein’s (1990) work is rooted in the new institutionalism of organization theory, whereas Roy (1997) and Prechel (2000) are examples of the new economic sociology, the former with an institutionalist orientation, the latter with a more Marxian hue. Each offers multiple methods, from cross-sectional surveys of quantitative data sampled at regular historical intervals, through to detailed narrative case studies. These competing metanarratives of American capitalism reflect longstanding historiographical concerns with the viability of the industrial corporation in advanced capitalist economies, and the power that such corporations wield, which resonate with contemporary debates concerning globalization (e.g. Kaysen 1996; Marens 2003).

Chandler has consistently neglected the management of labour, and the role of labour itself in the modern corporation (McCraw 1988, 20). This lacuna in business history has been addressed by the work of Jacoby (1997, 2004a) on the USA, Gospel (1992) on the UK, as well as comparative studies by Jacoby (2004b), amongst others. Scranton’s (1997) work raises the question of whether American capitalism could have taken alternative paths. The theme of historical contingency is picked up by Perrow (2002), in his masterful historiographical synthesis on the origins of American corporate capitalism, as well as the ‘historical alternatives’ school outlined by Zeitlin (2003). The historical alternatives approach denies ‘the existence of a unilinear logic of material progress’ (Zeitlin 2003: 63). It also encourages an appreciation of narrative, since it is through narrative that historical agents ‘constitute their identities and interests’ (2003, 65). History matters because the contingencies of history facilitate alternatives, and contingency calls for narrative. There is also room for the ‘dark side’ of power: exploitation and conflict.

Faced with mounting criticism of the traditional Chandlerian viewpoint, business historians such as Toms and Wilson (2003) have suggested extensions to it, for example, to accommodate current concerns with corporate governance and accountability to external stakeholders. However, it should be noted that there has also been robust defense of the Chandlerian paradigm. Whittington and Mayer’s (2000) landmark study stands in the tradition of the original Harvard studies that followed Chandler’s *Strategy and Structure* (1962), such as Channon’s (1973) study of British firms. They surveyed ‘the domestically owned members of the Top 100 industrial companies by sales’ in France, Germany and the United Kingdom (Whittington and Mayer 2000, 15), choosing two comparison points a decade apart, in 1983 and 1993. From their study they make strong political claims for the historical importance of the multidivisional corporation, and it is worth quoting them at length:

We should recall the sense of shock and anxiety experienced by Americans and American-trained scholars as they contemplated the Europe of the 1950s and 1960s. Europe was a dark continent, historically the home of undemocratic fascism, then still threatened by undemocratic communism. While Soviet Europe seemed to be mustering huge economies of scale, industry in Western Europe was fragmented by history and borders. Western European business elites were untrained, stagnant, and incestuous; they had already shown themselves compliant in the face of military occupation and dictatorship … The multidivisional, as it challenged the hierarchies of centralized functional organizations, and as it opened up the opaque complexities of holding companies, was part of a democratic as well
as economic project. The transparency, meritocracy, and accountability of the multidivisi-
ional might have been limited – they were – but on the whole the new structure was much
better than what went before. It was Europe’s good fortune that democratic and economic
interests coincided even to this extent.

(2000, 218–19)

Whittington and Mayer (2000) characterize the debate between Chandlerian business history,
which advocates the near universal superiority of the professionally managed capitalist corp-
oration, and institutionalist defenders of alternative organizational forms, as a reflection of ‘a wider
contest between positivist universalism and contextualist relativism within the management sci-
ences’ (2000, 11). They accept that ‘context matters’, but their question is, ‘how much?’ (2000,
33). According to Andrew Pettigrew (2001, S66), Whittington and Mayer’s systematic empir-
ical work demonstrates that ‘modernist forms of science variously labelled as “normal science”,
“positivism”, or “rigorous research” are still alive and well’ in management research. And we see it
as significant that their research is resolutely historical, albeit ‘history with purpose’ (Whittington
and Mayer 2000, 3). Even though they claim adherence to the Chandlerian view, Whittington
and Mayer’s bold claims reconnect business history with broader historiographical questions
concerning the relationship between business and politics in Europe (Kobrak and Hansen 2004).

9. Management history and management education

Management history and business history overlap, especially in the study of management prac-
tices, such as scientific management (Nelson 1980), or corporate governance (Marens 2002), or
particular management functions, such as labour management (Gospel 1992), marketing (Laird
1998; Witkowski 1998, 1999), or accounting (Kaplan and Johnson 1991; Toms 2002), and the
role of management consultants (McKenna 2001, 2006) and management education (Locke
1989; Amdam 1996; Bjarnar, Amdam and Gammelsæter 2001) in diffusing management prac-
tices. However, the history of management thought constitutes a well-established and concep-
tually distinct field. Much of the research on the history of management thought is focused on
F.W.Taylor and the influence of scientific management. Wrege and Greenwood’s (1991) account
is the most comprehensive and authoritative to date. Over the course of many years Wrege and
his co-researchers have demolished many of the myths surrounding Taylor (Wrege and Perroni
1974; Wrege and Hodgetts 2000). In his popular biography of Taylor, Kanigel (1997, 571) duly
acknowledges the work of Charles D. Wrege, his students and associates, and in particular his
late colleague, Ronald G. Greenwood. Taylor’s contribution to management thought has been
continually contested. Nelson (1980), for example, contends that Taylor’s technical achievements
outweighed his contributions to management thinking. As a counter to Braverman’s (1974) influ-
cential Marxist demonization of Taylor, Chris Nyland and his coresearchers (1996, 1998; Bruce
and Nyland 2001) have drawn attention to the progressive elements in Taylorism and scientific
management, and the close links between some Taylorists and organized labour. Monin et al.
(2003) have used techniques derived from literary criticism to deconstruct Taylorist texts. Lois
Kurowski has recently drawn attention to the significance of Taylor’s views on race (Kurowski
2002) and religion (Kurowski and Rowlinson 2003) that have previously been overlooked.

Beyond Taylorism, the history of management thought has seen a series of important revi-
sions. Mary Parker Follett is now acknowledged as an important management thinker whose
contribution to management thought was hitherto overlooked due to her being a woman (Tonn
2003), opening the way for further research into the contributions of thinkers that have previ-
ously been overlooked. Hoopes (2003) provides a comprehensive critique of the influence of
management thinkers in American society. Bill Cooke (1999) has argued that the leftist background of major figures such as Kurt Lewin has been written out of organization studies. Fiona Wilson (2003) has reconsidered management thinkers from a gender perspective, and Dallas Cullen (1994, 1997; Cullen and Gotell 2002) has provided a feminist critique of Maslow and motivation theory. Gantman (2005) combines a history of management thought with a telling critique of managerial ideology derived from critical management studies.

What brings business historians and management historians together is a concern to promote the study of history within business and management education. A case can be made that neither management practitioners nor management and organization studies academics know very much about business history, or the history of management and management thought. Chandler et al. (1986) made the case that history matters for practising managers. McCraw (in Chandler et al. 1986, 86) suggests that history can debunk an organization’s myths. Nevertheless, and seemingly without contradicting McCraw, Tedlow claims that history can help managers by ‘getting things, events, and facts into shared memory’ (in Chandler et al. 1986, 82), and business historians remain convinced that ‘good history is good business’ (Ryan 1988, 563). But whether or not history is a valuable ‘resource’ for managers in business (Usdiken and Kieser 2004, 329 note 11), that does not necessarily justify a place for history in business and management education. Debate on this issue has recently been prompted by David Van Fleet and Daniel Wren’s (2005) article tracing the apparent decline of history teaching in American business schools during the last 20 years. In response Yates (2005) contends that MBA students probably need business history, as promoted by Harvard Business School’s highly successful history course, whereas PhDs may need more management history. Bedeian (2004) criticizes the widespread ‘historical illiteracy’ amongst management researchers, and makes the case for studying the history of the management discipline in doctoral programs. In a long and considered review, Down (2001) takes on the argument that ‘business managers simply do not have the time to think about the past’. Down’s view is that business executives and management educators do not need to be historians, ‘or even to learn history’, but that since everyone involved in organizational activities bases their interpretations and decision-making on an analysis of past events, however recent, it is worth reflecting how such historical interpretations are constructed (Down 2001, 406). In other words, Down is arguing for an understanding of history as a process, rather than an accumulation of historical facts, and he warns against the use of historical case studies that are tailor-made for business students, which he describes as ‘kitsch, or light’ histories (2001, 407). In a similar vein Brady (1997) argues that ‘the study of history can benefit the modern manager’ by debunking erroneous business ideologies, such as free market economics.

Textbooks are one vehicle for promoting history within business schools, since even business school faculty who are committed to history can hardly be expected to teach history courses without the resources that are now expected by students. Wren’s (2005) textbook is now well established for the history of management thought. McCraw’s (1998) edited book derives from the Harvard business history course, and Wilson (1995) has provided an overview of British business history that can be used for teaching. Jeremy (1998) has produced a more conventional textbook for studying business history. However, each of these is predicated on the assumption that history should be taught as a separate course, rather than integrated into the main business school courses such as organization theory, marketing, strategy and human resource management. Keith Grint (2001), for example, draws on narratives of leaders in history, some of whom, such as Florence Nightingale, are hardly business leaders, in order to question conventional scientific leadership research.

If history is to be brought into the business school curriculum, then we should consider how it came to be excluded in the first place. Arguably, if there is a historic turn taking place in
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Management and organization theory, then there was an earlier ‘historic break’, whereby history and narrative case studies were excluded. It is worth noting that John Child began his career as a leading organization theorist with a major study of the history of management thought in Britain (1964, 1969). Derek Pugh and David Hickson were both major contributors to the Aston Studies. Their Writers on Organizations series (Pugh and Hickson 2000) now constitutes a small library on the history management thinkers. Pugh has been a keen supporter of the Management History Research Group that promotes the study of management thought, and the inclusion of history in the business school curriculum in the UK.

10. Public history

There is increasing public interest in history. This is reflected in the rise of public historians, such as Simon Schama, who presented a highly successful televised history of Britain (Schama 2001). History departments at leading universities are keener than ever to recruit faculty members with a high public profile. The work of several public historians, such as Schama, is predicated upon a conscious, and to some extent ironic, return to narrative and storytelling licensed by theorists such as Hayden White. The theoretical ramifications of a return to narrative in history resonate with the increased attention to narrative and storytelling in organization theory (e.g. Weick 1995; Gabriel 2000; Boje 2001), but organization theorists have tended to use literary theory to interrogate texts in their own discipline (e.g. Czarniawska 1999), instead of improving their writing for a wider readership, as postmodernist historians have done (Evans 1997). Developments in history have implications for business schools. For example, one of the leading conservative public historians, Andrew Roberts, presented a television series on leadership based on historical lessons from Hitler and Churchill (Roberts 2003). If, as Grint (2001) claims, history can provide an understanding of leadership as an art rather than a science, then historians such as Roberts are likely to impinge upon the claims of business school faculty in relation to leadership and other fields. Management and organization theorists may dismiss this as pop history or Heathrow Organization Theory (Burrell 1997). But John Ramsden (2002, 584–6), a historian who has examined the memorialization of Churchill, is not so dismissive of the business books that use Churchill as a model of leadership. Public historians have occasionally turned their attention to business matters. David Halberstam’s (1986) historical study of Ford and Nissan was a timely comparison of American and Japanese corporate cultures. In addition to his more popular work, Niall Ferguson is also the author of a major commissioned history of the Rothschild bank (1998b) that implicitly challenges conventional business school models (Rowlinson 2000). We wonder whether there is scope for considering the genres of public history and their relevance for management and organization theory.

One flourishing genre of public history is that of counterfactual history, which asks ‘what if?’ or ‘what might have been?’ (Cowley 2002). ‘What if?’ has been so successful that it is registered as a trademark of American Historical Publications, Inc. (Roberts 2005). This proliferation followed the success of Ferguson’s (1998a) theoretically informed work on counterfactual history. Initially counterfactuals concerned perennial questions: What if Germany had invaded Britain during the Second World War? (Roberts 1998). What if Lincoln had not freed the slaves? (Wicker 2002). What if’s have become the preserve of conservative historians, and often tend to imagine how much better history would have been if some radical event had been avoided, or, less frequently, how much worse it might have been if a more progressive turn had been taken (Žižek 2005). Counterfactuals have been set up as a liberal or conservative challenge to the historical determinism that Marxists allegedly adhere to. However, as Kieser (1994) has pointed out, a more historical approach could also temper the determinism that prevails in the predominant
theories of organization, and counterfactuals might be one way to counter such determinism (Booth 2003).

Summary and conclusions

As befits a new venture, we will finish with an optimistic overview of the prospects for management and organizational history. There is an historic turn underway in management and organization theory. Insofar as this turn leads to a historical reorientation, rather than merely a supplement or integration of history into management and organization theory, it is aligned with the reorientation from critical management and gender studies. As part of the historic turn there is scope for reflection on the appropriate methods and styles of writing for historically oriented studies of organizations. Management and organization theorists are taking more interest in the philosophy of history and historical theorists, such as White, Foucault and Ricoeur. While the initial concentration on Foucault reinforced the suspicion of management and organization theorists towards narrative, a greater understanding of White, Ricoeur and McCloskey is likely to lead to greater appreciation of well-crafted historical narratives. The connection of organizational culture and identity with history and social memory studies is one particular theme that we expect to see developing within the now identifiable field of organizational history. The field also encompasses the historicization of management and organizational phenomena. In parallel with the historic turn in management and organization theory, business history has become more open to an engagement with theory from sociology and cultural studies, even if many business historians remain in thrall to economics. The current concern with business ethics and corporate social responsibility needs to be more historically informed, and conversely historical research needs to pay more attention to the meaning and ethics of past business behaviour, as is illustrated by the treatment of history by many German companies that have only recently come to terms with their record during the Nazi era. The proliferation of metanarratives of corporate capitalism has challenged the Chandlerian paradigm, which opens up space for a much broader historiographical debate about the role of the modern corporation, not only in relation to economic growth, but also in relation to equality and democracy in an era of globalization. The study of management history continues to provide provocative revisions in the history of management thought. Lively historiographical debates in both business history and management history are likely to find an audience in business schools. Finally, there is enormous public interest in history, especially well-told historical narratives. This provides an impetus for business schools to respond to history, for example, by looking to historical insights into the art of leadership rather than dry science.

References


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