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CONCEPTUALIZING HISTORICAL ORGANIZATION STUDIES

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Abstract

The promise of a closer union between organizational and historical research has long been recognized. However its potential remains unfulfilled: the *authenticity of theory development* expected by organization studies and the *authenticity of historical veracity* required by historical research place exceptional conceptual and empirical demands on researchers. We elaborate the idea of *historical organization studies*, organizational research that draws extensively on historical data, methods and knowledge to promote *historically informed theoretical narratives* attentive to both disciplines. Building on prior research, we propose a typology of four differing conceptions of history in organizational research: history as evaluating, explicating, conceptualizing, and narrating. We identify five principles of historical organization studies – *dual integrity*, *pluralistic understanding*, *representational truth*, *context sensitivity* and *theoretical fluency* – and illustrate our typology holistically from the perspective of institutional entrepreneurship. We explore practical avenues for a creative synthesis, drawing examples from social movement research and micro-history. Historically informed theoretical narratives whose validity derives from both historical veracity and conceptual rigor, afford dual integrity that enhances scholarly legitimacy, enriching understanding of historical, contemporary and future-directed social realities.

Keywords

Historical Organization Studies, Organization Theory, Epistemology, Narrative, Research Methods.

CONCEPTUALIZING HISTORICAL ORGANIZATION STUDIES

The promise of a closer union between organizational and historical research has long been recognized (Kieser, 1994; Zald, 1996). Yet the potential of history to enrich and transform our understanding of contemporary organizations and organization theory remains unfulfilled (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Kieser, 1994; Zald, 1993). Much of organization theory tends to downplay “the exceptional value of the long time span” (Braudel, 1980: 27). History, signifying both the past as experienced by actors and the narratives historians weave from this (Mills, Weatherbee, & Durepos, 2013; Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014), often stays hidden in organizational research.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the potentialities for a creative synthesis between history and organization studies as endeavours that share common ground. We define *historical organization studies* as organizational research that draws extensively on historical data, methods and knowledge, embedding organizing and organizations in their socio-historical context to generate historically informed theoretical narratives attentive to both disciplines; alert to changing interpretations of meaning over time and “the residue or sedimentation of prior templates” (Suddaby, Foster, & Mills, 2014: 113). The term “historical organization studies” (Flyvberg, 2006; Greenwood & Bernardi, 2014; Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014; Rowlinson & Hassard, 2013) is arguably of more recent provenance than that of “organizational history” (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991; Rowlinson et al., 2014), relative to which it has been used less widely. Here we deploy the construct to denote organizational research to which history is integral, in which history and organization studies are of equal status, underpinned by the notion of *dual integrity*, as opposed to the history of a specific organization or set of organizational circumstances (Leblebici, 2014).

The field of organization studies is generally recognized as comprising a broad church, “an eclectic subdiscipline of social science approaches that bridges organization and management theory, organizational behaviour, organizational psychology, and the sociology of complex organizations” (Zald, 1993: 513). At core is the desire to better understand how actors constrained by social forces fashion organizational structures and practices that frame societal relations and institutions, impinging on individuals and communities (Clegg & Bailey, 2008). Yet to date organization studies has been limited by its orientation towards the synchronic, privileging contemporary, cross-sectional studies covering limited time-spans (Roe, Waller & Clegg, 2008; Zald, 1996). There is much to gain from greater incorporation of history as a dynamic process not “sliced into discrete moments” (Bryant & Hall, 2005: xxix). Organization studies, as a social science, stands to benefit from a more intense engagement with history as a means of infusing greater realism and substance; affording opportunities for access to structures and categories of knowledge hitherto under-explored, as Wallerstein (2004) shows in his theoretical-historical elaboration of world-systems dynamics. Through comparative analysis of temporal and spatial similarities and differences, fresh concepts may be developed and new insights emerge (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013; Ruef, 2012; Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011).

History, in turn, has been limited by an insufficiently rigorous engagement with theory. This has led to problem misrecognition and analytical and interpretive failings, as in the exaggerated claims made for the impact of railroads on US economic growth before the application of counterfactual reasoning and “cliometric” techniques, combining theory and quantitative methods (Fogel, 1964, 1970; Ferguson, 1997). Business and management history, especially, has much to gain from deeper association with organization studies whose theoretical insights might open up fresh avenues of analysis and interpretation (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

The challenge for historical organization studies, stated simply, is to integrate history and theory, overcoming the aversion to theory of historians and the neglect of historical processes by organization theorists. Rowlinson et al. (2014) identify a particular case of a more generic problem when they address the relationship between organization studies and history: that of spanning field boundaries (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Spanning boundaries demands two-way ontological and epistemological understanding and a willingness to engage with “the other”. The past, for the philosopher historian Michel de Certeau (1988: 5), is “other” time, a past that discourse sutures to the present while simultaneously “*dissociating*” one another. De Certeau (1988: 5) considers hearing “what the other keeps silent” as fundamental to deepening understanding. It is not just what we discern and apprehend that matters; what escapes our notice may be equally important (Decker, 2013). The limited permeability of field boundaries hampers the cultivation of relationships with historical otherness, curbing cross-pollination and the building of conceptual and methodological bridges, obstructing “conversation in the field[s] and dialogue with other disciplines” (Hansen, 2012: 693; Gulati, 2007).

Organization studies, we propose, should look outward to engage more fruitfully with history, whilst explicitly recognizing the difficulties of working across field boundaries to create a new space for academic enquiry. We aim to demonstrate how history might enrich organizational theory (Kieser, 1994), posing two guiding research questions. First, *how might the enterprise of organization studies be enriched through greater, more meaningful engagement with history, historical sources and historical methods?* Second, *what form(s) might such a dialectical engagement or creative synthesis of historical organization studies assume?* We elaborate four distinct conceptions of history in organization studies to establish a typology on which historical organization studies might be built, populating its cells with examples of pertinent organizational theories. Following this we identify five key principles

that inform historical organization studies – *dual integrity, pluralistic understanding, representational truth, context sensitivity, and theoretical fluency* – illustrating our typology holistically from the perspective of institutional entrepreneurship. We explore avenues for a creative synthesis in practice and reflect on the future potentialities for theory development in historical organization studies.

CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORY IN ORGANIZATION STUDIES

The epistemological paradigms embraced by organization studies and history may appear *incommensurable*, placing irreconcilable conceptual and empirical demands on researchers (Kuhn, 1970; Steinmetz, 2007a). The work of Kieser (1994) and Zald (1993, 1996) has nevertheless spawned a growing tradition of writing on the subject (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006; Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Mills et al., 2013; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993). Lamenting the lack of progress made in infusing organization studies with historical perspectives, Üsdiken and Kieser (2004) offer three potential remedies: history might “supplement” social science within organization studies; history and organization studies might be “integrated”; most radically, organization studies might be “reoriented” towards history and greater humanism. The position we take in what follows is “integrationist”, predicated on a union between organization theory and historical analysis. We dismiss supplementing as tokenistic and reorientation as unrealistic in urging organization theorists to go against the grain of social scientific tradition.

Recent research has played a major role in intensifying the debate (Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014; Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Leblebici, 2014; Lippmann & Aldrich; Suddaby et al., 2014; Wadhvani & Jones, 2014). Rowlinson et al. (2014) in particular have sharpened the analytical focus by highlighting three epistemological dualisms – explanation, evidence and temporality – between organization studies and traditional narrative history: organizational research privileges analysis over narration, self-generated data over

documentary sources, and chronology over periodization. The distinction between the narrative and social scientific types of history is encapsulated in the debate between Fogel and Elton in *Which Road to the Past?* (1983). Traditionalists such as Elton follow Collingwood (1993: 419) in asserting that narrative is inseparable from the idea of history. Fogel, conversely, champions the “rigorous testing” of social science theories (Fogel & Elton, 1983: 32). Narrative historians are reticent in revealing the principles underlying their research (Collingwood, 1993: 389), favouring the implicit embedding of theory within analysis, while social scientific history champions hypothesis testing and the explicit articulation of theoretical constructs (Fogel, 1970; Kousser, 1980; McCloskey, 1991). The two schools are also differentiated by their approaches towards interpretation, the former advocating a skilful interplay of inductive and deductive reasoning, the latter drawing its inferences more directly from theory, evidence and analysis (Aron, 1959).

Kipping and Üsdiken (2014), recognizing the importance of these distinctions, advance the debate by suggesting three ways in which history might relate to organization theory at the macro and micro levels of analysis: first, as a means of testing theory (which they term “history *to* theory”); second, as a means of informing theoretical perspectives (“history *in* theory”); third, as a means of incorporating historical complexity within the theorization process itself (“historical cognizance”). These are valuable ideas on which we build. In doing so, our objective of dual integrity implies reaching beyond cognizance to a unified, principled, historical organization studies integrating organization theory and historical analysis. Lippmann and Aldrich (2014) propose evolutionary theory as offering a potential integrative domain, recognizing even-handedly the importance of context in conjunction with the articulation of generalized organizational processes (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). Wadhvani and Jones (2014) likewise stress the importance to historical entrepreneurship theory of transcending chronology to reveal the interrelationships between

actions and events. Despite this *rapprochement*, scholars from both history and organization studies, Leblebici (2014: 56) suggests, need to express their differing ontological and epistemological positions more clearly, especially how “their unique perspectives lead not only to substantive debates but also an eventual integration”. In what follows we build on these ideas to propose that the division between the narrative and social scientific modes of historical research and writing help point the way toward a creative synthesis between history and organization studies, engendering “substantive and insightful understanding of human agency by leveraging their disciplinary differences” (Leblebici, 2014: 66).

Organizations are structures of sedimentation, where change is often invisible to the observer (Clegg, 1981; Cooper, Hinings, Greenwood, & Brown, 1996). However, this does not mean that the potentialities of history in organization studies have gone unnoticed. We concur with Kipping and Üsdiken (2014) that organizational research contains more history than commonly “meets the eye”. Several prominent theoretical strands within organization studies are informed by a historical dynamic, albeit often unstated. Organizational theories implicated by history that exhibit historical awareness include path dependence (David, 1985; Arthur, 1989; Sydow, Schreyögg & Koch, 2009) and cognate theories such as imprinting (Stinchcombe, 1965; Johnson, 2007) and structural inertia (Hannan & Freeman, 1984); the resource based view of the firm (Wernerfelt, 1984) and dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997); organizational ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Ruef, 2004; Ruef & Patterson, 2009); institutionalism (Leblebici et al., 1991; North, 1990; Rojas, 2010; Suddaby et al., 2014); postmodernist and Foucauldian perspectives on genealogy (Foucault, 1979; Newton, 2004); organizational memory (Rowlinson, Booth, Clark, Delahaye, & Procter, 2010); and strategy and strategic change (Raff, 2000). Our intention is not to discuss individual theories, but to think more holistically about conceptualizing the foundations for historical organization studies; the emergence of a

creative synthesis depending crucially on building on common ground where it exists (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014). To this end, in Figure 1 we delineate four distinct conceptions of history in organization studies, offering a foundational model for the future development of historical organization studies.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Two important distinctions underpin our typology. The first relates to the *purpose* of incorporating history in organizational research. The classic view is to conceive of history as *interpretation*, as a means of explaining the present through the identification of (dis)continuous social forces or causal chains bearing upon it (Collingwood, 1993; de Certeau, 1988). Interpretation as a guiding purpose contrasts with history conceived as a resource that enables the *exposition* and substantiation of ideas, constructs and theories (Aron, 1959; Newton, 2004). The second distinction relates to *mode of enquiry*. In the social scientific approach, theorization is explicit, oriented to the identification of overall patterns, processes and generalizations as the primary goal (Fogel, 1970; McCloskey, 1991). Conversely, in the narrative mode, the expression of theoretical ideas remains embedded within the story being told (O'Connor, 2000). When these two dimensions of *purpose* and *mode* are juxtaposed, a typology of four distinct conceptions of historical organization studies emerges, each with different potentialities for organization studies: namely, *history as evaluating*; *history as explicating*; *history as conceptualizing*; and *history as narrating*. In what follows, we elaborate each conception with reference to illustrative organizational theories that fit within the cells of our typology (or complicate it – some, like path dependence, straddling more than one cell). This framework provides a conceptual foundation for envisioning a more fully informed, sensitive, reflexive approach to historical organization studies and the conditions needed to achieve a creative synthesis (Rowlinson et

al., 2014); adding to the overarching body of organizational scholarship by demonstrating how disparate streams of historical research may be synthesized according to their purpose and mode of enquiry.

History as Evaluating

The primary focus of this type of research is theoretical, in which pre-existing theory frames the analysis of complex empirical issues. Theory is confronted with detailed historical evidence to test its explanatory power and identify limitations. The value to organization studies lies in *testing and refining existing theory*. Organizational ecology research (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1984, 1989), for example, has spawned a large body of theory relating to the dynamics of organizational populations, including founding, market entry and exit, structural inertia, organizational mortality and longevity (Freeman, Carroll, & Hannan, 1983; Barron, West, & Hannan, 1994; Ruef, 2004). In the strategy domain, Miller and Shamsie (1996), whose work is grounded in the resource-based view of the firm, distinguish between property-based and knowledge-based capabilities in their study of US film studios, finding that the former matter most in periods of environmental certainty and the latter in times of uncertainty. Liebowitz and Margolis (1995) probe the case of the VHS recording format, once taken as an example of “lock-in” to an enduringly inferior outcome, to pinpoint limitations in the alluring but imperfect logic underlying path dependence theory, refining understanding by identifying three distinct forms of path dependence.

Historical organization studies of the *evaluative type*, wherein history is used to interrogate and refine theory, help uncover the “dynamics of the phenomena” under scrutiny while pointing to commonalities observed elsewhere (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991: 617). The argument is regularly made that historical case studies are too specific for meaningful lessons to be extracted from them; that in the search for generalizations, the role of history is minimized. Yet history is not incompatible with generalized mechanisms. According to this

conception, history serves as laboratory or testing ground to confront theory with reality in an incremental process of knowledge creation. Historical specificities matter, since differences between industries and organizations can unsettle fixed conceptions (Eisenhardt, 1989). This is reflected in the extensive overviews of organizational ecology research conducted by Hannan and Freeman (1989) and Carroll and Hannan (2000). Re-evaluating judgments is vital since researchers' views are located within "different regimes of evaluation", bearing the stamp of the times in which they were formed (Leblebici, 2014: 74).

History as Explicating

Fundamental to explication is the development of an interpretive synthesis consistent with both theory and the historical record. The value to organization studies lies in *applying and developing theory to reveal the operation of transformative social processes*. North (1990), for example, is keen to discover why nations experience ongoing disparities in economic performance. He finds his answer in enduring differences in institutional frameworks, some of which are more conducive to economic growth than others. In North's world, the pivotal relationship in society is between institutions (which establish the rules of the game) and organizations (teams that play by the rules). Institutional frameworks shape interorganizational fields but institutional entrepreneurs may seek to change the rules to their advantage, instigating new practices (Leblebici et al., 1991). Institutional theory owes much of its appeal to its efficacy in explaining social phenomena in ways that question conventional assumptions (Suddaby et al., 2014). This recognizes that the choices actors make are constrained by prevailing societal rules and ideologies, accentuating the importance of institutional path dependence and adaptation (Leblebici et al., 1991).

Fligstein's (1990) explication of the metamorphosis of corporate control in the US from 1880 to 1990 focuses on the transition undergone by the country's largest industrial companies. He locates the causes of relative decline in the "long-run strategic interaction"

that played out between firms and successive governments; observing that this derives from the idea of the firm engendered by prevailing institutional frameworks. Boltanski and Chiapello's (2007: 531) explication of contemporary capitalism is even more ambitious, seeking to unveil its underlying mechanisms that fail to evoke meaningful critique. They aim to reinsert this missing critique into "the interstices of everyday life" by taking a long view that is "collective and historical from start to finish" (pp. 535, 532).

In historical organization studies of the *explicatory type*, comprehensive arguments emerge from the interplay of theoretical ideas and historical evidence, leading to new interpretations of past-to-present and theoretical refinements. The mode of enquiry is social scientific, featuring fluent narration and sometimes long-run comparisons across space and time (Piketty, 2014). Notions of (dis)continuity are deployed in empirical analyses to contrast periods of incremental change with shorter bursts of rapid change, when time is compressed and the forces of change transformative (Mizruchi, 2013). Numerous sources are drawn upon to substantiate the ideas and propositions advanced in drawing far-reaching conclusions.

History as Conceptualizing

The value to organization studies of this type of research lies in *generating new theoretical constructs*. David's (1985) paper on the longevity of the QWERTY keyboard is foundational to the theory of path dependence, showing how temporally distant events can have lasting impact (Sydow et al., 2009). The QWERTY layout, designed in 1867 to overcome mechanical clashes, became "locked-in" despite better formats being available due to "*technical interrelatedness, economies of scale and quasi-irreversibility of investment*" (David, 1985: 334). Historical research in the strategy domain elicits the generation of concepts. Tushman and O'Reilly's (1996) work on organizational ambidexterity, which juxtaposes the challenges of *exploitation* and *exploration*, demonstrates the tendency for firms to evolve strategies and practices in sync with environmental conditions, achieving

efficiency in exploitation, but with the risk of structural inertia impeding effectiveness in exploration. Hence, only a “small minority of firms initiate discontinuous change before a performance decline” (Tushman & O’Reilly, 1996: 28). One such firm is Intel, which has refashioned itself twice since 1968, first from semiconductor memory manufacturer to microprocessor specialist and latterly to Internet building block supplier. Burgelman (2002) analyses these transitions within the framework of evolutionary theory, attributing Intel’s success in reinvention to a complex of factors enabling it to embrace bold strategies, nurture adaptive capabilities, and synchronize exploitation and exploration.

At the core of historical organization studies of the *conceptual type* is the desire to draw lessons from history, generalizing inductively on the basis of specific cases. This may be an “inexact process” but it is one that may nurture “richer and more robust... conceptualization” (Wadhvani & Jones, 2014: 213). David’s (1985: 332) story caught the imagination because it pointed to the importance of contingency in shaping persistent solutions, as well as to “the dynamic process” itself taking on “an *essentially historical character*”, engendering a new conceptual language and perspective on organizational dynamics. Likewise, Tushman and O’Reilly (1996: 24-7) propose that ambidexterity results from the combination of loose-tight structures accompanied by strong social controls, encouraging diversity and a plurality of approaches within an enabling strategic framework. Burgelman (2002) describes his research method as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), proceeding inductively from analysis of data gleaned from documents and interviews with top executives. His research leads to a series of “insights” – part observational, part conceptual – that extend evolutionary theory.

History as Narrating

The value to organization studies of this type of research lies in *explaining the form and origins of significant contemporary phenomena*. Theory is largely offstage, propositions

and arguments emerging inductively from the accumulation, ordering and analysis of historical evidence. This approach exhibits a high level of context sensitivity (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014). In Chandler's trilogy (1962, 1977, 1990), for example, a mass of case evidence is deployed to explain the spread of innovations such as managerial hierarchies, multidivisional structures and diversification. His text combines interpretive elements with analytical moves to identify the causal factors that lead firms to displace markets in coordinating economic activity and first movers to establish dominant positions. In *Exporting the American Model* (1998), Djelic recounts how American policy-makers and their European allies accelerated convergence on the American corporate system of economic organization after World War II, promoted as a model for the West. Beyond the corporate perspective, Tilly (2004) probes the history of social movements from the later eighteenth century, defined as a distinct form of contentious politics. Effective action, he argues, derives from a blend of campaigning, application of a repertoire of techniques, and the demonstration of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment.

Historical organization studies of the *narrative type* privileges historical storytelling and argumentation over theorization, while yielding general propositions susceptible to theoretical interrogation and empirical testing. There is increasing intellectual exchange around the narrativization of organizational life, which is closely related to sensemaking (Maclean, Harvey, & Chia, 2012; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Weick, 1995); historical time being an intrinsic aspect of the sensemaking process (Maclean, Harvey, Sillince, & Golant, 2014; Wadhvani & Jones, 2014). Generalizations and propositions flow inductively from careful evaluation of evidence – primary sources, such as documents, diaries, letters and oral histories, as well as secondary sources, including research monographs. Historiography, the process of writing and making meaning from history, is for de Certeau (1988: 9, 10) “a staging of the past” in which the past represents “the fiction of the present”. In this

dramatization, logic and theory are backstage, drawn upon to make sense of evidence and to link one piece of evidence to another. Theoretical arguments infusing such historical narratives remain largely unexpressed (Leblebici, 2014). Chandler deploys the logic of internalization in *The Visible Hand* (1977) without explicitly mentioning the theory of transaction costs (Bucheli, Mahoney, & Vaaler, 2010; Williamson, 1979). Djelic (1998) draws implicitly upon path dependence theory to show how and why contexts and specificities matter; the strength and interplay of isomorphic and path dependent forces varying between countries. Likewise, history matters, Tilly (2004), suggests, because it explains why social movements embrace distinctive forms of protest, highlighting the contextual conditions that make movements possible (Davis, McAdam, Richard, Mayer, & Zald, 2005; de Bakker, den Hond, King, & Weber, 2013).

TOWARD A CREATIVE SYNTHESIS

A creative synthesis is defined by Harvey (2014: 325) as “an integration of group members’ perspectives into a shared understanding that is unique to the collective.” The four conceptions of history explored above are expressions of “the historicity of organizational life” (Zald, 1996: 256). The phenomena that organization theorists seek to explain are historically constructed and imprinted (Stinchcombe, 1965). Theory, if it is to be truly expressive of social reality, can only be developed, elaborated and tested against the type of rich temporal data, quantitative and qualitative, found in history (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991). This interplay is central to knowledge creation, since, returning to de Certeau’s (1988) notion of the past as other, “the making of knowledge claims occurs in an awareness of... involvement with others and otherness” (Holt & den Hond, 2013: 1587).

The ideal embraced by the notion of *dual integrity* is that historical organization studies should be deemed authentic within the realms of both organization studies and history. Within the eclectic mix of theory and subject matter that constitutes organization

studies we hold that the acid test of authenticity is *theory development*, making an explicit contribution to advancing generalizable knowledge within the field (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2011). The pluralism of organization studies allows for variety in theory and methods while remaining focused on organizations, organizing and organizational contexts (Holt & den Hond, 2013). History, conversely, is near unbounded in subject matter (Braudel, 1980). Its defining characteristics relate to method and the derivation of meaning. The acid test for authenticity is *historical veracity*, the quality of *ringing true* that stems from faithfulness to available evidence, involving source analysis and evaluation to determine the quality of evidence and its interpretive value (Bloch, 1953; Elton, 2002; Evans, 1997). Logic and inductive reasoning are essential to interpretation, but should be consistent with the evidence, acknowledging the interpretive weight placed upon it (Carr, 1990). Likewise, given the subjective element of imagination inherent in interpretation, a key requirement is that historians should declare their sources so that others may challenge inferences drawn from them (Collingwood, 1993; White, 1987). Historians do not apply the test of replicability, but in the name of historical veracity apply instead the test of openness with respect to evidence and reasoning in the imaginary re-enactment of past experience (Elton, 2002).

The fundamental premise of this paper is that the *authenticity of theory development* expected by organization studies and the *authenticity of historical veracity* required by historical research place exceptional conceptual and empirical demands on researchers, in part explaining the hitherto limited contribution of history to organization studies. Appraised against the standards of *theory development* and *historical veracity*, the exemplars considered in our discussion of Figure 1 largely satisfy both requirements, demonstrating how engagement with history has enriched the field of organization studies. There are occasional failures to establish historical veracity in the selected examples. Burgelman (2002), for example, details his research methods but does not fully satisfy historical standards by

identifying his sources (interviewees and documents) and relating these to specific events. However, we contend that what has been achieved already indicates the considerable potential for growth in all four types of historical organization studies. For this to be realized, the principles for a creative synthesis underpinning the practice of historical organization studies require further elucidation. We next argue that *dual integrity*, *pluralistic understanding*, *representational truth*, *context sensitivity* and *theoretical fluency* are fundamental to historical organization studies, which should seek to resolve some of the apparent dichotomies identified above by *embracing alterity*. Dismantling the forged partitions between knowledge domains is to approach social life in its full, dynamic potential, enhancing the capacity to see afresh and think anew (Braudel, 1980).

Principles for a Creative Synthesis

Dual integrity. We believe that fruitful collaboration depends on *dual integrity*. This represents the *overarching principle* in the synthesis of organizational and historical scholarship, from which the remaining four principles follow. We give dual integrity primacy because it implies mutual respect and demonstrable competence in both disciplines, according equal value to both while guaranteeing appropriate standards in each (see Table 1). We regard dual integrity as critical to attracting scholarly legitimacy in a nascent field.

There are obvious dangers. Kieser (1994: 619) emphasizes that the exercise of integrity in selecting and interpreting material is crucial to avoid mirroring “the ideologies of the researcher”. White (1987: 164) warns of the risk of historical dilettantism, charging those who venture into history to consider the values they bring to the process: “If you are going to ‘go to history’, you had better have a clear idea of which history, and you had better have a good notion as to whether it is hospitable to the values you carry into it.” Dual integrity implies embedding a Janus-like perspective within the research design itself, drawing on the past as a subjective, interpretive means of making sense of the present and future (Suddaby,

Foster, & Trank, 2010). Viewed in this light, neither discipline should direct the research agenda at the expense of the other, connecting “abstract concepts in organization theory... to case-specific historical knowledge without undermining the value of one or the other”. The most celebrated social theories demand “both a historic turn and an appreciation of a theoretical lens” (Leblebici, 2014: 79, 81). Dual integrity has implications for theory building, creating the conditions for history to inform conceptual lenses in organizational research as an integral part of theorization with the power to “stretch the scope of explanations” (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014: 128). For these reasons, we are not suggesting that organization theorists merely borrow tools or methods from history, but are striving instead for a meaningful synthesis in accord with the ideal of dual integrity.

Pluralistic understanding. Given the different conceptions of history explored above, it is evident there is no one best way to achieve a creative synthesis. We agree with Hall (1992: 189) that “it makes little sense to single out any one strategy as the ‘best’.” Dual integrity requires a *pluralistic understanding* open to alternatives and different forms of synthesis. This involves a relaxation of boundary assumptions that Steinmetz (2007a: 1) likens to the arbitrary “political borders that European colonial powers drew onto the map of Africa.” We do not advocate a collapse of opposites, “the instantaneous dissolving of what... have been understood as profound antinomies” (Martin, 2003: 2). Rather, by drawing on the strengths of both disciplines, we favour blending approaches to “seemingly dichotomous concepts that are, in fact, mutually implicated” (Suddaby et al., 2011: 243). This draws on Weber’s (1947) notion of *verstehen* informed by an empathetic tolerance of different methods and practices, marrying historical explanation with an understanding of human agency; the distancing afforded by historical distance enhancing understanding of contemporary and future-directed realities (Ricoeur, 1978). Such an approach acknowledges that “the conceptual breadth of organization theory, its being ‘pluri-paradigmatique’, allows for ways

of comparative theorizing and analysing that few other ‘disciplines’ are able to match” (Holt & den Hond, 2013: 1594). This implies a form of transdisciplinarity (Hall, 1992; Steinmetz, 2007b) that entails “a genuine willingness on both sides of the cultural divide to accept the potential contributions of the other” (Leblebici, 2014: 80). Building on Holt and den Hond’s (2013: 1594) notion of “stretching”, we advocate openness to diversity and alterity regarding epoch and approach; developing greater porosity of boundaries to accommodate different ways of doing history in organization studies.

Representational truth. A third principle stresses the importance of historically informed organizational research *ringing representationally true*, exhibiting a high degree of congruence between evidence, logic and interpretation. A “good story”, writes Zald (1993: 522), “must be true, and if the world is complex, a true story cannot just be weighted to one side of the issue”. As Judt and Snyder (2013: 260) observe, “If it rings false, then it’s not good history, even if it’s well written... on the basis of sound scholarship”. The thesis propounded by Chandler (1962) that structural innovation is a function of strategic change rings representationally true due to his faithfulness to detailed evidence and the logic underpinning his interpretation, not because he aimed to satisfy the expectations of organization theorists (Leblebici, 2014). The organizations Chandler explored can be re-examined by management theorists through different cognitive lenses and, if appropriate, recast in a contemporary light (Bucheli et al., 2010; Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014).

Organizational theory regularly adopts a decontextualized style in which organizations appear uprooted from their socio-cultural environments. Abstracted representation is intended to aid generalizability and prevent identification, such that organizations are referred to anonymously as, say, “the Office” (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012) – timeless, dislocated “abstracted entities” (Zald, 1996: 256). Yet such fictionalization, while ensuring anonymity, impedes representational verisimilitude and verification (Clark &

Rowlinson, 2004; Godfrey & Hill, 1995). Too much abstraction removes from actors and events the “untidiness” that Pettigrew (1985: 1) believes they should retain and reveal; a sentiment we endorse on the grounds that “an accurate mess is far truer to life than elegant untruths” (Judt & Snyder, 2013: 270). In the case of historical research, the need for anonymity of firms and actors may be obviated, since the events in question occur at one remove in the “other time” of the past (de Certeau, 1988). Disembedding organizations from the local contexts within which they were formed deprives the reader of telling details, preventing the narrative from *ringing true* to those who read it (Geertz, 1973). History and real human social existence are inextricably related, social exchange being “historically transacted” (Bryant & Hall, 2005: xxxi). Representational truth is required to convey this interrelatedness.

Context sensitivity. Representational truth is part and parcel of what Judt and Snyder (2013: 268) call “getting it right”, constructing a rounded picture to enhance understanding of the issue in question. This underlines the importance of *context sensitivity*, attentiveness to historical specificities, a fourth principle for a creative synthesis that is especially pronounced in historical research of the explicatory and narrative types (Hassard, 2012).

Hall (1992: 181) contends that there are theoretical and methodological reasons for prioritizing contextualized explanation. Organizations are not stand-alone entities but are “shaped by the worlds they inhabit” (Lippman & Aldrich, 2014: 124). Attentiveness to temporal and geographical settings unlocks a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural embeddedness of organizations and institutions as the outcome of contingent historical processes from which they have emerged (Suddaby et al., 2014). From this viewpoint, context is not a “constant or passive variable” but exhibits instead a “strong presence” (Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer, & Zilber, 2010: 1238, 1237).

Lippmann and Aldrich (2014) draw on Morgan and Prasad's (2009) investigation of tax policies in France and the US to highlight the profound influence socio-historical contexts exert on particular institutional arrangements. Wadhvani and Jones (2014: 194) likewise identify context as key to the entrepreneurial process because opportunities can only be seized "in time". Hence, the "making present" of entrepreneurial opportunity depends on the ongoing interplay between entrepreneur, place and the process of becoming, enveloped by the "experiential flow of history" (Popp & Holt, 2013: 10). Notwithstanding the parsimony principle, which cautions that too much detail may detract from the argument being made (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), organizations are historically nested in specific temporal, socio-political contexts and processes. Context sensitivity is required to elucidate more fully their present significance in contemporary society (Geertz, 1973; Zald, 1993).

Theoretical fluency. The fifth principle of historical organization studies is *theoretical fluency* (Hassard, 2012), signalling command of the appropriate conceptual language. The approach followed by organization theorists of taking an existing theory as the starting-point for their research, putting the "truth" to one side, is misplaced here (Leblebici, 2014). Organizations are rarely chosen as sites of historical empirical investigation for their potential theoretical contribution so much as for the intrinsic interest of the organization or subject under study (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Leblebici and Shah (2004) stress that to gain a fuller understanding of organizations demands theorization together with an interpretation of actors' intentionalities, since: "Time is not a line, but a network of intentionalities" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 417). Harvey, Press and Maclean (2011) provide a useful example of explicating temporal-theoretical ideas in their examination of how tastes are formed and reproduced across generations through their study of William Morris. Taste formation emerges as a *dynamic* process. As this study shows, ideas from existing organizational theory may be revised when confronted with historical data, leading to theoretical development

(Kieser, 1994). Such theoretically informed historical organizational research might overcome the apparent dichotomy between exposition and interpretation outlined in Figure 1 by providing a more nuanced dialectic between explanation and understanding, each implicated in the other. As Ricoeur (1978) explains, “Understanding precedes, accompanies, closes, and thus *envelops* explanation. In return, explanation *develops* understanding analytically”. This suggests that while theoretical fluency is particularly suited to history as conceptualizing and evaluating, it also enhances conceptions of history whose primary purpose is to explain. In this way, explicitly (in the case of explicating) or more implicitly (narrating), “a theoretical narrative becomes an integral part of historical narrative discourse” (Leblebici, 2014: 73).

The notion of “rhetorical history” advanced by Suddaby et al. (2010) is illustrative. This draws on Hobsbawm’s (1983) concept of invented tradition to underline the interpretive dimension of history, revealed as a combination of subjective and objective reality through which the past may be persuasively re-interpreted. Rhetorical history addresses the theoretical intersection between history and organization studies where the two become conjoined. Wadhvani and Jones’s (2014) exploration of historical entrepreneurship also targets this conceptual overlap, building temporal sequencing into an overarching theoretical perspective designed to emphasize how entrepreneurs’ conception of their socio-historical situatedness influences the types of opportunity they pursue. Both examples illustrate Kipping and Üsdiken’s (2014: 576) notion of “historical cognizance”, characterizing studies that absorb historical complexity as “an explicit part of theorizing itself, through the introduction of period effects or the development of historically contingent theories.”

Table 1 brings together the four conceptions of history in organization studies and integrates these with the five principles delineated above. This indicates the relative importance – essential, important or useful – of each principle to each mode of historical

inquiry, and states succinctly the value of applying a particular principle in each type of research. It suggests that some principles weigh more heavily in some instances than in others. For example, the principle of theoretical fluency may be of relatively limited importance to scholars like Chandler (1962) when writing business history narratives, but it is intrinsically *important* to the other three modes of enquiry. Likewise, the conceptualizing approach may call for a move away from representational truth in favor of abstraction, as illustrated by Weber's (1947) effort to develop ideal types. History of the explicating type, as exemplified by North (1990), arguably calls for a higher degree of representational truth due to the specific "truth claims" that studies of historical institutionalism tend to advance (Suddaby et al., 2014: 104). Dual integrity, the overarching principle from which the others follow, is deemed *essential* to all types of historical organization studies.

Insert Table 1 about here

Realizing a Creative Synthesis

The five principles discussed above underpin our vision of historical organization studies as an emerging field of academic enquiry. Each of the four quadrants within our typology represents a lens through which a particular phenomenon might be examined, with differing insights emerging in consequence. This can be illustrated by taking a single example. For this historiographical exercise we have selected *institutional entrepreneurship* as the theoretical domain (DiMaggio, 1988), acknowledging the growing interest in historical institutionalism (Leblebici et al., 1991; Suddaby et al., 2014) and historical entrepreneurship theory (Popp & Holt, 2013; Wadhvani and Jones, 2014), using Andrew Carnegie as our historical subject.

Institutional theory, a prominent conceptual lens in organizational theory, holds that organizations are susceptible to their socio-cultural milieu as well as to prevailing economic

conditions (Suddaby, 2010a). An institution comprises “more-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behaviour that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing order” (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008: 4-5). Hence, institutions take the form of systematized rules or norms of behaviour that lend significance to taken-for-granted social arrangements that are relatively impervious to change (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2009).

Organizational institutionalism has evolved from an initial concern with subjective values, attitudes, informal interaction and local communities, dubbed “old institutionalism” (Selznick, 1949; 1957), to a preoccupation with legitimacy, embeddedness, routines and scripts at field or societal level, labelled “new institutionalism” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 13; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). “Neo-institutionalism”, which blends the two approaches, focuses attention on organizational stability and change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

However, while old institutionalism recognized the influence of agency in shaping social arrangements, new institutionalism has tended to overlook individual efforts to mould institutional rules, prompting calls to correct this imbalance by revising perceptions of individuals as agents rather than onlookers (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011). Dynamic players within the field orchestrate institutional change according to Leblebici et al. (1991). Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) likewise stress the role played by elites as change agents in institutional adaptation. The notion of “institutional entrepreneurship” that these views convey underlines the key role of individual agents in reshaping institutional landscapes in their favor. Institutional entrepreneurship therefore concerns “the activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones” (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004: 657).

Hence, institutional entrepreneurs are actors who envision and engender novel institutions to suit their preferred interests (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006).

The historical subject under review here is the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) operating within the field of philanthropy. Carnegie was heavily involved in institution building (Nasaw, 2006). His pledge to distribute the bulk of his wealth during his lifetime marks him out as a pioneer, reframing expectations for others to follow (Bishop & Green, 2008).

Evaluating. Under this conception of history, detailed historical evidence is deployed in *testing and refining existing theory*. One element critical to institutional entrepreneurship, and germane to Carnegie's case, concerns legitimacy and how it is acquired in a situation where there is no pre-existing legitimacy on which to draw, as might apply in a nascent industry or new institutional environment. Aldrich and Fiol (1994) argue that legitimacy is a substantive issue in institutional entrepreneurship, its pursuit progressing from innovation to wider socio-political contexts. Legitimacy is closely allied to reputation. Carnegie's standing had been badly tarnished by his reputation for exploiting customers, acquaintances and enemies alike (Hutner; 2006), and most emphatically by the 1892 Homestead strike when he locked employees out of the steelworks and brought in the military. Through authorship of *The Gospel of Wealth*, Carnegie (2000b) sought to reframe the compact between wealthy industrialists and the wider community, enhancing the legitimacy of the former through an agreement to give back to the latter. He reconfigured the meaning of wealth as something that could be enjoyed provided it was given away during the lifetime of the holder. In this way, Carnegie emerged as a "rule creator" (Garud, Jain, & Kumaraswamy, 2002: 208) who sought to change the social norms pertaining to philanthropy to establish wider institutional legitimacy for wealthy entrepreneurs.

In the interests of representational truth and pluralistic understanding, accurately reflecting social reality matters. Greenwood and Suddaby (2006: 29) identify institutional entrepreneurs as "interest-driven, aware, and calculative". In opposition to Boulding's (1962)

argument that philanthropy represents a gift driven by altruism without implied reciprocity, inspecting philanthropic practice through the lens of institutional entrepreneurship theory unsettles this perception, re-evaluating it as a legitimating strategy which allows philanthropists to reap a potential profit of supposed disinterestedness (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994).

Explicating. Under this conception of history, *application and development of theory* within history fosters a deeper, nuanced understanding of the operation of transformative social processes, potentially leading to the development of new theoretical insights.

Acquiring an understanding of how institutional fields assume shape and form represents a key stage in advancing institutional theory (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004). This requires two-way interaction between theory and evidence, in keeping with our principles of dual integrity and pluralistic understanding. History as explicating elucidates elements of institutional entrepreneurship by accentuating context sensitivity and the institutional conditions in which transformative processes occurred. This illuminates *inter alia* the “historically derived perceptions” (North, 1990: 96) characterizing actors within the nascent philanthropic field. Carnegie’s (2006a, 2006b) rags-to-riches narrative, which charts his career progression from poor Scottish immigrant to world-maker, is couched within the parameters of the socially constructed norms and assumptions of the day (North, 1990). Context sensitivity fosters authenticity through the accumulation of contextual detail that rings true, validating inferences drawn from the interplay of theory and data.

Carnegie’s writing and practice shed light on the paradox of embedded agency. He emerged as an agent of institutional change within a nexus of taken-for-granted prescriptions of accepted modes of social behavior (Seo & Creed, 2002), confirming that institutions are not permanent but subject to “ongoing transformations by motivated actors” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004: 692). Carnegie was not the first wealthy industrialist to invest a large part of his fortune charitably, but through his endeavours he reshaped the institution of philanthropy

itself, changing the orientations and practices of rich industrialists both in the US and further afield. Viewed in this light, Carnegie emerges as an institutional entrepreneur first and foremost and a philanthropist secondarily, his philanthropy serving as a platform to realize desired outcomes in other domains, including international peace and arbitration, innovation in philanthropy spawning innovation in wider socio-political fields (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994).

Conceptualizing. Under this conception of history, the objective is to *generate new theoretical constructs* through systematic interrogation of historical data while encouraging theoretical boldness in the spirit of pluralistic understanding. Framed this way, historical analysis of institutional entrepreneurship promotes theoretical fluency by placing conceptual emphasis on the multi-level role played by Carnegie in refashioning the emergent philanthropic field (Garud et al., 2002). This accentuates the conjoined nature of entrepreneurship and philanthropy within his world, with similar strategies in play, deploying accumulated economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital to succeed in business and philanthropic ventures (Bourdieu, 1986). In employing entrepreneurial and business skills and contacts to further his philanthropic agenda, Carnegie may be seen to have pioneered “entrepreneurial philanthropy”, defined, following Harvey, Maclean, Gordon and Shaw (2011: 428), as the pursuit by entrepreneurs on a not-for-profit basis of social objectives through active investment of their economic, cultural, social and symbolic resources.

Investment in philanthropic projects yielded positive returns for Carnegie in terms of capital accumulation; revealing the various capitals he accrued as intrinsically interconnected. It is important to recognize for the sake of representational truth that philanthropy increased his stocks of social *and* symbolic capital, enabling him to convert surplus millions into higher social standing and access to prized networks that he could exploit to expand his business (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutional entrepreneurship could now be practised on a far wider stage, enhancing his ability to realize preferred outcomes through the exercise of an increasingly

extensive policy-making role in society. What Bourdieu (1987) calls “world-making”, “the embedded ways in which agents relate to and shape systems of meaning and mobilize collective action to change social arrangements” (Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002: 475), became feasible. On a practical level, Carnegie’s example provided a role model for prospective entrepreneurial philanthropists, such as Gates, to follow. On a conceptual level, it illustrates how a theoretical construct like entrepreneurial philanthropy can be boldly and creatively expanded to inform related concepts such as world-making.

Narrating. Under this conception of history, propositions and arguments emerge inductively in *explanation of the form and origins of significant contemporary phenomena*. Wadhvani and Jones (2014) note that entrepreneurship scholars have recently displayed heightened interest in personal narrative accounts so as to illuminate the entrepreneurial process (Popp & Holt, 2013). History of the narrative type is characterized by a high degree of context sensitivity, emphasizing the formative influence of situated environment(s) in which institutional adaptation plays out. Carnegie’s (2006b) account of how he accumulated his fortune and gave most of it away, one of the first life stories to be published by a businessman, is related chronologically and abounds with telling details.

Institutions, Munir and Phillips (2005) observe, are primarily constructed discursively through texts rather than actions, suggesting that one of Carnegie’s main contributions to modern philanthropy lay in *narrating his story*, making a powerful case for entrepreneurial philanthropy that inspired others to act (Bishop & Green, 2008; Golant, Sillince, Harvey, & Maclean, 2015). *The Gospel of Wealth* (2000b) proved game changing, shifting perceptions of what it meant to be super-wealthy by insisting that possession of great wealth entailed commensurate obligations to communities. Carnegie reconstructed the narrative identity – the “story a person tells about his or her life” (Ezzy, 1998: 239) – of affluent entrepreneurs by re-positioning them as trustees of wealth rather than possessors of large fortunes. He changed

the institution of philanthropy by altering “the conditions and contexts under which subsequent cognitive and behavioural acts” would play out (Wadhvani & Jones, 2014: 203). In instilling a new conception of charitable giving among a section of the wealthy, he modified the prevailing script to their potential advantage by linking wealth directly with moral legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). More discourse analysis of narratives told by institutional entrepreneurs, past and present, might promote representational truth by elucidating how they embed their own interests in the reconfigured field while ostensibly transcending self-interest (Maclean, Harvey, Gordon, & Shaw, 2015; Munir & Phillips, 2005; Suchman, 1995).

DISCUSSION

We argue that to realize the full potential of historical organization studies, we should celebrate difference and value each of the four types we delineate, building on what has already been achieved. At the same time, it is important to recognize that much remains to be done before organization theorists fully embrace history. There are pioneers who have blazed a trail, but the way forward is not yet fully charted. Many questions remain unanswered. For example, how might historical organization studies deal with the static/dynamic dichotomy? What kind of topics might it focus on? What kind of theorizing approach might be appropriate to it? The list is far from exhaustive; nonetheless even provisional answers to these questions might demonstrate how organizational theorists might incorporate history more fully in their research, while articulating how organizational theory can extend the reach of historical research in turn.

Advancing Historical Organization Studies

Diachronic and synchronic contrasts. A creative synthesis can involve synthesizing paradoxes, real or apparent (Suddaby et al., 2011). William Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence* speaks of seeing “a world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower. Hold infinity in the

palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour.” Organization studies, we suggest, would benefit from varying its temporal perspectives in the spirit of Blake’s verse to admit more diachronic and synchronic contrasts (Giddens, 1979). The synoptic and dynamic are interrelated, a synoptic image of a society being essential to gauge its diachronic evolution (Steinmetz, 2007a). Braudel (1980: 33, 27) sees value in the contrast between “explosions of historical time” when set against the “semistillness” of “expanses of slow-moving history”, lengthening timescales resulting in “a history capable of traversing even greater distances.” Braudel (1995) illustrates this perspective through his study of the Mediterranean, the heterogeneous histories of its peoples exhibiting unexpected unity. Likewise, Johnson (2007) explores the origin and operation of the Paris Opera, revealing how conditions peculiar to its founding left an enduring stamp on its development over centuries (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014). Some mutations are discernible only when examined in the fullness of time (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006; Kieser, 1994, 1998; Ruef, 2012; Ruef & Fletcher, 2003; Ruef & Patterson, 2009). Change to deep structures is often protracted, pointing to the role of history as revealing patterns and sequences that determine long-term socio-economic arrangements (Wadhvani & Jones, 2014: 198). Extending timescales may be problematic when undertaking real-time organizational research, but in historical organization studies the availability of the “other time” of the past means this problem is more easily surmounted (de Certeau, 1988).

The case we make is not specifically for research over extensive time frames, but for a more open “dialectic of duration” (Braudel, 1980: 26) that a closer *rapprochement* of history and organization studies could offer. The past illuminates the present and the projected future, and it is in the interplay between different time frames that the greatest potential for enhancing understanding lies. The past should not be made to adhere to “static, dyad-like, either/or, before/after formulations” (Judt, 1979: 77). Nor is history a seamless narrative. Embracing a “multiplicity of time” to punctuate the “*longue durée*” of long-lasting

movements with shorter bursts of transformative change casts fresh light on contemporary realities (Braudel, 1980: 27). There is a “sedimentation effect” in processes of socio-historical change whereby the significance of an event may only become apparent much later, looking back, discernible in underlying structures and practices (Clegg, 1981; Suddaby et al., 2014: 101). Contrasting timescales help to pinpoint “the unique effects of situational genesis and context” (Hall, 1992: 181), potentially uncovering earlier origins of phenomena than anticipated (Casson & Casson, 2013).

Examining change in retrospect throws into relief commonalities and differences between timeframes so that the general may emerge from the particular (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014). Theorization concerns the articulation of common structures and associations, fostering shared perspectives that yield original ideas (Steinmetz, 2007a). For historians, viewing phenomena through the cognitive lens of an organizational theory can enhance understanding because the reframing of an issue can cast it in a new light, and because theory, being used to predict, is oriented towards the unfolding future (Popp & Holt, 2013). This may extend temporal horizons from the past into the present and future, as “patterned ways of making sense of the world” pointing to what might lay ahead (Hall, 1992: 171).

Managerialism and social movement research. Power is the pivotal notion in the study of human society (Clegg, 1989; Haugaard & Clegg, 2009; Judt, 1979), integral to the study of capitalism and its managerial elites (Maclean, Harvey, & Chia, 2010; Maclean, Harvey, & Press, 2006). History likewise has accorded undue attention to political power brokers and captains of industry relative to the lives of ordinary people (Collingwood, 1993; Sewell, 2005). Organizational history has centred on management, to whom the majority of documents in corporate archives relate (Delayhaye et al., 2009). While labour process theorists have addressed this issue (Knights & Willmott, 1990), the imbalance remains. The new configurations of power currently obtaining have generated increasing levels of

inequality largely hidden from view, but susceptible to revelation through historical analysis (Piketty, 2014).

Research on social movements and civil society in which history and organization studies are conjoined might help rectify the imbalance between elite and people's histories. Lippmann and Aldrich (2014: 138) argue that social movements serve as "selection forces for organizations"; how firms respond to them often determining their chances of survival. Courpasson (2013: 1244) has disclosed that when he proposed a special issue of *Organization Studies* on social movements, the objection was raised that this "would not belong to organizational research per se." The notion that social movements might fall outside the province of organization studies is revealing, implying there are some topics deemed to fit within the disciplinary boundaries of organizational research and others that do not. However, social movement research arguably exemplifies the type of subject to which historical organization studies might contribute; engendering new sources of institutional logics while presenting an opportunity to learn from past struggles in specific contexts (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002). Grass-roots action provides countervailing resistance to the oppressive force of capitalist and political elites in past and present times, creating the conditions for theoretical integration between empirical and disciplinary domains (de Bakker et al., 2013; Tilly, 2004). All social movements are different, bound up with the specific geopolitical contexts that spawned them, while displaying commonalities enabling generalizations to be drawn (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991). The French Revolution, for example, observed through the lens of social movement research, emerges as a "turning-point in the cultural history of the modern world-system" (Wallerstein, 2004: 60), shifting the boundaries between the included and excluded.

Meta-narratives and micro-history. Historical organization studies reside in the interaction between meta-narrative and micro-history (Magnússon, 2006). We define micro-

history as the history of the unique event or circumscribed community. Its “close optic” (Putnam, 2006: 626) provides an antidote to hegemonic meta-narratives: grand narratives or major storylines that unfold over time and amplify “the voices of the articulate elite whose documentation is so abundant” (Brown, 2003: 7). Micro-history recognizes the importance of the daily encounters that sustain a social reality and the power relations these engender, eschewing the “biggest and most successful exemplars” that typically attract academic attention (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014: 140). Ulrich’s (1991) study of midwifery, for example, is extrapolated from one midwife’s diary. In re-directing attention towards the life-worlds of ordinary individuals, micro-history offers a context-rich alternative to research overly fixated on large-scale endeavours.

Popp and Holt (2013) provide a useful illustration of micro-history that makes sense of unfolding entrepreneurial opportunity by examining letters penned by the founders of a merchant house in Calcutta in 1834. Recourse to personal letters provides a window on the day-to-day minutiae of entrepreneurial lived experience. The authors challenge the dominant theorization of entrepreneurial opportunity (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), which emphasizes outcomes at the expense of the social micro-processes that produced them (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014). Their study comprises a future-oriented historical narrative that conforms to the narrative and conceptual types discussed above. Thought-provoking historical accounts that challenge orthodox theories encourage organizational researchers to cast their nets more widely in terms of their sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives.

Meta-narratives formed by the dominant themes of late modernity include the rise of individualism, which has suppressed longstanding notions of collectivity (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; Fligstein, 1990). Such universalising rhetorics drown out subjective grass-roots stories told by those denied access to the levers of power (Brown, 2003). Life stories related by individuals located outside the customary frame of research – who represent “the

other” in de Certeau’s (1988) terms – convey personal experience while highlighting generalities. Micro-history stays close to reality, providing a means of accessing collective memories through personal testimony. Real people emerge through such stories with identities and opinions of their own (Magnússon, 2006). Viewed in this light, a micro-historical approach may reinvigorate organizational research by uncovering fresh, pluralistic insights through a “bottom up” perspective, challenging macro-level views by invoking the (extra)ordinary vitality of human agency (Roy, 2000).

Organizational theory may enhance the interaction between meta-narrative and micro-history, offering historians an array of conceptual lenses to inform their work (Leblebici, 2014). Examining a historical event through the cognitive lens of a relevant organizational theory – such as the founding of the Paris Opera seen through the lens of imprinting (Johnson, 2007), or shifting attitudes to whale-watching from an institutional perspective (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004) – frames that phenomenon so as to promote shared approaches, “making other types of understanding more explicit” (Leblebici, 2014: 76). Making sense of the past through different theoretical frameworks highlights connections between seemingly disparate events. These may play out on stages of varying dimensions according to different timescales. However, highlighting the general in the particular allows both to be seen in combination, affording new comparative perspectives (Wadhvani & Jones, 2014).

Mapping the Future

A creative synthesis entails a more meaningful engagement with “the other”, bringing together two different “heterologies” or “discourses on the other” to foster mutual understanding (de Certeau, 1988: 3; Sewell, 2005). The future of organization studies as a discipline requires continuing intellectual boldness (Holt & den Hond, 2013). Bridge building demands a greater porosity of boundaries that challenges the orthodoxy of dominant paradigms (Steinmetz, 2007a). Guided by this perspective, our first main contribution to the

literature is to have elaborated and refined the idea of *historical organization studies*. This concerns organizational research that draws extensively on historical data, methods and knowledge to marry together historical narrative with organizational explanation. The writing of history is imbricated with the doing of organization studies to generate historically informed theoretical narratives characterized by *dual integrity*, building on the strength and diversity of both disciplines.

We have drawn on existing research from organization studies (Kieser, 1994; Rowlinson & Clark, 2004; Üsdiken & Kieser, 2004; Zald, 1993), history (Braudel, 1980; Collingwood, 1993; Judt & Snyder, 2013; White, 1987) and recent research which addresses the conceptual overlap between the two (Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014; Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Leblebici, 2014; Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Suddaby et al., 2014; Wadhvani & Jones, 2014) to establish that *theory development* and *historical veracity* are dual requirements for successful research in historical organization studies, key to the realization of a creative synthesis. Historical veracity demands that researchers attend to organizational failures, often omitted from official documentation, as well as to what organizations choose to forget, fostering a rounded understanding (Booth et al., 2007; Lamoreaux, Raff, & Temin, 2007). This encourages researchers to appreciate that generalizations pertaining to social realities are bounded by specific times and contexts (O'Sullivan & Graham, 2010). How authenticity is constructed is important, with implications for legitimation, which requires “a *relationship* with an audience” (Suchman, 1995: 594). A creative synthesis is bound up with legitimacy-seeking since its emergence depends on the development of shared understanding amongst research communities (Harvey, 2014). Moving forward collectively hinges on the articulation of recognized constructs on which scholars can agree (Suddaby, 2010b). Our core insight is to suggest that historically informed theoretical narratives mindful of both disciplines, whose authenticity

stems from *both theory development and historical veracity*, make a singular claim to scholarly legitimacy. Legitimation through dual integrity will help research that falls within the ambit of historical organization studies to reach a more general audience, showing that the dualism between narrative and scientific approaches can be respected yet integrated, informing one another, demonstrating how historical methods, data, and theoretical and substantive insights can add value to the social scientific mainstream.

Our second main contribution is to develop and exemplify a conceptually robust foundational model for historical organization studies. Figure 1 elaborates a typology of four distinct conceptions of history in organization studies, informing strategies for future research. The value of history conceived as *evaluating*, wherein theory is confronted with historical data, lies in *testing and refining existing theory*. Organizational ecology and the resource-based view of the firm are illustrative of theoretical domains ripe for a fuller engagement with historical organization studies of this genre (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1984, 1989; Miller & Shamsie, 1996). The value of history conceived as *explicating*, wherein synthetic narratives emerge from the interplay of theory and evidence, lies in *applying and developing theory to reveal the operation of transformative social processes*. Institutional theory (Selznick, 1949, 1996), predicated upon “a central but unarticulated assumption of historical methods and theory”, illustrates the potential for this type of research (Suddaby et al., 2014: 101). The value of history conceived as *conceptualizing*, wherein historical analysis stimulates new ways of seeing, resides in *generating new theoretical constructs*. The origin of path dependence theory is illustrative (David, 1985; Sydow et al., 2009). The value of history conceived as *narrating*, wherein observed patterns and recurrences form the basis of detailed analysis, lies in *explaining the form and origins of significant contemporary phenomena*, being a source of context-sensitive interpretations and arguments. Cognitive lenses that draw on the narrative turn, especially the sensemaking perspective, might enhance

research of this genre (Fenton & Langley, 2011; Weick, 1995). It is arguably the narrative mode of historical enquiry that has gained most traction in organization studies in recent years (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Hansen, 2012; Rowlinson & Clark; Rowlinson et al., 2010), reflecting the growing recognition that narratives open a valuable window onto the organizational world (Gabriel, 2000). Overall, the value of our typology lies in demonstrating the research potentialities of historical organization studies, which we have exemplified by examining the career of Andrew Carnegie as institutional entrepreneur and philanthropist through our four conceptual lenses in turn.

Our third main contribution is to elaborate five principles underpinning historical organization studies: dual integrity, pluralistic understanding, representational truth, context sensitivity and theoretical fluency, encapsulated in Table 1. We fashion a creative synthesis, especially through our overarching principle of *dual integrity*, which emerges from and inhabits the theoretical overlap between two equally valued disciplines. Dual integrity demands that organizational researchers pay due regard to historical veracity in the search, selection and evaluation of data whilst cultivating a nuanced capacity theoretically to appraise the logics of institutions, cultures and human interaction (Greenwood & Bernardi, 2014). The practical balance struck between theoretical and empirical concerns will naturally vary by type of study. We argue that historical organization studies should eschew prescribing a new blueprint in favour of “stretching” to embrace alterity in terms of subject matter, approach and periodization; there being more than one way to understand the past (Holt & den Hond, 2013: 1594; Kieser, 1994).

We contend that history and organization studies, as humanistic endeavours inextricably linked through an enduring concern for the human condition, offer, when synthesized, enhanced potential to transform our understanding of contemporary and future-directed organizational realities (Zald, 1993). We do not advocate a collapse of opposites but

argue instead for informed collaboration between seemingly divergent concepts that emerge as “mutually implicated” (Suddaby et al., 2011: 243). Together, our three contributions demonstrate that history affords a singular opportunity to cultivate an in-depth understanding of the contextualized, sedimentary processes whereby organizations emerge, grow, flourish and ultimately decline; the past informing the present and future.

Conclusion

At the outset of this paper, we asked how the enterprise of organization studies might be enriched through greater, more meaningful engagement with history, historical sources and historical methods. In response we suggest that, on a conceptual level, through engagement with primary materials and critical reading of established narratives, history stimulates thinking on vital organizational and institutional phenomena that might otherwise go underappreciated, engendering new theoretical ideas, propositions and arguments. The past can revivify future organizational research by extending historical approaches to areas such as entrepreneurship (Wadhvani & Jones, 2014; Popp & Holt, 2013), institutional entrepreneurship (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Munir & Phillips, 2005) and institutionalism (Leblebici et al., 1991; Suddaby et al., 2014). Taking a long-run perspective rebalances consideration of organizational origins and development *vis-à-vis* outcomes and end results (Casson & Casson, 2013), so that the academic endeavour itself becomes “an origin, rather than an end” (Popp & Holt, 2013: 25). On an empirical level, history affords access to a wealth of multi-level quantitative and qualitative data related to organizations and organizing that might be deployed in testing, refining and developing theoretical ideas. On a methodological level, historical methods, designed to allow inferences to be drawn from complex, incomplete data, have great potential for application in organizational research.

Historians also stand to benefit from greater engagement with organization theory. Viewing an event through a particular cognitive lens can engender new conversations.

Reframing a phenomenon can reveal fresh insights to challenge existing thinking, illuminating the historical landscape. Temporal-theoretical perspectives deriving from one period may be transferable to other research settings. Adoption of a conceptual lens drawn from organization theory can highlight new comparative perspectives that might otherwise go unnoticed, accentuating links with similar studies to elucidate the “bigger picture” (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014). Elucidating the bigger picture may extend timeframes, affording access to liminal spaces between past, present and future, which are interrelated: “The present *is* the future of the past; it is thus both future and past in a synthesis that is actual” (Collingwood, 1993: 405).

The purpose of producing a typology or roadmap is to help researchers find their way in the future. Mapping the territory is valuable, since new concepts often develop on the perimeter of a field through the juxtaposition of antinomous perspectives (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). Boundary bridging allows new vistas to emerge, revealing contradictory yet overlapping logics. In nurturing *historically informed theoretical narratives*, organization studies imbued with varying conceptions of history can synthesize ideas and advances into impactful new theories. These may serve as guideposts to the future, pushing onward by re-mapping the past (Gaddis, 2002; O’Sullivan & Graham, 2010), exploring what did not transpire as well as what did (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2014). At a time when the field of organization studies is concerned about a “future where theory is of less importance” (Devers, Misangyi, & Gamache, 2014: 248), the uses of the past in organizing and organizations provide fecund territory of contemporary relevance for future theorization. Field theory provides a potential locus where historically oriented organization studies might take place (Bourdieu, 1969; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Pushing the boundaries of existing fields implies their redrawing to admit unorthodoxy, introducing the possibility of theorizing more directly about intersections between fields (Fligstein, 2001). Such intersections may

spark ideas for the assimilation of history with synchronic explication, since “the only way to reach conditions that we cognize and wish for is to make use of those conditions that we have not wished for” (Martin, 2003: 44).

We posed a second question concerning the form(s) a creative synthesis of historical organizational studies might assume. In exploring practical possibilities for this, we illustrated our idea of historical organization studies with examples drawn from social movement research and micro-history. These provide alternative perspectives to the longstanding emphasis in organization studies on managerialism and for-profit organizations, offering a bottom-up, pluralistic antidote to hegemonic meta-narratives. Change to a scholarly field more likely originates from the periphery where disciplinary boundaries are stretched (Leblebici et al., 1991). The value of micro-history lies in its focus on what history has “forgotten” and deems to be irrelevant. Yet what the past ignores has a habit of coming back to haunt it, as Fogel and Engerman (1974) demonstrated with regard to what the world knew, or thought it knew, about slavery. This undermines any notion that the past is fixed and unchanging, eschewing closure while remaining permanently open to revision. The theoretical possibilities that uses of the past may stimulate within the field of organization studies are potentially substantial. For as de Certeau (1988: 4) insists, “whatever this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant – shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explication – comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies”.

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FIGURE 1

Four Conceptions of History in Organization Studies

| | | PURPOSE | |
|------------------|----------------------|--|--|
| | | Exposition | Interpretation |
| M O D E | Social Scientific | <p>Evaluating</p> <p>History used in testing and refining theory and arguments</p> | <p>Explicating</p> <p>History used in applying and developing theory to reveal the operation of transformative social processes</p> |
| | Narrative | <p>Conceptualizing</p> <p>History used in generating new theoretical constructs</p> | <p>Narrating</p> <p>History used to explain the form and origins of significant contemporary phenomena</p> |

TABLE 1

Types and Principles of Historical Organization Studies

| <p>TYPES PRINCIPLES</p> | <p>Evaluating (testing and refining theory and arguments)</p> | <p>Explicating (revealing the operation of social processes)</p> | <p>Conceptualizing (generating new constructs)</p> | <p>Narrating (explaining origins of contemporary phenomena)</p> |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Dual Integrity (historical veracity and conceptual rigor)</p> | <p><i>Essential</i> in creating historical organization studies of all types attentive to the fundamental values of both disciplines</p> | | | |
| <p>Pluralistic Understanding (openness to alternatives and different ways of seeing)</p> | <p><i>Useful</i> in suggesting alternative hypotheses</p> | <p><i>Useful</i> in developing nuanced understandings of specific events and outcomes</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in stimulating creative thinking and theoretical boldness</p> | <p><i>Useful</i> in making connections to discern patterns, sequences and associations</p> |
| <p>Representational Truth (congruence between evidence, logic and interpretation)</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in confirming, adopting or rejecting theoretical ideas</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in validating inferences drawn from interplay of theory and data</p> | <p><i>Useful</i> in establishing empirical plausibility of new constructs</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in demonstrating goodness-of-fit between evidence and interpretation</p> |
| <p>Context Sensitivity (attentiveness to historical specificities)</p> | <p><i>Useful</i> in unsettling fixed conceptions and re-evaluating past judgements</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in distinguishing between general and particular forces in change processes</p> | <p><i>Useful</i> in identifying contingencies that shape particular outcomes</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in revealing the formative influence of situated environments</p> |
| <p>Theoretical Fluency (command of conceptual terrain)</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in interrogating and refining existing theories</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in identifying transformative social processes</p> | <p><i>Important</i> in engendering new constructs and demonstrating novelty</p> | <p><i>Useful</i> in discerning critical relationships and causal forces</p> |

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