E ditors' picks: history research in management and organization studies

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Introduction: Engendering history as critique

This Editors' Picks provides an occasion to celebrate the momentum that doing history research in management and organization studies (MOS) has gained since the calls for more history in the early 1990s (Zald, 1993, 1996; Kieser, 1994; Üsdiken and Kieser, 2004). *Organization* is an especially appropriate venue to do so given the dedication of the journal to disseminating critically oriented scholarship. The initial calls for more history

work in MOS suggested, in varying ways (empirical, epistemological) and degrees, that

doing history could act as a vehicle for critique. Indeed the articles selected for this

Editors' Picks are not only evidence of the growing momentum for more history in MOS

but each in its own vein engenders history as a vehicle for critique. The theme is

exemplified well by Cooke (1999) who provides a critical reconstruction of the

Management of Change literature with a focus on redressing the silences surrounding the

role of the ideological left in the disciplines' own accounts of its past. In his assertion that

all management and organization theory is shaped by past processes and are nonetheless

viewed through a political lens formed by contemporary concerns, Cooke calls for greater

awareness in the historical construction of *representations* of management and organization

theory. Though Cooke (1999) does not use the terms 'critical history,' his article teaches us

that a 'critical history' (as envisioned today) might imply acknowledging the historicity of

management theory as a precondition for taking responsibility to change its (self-

)representations that are uncontested, naturalized and un-reflexive.

Evidence of the growing momentum for more history and history-oriented research is found

in *Organization*, but also beyond. *Organization* for example, has published two special

issues that draw on history as a central unifying theme (Carter, McKinlay and Rowlinson,

2002; Rowlinson, Casey, Hansen and Mills, 2014). Special Issues on history have been

published in other business and organization journals including *Human Relations* (Cooke,

Mills and Kelley, 2006), the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (van Baalen

and Bogenrieder, 2009), the *Journal of Management Studies* (O'Sullivan, Graham and

McKenna, 2010) and the *Academy of Management Review* (Godfrey, Hassard, O'Connor,

Rowlinson and Reuf, 2014). Specialist history journals have also experienced a surge. For

example, the journal *Management & Organizational History* was launched in 2006 as a

forum sympathetic to histories that are transparent and reflective of their choice of

philosophical assumptions (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Jacques, 2006). Also, 2006 saw

the re-launch of the *Journal of Management History* as a stand-alone venue dedicated to

history research (Lamond, 2006). Adding to the momentum are the numerous conference

streams, professional development workshops, symposia and two recent edited collections

(Bucheli and Wadhwani, 2014; Genoe McLaren, Mills and Weatherbee, 2015). Each effort

is dedicated to answering the call for more history or documenting its impact.

Nonetheless, what has been referred to as the call for an *historic turn* in MOS is, despite the

notable developments listed above, still problematic in two key ways. First, many of the

recent developments exemplify calls for, rather than evidencing, more historical

engagement with MOS. Second, far too many contributions to the historic turn remain atheoretical and/or uncritical. These serve at best to fuse ahistorical MOS accounts with atheoretical historical work (Rowlinson and Procter, 1999). These developments continue despite Booth and Rowlinson (2006) and others' call for more history that is accompanied by a call for theory, or theorized historical analysis, including work that draws on philosophers from the humanities, including the work of Hayden White and Michel Foucault. These efforts aimed at doing more history have fuelled a lively discussion concerning how to represent the past as history in business and organization studies as well as the reasons why this should be done. Central to the discussion, and underpinning much of it is the taken for granted assumption that doing history offers tremendous potential for critique. The articles we have selected for the Editors' Picks, each in their own way, illustrate the potential of doing history as a vehicle for critique.

It's time to introduce our selections for the Editors' Picks. Before we proceed to a synopsis of each article, we comment on the articles' relationship to MOS and, to one another. We have noted above that history work in MOS is on the rise. At least three articles (O'Connor, 1999; Cooke, 1999; Marens, 2013) selected for the Editors' Picks illustrate the (emerging) relationship between MOS and history. Each shows the relevance of history

research to MOS. A theme of our own research (Mills and Helms Mills, 2013; Durepos and Mills, 2012) has been to highlight the potential of history for engendering critique. As we have contended above, this critique comes in various forms. Postcolonial research, for instance, plays a large role in critical management studies and this prompted us to include Ibarra-Colado's (2006) highly cited work. While we were encouraged by the amount and quality of postcolonial history research, we were somewhat disappointed by the limited quantity of articles on gender and history. This condition seems to point to a broader issue about the (continued) marginality of feminism and gender research (Mills, 1995). Our concern was somewhat redressed by the quality of the research in this area. On this note, we included articles by Brewis and Warren (2011) and Cullen (1997). In different ways, each article brings to the fore issues of gender and history in MOS research.

Doing historical analysis in MOS has brought up a number of debates about what counts as history and whether the research should have an empirical contribution, a theoretical one or both. Certainly in MOS, there is a need and desire for transparency and reflexivity in choice of methodology (and perhaps also epistemic and ontic choices). *Organization* has published excellent articles in this regard. To highlight this theme, we included McKinlay's (2002) article as well that by Wolfram Cox and Hassard (2007). *Organization*

has also published articles intended to develop theory to guide doing history research (Durepos and Mills, 2012; Mills, Weatherbee and Durepos, 2014). Representative of this theme is the article by Shenhav and Weitz (2000) who draw on a sociology of translation to craft their historical constructivist analysis.

Article selections and synopses

Cullen D (1997) Maslow, monkeys and motivation theory. *Organization* 4(3): 355-373.

In this article Cullen revisits Maslow's lessor-known work on primates and dominance, arguing that notions of hierarchy and superiority arising from that research are embedded in Maslow's work on motivational needs and serve to justify managerial power.

Wolfram Cox J and Hassard J (2007) Ties to the past in organization research: a comparative analysis of retrospective methods. *Organization* 14(4): 475-497.

In this article Julie Wolfram Cox and John Hassard analyse different forms of 'retrospective research' and outline four important types that serve to 'control,' 'interpret,'

'co-opt,' and/or 'represent' the past. Each has implications not only for how the past is understood but also the managerialist uses to which this can be applied.

Ibarra-Colado E (2006) Organization studies and epistemic coloniality in Latin America: thinking otherness from the margins. *Organization* **13(4): 463-488.**

Eduardo Ibarra-Colado explores the impact of coloniality that permeates the development of Organization Studies in general and the idea of Latin America in particular. He goes on conclude with a call for a research agenda that draws on theoretical perspectives that 'recognize otherness.'

Marens R (2013) What comes around: the early 20th century American roots of legitimating corporate social responsibility. *Organization* **20(3): 454-476.**

Richard Marens revisits the development of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to reveal its rootedness in 'explicit, managerial-centred' approaches of US corporations to prevent unionization and starve of federal regulation. Marens goes on to argue that the rise of 'neo-liberalism has revived managerial CSR' and masked its origins.

McKinlay A (2002) Dead selves: the birth of the modern career. *Organization* **9(4): 595-614**.

Alan McKinlay examines the 'rise of the modern career based on merit and open competition' in Scottish banking. Drawing on extensive archival research, McKinlay studies the system of 'central files that charted the individual's technical competence and conformity to the bank's cultural expectations [including] a continuous record of salary, promotion, and punishment over an individual's entire career.' In the process the files opened 'up the individual to scrutiny by the centre' but also shaped the career as 'a highly efficient form of supervision that relied heavily upon individual's self-regulation' resulting in conformity through both reliance on economic and moral pressures.

O'Connor E (1999) Minding the workers: the meaning of 'Human' and 'human relations' in Elton Mayo. *Organization* **6(2): 223-246.**

In this article Ellen O'Connor focuses on the 'theory and practice of "human" in the work of Elton Mayo.' In examining the roots of the various ideas that came to constitute human

resource management (HRM), O'Connor recovers many of the ideas of and influences on Elton Mayo who, she contends is 'absent from noted historical and contemporary writings about HRM.'

Rowlinson M and Carter C (2002) Foucault and history in organization studies. *Organization* **9(4): 527-547.**

In this article Mick Rowlinson and Chris Carter engage with the call for 'an historical perspective in organization studies' through a critical examination of 'the criticisms of Foucault from historians.' Reviewing six of these 'main criticisms,' the authors go on to critique the work of Foucauldian MOS scholars, concluding that 'so far, the invocation of Foucault has exacerbated the problematic treatment of history in organization studies.'

Shenhav Y and Weitz E (2000) The roots of uncertainty in organization theory: a historical constructivist analysis. *Organization* **7(3): 373-401.**

Drawing on 'primary data collected from the American Machinist and the Engineering Magazine,' this article examines how the notion of uncertainty came to play a critical role

in the development of organization theory. Referring to 'the rise of discourse on uncertainty in emergent organization theory during the period 1879-1932, Shenhav and Weitz contend that the notion of uncertainty was '"'translated" . . . from the technical field to the management of organizations.' They go on to conclude that 'the concept of uncertainty may be regarded as socially constructed knowledge that was created in a unique historical context and enacted by organizational actors and management theorists.'

Brewis J and Warren S (2011) Have yourself a merry little Christmas? Organizing Christmas in women's magazines past and present. *Organization* 18(6): 747-762.

In this article Jo Brewis and Sam Warren investigate the organization of Christmas in 15 women's magazines from the 1930s and 2009, using an analytical strategy of close reading to explore the discursive imperatives these texts seem to (re)create around female 'festive labour'. In the process, they note a shift from the 'domestic goddess' discourse of the 1930s to a construction of women's role in performing Christmas that rests on a somewhat contradictory rendering of managerialism. They conclude with a 'pessimistic' note 'that the pressure on women to pull off the perfect Christmas has intensified . . . but at the same time

there is a sense here that even the most intensive endeavours are doomed never to entirely succeed.'

Cooke B (1999) Writing the left out of management theory: the historiography of the management of change. *Organization* **6(1): 81-105**.

In this article Bill Cooke argues that not only has the 'change management discourse appropriated central ideas of action research, group dynamics, and the management of attitude change from the political left' but that this 'has been concealed by the way that that discourse has written its own history, that is, its historiography.' In his prescient conclusion, Cooke argues that 'it is not only managerialist historiographies, but also supposedly more critical approaches to organizational theory which have a historiographical shaping effect.'

Selection process and criteria

When we first embarked on the process of selecting articles for our *Editors' Picks* on doing history in MOS the task was daunting. An initial search using the term history revealed that

there were 657 articles published in *Organization* since 1994 that included some reference to engaging with history. Even when we shortened the list to include only those articles that either a) provided a narrative of the past, or b) a theoretically informed contribution about how to do history, we were left with around 50 articles. Worse still, most of the 50 articles were among our favourite reads.

Narrowing the shortlist of 50 articles to the ultimate Editors' Picks composed of ten articles was an exercise that created a host of mixed emotions. At certain points, we experienced anxiety about our specific selections and concern about the wonderful work that was excluded. We reflected extensively on our role in elevating ten articles above all others. We hope the act will not marginalize the unselected, but otherwise excellent, history articles in *Organization*. We came to realize that our anxiety was seeded in positive ground: the difficulty in getting a shortlist of 50 articles to a shorter list of ten Editors' Picks is evidence of the quality of history work produced and published in *Organization*.

In attempting to develop criteria for our final selections we looked for articles that best exemplified the tensions between producing historical understandings of the past and providing a critique of the nature of historical research. Examples of the former type of

research can be found in historical accounts that reveal the limitations of ahistorical MOS studies (e.g., Cooke's 1999 study of how the `left was written out of MOS') and/or the exposure of taken-for-granted historical accounts of developments within MOS that lead to the exclusion and marginalization of others (e.g., Ibarra-Colado's 2006 questioning of the embedded coloniality in MOS). Examples of the latter type of historical work include articles that question the socio-political character of particular approaches to the study of history (e.g., Wolfram Cox and Hassard's 2007 review of 'retrospective research') and/or introduce alternative philosophies and methods of doing history (e.g., Rowlinson and Carter's 2002 discussion of Foucault's contribution to history and organization studies).

In selecting articles that fit one or other of the critical tensions discussed above, we were also concerned to ensure that the field was not narrowed to any particular methodological approach. As far as possible, we sought to reflect issues of class, race, and gender and, in the process, Marxist (e.g., Marens, 2013), postcolonial (e.g., Ibarra-Colado, 2006) and feminist (e.g., Brewis and Warren, 2011) as well as poststructuralist (e.g., Rowlinson and Carter, 2002) and relational accounts (e.g., Shenhav and Weitz, 2000).

As part of the exercise, we also asked ourselves what it was that inspired us to do our own history research in organization and management (articles in *Organization* include, Durepos and Mills, 2012; Mills, Weatherbee and Durepos, 2014; Mills and Helms Mills, 2013; Mills, 1995). The theme that emerged is the potential of history for engaging in critique.

Our final criterion is perhaps the most controversial. We restricted our choices to one selection per author. Including our own work (Mills 5 papers; Durepos, 2 papers), which we naturally excluded, nine authors have had two or more papers dealing with history published in *Organization*, including Mick Rowlinson (5); Bill Cooke and John Hassard (3); and Chris Carter, Alan McKinlay, and Keith Hoskin (2). Clearly, this speaks to their impact on the field and, as such, needs to be recognised. Our hope is that this recognition will suffice and encourage readers of *Organization* to follow up by seeking out further work by these various authors.

Editor's picks collection and implications for pedagogy

The Editor's Picks collection is useful as a teaching tool for encouraging students to

consider the relationship between history and studies of organization. To begin with, it

spans a critical period in debates around the importance of understanding organizational

events within historical context. At its peak, this debate spanned the work of Zald (1989)

and Keiser (1994) and that of Booth and Rowlinson (2006) as well as the call for a historic

turn in management and organization studies. Indeed, the articles by Rowlinson and Clark

as well as Rowlinson and Carter helped to set the stage for the notion of the historical turn,

and the need for a critical lens. The work of Wolfram Cox and Hassard contributed to the

overall debate through their focus on different ways of conceptualizing history and the past.

Into the midst of the debate, work by O'Connor, McKinlay, Shenhav and Weitz, as well as

Marens provided prime examples of how the past can throw light on our understandings of

current thinking about, respectively, `the human' in organization, the rise of the notion of

`the career,' the role of uncertainty in the shaping of theories of organization, and the

historical basis of corporate social responsibility. Finally, key articles in *Organization*

helped to surface the gendered (Cullen; Brewis and Warren), class (Cooke), and

postcolonial character (Ibarra-Colada) of historical accounts.

What's next: the future of critical history in MOS

Despite the maturity of select Editor's Picks articles, critical history as an 'explicit' sub-field of MOS is nascent in our opinion. Though agenda setting runs the risk of hegemony, we wish to imagine what its future might hold. A broad review of extant literature surfaces various motivations that have fueled history research in MOS. These motivations include the history of an intellectual discipline or academic field (history of management thought; Wren, 2005); history to build or develop construct/concept clarity in an academic field (Suddaby, 2010); business and organizational history (history of an organization; Rowlinson, 2004; Durepos and Mills, 2012); undertaking historical research to develop theory about the craft of history (Durepos and Mills, 2012; Suddaby, Foster and Quinn-Trank, 2010) and finally, the central theme of this piece, engendering history as a vehicle for critique. Though we see critical history as contributing to any of these broad agendas, we suggest it be done in a particular spirit.

This begs the question, what is the *spirit* of *critical history*? Our answer is intentionally partial and non-definitive. We suggest that critical history is knowledge and our performances of the past transformed as history in a reflexive and anti-performative way with an agenda to de-naturalize (Fournier and Grey, 2000). First, critical history is *reflexive* in that it explicitly situates knowledge of the past as an outcome of the researcher

and the politics of her research. Second, critical history is *anti-performative* in that it exposes and problematizes narrow historical objectives that limit the pursuit of history to gaining insights on improving future efficiency and profitability. Third, critical history pursues an agenda of de-naturalization. This means de-naturalizing hegemonic organizations by exposing alternative and problematic pasts of organizations that destabilize their organizational memory, image, power and legitimacy. It also means de-naturalizing dominant historiography to disturb history as objective and truthful knowledge of the past. It is historical research in this spirit that we hope will continue to populate the pages of MOS research. Certainly, the articles in the Editor's Picks collection embody this spirit.

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