Check for updates

The Journal of Management invites commentaries on this Guest Editorial. For consideration, please submit to http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jom as Original Research, including "Response to Suddaby and Foster" in the title. Commentaries will be treated as editorials, but will also be peer reviewed.

Journal of Management
Vol. 43 No. 1, January 2017 19–38
DOI: 10.1177/0149206316675031
© The Author(s) 2016
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Guest Editorial

History and Organizational Change

Roy Suddaby
University of Victoria
Newcastle University

William M. Foster
University of Alberta

This research commentary introduces historical consciousness to studying organizational change. Most theories of organizational change contain within them implicit assumptions about history. Made explicit, these assumptions tend to cluster into different models of change that vary by the assumed objectivity of the past and the associated malleability of the future. We explore and elaborate the implicit assumptions of history. We identify four implicit models of history in the change literature: History-as-Fact, History-as-Power, History-as-Sensemaking, and History-as-Rhetoric. We discuss the implications of theorizing organizational change from each of these views of history and outline future directions for studying change with a heightened understanding of history.

Keywords: *change; history; power; rhetoric; sensemaking*

Organizational change is a central and enduring subject in management. The massive growth in literature on change presents an ongoing challenge for management scholars who often must rely on typologies to impose some form of discipline on what is increasingly an unruly subject. While typologies offer excellent reviews of the extant literature, they fail to adequately define what is meant by the concept of change. In much of the literature, change lacks "construct clarity" (Suddaby, 2010). The underlying assumptions are not articulated, the contextual conditions under which it applies are not clear, and, often, the concept of change is not defined. Critics suggest that the greatest weakness of change management

Corresponding author: Roy Suddaby, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, University of Victoria, 3800 Finnerty Road, Victoria, BC V8P 5C2, Canada.

E-mail: rsuddaby@uvic.ca

scholarship is that change is a universal but undefined construct (Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001), and its epistemological status is "left unexamined" (Quattrone & Hopper, 2001: 404).

As a result, we often fail to address basic questions about change. How do we know when change has successfully occurred? How can we distinguish change from stability? Where, in complex organizations, do we look for change? And, perhaps most importantly, what do we mean when we say an organization has changed?

We address these fundamental questions in this essay. Our central argument is that *variations in how we conceptualize change are underpinned by different assumptions about history and its relationship to our capacity for change*. We adopt a historical lens because, at their core, the study of change and history both involve the retrospective interpretation of past events. There are, however, important differences in how we theorize history.

The degree to which we see the past as objective or subjective clearly influences how we understand change. There is an important but unarticulated relationship between how concrete we believe the past to be and the degree of agency that we introduce into our models of change. Those who see the past as an objective reality might reasonably be expected to also see the future as highly influenced if not fatalistically determined by history. Conversely, those who see the past as highly subjective might equally be expected to see the future as much more malleable and open to alternatives based on creative interpretations of the past. *Our explicit theories of change and our ability to change, thus, vary by our implicit models of history.*

In this paper, we present four distinct conceptualizations of change, each of which rests on a continuum between an objective and a subjective view of history. We term these categories *History-as-Fact*, *History-as-Power*, *History-as-Sensemaking*, and *History-as-Rhetoric*. Each category is representative of distinct assumptions about the nature of the past and how our understanding of the past influences how we perceive when change has occurred. We argue that each of these categories of implicit assumptions about history incorporate related assumptions about our ability to effect change (agency), how we define change (focal unit of analysis), and how difficult we assume change to be.

History-as-Fact

Key Assumptions

A distinct theme in organizational research contains an implicit assumption that a firm's history makes change extremely difficult. The constraining influence of history is understood to occur as the result of three key influences. First, the founding conditions of an organization are theorized to exert a powerful influence over the initial structure of the organization and exert a restrictive pressure on subsequent change. This influence is perhaps best captured by Stinchcombe's (1965) construct of *imprinting*.

Second, much of the change literature assumes that as time passes, an organization ossifies. Like humans, the assumption is that as organizations age, they are seen to acquire experiences, traditions, and practices, which create powerful forces of internal inertia. The construct that best illustrates this concept is Hannan and Freeman's (1989) notion of *structural inertia*, but it is also reflected in related organizational constructs like *institutionalization* (Selznick, 1949) or *cognitive sunk costs* (Oliver, 1997).

Third, many models of change assume that decisions in the past restrict human agency and strategic choice. Past decisions influence present decisions, and, with the accumulation of time, opportunities for change inexorably narrow into a deterministic form of path dependence. This assumption is best illustrated by the construct termed *escalation of commitment* (Staw, 1976) but is also evident in related constructs like *path dependence* (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2011) or *historical lock-in* (Arthur, 1989, 1994).

These models of change share some common, and perhaps erroneous, assumptions about history. First, time is understood to be a continuous, measurable, and linear flow that occurs, for the most part, independently of human experience. Second, the cumulative passage of time—that is, the past—creates a sedimentary accumulation of past events and experiences that collectively become expressed as "traditionalizing" (Stinchcombe, 1965) or "inertial" (Hannan & Freeman, 1989) forces that limit an organization. Finally, the process of reflecting on the past, and interpreting it—that is, history—is seen to be an act of objective reconstruction that is largely absent of human agency. The analysis of organizational history, which is understood to be the faithful accumulation of "brute facts" (Searle, 1995), serves to constrain human agency rather than to generate opportunities and alternatives for change.

The notion that organizational history is objective and oppressive to change is, perhaps, the dominant view in management research. These assumptions suggest that because time and history reduce agency, change is very difficult to accomplish because any change effort must face the herculean task of overcoming the past. Change, in this view, typically requires an exogenous shock or some form of profound intervention that forcefully disrupts the constraining influence of history.

Key Constructs: Imprinting, Structural Inertia, and Escalation of Commitment

Imprinting. Stinchcombe (1965) observed that the founding conditions of an organization play a long-lasting role in its future development. Drawing from developmental psychology, Stinchcombe observed that, at founding, organizations are particularly sensitive to adopting influences and characteristics from their external environment. Once adopted, these characteristics tend to persist. In support of this assertion, Stinchcombe points to the high degree of similarity in the structure of organizations founded during a similar historical period.

The construct of imprinting has been very influential in theories of organizational change (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). Most work has focused on demonstrating that founding characteristics persist throughout the life of an organization (Boeker, 1989). Research, thus, has demonstrated the role of imprinting in the persistence of organizational structure (Barron, Hannan, & Burton, 1999), network structures (Marquis, 2003), and a host of related organizational outcomes (Kimberly, 1979; Romanelli & Tushman, 1986). More current research has turned attention to understanding why some environmental characteristics are adopted and others are not and the processes by which those characteristics are made to persist (Johnson, 2007).

A clear implication of imprinting research is that the historical conditions at founding severely limit an organization's ability to change. History constitutes an objective reality that episodically fixes organizational conditions and constrains the agency of managers who seek to change the organization. Change, in imprinting research, is largely the result of an exogenous shock that threatens the viability of the organization (Lippman & Aldrich, 2013).

Structural inertia. A similar understanding of the restrictive influence of history and time is offered by Hannan and Freeman's (1977) concept of structural inertia. Organizations, they observe, suffer from "strong inertial pressures on structure arising from both internal arrangements (for example, internal politics) and from the environment (for example, public legitimation of organizational activity)" (Hannan & Freeman, 1977: 957). Internal factors that contribute to inertia in organizations include sunk costs (actual and cognitive), political coalitions, and the growth of bureaucracy. External inertial forces are commonly known in strategic management and include access to resources, barriers to entry, and competitive pressures. Collectively, these factors make organizational change extremely difficult to accomplish.

Similar to imprinting, the construct of structural inertia adopts a highly deterministic view of time and history. The concept is based on the assumption that organizational success is dependent upon an organization's ability to consistently reproduce routines and structures that initially made the organization successful. As a result, young organizations are assumed to be extremely vulnerable to competition and are likely to fail. Old organizations, which have successfully stabilized the reproduction of routines and structures, risk becoming ossified and unable to adapt to environmental change.

The cumulative weight of an organization's history is often cited as a reason why firms are unable to strategically adapt to internal and external challenges. Oliver (1997) argues that history and tradition are linked to specific ways that firms process information and conduct their operations. These "cognitive sunk costs" restrict managers from thinking about strategic challenges differently, which hampers and often prevents change. History is an objective and immutable fact that managers have to cope with.

Escalation of commitment. The term *escalation of commitment* refers to a well-established phenomenon in which actors (e.g., individuals, groups, organizations) continue with a course of action despite accumulating negative outcomes. Staw (1976) used a simulated investment decision to demonstrate that individuals who felt responsible for a losing course of action were more likely to increase their investment than individuals who did not.

The term is broadly applied to contexts where a history of decision making produces large "sunk costs" that irrationally constrain human agency so that managers continue to commit resources to a clearly failed strategy. The resilience of the phenomenon has been aptly demonstrated by studies in such diverse fields as game theory (Zardkoohi, 2004), psychology (Moon, 2001), and political science (Fearon, 1994).

A core assumption of the escalation of commitment concept is that past events and behaviors create serious constraints for future action. Staw (1981) explains this with the observation that broad social norms of appropriate behavior dictate that leaders and managers should be consistent over time. As a result, managers tend to stick with decisions once made because that is what leaders are assumed to do.

Implications for Change

Collectively, these three constructs—imprinting, structural inertia, and escalation of commitment—demonstrate how our implicit assumptions of history inform our explicit models of change. An objective, positivist view of history contains within it a series of related but unarticulated assumptions that define the difficulty of change, the key to successful change,

the focal unit of change, and how we know when change has occurred. We examine each of these implications in turn.

Difficulty of change. Change theorists who hold a positivist and objective view of history tend to see change as a difficult process that can be successful only through extreme levels of episodic intervention. In this perspective, because history is understood as an inexorable accumulation of events that constrain choice, over time, organizations are assumed to acquire inertial properties (Kelly & Amburgey, 1991). Events that occur early in the life history of the organization persist and are felt powerfully as the organization ages. Organizations, in this view, age like humans and grow increasingly rigid over time. Resisting change is seen as the default state of most organizations, and change, typically, occurs only when organizations are faced with few alternatives.

Similarly, an objective view of history as unfettered facts tends to limit assumptions of human agency. That is, an implicit assumption of history as "brute fact" carries with it an associated assumption of deterministic fatalism. Researchers in this tradition, thus, structure models of change in which early events both determine later events and delimit alternatives—a process described as "path dependence" (e.g., Schreyögg & Sydow, 2011; Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009). Human agency to effect change is limited not only because of the powerful determination of the past but also because of the implicit inability of human participants to alter their interpretation of the past.

Success of change. The impetus for change is typically "exogenous" and takes the form of an "environmental jolt" (Meyer, 1982; Sine & David, 2003) or a forced intervention that arises independent of the organization. Models of successful endogenous change must overcome the powerful calcifying effects assumed to accumulate over time. Internally induced change, thus, must simulate the profound disruptive effect of an exogenous shock. The enormous effort required to accomplish this simulated jolt is perhaps best illustrated by Lewin's (1947) classic description of facilitating change by first "unfreezing" the organization—that is, dislodging the inertial "rust" that has accumulated over time, executing the change, and then "refreezing" the organization.

Unit of change. The focal unit of change in this perspective is the entity (i.e., the organization or, more specifically, the organizational structure). Researchers know that change has occurred when the entity passes from one state to another. This linear and objectivist view of change, as Quattrone and Hopper (2001: 408) observe, is predicated on epistemological assumptions that time is linear and history is objective. Organizations "change" when they adopt new structures or operations. Change is defined in terms of naive positivism—a material change in states of being that occur in a segmented and linear temporal domain.

It is important to recognize, however, that not all change theorists accept these underlying assumptions of time and history or this particular definition of change. This view tends to overemphasize the importance of structural or design changes in organizations and tends to underemphasize the role of changes in culture or meaning systems (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Clearly, thus, there are alternative assumptions about the nature of history and its effect on models of change. As we demonstrate in the next section, there are other models of change that are based on implicit assumptions about history in which the past is much less concrete and the ability to interpret it offers emancipatory opportunities for creativity and change.

History-as-Power

Key Assumptions

A somewhat different view of organizational change emerges if the assumption of history as objective fact is retained but the focal point of change is not the design or structure of the organization but, rather, the power structure of the various coalitions or entities within the organization. This perspective of organizational change draws directly from Marx's view of history and is based on three key assumptions.

First, this perspective of organizational change carries an implicit assumption of *historical materialism*. All social structures, including societies, communities, and organizations, are "historically constituted" into relations of production that define both social position or class and the division of labor (Clegg, 1981: 545). Change typically serves to consolidate the power of owners or managers. For the working class, historical change is manifest in the increasing specialization of work—that is, breaking it into discrete units of repetitive activity—which enables increased intensification of the frequency of production.

A second assumption is that the inexorable effect of history is to solidify not the design and operational structure of organizations as is suggested by the History-as-Fact view but, rather, differences in *power* of various coalitions within the organization. The increased disaggregation of work, often termed "Fordism" or "Taylorism" (Kanigel, 2005), tends to crystallize differences in power in organizations by granting increasing control to owners and their surrogates while disempowering and alienating workers.

A third assumption is that change occurs *dialectically*. As historically constituted power structures, organizations exist in relatively long periods of stasis during which the pressures for entropy and change exist in relative equilibrium, effectively counterbalancing the various power coalitions within the firm. Small incremental efforts to change are relatively ineffective because the power differences in the social structure of organizations encourage workers to resist change. Midlevel managers also encourage stasis as they seek to maintain carefully constructed "webs of interdependent relationships with buyers, suppliers, and financial backers" (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985: 177) to preserve existing patterns of culture, norms, and ideology.

Collectively, historical materialism, power, and dialectical change present a view of history that constrains change because of intricately counterbalanced pressures for change and stability. History is still understood to be objective, and time is linear, unidirectional, and largely independent of human experience. The cumulative passage of time (i.e., history) is seen to promote stasis and inertia.

However, the History-as-Power perspective acknowledges greater capacity for human agency to effect change because it acknowledges the ability of individuals to reflect upon the history of power relations and to act upon them. As we describe below, this view of history tends to produce models of change characterized by long periods of stability but punctuated by distinct bursts of revolutionary change.

Key Constructs: Contradiction, Praxis, and Punctuated Equilibrium

Contradiction. A central concept in the History-as-Power view is the Hegelian understanding that all social systems are complex collections of coalitions of different interests

(Benson, 1977; Clegg, 1981). Over the history of an organization, ongoing interaction tends to exacerbate existing contradictions and produce new ones (Ford & Ford, 1994). Typically, these oppositional contradictions counterbalance each other and result in long periods of stasis or resistance to change. Periodically, however, the contradictions between opposing forces become unbalanced and change occurs (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995).

The construct of contradiction is pervasive in the change literature and has been used to theorize processes of change at the individual (Jermier, 1985), organizational (Ford & Ford, 1995), and institutional (Seo & Creed, 2002) levels of analysis. Organizational contradictions often initiate moments of organizational change that compromise the performance of an organization. So, for example, firms sometimes initiate change in an effort to appear legitimate to internal or external audiences, knowing fully that the change will reduce profit or efficiency (Lamertz & Baum, 1998; Westphal & Zajac, 1993).

Some firms, because of historically accumulated dominant internal coalitions, become resistant to change and engage in acts of conformity or *competency traps* (Levitt & March, 1988) that undermine future success. Miller (1990) describes these firms as suffering from the "Icarus paradox," noting that the source of a firm's internal success often creates an irrational internal commitment to actively resisting change even when doing so threatens the firm's existence.

Praxis. Over long periods of stability, much of organizational life, including roles, status orders, and acts of resistance to change, tend to become reified or attributed to an autonomous authority that exists outside the organization. Only through ongoing reflection about the history of an organization can organizational participants come to realize that they themselves are the creators of this organizational power structure that appears to constrain their own agency (Morgan, 1997). The key to successful organizational change, then, is the ability to overcome the power of the past by unlearning it (Kolb, 1996), by reinterpreting it (Bartunek, 1993), or by critically analyzing one's organizational history (Barrett & Srivistava, 1991).

The process of reflecting on and overcoming one's collective history is called organizational praxis (Bradbury & Mainemelis, 2001). Perhaps the best empirical application of the use of praxis (Heydebrand, 1983) is offered by Bartunek's (1984) case study in a Roman Catholic religious order. The changes, which came to be known as "Vatican II," encouraged the Church to reintegrate with world society. This represented a fundamental challenge to the order, which had, for centuries, adopted the philosophy of the need to remain separate from the secular world. The proposed change, thus, represented a cosmological change for the order, requiring what amounted to a denial of much of the organization's prior history.

Bartunek (1984) observed a successful and incremental process of change. She explains this somewhat surprising outcome as the result of successful dialectical change in which the original worldview (or thesis) was challenged by a contradictory worldview (or antithesis) and was, gradually, resolved by collectively and critically reflecting upon and integrating the old and the new worldviews into a creative new worldview (i.e., synthesis).

Punctuated equilibrium. While the concept of praxis describes how opportunities for change are first identified in the History-as-Power approach, the process through which change occurs is captured by the construct of *punctuated equilibrium*. Borrowed from evolutionary biology, punctuated equilibrium refers to processes of change characterized by long

periods of relative stability interrupted by short, sharp episodes of revolutionary change. This model of change is quite influential and has been used to explain change at multiple levels of analysis, including individuals (Levinson, 1978), the small group (Gersick, 1988), organizations (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985), and social or organizational fields (Meyer, Gaba, & Colwell, 2005).

Tushman and Romanelli's (1985) study of change in the microcomputer industry offers an early field level empirical demonstration of punctuated equilibrium. They observed that changes in the firms were clustered, as would be predicted by a punctuated equilibrium model of change, rather than randomly dispersed, as might be expected under a gradual, more evolutionary model of change. Significantly, they also demonstrate that models of punctuated equilibrium are described by distinct shifts in the power distribution within organizations over time. Long periods of power consolidation are associated with organizational stability, but shifts in the power distribution in the organization are typically associated with spasms of revolutionary change.

Punctuated equilibrium also operates at group level processes of change. Gersick (1988) observed that project teams evolve through two main phases separated by a transition phase. During the initial inertial phase group, members apply traditional thinking strategies and work routines to their project and devote time to developing roles and political coalitions designed to resolve conflicts. In the transition phase, which occurs at roughly the midpoint of the allotted time, the inertia is disrupted and members initiate major changes in their work strategy. During the second phase, group members return to a phase of relative stability. Gersick (1988: 28) describes the process of change as a "dialectical" model of punctuated equilibrium.

A clear implication of this approach to change is that history tends to crystallize power structures in an organization. As a result, change is dialectical and characterized by long phases of relative inertia maintained by countervailing political pressures within the organization. At certain points of time, however, the equilibrium is disrupted and change occurs, typically in a revolutionary burst of activity.

Implications for Change

In combination, the constructs of contradiction, praxis, and punctuated equilibrium describe a distinct and well-established model of change that is predicated upon an implicit model of history in which history is still objective and deterministic but holds the key to emancipatory change. Adopting an assumption that history is power offers a different definition of the construct of change—with distinct implications about how difficult change is, how to successfully implement change in organizations, and how we know when change has actually occurred. We summarize these observations in the balance of this section.

Difficulty of change. Conceptualizing change through the lens of History-as-Power allows a somewhat more dominant role for human agency in processes of change. Agency is enacted through reflexivity and praxis—that is, through the ability of individuals or collectives to overcome the constraints of their history through retrospection, critical reflection, and creative visioning (Foster & Wiebe, 2010; Jermier, 1985; Suddaby, Viale, & Gendron, in press). Change, as a result, is not only possible to achieve; it is somewhat inevitable.

Success of change. In this view, the possibility of change can be identified through organizational praxis, or deep reflection on the historical conditions that created present organizational arrangements and the associated insight that the existing power structure can be changed. Change occurs in periods of punctuated equilibrium or revolutionary change during which the existing power structures are dissolved and replaced by new ones. Greiner (1972) describes such dialectical change as a series of small adaptations that accumulate over time to produce a profoundly new organization. As a company progresses through developmental phases, he notes, each evolutionary period creates its own revolution.

Unit of change. In dialectical models of change, the primary unit of analysis is the balance of power between opposing forces in an organization (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Such forces can become manifest in various forms, but most research has focused on political coalitions and their struggle for dominance in organizations. A range of terms are used to describe these political groups, including *dominant coalitions* (Cyert & March, 1963), *upper echelons* (Carpenter, Geletkanycz, & Sanders, 2004), *incumbents and challengers* (Fligstein, 2001), and *top management teams* (Wiersema & Bantel, 1992).

From this dialectical perspective, organizations are understood to be historical accretions of power. While history is still understood to be objective, the key mechanisms of change—contradiction, praxis, punctuated equilibrium—are largely ideohistorical. That is, they are each based on different ways of cognitively integrating the past, present, and future. As we argue in the next section, when we relax our assumptions about the objectivity of history, the restrictions on human agency are similarly relaxed and the opportunities for change increase.

History-as-Sensemaking

Key Assumptions

A third view adopts a phenomenological view of history. Phenomenology is based on the premise that reality consists of experiences, objects, and events as experienced in human consciousness, rather than in the objects, events, and experiences themselves. In management theory, phenomenology is best reflected in Weick's (1995) notion of sensemaking in which organizational reality is based on how participants interpret their collective experience. Sensemaking thus privileges human interpretation of events over the "brute facts" of reality and "is less about discovery than invention" (Weick, 1995: 13).

Three key assumptions define the construct. First, sensemaking rejects the essentialist assumption that change occurs as a discrete event outside human consciousness. Instead, change occurs in human cognition when some events are selected out of the ongoing flow of organizational experience and are identified and labeled as "change" (Weick, 1979). Second, these interpretive processes can occur collectively, at the level of groups (Gephart, 1984), organizations (Daft & Weick, 1984), or even larger social groups (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Shared assumptions of social reality hold a determinative effect of group values. Third, shared schema about how to interpret past events has a powerful influence on future behavior. That is, the cognitive frames that we use to experience the reality of the present are based on retrospective and collective interpretations of past events. In turn, past events delimit the array of choices available for future action.

These assumptions—which in the sensemaking literature are termed *enactment, collective frames of reference*, and the *role of past interpretation on future behavior*—present a view of history as a phenomenological subject of human interpretation rather than an objective set of immutable facts. Not only is history a matter of interpretive construction, time is viewed not as a linear and unidirectional flow, but as a process of understanding achieved in an iterative pluperfect form—that is, moving back and forth between the past and present.

Key Constructs: Retrospective Enactment, Selection, and Identity

Three key constructs help to illustrate how the implicit assumptions of history, described above, influence explicit models of change in sensemaking theory: *retrospective enactment*, *selection*, and *identity*. We elaborate each below.

Retrospective enactment. Enactment refers to the process in symbolic interaction theory through which shared meaning systems are brought into reality through action. So, for example, a young doctor encountering a patient for the first time enacts the script of professionalism by acting as if she always has been a physician. By reaching back to preexisting cultural templates—scripts, roles, traditions—the physician can effectively use the past to make sense of the future. Retrospective enactment, thus, uses creative historical reasoning to produce outcomes based on retrospective assessments of events that have not yet occurred. A key element of sensemaking is the ability to engage in "future-perfect-thinking" by using past tense to impose order on a chaotic and unknowable future (Weick, 1979).

Schultz and Hernes's (2013) account of the resurgence of the Danish toy manufacturer LEGO aptly illustrates the use of retrospective enactment. The authors describe two distinct historical strategies used by the company in its change efforts. The first strategy encouraged team members to analyze "lessons of the past" and focused on short-term time horizons. That is, they studied failed attempts at organizational identity change from a few decades in the past and encouraged team members to use those findings to develop identity claims in the near future (i.e., 9 months ahead).

The second strategy involved much longer time horizons in which team members reached back 75 years to the early founding of the firm to identify the essence of the firm, a time period that extended well beyond the invention of the core product of the firm (the building block). The team, ultimately, identified the promotion of child development and creativity as its enduring essence and helped stimulate a renaissance of new products for the firm.

LEGO, thus, used sensemaking techniques to motivate strategic change by retrospectively reconstructing a degree of coherence and continuity between the organization's past history and a, largely predefined, future direction. Historicizing the present and the future through retrospective sensemaking, according to Weick, provides "the *feeling* of order, clarity and rationality" (1995: 29).

Selection. Selection refers to the process by which actors select plausible interpretations of data on the basis of how well these interpretations are thought to fit with past understandings. Acts of selection depend on assumptions of *bracketing* in which actors make sense of

the raw flow of experience by creating temporal continuity between some events and temporal discontinuity between others. The process of selecting some events as continuous or discontinuous with others is a way of imposing meaning on experience by making it consistent or inconsistent with cognitive templates drawn from the past.

Ravasi and Phillips (2011), for example, demonstrate how the venerable Danish design firm Bang & Olufsen employed processes of selective bracketing to realign their strategy to better fit with changes in the external, competitive environment. The company periodically revised the history of the organization to mask profound changes in the strategic direction of the company as being consistent with the past. Executives used legitimation techniques to ensure that organizational participants did not select or bracket change efforts as unique events.

A similar example of using selection to create disjuncture with the past is offered by Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) analysis of arguments used by accountants to challenge the legitimacy of a new organizational form—multidisciplinary partnerships—that threatened to allow large accounting firms to assume ownership of law firms. Opponents of the new form used a variety of verbal techniques to emphasize how threatening the new form was by characterizing the profession as "being at a crossroad," "crossing the Rubicon," and "failing to honor their past." Persuasive language can be used to skillfully characterize an event as discontinuous with the past and therefore dangerous. Rhetoric, thus, is used to bracket and select an event as illegitimate.

Identity. Change succeeds when it is seen to be consistent with past behavior. Gioia, Corley, and Fabbri (2002) observe that a reconstituted history assists change in organizations by creating a coherent identity. Identity, they argue, can be articulated only through retrospective interpretation. As conditions change, however, so too do our interpretations of the past. As a result, "all history is likely to become revisionist history" (Gioia et al., 2002: 623).

For example, Howard-Grenville, Metzger, and Meyer (2013) demonstrate how revisionist history is employed to create identity. In their analysis of the resurrection of the community identity of Eugene, Oregon, they show how actors used "orchestrated experiences" based on recreating elements of the city's historical "golden age" as "Track Town" to reconnect stakeholders with the city's storied past. These activities involved strategically drawing from "Eugene's history, saluting athletes, rhapsodizing about heroic performances and celebrating Hayward Field itself" (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013: 128). History, thus, offers a critical but somewhat invisible or intangible resource that was effectively mobilized by select rhetorical strategies designed to resurrect a communal identity sedimented by years of neglect.

Sensemaking, thus, is a process by which organizational participants cognitively reconstruct events as either change or continuity through processes of collective interpretation and reinterpretation of identity. History, in this view, is not objective, and the process of reconstructing the past is not bound by the brute facts of the past. Rather, the act of interpreting the past is motivated by an interest in constructing an identity of the organization as either continuous or discontinuous with an imagined future.

Implications for Change

Collectively, the concepts of retrospective enactment, selection, and identity introduce a model of change that is defined not by a linear transition through phases of unfreezing,

changing state, and refreezing, as defined by Lewin (1947), but, rather, is characterized by human cognition and interpretation. This model of change builds on a well-established stream of phenomenological research (Daft & Weick, 1984; Gephart, 1984; Quinn & Kimberly, 1984) in which the pace, direction, and success of change is managed by the interpretations of events by dominant collectives in the organization.

Sensemaking theory dominates this approach to change but is supported by related theoretical traditions, including events-based construction (Isabella, 1990), cultural change (Pettigrew, 1987; Schein, 1985), and symbolic interactionist approaches to change (Barley, 1986; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983). A clear differentiator of this model of change is its overt acknowledgement of the importance of the past and the critical role of selective memory in reconstructing salient elements of the past to create a credible history.

Difficulty of change. This approach ascribes a high degree of human agency to managing processes of change that is in contrast to the more essentialist approaches embedded in both the History-as-Fact and the History-as-Power approaches. The key challenge in managing change is not in controlling what events happen, as Lewin (1947) suggests, but, rather, in creating shared interpretations of what happened. That is, change requires an interpretive shift in the cognitive frames that define the dominant reality of the organization.

Success of change. Viewing change through the lens of History-as-Sensemaking substantially changes organizational assessments of successful change. In this model, change often occurs iteratively and retrospectively. Because interpretation occurs after events have occurred, successful change is apparent only a posteriori and once a collective assessment of the change effort has emerged.

Unit of change. In contrast to the prior models of change, where the primary unit of analysis was the organizational entity (either its organizational structure or its power structure), in the History-as-Sensemaking approach, the clear unit of analysis is the marked shift in meaning or cognition that occurs within a social group. Weick (1995) uses the term *cosmological episode* to capture the disruptions in meaning systems that occur when organizations adopt a new interpretive scheme. Cosmology episodes are characterized by a sudden and profound loss of rationality or meaning in one's lived experience where prior perceptions of change, which once made sense, no longer cohere and participants are forced to reconstruct a new interpretive framework within which to organize experience.

History-as-Rhetoric

Key Assumptions

A fourth implicit model of history extends the view that conceptualization of the past is interpretive with the added assumption that the process of interpreting the past is highly agentic and can be deliberately manipulated for strategic purposes. The term *rhetorical history* is used to describe the "strategic use of the past as a persuasive strategy to manage key stakeholders of the firm" (Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn-Trank, 2010: 157). Participants in processes of organizational change are assumed to have high degrees of agency in creating narratives of the past designed to facilitate strategic change in organizations.

In this view, history is essentially a narrative of the past and is therefore highly subjective. This critical view of historiography rejects the notion of a single unifying historical account or "grand narrative" and suggests that the depth and richness of available "brute facts" of the past offer skilled rhetoricians a potentially infinite number of equally valid histories.

As a result, history is assumed to be more biased by the present and future than previous views of history have allowed, and the construction of any particular history is deliberate and strategic. Hobsbawm (1983: 1) thus demonstrated how many "ancient" traditions are, in reality, of fairly recent origin. He coined the term *invented tradition* to identify a range of contemporary social institutions that deliberately claim certain rituals, routines, and practices to be much older than they actually are in order to make claims of authenticity, continuity, and legitimacy.

Key Constructs: Periodization/Continuation, Memorialization, and Strategic Forgetting

The notion that history is highly malleable and open to revision helps define a model of change that uses narratives of history to facilitate strategic change. We elaborate three constructs upon which the concept of rhetorical history is based—periodization/continuation, memorialization, and strategic forgetting.

Periodization/continuation. One of the simplest ways for organizations to rhetorically reconstruct history is to impose artificial categories on the continuous flow of time and experience. Periodization is the process of retrospectively cultivating "the idea of a radical transformation in terms of 'before' and 'after'" (Ybema, 2014: 499). Periodization is largely accomplished through rhetoric that serves to bracket temporal experience. Periodization bears some similarity to Weick's (1979) notion of "bracketing" but differs in the degree of deliberation and agency. That is, in contrast to bracketing, which is largely a preconscious form of cognition, periodization is intentional and strategic.

Perhaps the best empirical illustration of the use of periodization as a rhetorical strategy for change is offered by Biggart's (1977) analysis of the change effort in the U.S. Postal Service. Biggart attributes the success of the effort, in part, to the ability of the change agents to artificially create a sense of division between the past and the future. They achieved this by demonizing and discrediting long-held values and the removal of many of the symbols of the "old" organization—that is, retiring the 200-year-old name of the organization, designing a new logo with modern typeface, repainting thousands of postal trucks and mailboxes—in what was described as a corporate "makeover." Biggart emphasizes the critical role played by internal and external corporate communication in articulating the core message that the old organization "was no more" in a deliberate effort to rhetorically destroy the old history of the organization.

Disengaging with the past through a formal declaration of a division in time is essential to creating a new organizational reality (Jick, 1993) and has the effect of retroactively changing both the past and the future. Imposing periods on the continuous flow of time is a form of "mnemonic cutting and pasting" (Zerubavel, 2012) that uses language to impose meaning and significance onto discrete chunks of time (Czarniawska, 1997). Periodization, thus, is an effective way of facilitating change by rhetorically reconfiguring the past and reimagining the future through the lens of the present.

Memorializing. A related rhetorical strategy of changing the past is the act of memorializing periods of the past in an effort to signal either continuity or a breach with the past. Considerable research has documented the empirical fact of corporate memorialization, which tends to use *celebrations* to reify a disjuncture or signal closure with the past (Deal & Key, 1998) or rituals, which are used to signal continuity with the past (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010). So, for example, research has emphasized the importance of mourning the passage of a celebrated CEO, such as Steve Jobs, in order to mark transition to a new form of leadership (Bell & Taylor, 2016) or canonizing the iconic image of a founder (Foster, Suddaby, Minkus, & Wiebe, 2011). Often, memorializing involves a high degree of revisionist history and a deep reliance on nostalgia—or appeals to an invented past that never actually was (Gabriel, 1993; Strangleman, 1999).

Memorializing the transition to a new period in corporate history aids change by giving organizational members an opportunity to honor the past (Wilkins & Bristow, 1987) and achieve symbolic closure that makes real the passage from one moment of reality to another (Jick, 1993). Such closure is essential to successful change and requires some form of institutional recognition or acknowledgement by the organization. The central objective of memorialization is to reify the periodization of past events. It is also to reinforce and emphasize those values from the past that are still valued while providing organizational members with a path to a new and altered organization.

Strategic forgetting. A growing body of research demonstrates that organizations often engage in acts of intentionally erasing elements of their collective memory in order to facilitate change. Strategic forgetting "can be a critical first step in organizational renewal when an organization needs to change" (de Holan & Phillips, 2004a: 425). In a study of Canadian hotels adapting to local conditions in Cuba, de Holan and Phillips (2004b) document how successful hotels strategically discarded well-established routines and schemas that had been successful in the past in order to make room for new knowledge, innovative routines, and fresh schemas. Forgetting "is an important managerial concern and must be managed or the organization will pay the price for failing to do so" (de Holan & Phillips, 2004b: 1612).

A related study of change in a French aeronautics company documented repeated and strategic omissions of historical fact in the firm's corporate bulletin (Anteby & Molnár, 2012). The researchers identify two basic types of strategic forgetting: *structural omissions*, in which historical facts that contradict managerial identity claims for the company are intentionally omitted, and *preemptive neutralizations*, where management deliberately reframes contradictory historical facts with a view to mute problematic identity cues in an organization's past.

Implications for Change

When history is understood to be a rhetorical resource that can be reconstructed to suit strategic purposes, the models of change are characterized by high degrees of agency in managing the past for future interests. This approach draws on a long history of research on the important role of narrative in processes of organizational change (Boje, 1991; Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Humphreys & Brown, 2002) but focuses specifically on narratives that strategically reinterpret the past for present or future purposes.

Difficulty of change. In contrast to prior implicit models of objective history, where the past is viewed as an essentialist constraint on action, this model of history grants tremendous

creative license to change agents interested in revising a firm's narrative of its past. There are clear constraints to the degree to which the past can be revised, as the German corporations Bertelsmann and Volkswagen discovered in their attempts to revise their historical narratives in order to deny affiliations with the Nazi regime (C. Booth, Clark, Delahaye, Procter, & Rowlinson, 2007). However, the change literature, particularly techniques that use scenario planning, reinforce the powerful role played by selective reconstruction of the past as a means of facilitating change in the present. Scenario planning, like rhetorical history, is premised on the assumption that corporations, like human beings, are capable of revising their past in order to achieve a desired future. The key to successful scenario planning is to creatively avoid the assumed objectivity of the past by questioning taken-for-grantedness assumptions about prior interpretations of the past (Schwartz, 1991).

Unit of change. The primary unit of analysis in change processes that are based on implicit models of History-as-Rhetoric is the historical narrative itself (McGaughey, 2013). Research in organizational storytelling has demonstrated that effective stories are far more persuasive or effective in changing attitudes than the use of statistics or other quantitative data (Martin & Powers, 1983). The test of whether change has occurred, thus, is when the organizational narrative and associated practices (traditions, rituals, descriptions of heroes and villains, and claims of uniqueness based on history) have been changed.

Success of change. In order to be successful, narratives must adopt all of the elements of successful rhetoric (W. Booth, 1983; Burke, 1969). The narrative must be coherent and credible. The strategic intent of the story must be disguised (Barry & Elmes, 1997), and it is advantageous, but not necessary, that the narrative is based on a kernel of objective fact. As Gardner observes, a visionary leader must offer a story "that builds on the most credible of past syntheses, revisits them in the light of present concerns, leaves open a space for future events, and allows individual contributions by the persons in the group" (1995: 56). Credibility in rhetorical history, thus, is based on the same criterion as most storytelling but necessitates storytelling structures that capture convincing and believable accounts of the past.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our central objective has been to demonstrate how implicit models of history have influenced explicit models of organizational change in management studies. Drawing a continuum in which history is seen to be largely objective and deterministic, on one hand, and largely subjective and malleable on the other, we describe four implicit models of history that define different explicit models of organizational change. We elaborate the implications that each of these implicit models of history hold for what change is, how it unfolds, and where, in an organization, we should look in order to successfully manage change. We summarize these implications in Table 1.

One of the critical insights of our analysis is the demonstrative lack of construct clarity in the concept of change. Depending upon their implicit models of history, theorists often mean different things when they use the word *change*. What must change and what must stay the same when organizations change? Our analysis indicates that our answer to this question depends, largely, on which implicit model of history we subscribe to and how we understand the reciprocal relationship between change and stability.

Table 1
Varieties of History and Theories of Change

	History-as-Fact	History-as-Power	History-as-Sensemaking	History-as-Rhetoric
History is . . .	Objective	Objective	Subjective	Subjective
Epistemology	Positivist	Critical	Interpretive	Constructivist
Unit of Change	Structure	Power Relations	Meaning	Narratives
Representative Constructs	Imprinting Structural Inertia Escalation of Commitment	Contradiction Punctuated Equilibrium Praxis	Enactment Selection Identity	Periodization Memorialization Forgetting
Change Occurs . . .	Incrementally	Episodically	Retrospectively	Instrumentally
Likelihood of Change	Low	Low/Moderate	Moderate	High
Assumption About Agency	Low	Low/Moderate	Moderate	High
Triggers of Change	Shocks	Conflict	Reflexivity	Plurality

Can we say that change has occurred if the structure of the entity remains the same but the political value structure changes? Advocates of History-as-Fact would say no, but those who see History-as-Power might disagree. Similarly, can we say that change has occurred when a radical new technology, such as the electric light bulb or the automobile, has been introduced? Perhaps, at least according to the standard of change set by the History-as-Fact view. But the empirical evidence suggests that, in order for the innovation to be successful, considerable rhetoric will be required to suggest that the innovation is either continuous with the past (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001) or a significant breach of the past (Rao, 1994)—a definition of change offered by the History-as-Rhetoric view.

What is less well understood is how these implicit models of history influence the capacity to *manage change*. While we have demonstrated a causal link between how we theorize the past and the possibility of change in the future, we have little understanding of how that causal linkage can be manipulated to encourage innovation or to identify innovators. So, for example, do successful entrepreneurs differ from the rest of the population in how they conceive of the past and its link to future opportunities? Are entrepreneurs more apt to revise their view of history to facilitate an envisioned future? Similarly, can we encourage innovation by teaching populations to see the past as less concrete and therefore less fatalistically path dependent?

Another key insight of our analysis is that the construct of organizational identity is intimately associated with our assumptions of the degree of objectivity in the past. Those who see the past as largely fixed and immutable appear to be more likely to see organizational identity as similarly fixed and immutable. By contrast, interpretive assumptions about the past make organizational identity a much more fluid and adaptive construct. This observation has important implications for revisiting long-standing issues in organizational commitment. Do organizations that demonstrate high levels of commitment amongst their members rely on narratives of the past that are more objective and unchangeable than organizations with low commitment? Are there individual differences in assumptions of the past that make some organizational members more apt to exhibit high citizenship behavior than others?

Traditionally, theories of change have focused on identifying categories of change and matching them to different organizational or environmental conditions in order to manage the change process. The assumption is that change occurs in the present with a view to overcoming the past. In this paper, we reverse that assumption by suggesting that many of the impediments to successful change are the product of inherent assumptions about the nature of history and the lack of agency that we have in revising the past.

Our intent in this essay has been to demonstrate a "historical consciousness" in how we theorize change in organizations (Suddaby, 2016). By historical consciousness we mean a degree of reflexivity or heightened appreciation of how our collective assumptions about history can influence our understanding of the present and how we envision the future (Seixas, 2004). Rather than adopting an essentialist view of history as a set of immutable facts that must be overcome by constructing an artificial breach or rupture with the past, our core insight is that successful change can occur by reframing our attitudes and preconceived notions about the past. History actually offers a valuable but underexploited organizational resource that can be used to motivate and successfully manage change.

References

Anteby, M., & Molnár, V. 2012. Collective identity meets organizational memory: Remembering to forget in a firm's rhetorical history. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55: 515-540.

Arthur, W. B. 1989. Competing technologies, increasing returns and lock-in by historical events. *The Economic Journal*, 99: 116-131.

Arthur, W. B. 1994. *Increasing returns and path dependence in the economy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Barley, S. R. 1986. Technology as an occasion for structuring: Evidence from observations of CT scanners and the social order of radiology departments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 31: 78-108.

Barrett, F., & Srivastva, S. 1991. History as a mode of inquiry in organizational life: A role for human cosmogony. *Human Relations*, 44: 231-254.

Barron, J. N., Hannan, M. T., & Burton, D. M. 1999. Building the iron cage: Determinants of managerial intensity in the early years of an organization. *American Sociological Review*, 8: 527-547.

Barry, D., & Elmes, M. 1997. Strategy retold: Toward a narrative view of strategic discourse. *Academy of Management Review*, 22: 429-452.

Bartunek, J. 1984. Changing interpretive schemes and organizational restructuring: The example of a religious order. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29: 355-372.

Bartunek, J. 1993. The multiple cognitions and conflicts associated with second order organizational change. In J. K. Murnighan (Ed.), *Social psychology in organizations: Advances in theory and research*: 322-349. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bell, E., & Taylor, S. 2016. Vernacular mourning and corporate memorialization in framing the death of Steve Jobs. *Organization*, 23: 114-132.

Benson, K. 1977. Organizations: A dialectical view. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 22: 1-21.

Biggart, N. 1977. The creative-destruction process of organizational change: The case of the post office. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 22: 410-426.

Boeker, W. 1989. Strategic change: The effects of founding and history. *Academy of Management Journal*, 32: 489-515.

Boje, D. M. 1991. The storytelling organization: A study of story performance in an office-supply firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36: 106-126.

Booth, C., Clark, P., Delahaye, A., Procter, C., & Rowlinson, M. 2007. Accounting for the dark side of corporate history: Organizational culture perspectives and the Bertelsmann case. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 18: 625-644.

Booth, W. 1983. *The rhetoric of fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bradbury, H., & Mainemelis, C. 2001. Learning history and organizational praxis. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 10: 340-357.

Brown, A. D., & Humphreys, M. 2003. Epic and tragic tales: Making sense of change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 39: 121-144.

Burke, K. 1969. *A rhetoric of motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Carpenter, M. A., Geletkanycz, M. A., & Sanders, W. G. 2004. Upper echelons research revisited: Antecedents, elements and consequences of top management team composition. *Journal of Management*, 30: 749-778.

Clegg, S. 1981. Organization and control. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26: 545-562.

Cyert, R. M., & March, J. G. 1963. *A behavioral theory of the firm*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Czarniawska, B. 1997. *Narrating the organization: Dramas of institutional identity*. London: Sage.

Dacin, M. T., Munir, K., & Tracey, P. 2010. Formal dining at Cambridge colleges: Linking ritual performance and institutional maintenance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53: 1393-1418.

Daft, R. L., & Weick, K. E. 1984. Toward a model of organizations as interpretation systems. *Academy of Management Review*, 9: 284-295.

Deal, T. E., & Key, M. K. 1998. *Corporate celebration: Play, purpose and profit at work*. New York: Berrett-Koehler.

de Holan, P. M., & Phillips, N. 2004a. Organizational forgetting as strategy. *Strategic Organization*, 2: 423-433.

de Holan, P. M., & Phillips, N. 2004b. Remembrance of things past? The dynamics of organizational forgetting. *Management Science*, 50: 1603-1613.

Fearon, J. D. 1994. Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes. *American Political Science Review*, 88: 577-592.

Fligstein, N. 2001. Social skill and the theory of fields. *Sociological Theory*, 19: 105-125.

Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. 1994. Logics of identity, contradiction and attraction in change. *Academy of Management Review*, 19: 756-785.

Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. 1995. The role of conversations in producing intentional change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20: 541-570.

Foster, W. M., Suddaby, R., Minkus, A., & Wiebe, E. 2011. History as social memory assets: The example of Tim Hortons. *Management and Organizational History*, 6: 101-120.

Foster, W. M., & Wiebe, E. 2010. Praxis makes perfect: Recovering the ethical promise of critical management studies. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 94: 271-283.

Friedland, R., & Alford, R. R. 1991. Bringing society back in. In W. W. Powell & P. J. DiMaggio (Eds.), *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*: 232-263. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gabriel, Y. 1993. Organizational nostalgia: Reflections on the golden age. In S. Fineman (Ed.), *Emotion in organizations*: 118-141. London: Sage.

Gardner, H. 1995. *Leading minds: An anatomy of leadership*. New York: Basic Books.

Gephart, R. 1984. Making sense of organizationally based environmental disasters. *Journal of Management*, 10: 205-225.

Gersick, C. 1988. Time and transition in work teams: Toward a new model of group development. *Academy of Management Journal*, 31: 9-41.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Fabbri, T. 2002. Revising the past (while thinking in the future perfect tense). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 15: 622-634.

Greiner, L. 1972. Evolution and revolution as organizations grow. *Harvard Business Review*, 50(4): 37-46.

Hannan, M. T., & Freeman, J. 1977. The population ecology of organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82: 929-964.

Hannan, M. T., & Freeman, J. 1989. *Organizational ecology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hargadon, A., & Douglas, Y. 2001. When innovations meet institutions: Edison and the design of the electric light. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46: 476-501.

Heydebrand, W. V. 1983. Organization and praxis. In G. Morgan (Ed.), *Beyond method*: 306-320. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Hobsbawm, E. 1983. Introduction. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *The invention of tradition*: 1-14. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Howard-Grenville, J., Metzger, M. L., & Meyer, A. D. 2013. Rekindling the old flame: Processes of identity resurrection. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56: 113-136.

Humphreys, M., & Brown, A. D. 2002. Narratives of organizational identity and identification. *Organization Studies*, 23: 421-447.

Isabella, L. A. 1990. Evolving interpretations as a change unfolds: How managers construe key organizational events. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33: 7-41.

Jermier, J. 1985. When the sleeper awakes: A short story extending themes in radical organization theory. *Journal of Management*, 11: 67-80.

Jick, T. 1993. Implementing change. In T. Jick (Ed.), *Managing change*: 192-201. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin.

Johnson, V. 2007. What is organizational imprinting? Cultural entrepreneurship in the founding of the Paris Opera. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113: 97-127.

Kanigel, R. 2005. *The one best way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the enigma of efficiency*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kelly, P., & Amburgey, T. 1991. Organizational inertia and momentum: A dynamic model of strategic change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34: 591-612.

Kimberly, J. R. 1979. Issues in the creation of organizations: Initiation, innovation, and institutionalization. *Academy of Management Journal*, 22: 437-457.

Kolb, D. A. 1996. Management and the learning process. In K. Starkey (Ed.), *How organizations learn*: 270-287. London: Thompson.

Lamertz, K., & Baum, J. 1998. The legitimacy of organizational downsizing in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 15: 93-107.

Levinson, D. J. 1978. *The seasons of a man's life*. New York: Knopf.

Levitt, B., & March, J. G. 1988. Organizational learning. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 14: 319-340.

Lewin, K. 1947. Frontiers in group dynamics. *Human Relations*, 1: 5-41.

Lippman, S., & Aldrich, H. E. 2013. History and evolutionary theory. In D. Wadhwani & M. Bucheli (Eds.), *Organizations in time*: 124-146. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Marquis, C. 2003. The pressure of the past: Network imprinting in intercorporate communities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48: 655-689.

Marquis, C., & Tilcsik, A. 2013. Imprinting: Toward a multi-level theory. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 7: 195-245.

Martin, J., & Powers, M. 1983. Truth or corporate propaganda: The value of a good war story. In L. Pondy, P. Frost, G. Morgan, & T. C. Dandridge (Eds.), *Organizational symbolism*: 93-107. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

McGaughey, S. L. 2013. Institutional entrepreneurship in North American lightning protection standards: Rhetorical history and unintended consequences of failure. *Business History*, 55: 73-97.

Meyer, A. 1982. Adapting to environmental jolts. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 27: 515-537.

Meyer, A. D., Gaba, V., & Colwell, K. A. 2005. Organizing far from equilibrium: Nonlinear change in organizational fields. *Organization Science*, 16: 456-473.

Meyerson, D., & Martin, J. 1987. Cultural change: An integration of three different views. *Journal of Management Studies*, 24: 623-647.

Miller, D. 1990. *The Icarus paradox: How excellent organizations can bring about their own downfall*. New York: Harper.

Moon, H. 2001. The two faces of conscientiousness: Duty and achievement striving in escalation of commitment dilemmas. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86: 533-540.

Morgan, G. 1997. *Images of organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Oliver, C. 1997. Sustainable competitive advantage: Combining institutional and resource based views. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18: 697-713.

Pettigrew, A. 1987. Context and action in the transformation of the firm. *Journal of Management Studies*, 24: 649-670.

Pettigrew, A., Woodman, R. W., & Cameron, K. S. 2001. Studying organizational change and development: Challenges for future research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44: 697-713.

Pondy, L. R., Frost, P. J., Morgan, G., & Dandridge, T. C. 1983. *Organizational symbolism*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Quattrone, P., & Hopper, T. 2001. What does organizational change mean? Speculations on a taken for granted category. *Management Accounting Research*, 12: 403-435.

Quinn, R. E., & Kimberly, J. R. 1984. *Managing organizational transitions*. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin.

Rao, H. 1994. The social construction of reputation: Certification contests, legitimation, and the survival of organizations in the American automobile industry: 1895-1912. *Strategic Management Journal*, 15(S1): 29-44.

Ravasi, D., & Phillips, N. 2011. Strategies of alignment: Organizational identity management and strategic change at Bang & Olufsen. *Strategic Organization*, 9: 103-135.

Romanelli, E., & Tushman, M. L. 1986. Inertia, environments, and strategic choice: A quasi-experimental design for comparative longitudinal research. *Management Science*, 32: 608-621.

Schein, E. H. 1985. *Organizational culture and leadership: A dynamic view*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Schreyögg, G., & Sydow, J. 2011. Organizational path dependence: A process view. *Organization Studies*, 32: 321-335.

Schultz, M., & Hernes, T. 2013. A temporal perspective on organizational identity. *Organization Science*, 24: 1-21.

Schwartz, P. 1991. *The art of the long view: Paths to strategic insight for you and your company*. New York: Doubleday.

Searle, J. 1995. *The construction of social reality*. New York: Free Press.

Seixas, P. C. 2004. *Theorizing historical consciousness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Selznick, P. 1949. *TVA and the grass roots*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Seo, M.-G., & Creed, W. E. D. 2002. Institutional contradictions, praxis, and institutional transformation: A dialectical perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 27: 222-247.

Sine, W. D., & David, R. J. 2003. Environmental jolts, institutional change and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunity. *Research Policy*, 32: 185-207.

Staw, B. M. 1976. Knee-deep in the big muddy: A study of escalating commitment to a chosen course of action. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16: 27-44.

Staw, B. M. 1981. The escalation of commitment to a course of action. *Academy of Management Review*, 6: 577-587.

Stinchcombe, A. L. 1965. Social structure and organizations. In J. G. March (Ed.), *Handbook of organizations*: 142-193. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Strangleman, T. 1999. The nostalgia of organizations and the organizations of nostalgia: Past and present in the contemporary railway industry. *Sociology*, 33: 725-746.

Suddaby, R. 2010. Construct clarity in theories of management and organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 35: 346-357.

Suddaby, R. 2016. Toward a historical consciousness: Following the historic turn in management thought. *M@n@gement*, 19(1): 46-60.

Suddaby, R., Foster, W. M., & Quinn-Trank, C. 2010. Rhetorical history as a source of competitive advantage. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 27: 147-173.

Suddaby, R., & Greenwood, R. 2005. Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50: 35-57.

Suddaby, R., Viale, T., & Gendron, Y. in press. Reflexivity: The role of embedded social position and social skill in processes of field level change. *Research in Organizational Behavior*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2016.02.001

Sydow, J., Schreyögg, G., & Koch, J. 2009. Organizational path dependence: Opening the black box. *Academy of Management Review*, 34: 689-709.

Tushman, M. L., & Romanelli, E. 1985. Organizational evolution: A metamorphosis model of convergence and reorientation. In L. L. Cummings & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior*, vol. 7: 171-222. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Van de Ven, A. H., & Poole, M. S. 1995. Explaining development and change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20: 510-540.

Weick, K. E. 1979. *The social psychology of organizing*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Weick, K. E. 1995. *Organizational sensemaking*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Westphal, J. D., & Zajac, E. J. 1993. Substance and symbolism in CEOs long term incentive plans. *Administrative Sciences Quarterly*, 39: 367-390.

Wiersema, M., & Bantel, K. 1992. Top management team demography and corporate strategic change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35: 91-121.

Wilkins, A. L., & Bristow, N. J. 1987. For successful organizational culture, honor your past. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 1: 221-228.

Ybema, S. 2014. The invention of transitions: History as a symbolic site for discursive struggles over organizational change. *Organization*, 21: 495-513.

Zardkoohi, A. 2004. Do real options lead to escalation of commitment? *Academy of Management Review*, 29: 111-119.

Zerubavel, E. 2012. *Time maps*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.