



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Understanding management gurus and historical narratives: the benefits of a historic turn in management and organization studies

Keulen, S.; Kroeze, R.

DOI

[10.1177/1744935912438311](https://doi.org/10.1177/1744935912438311)

Publication date

2012

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Management & Organizational History

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Keulen, S., & Kroeze, R. (2012). Understanding management gurus and historical narratives: the benefits of a historic turn in management and organization studies. *Management & Organizational History*, 7(2), 171-189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744935912438311>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)

Management & Organizational History

<http://moh.sagepub.com/>

Understanding management gurus and historical narratives: The benefits of a historic turn in management and organization studies

Sjoerd Keulen and Ronald Kroeze

Management & Organizational History 2012 7: 171

DOI: 10.1177/1744935912438311

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://moh.sagepub.com/content/7/2/171>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Management & Organizational History* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://moh.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://moh.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://moh.sagepub.com/content/7/2/171.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - May 16, 2012

[What is This?](#)

Understanding management gurus and historical narratives: The benefits of a historic turn in management and organization studies

Management & Organizational History

7(2) 171–189

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1744935912438311

moh.sagepub.com



Sjoerd Keulen

University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Ronald Kroeze

VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Abstract

A historic turn in organization studies requires a basic theoretical understanding of ‘doing history’ and an appreciation of the centrality of narrative in history. Following the cultural turn in history, narrativist historians and philosophers of history such as Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit and Paul Ricoeur have made the case that narrative is an essential and unavoidable component in history. We demonstrate the persuasive capacity of narrative through a narrativist critique of three best-selling ‘management gurus’. This analysis illustrates the following: (1) the narrative features of popular organizational theories; (2) the basis of the success of guru literature; and (3) why gurus and organizational scientists themselves do not understand the narratological mechanisms behind their success. Finally, we maintain that historical narrativism offers the possibility for positioning organizational history as a highly relevant field for management academics, gurus and even managers, providing support for a historic turn.

Keywords

historiography, management gurus, management fashions, methodology, historical narrativism, new cultural history, historical theory, practical relevance

Introduction

As early as in 2004 Peter Clark and Michael Rowlinson analysed the growing interest in history within management and organizational studies and pleaded for a ‘historic turn’: a call ‘for more history’ and ‘a different approach to history’ in this discipline. Since then, incorporating history within the field has become more common, but also subject to more discussion. The reasons behind this are the

Corresponding author:

Sjoerd Keulen, University of Amsterdam, History Department, Spuistraat 134, NL-1012 VB Amsterdam

Email: s.j.keulen@uva.nl

methodological, epistemological and ethical problems of organizational history writing, which are themselves the result of an imperfect understanding of ongoing debates in the historical sciences about what history is, how it should be written, and what its added value is for organizations and knowledge of organizations. We will argue that one way to approach this problem is to focus more on understanding the unique persuasiveness and attractiveness of history for academics or managers of organizations.

In order to make sense of the 'historic turn' we will first discuss the need to be aware of the fact that in organizational studies there is a different idea of scholarship and science, and therefore of history, than that prevalent in the historical sciences. This explains why at conferences of historians and organizational scientists one hears definitions of history that are often as diverse as the participants, and why organizational history is still confused about the epistemology, methodology and ethics of history. Second, this makes it possible to understand why it so difficult to define what proper organizational history really is about, and why this requires a certain level of theoretical and methodological understanding for both historians and organizational scientists. Finally, although it is now more common to accept 'new cultural history' (NCH) in organizational history, there seems to be a lack of interest of organizational scientists in analysing what, according to leading historians, was the real contribution of the cultural turn, which was the breeding ground for the historic turn (Booth and Rowlinson 2006; Jacques 2006).

In the second part of the paper we suggest that the most attractive form of organizational history writing is historical narrativism, by which we mean history writing based on accepting insights of leading historians and philosophers of history who constructed historical theories of narrative, and the assumption that proper historical accounts can at best be written in the form of a narrative. Although (historical) narrativism is a concept that causes much confusion to both business historians and organizational scientists, it is theoretically sound and provides practical insights for everyday management. Moreover, it is a dominant form of writing history within the historical sciences, which goes back to the heydays of history writing during the era of historicism but also incorporates an understanding of the linguistic/cultural turn that was the most important paradigm shift in the historical sciences of the last decades. Besides, narratives have a wide relevance outside the academic world, because its explanatory power is closely related to everyday linguistic action and common sense. That is why narrativism can explain the success of the best-selling management gurus, whose works are viewed by managers in organizations as the most relevant writing in organization and management studies. This is quite striking, as the gurus themselves do not openly mention the narratological aspects of their work, but refer to quasi-quantitative methods of analysis in order to obtain a certain kind of academic credibility (which they often do not get) from social scientists. This will become clear from an analysis of the popular guru books *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman 1982, 2004), *Iacocca: An Autobiography* (Iacocca 1985) and *Good to Great* (Collins 2001).

The fact that both academics and gurus in the field of organization and management studies often neglect the narrative offers an opportunity for organizational historians. When they understand the basic assumptions of historical theories of narratives and the explanatory power of narrative, which is so central to historical awareness, their work can become much more relevant for both scholars and managers. Moreover, it will lead to the conclusion that a historic turn in organizational studies will be difficult to neglect.

Methodological problems in organizational and management history

When Clark and Rowlinson (2004: 331) spoke of 'a different approach to history' within organization studies, they were right in stating that this would introduce a debate on 'how history [is] like

and unlike science'. However, what history is and how it differs from (social) science are very hard questions to answer. Chris Lorenz (2011) has made clear that every search for a definition of history, or the best way of 'doing history', will lead to epistemological (what the characteristics of knowledge of the past are), methodological (how historical knowledge is achieved), ontological (what the essence of history is) and ethical (how history is used) controversy. What makes it even more difficult is that those academics who feel attracted to organizational and management history have quite different theoretical backgrounds. Political, social and cultural historians are often grouped in faculties of arts or humanities and embedded in historical science, whereas historically interested management and organizational scientists are often accommodated in business schools and connected to social sciences. Therefore, explicating the distinction between history and (social) science is the first necessary step towards understanding the epistemological, methodological, ontological and ethical challenges.

Currently, historians learn that history is both about events that happened in the past, which can be made accessible through source criticism, and the representation of this past in a historical account, which often takes the form of a narrative (Lorenz 2008; Tosh 2010). Since White's *Metahistory* (1973), historians have to accept that the past as hidden in sources and artefacts is not the same as the historical narratives historians write about it. Historians select, interpret and connect evidence from the sources, and use rhetorical tools in order to create something that was not available before: a coherent narrative (Ankersmit 1984). This does not mean that historical narratives are a form of literature. For years even the best-known proponents of narrative history, such as Frank Ankersmit, Alun Munslow and even Hayden White, state that narratives are always based on analyses of sources and cannot be created out of nothing (Lorenz 1998, 2011; Munslow 2003).

The second crucial characteristic of history writing is historical debate or the acceptance of the explicit presumption that historical methods, sources and narratives are never static and can even be in conflict with each other without being unscientific. Sources can be interpreted differently over time when new methods or sources are discovered. Historical narratives, therefore, have to be updated, not only because of new insights, but also because every generation of historians asks new questions (Jardine 2010). Thus, history writing is about *differences* between periods and places in the past and accounts of them, each with their own logic. This can only be explained by means of a *contextual* approach, which makes clear what kind of *processes* were structural and what events were only incidents or curiosities. These are all aspects of what might be called 'historical awareness'. Historical awareness is opposed to interpreting, explaining and perceiving historical reality and historical accounts of reality as being about *unchangeable traditions* (it has always been like this and will always be so), *nostalgia* (everything is getting worse) and *progress* (everything is getting better) (Tosh 2010). The most distinctive characteristic of history writing is its contemplative nature, which also accounts for its anti-positivistic methodology (Lorenz 1998, 2011).

Therefore, because the narratives and methods of historians are less bound, historians and social scientists often do not understand why certain topics are studied by the other camp. Social scientists would say that man is a *Homo politicus*, *Homo economicus*, *Homo managerus* etc., but historians would argue that history itself defines which subject seems most important to study and from which perspective. Hence, the choice of topic also influences the method chosen to study it. Instead of prefixed ideas about language or subject the outcome of the debate about a historical study among historians defines what is seen as proper history writing (Down 2001; Iggers 1997; Lorenz 2011; Tosh 2010).

Accepting that convincing views on historical reality are a combination of facts presented in varying narratives that are tested in historical debate, is an obstacle in the communication between historians and social scientists (Passmore 2011). Organizational historians have to cope with colleagues who regard organizational and management studies as purely objective and rational. The

difference can best be seen in the methodology. Organizational scientists often use quantitative inquiries, which will either confirm their hypotheses or not. History for them is a set of data that can be tested, while concepts such as human agency and man's irrational and creative choices receive less attention (Costea et al. 2006). Such a rational–quantitative approach may be theoretically sound, but it is also a sign that management and organizational scientists are less sensitive to the subjective, irrational and volatile nature of human behaviour and the crucial role of perception.

This rational–quantitative approach is the result of a different view on what organizational knowledge is. In fact many organizational and management scientists subscribe to an one-sided modernist view, and perceive and present reality as progress. The disadvantage is that *change* and *difference*, so crucial to historical awareness, are explained from the perspective of *rational progress* (Cumings and Bridgman 2011). Neil Brady (1997: 160) explained somewhat cynically, but no less clearly, that this causes the idea often heard in analysis of organizations that 'old problems are no longer problems... and history bears little or no utility for future solutions for current problems' because 'economic development is linear'. In the Netherlands management scholars even write explicitly anti-historical books in which they advise their readers not to be interested in history (van Duin 2007). This also explains why many handbooks of management offer no chapters on the historical development of management studies or the methodology of setting up historical research (Rowlinson and Hassard 2011), while in handbooks on the historical sciences the history of history writing (historiography) and the methodology and theory of history (philosophy of history) are crucial parts.

Another recurring problem and unbridgeable difference is the view on agents of change. Social scientists have a 'supra-intentional perspective', which assumes that an analysis of individual human action can never explain change as individual actions are always unintentional and caused by deeper structures (Burke 2008). Historians, on the other hand, often write historical biographies of important political leaders and founders of corporate organizations, in which it is presumed that individuals do bear responsibility for change. In general, social scientists have developed a more structural, a-personal and theoretical approach to explain reality than historians (Lorenz 2008; Passmore 2011).

The differences can be explained from a historical perspective. Although scholars such as Max Weber were able to combine history with a social-scientific approach, the paths of historians and social scientists had already diverged in the foundational period of the modern social sciences at the beginning of the twentieth century, leading to mutual lack of interest and even hostility. In the 1960s and 1970s, under influence of the Annales School, cliometrics and renewed interest in Marxism, the social sciences and historical sciences converged again (Galambos 2003). However, neither was really interested in mixing theories and methods. When scientists from both fields worked together and combined their insights they found important results, but they never solved their epistemological differences (Passmore 2011). The cooperation proved to be a breeding ground for new controversy, because the hypotheses, theories and quantitative methods of social science, which were presented as more 'scientific' than the methodology of history, caused irritation (Burke 2005; Hobsbawm 1997; Lorenz 2011). After a while the quantitative and structural approaches proved not to be the ultimate solution in the development of both social sciences and history as inexplicability and irrationality were still part of reality. Even historical accounts based on cliometrics, one of the most proper quantitative methods available for historical research, generated their own black boxes (Drukker 2006). In fact, the linguistic turn and the related rise of narrativism was a conscious action of philosophers of history and should be interpreted as an attack on the positivistic methods of the social sciences (Lorenz 1998: 310).

Finally, finding a suitable way of doing organizational history is difficult because of controversies among organizational historians themselves. When Clark and Rowlinson (2004: 332) stated that proper organizational history meant a 'turn to historiographical debates and historical theories of

interpretation that recognize the inherent ambiguity of the term “history” itself, which refers to both “the totality of past human actions, and... the narrative or account we construct of them”, they seem to have underestimated historians’ aversion to theory. Although much attention is paid to historiography, historians have generally never been really interested in theorizing about ‘history’. The reason is that it often results in an ethical debate about the use and purpose of history. This becomes clear from the debate between management and organizational scholars active in the field of organizational history on the one hand, and ‘source-minded’ organizational and business historians on the other.

The first group is interested in methodological debates, follows a ‘critical studies’ approach, tries to de-mythologize the use and presence of history in modern organizations, and is not really interested in history as ‘what actually happened’, after Leopold von Ranke’s dictum: *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. The advocates of this approach are more interested in deconstruction processes, but do not really want to accept that they are at the same time constructing new narratives and historical realities, or that not all constructed forms of history are bad myths and dangerous ideologies (Cox and Hassard 2007). The second group, on the other hand, present historical studies as interesting in themselves, because these scholars are focused on history proper. They claim that the relevance of history via sources speaks for itself; therefore, they see no advantage in theoretical and methodological debates. As a result they have difficulties in explaining the difference between the past, the sources of the past and the historical narrative (Skinner 2002: 26). However, the advantage of theorizing about history is not only that it provides arguments for critical and deconstructive views on past human behaviour, but that it also supports source-minded historians in explaining the persuasiveness of their historical narratives.

In short, there are many sides to the problem of organizational and management history. First, there is disagreement on what history is. Second, one has to accept that there is an unbridgeable gap between dealing with history from a historical-sciences and from a social-sciences perspective. Third, there is disagreement among organizational and management historians about the advantage of a theoretical viewpoint. Therefore, from a historical perspective there is much reason for scepticism about the cooperation between historians and organizational scientists. Debates within organizational and management history on works by Richard Evans, Frank Ankersmit, Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur are cases in point, as they cause more rifts than agreement (Taylor et al. 2009; Toms and Wilson 2010). However, this does not mean that the debate should be omitted, because theoretical and methodological debates can also help to bring about convergence.

The historic turn as a relevant narrative turn

The plea for a historic turn in organizational and management studies was the result of dealing with the impact of the ‘cultural turn’ (Down 2001). Influenced by historical anthropology and theorists of language and arts, the cultural turn established NCH, characterized by a focus on the study of symbols and symbolism, the invention of traditions and the ‘revival of the narrative’ (Burke 2008). NCH not only changed cultural history, but also influenced neighbouring fields such as social and economic history. Even in political history the Rankean historicist approach was replaced by a political-cultural approach (Pedersen 2004). At the moment it seems that organizational history scholars are aware of the growing influence of a cultural approach, but are also confused (Hesse et al. 2002). If we look at the inventories of the state of affairs in organizational and business history that were published in the last decade, it seems that the field is worried that, as Amatori (2009: 11) put it, although ‘in very good health’, it had missed the boat of the cultural turn. This sentiment has recently been echoed by others (Berghoff 2008; Delahaye et al. 2009; Fridenson 2008; Pierenkemper 2000; Scranton 2008).

During the first five years of the twenty-first century many hoped that embracing the methodology of NCH would make it possible to leave the worries and confusion behind. To this end, Booth and Rowlinson (2006) set up a research agenda. They pleaded for research with attention to historical theory and alternative methods and styles of writing organizational history, corporate culture and social memory. Despite all the effort and informed advice, the optimism about NCH in business, organizational and management history has died down, although the concept is still viewed as a good (or even the only) way forward (Fridenson 2008; Lipartito 2008). Growing debate, confusion and lack of enthusiasm can be traced back to the methodological and theoretical differences analysed in the previous section (Berghoff 2008; Rowlinson and Procter 1999; Toms and Wilson 2010).

However, the fact that the historical turn and hence NCH has not been fully integrated into organizational and business history may be an advantage. During the last years it has become clear that the NCH approach had several disadvantages. The downsides are 'symbolic overloading'; an overemphasis on the role of rhetorical conventions and styles that neglects questions of power, the role and chance of (political) structures and the importance of 'the event' and 'momentum' in history (de Haan 2004; Tosh 2010: 297). It has been argued, for example by Jürgen Kocka (Iggers 1997: 105) that the dominance of cultural aspects has led to studies of microhistory, which resulted in 'methodological irrationalism'. This 'concentration on the 'small' aspects of history isolated from broader contexts renders historical knowledge impossible and leads to the trivialization of history' (Iggers 1997: 105). Business historians are aware of those disadvantages (Galambos 2003; Siegenthaler 1999). Therefore, Kocka (1995: 504) suggested not to give in to the pressure of NCH. To this end, Kocka suggests learning the language of the neighbouring fields and engaging fully in their debates, with a focus on big themes.

Furthermore, in the end the most striking contribution of the linguistic turn and its related NCH was neither deconstruction nor microhistory, but the renewed attention to the narrative (Partner 2009). This comes close to the original goal of initiating a historic turn in organizational and business history that 'would parallel the "linguistic turn" in history' and was to 'necessitate greater reflection on the place of historical narrative in organisation studies' (Clark and Rowlinson 2004: 230). The most interesting and advantageous revelation the linguistic and cultural turn has to offer to organizational historians is its attention for the narrative aspects of history.

Finally, one should not forget that leading historians, especially those who initiated the linguistic and cultural turn in their fields, always kept an eye on the relevance of these methodological and theoretical insights for improving historical awareness outside the universities. This is no surprise as every theoretical debate about doing history is as much about ethics or the use of history as about epistemology and methodology (Lorenz 2011). That is why organizational historians should not forget that the narrative turn was closely related to a renewed emphasis on the relevance of historical narratives for society, instead of turning history into a deconstructivist, debunking, anti-institutional activity. Kocka has stated that history for history's sake is not relevant enough (Iggers 1997); the same is true for deconstruction for deconstruction's sake. Ankersmit (2006: 55), a philosopher of history who himself played a major part in introducing the linguistic turn in history, stated several times that 'practicing history was never "*l'art pour l'art*". The historian may and cannot permit himself to withdraw in an ivory tower; he has an important societal function.' For Ankersmit this objective must have great influence on the subjects historians choose to study and the way they present these. They should understand and use narrativism. In this respect he is much like Quentin Skinner, another pioneer of the linguistic turn, to whom it is also clear that historians should write relevant work and accept that man is highly responsible for social action and historical change (Palonen 2003; Skinner 2002). In short, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the cultural turn was a plea for understanding the historical narrative and its widespread relevance.

The explanatory power of historical narrativism

Many organizational scientists, even those interested in organizational history, find it difficult to understand the explanatory power of narrativism and historical narratives and therefore try to discredit it as an academic approach. When at a conference we presented a paper arguing that adopting narrativism would improve the relevance of organizational historiography, we got a telling reaction from one of the delegates: 'It's difficult, and it's wrong.' In fact, narratives are neither. They are highly accessible and convincing.

Munslow (2002: 18) defines the narrative as:

that written composition of historians that encompasses their source-based data founded on certain principles of selection and organisation [which] also encompasses the arguments used by the historian to establish cause-and-effect relationships between past events. What is more, the historical narrative is also the site of the historian's emplotment (what the historian thinks the order of the events described lead up to and mean).

A narrative, as the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1984: 38–9) has shown, functions just like a story. 'By means of the plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action.' The notion of 'a whole' is important to Ricoeur, because 'a thing is a whole if it has a beginning, a middle, and an end', just like a story. Through the composition of the story we make sense of it. This way of composition lies at the heart of a person's identity and is therefore so attractable and convincing. Ricoeur (1994: 163) states that 'narratives and life histories... are complementary' as someone's personal identity is a narrative identity. The acceptance that narratives function as a (personal) story is also accepted in organizational studies (Gabriel 2000: 239).

One of the main points of criticism against the logic of narrative is that it is fictional or just a personal view of the author/historian. Ricoeur says that narrative structures are forms of explanation in fiction, but this does not mean that we cannot accept this form of explanation 'without assimilating history to fiction' (Bevir 2000: 16). Ankersmit, who was one of the first philosophers bringing forward a historical theory of narrative, points out that although historians use fictional composition methods to integrate a large number of historical facts into syncretical categories such as the 'Industrial Revolution' or the 'Cold War', this does not mean that historians fabricate events (Ankersmit 1983: 15). To show the difference between facts and the author's interpretation, Ankersmit (1984: 188) used a metaphor to explain the crucial role of narrative for combining facts with interpretation:

We need bricks to build something (in analogy with the [historical] facts), but those bricks do not dictate us whether to build a house, a factory or a theatre with them (in analogy with the historical interpretation or coherence). That this is right can be seen in the existence of the historical discussion.

Thus, discrediting the explicit use of narrative history by overemphasizing the fictional aspects of narratives does not make sense.

In addition, when we look more closely at the explanatory power of narrative we see not only its scientific soundness, but also another reason why narrative explanations provoke resistance. The seemingly simple way of explaining, which is very close to ordinary discourse, has often discredited the narrative's convincingness. To put it differently, narratives are more connected to the language and logic of the shop floor and boardroom than to that of academia. This should be no reason to put aside the explaining power of narratives. As Carr (2008: 28) stated: 'Discarding a mode of explanation

simply because it does not fit an a priori ontological mould is not truly scientific.’ This is often what happens with narratives and storytelling (Sewell 2005). In fact, the most important reason for scholars like White and Ankersmit to bring historical theories of narrative forward was to criticize the positivistic and sciences-resembling approaches introduced by social scientists within the field of history (Lorenz 1998). Their insights gained much influence in the arts and humanities, but the social sciences stayed largely untouched by them. Because of the social scientist background and their original effort to resemble a ‘real’ science such as the natural sciences, many organizational scientists discredit narrative explanations. However, political scientist and philosopher Mark Bevir (2000) has argued against this inclination. According to him narrative explanations show two types of connections and explanations. The conditional connections are ‘actions, beliefs and pro-attitudes in a way which makes them intelligible in the light of one other’, while the volitional connections are ‘pro-attitudes to actions they motivate’. The combination of those two enables us ‘to make sense of the fact that agents moved from having pro-attitudes to states of affairs to intending to perform actions and to acting as they did’ (Bevir 2000: 13–14). Thus, historians uncover themes that really do exist, such as *zeitgeist* (Førland 2008). Moreover, the nature of narrative explanation is that of folk psychology, which is in fact not very different from explanations in the natural sciences (Bevir 2000: 12).

Last of all, narratives have been discredited by historians who present themselves as Rankean historicists and reject the linguistic and cultural turn. However, historicist and narrative explanations are branches of the same tree. By using metaphors as a tool to create coherence, the historicist tries to make sense of the past, which is no different than using narratives to understand the historical reality. In both cases, Ankersmit (2001: 139) argues, the metaphor (as a narrative substance) separates perspective (historicist writing, theory) from what is seen from that perspective (historical reality, data). To put it differently, the account of the historicist as well as that of the historical narrativist cannot be derived from the historical sources itself, which makes both accounts narratives.

In short, there are many reasons for organizational historians to accept a narrative approach. Not only is narrativism heir to the linguistic and cultural turn, it is also closely related to traditional approaches such as historicism. Then, a narrative approach shows how reflecting on past events is always a two-sided activity. Third, a narrative approach is neither fictional nor less scientific than many of the quasi-quantitative methods of social scientists. Finally, probably the strongest argument to accept narrative is that it can bring together historically interested scholars from different backgrounds, and present work in a way that is interesting for readers both within and outside universities as its reliance on folk psychology makes it broadly understandable.

The narratives provided by management gurus

Understanding the explanatory power of the narrative also helps to explain the success of the most thriving organizational and management genre outside the university, although frequently written by leading academics. Guru literature, or ‘Heathrow Organization Theory’ (Burrell 1997), is perhaps the most ridiculed and debunked form of organizational knowledge. We will discuss this genre from the perspective of the historian’s golden rule: ‘However bizarre the beliefs we are studying may seem to be, we must begin by trying to make the agents who accepted them appear as rational as possible’ (Skinner 2002: 40).

In the early 1980s in the USA, the manager, along with the yuppie, punk rock and shoulder pads, became a common sight in the streets. Management became a movement and part of the popular culture (Hood 2005). This became evident in the bookshops: each year between 1980 and 1985 in the USA a management book was the annual best-seller (Huczynski 1993). Only in 1981 and 1983 did other books sell better: *The Beverly Hills Diet* and Jane Fonda’s *Workout Book*. Among those

first highly successful books were Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, which sold over 10 million copies and was the most kept library book until 1997 (McClain 1997; Thomas 1989) and Lee Iacocca's (1985) *An Autobiography*, the overall bestseller of 1984 and 1985, selling more than 2.5 million copies.

The books received much criticism from both scholars and scientists. In 1983, within a year after the first publication, *In Search of Excellence* was heavily criticized by Daniel Carroll in the *Harvard Business Review*. A year later *Business Week* (1984) stated that a third of the 43 excellent companies found themselves in financial stormy weather. Then, research by financial analyst Michell Clayman found that shareholders would have had a three times higher return if they had bought stocks of non-excellent enterprises. It was especially Peters and Waterman's methodology that met with criticism. How the selection of 43 companies took place still remains a mystery after one has finished reading the book, and although the authors claim that the companies have specific characteristics that make them excellent, they nowhere explicitly state what these are. In addition, the 43 companies should have eight attributes of excellence, but many of these are illustrated by examples from non-excellent companies.

The criticism of *In Search of Excellence* had no influence on sales figures. Its successor, *A Passion for Excellence* (1985), written by Peters with Nancy Austin, sold more than one million copies in the USA alone, and even *The Pursuit of Wow* (Peters 1994) was purchased 353,000 times in the USA (Collins 2007: 90–1). This success clearly cannot be explained by the methodology used. Even Peters and Waterman (1982: xv) themselves wrote that the two theoretical chapters 'can be skipped'. A disappointed Carroll (1983: 79) gives a hint for understanding *In search of Excellence* when he states that 'the only supporting evidence [for excellence] is a series of anecdotes about the companies, and quotations, mostly from their leaders' and concludes that management theory was 'not moved further toward excellence by this book and may even have been needlessly delayed.' This critique is rather common to the genre. Organization sociologist David Collins (2004: 39) writes:

The books are composed largely of rather idiosyncratic, personal reflections and post-hoc justifications for decisions, failures and personal outbursts. They had little to tell us about the processes and problems of managing. What they offer us are little more than banalities and truisms.

When discussing guru books Clark and Rowlinson (2004: 346) also point to 'the voluntaristic narratives of Heathrow Organisation Theory'. However, anecdotes are neither idiosyncratic nor voluntaristic, but in fact form the essence of the genre's success.

The growing field in organization studies that is influenced by the cultural turn and uses narrative approaches is helpful here (Czarniawska 1998; Jackson 2001). In these studies it is pointed out that understanding the managerial language in an organization, which is full of stories and anecdotes, is very important for understanding the process of identity creation and sense-making of situations in organizations (Weick 1995). Managers use their 'pseudo-jargon' to concretize the abstract nature of their work and organizations, and give legitimacy to their actions (Watson 2004: 76–9). Narration is a convincing way to do this as it is the natural form of organizational communication (Czarniawska 1997: 28). Therefore it is not surprising that management gurus communicate their lessons in the forms of narratives (Clark and Salaman 1998). In their study of the production process of guru books, Timothy Clark and David Greatbatch (2004: 413) found that editors urged gurus to come up with stories about their exemplary organizations as the best way to make their management model 'vivid and concrete for the audience'. Narrative analyses of (guru) autobiographies (Watson 2009), management magazines (Watson and Bargiela-Chiappini 1998) and books by management gurus (Guthey, Clark and Jackson 2009; Huczynski 1993; Jackson 2001) have shown that the appeal of

management gurus for a large part lies in the fact that they produce stories and narratives to which their managerial audience can relate their own daily experiences. The dominant role of stories is also reflected in lectures by these gurus, in which anecdotes take up a large part of the time (Greatbatch and Clark 2005: 112). This kind of research has made organizational scientists much more aware of the rhetorical qualities involved in management fashions and the literary characteristics of different management concepts (Jackson 2001: 39, 42), which debunked the focus on rationality and linear progress so dominant in earlier research on management fashion (Abrahamson 1996; Abrahamson and Fairchild 1999). Although adding new interesting insights, the narrative approach could not adequately explain why new management (guru) fashions rose and fell, because – with the exceptions of Huczynski (1993: 116–70) and Kieser (1997) – these studies did not include time and zeitgeist as explanatory forces. This is where a historical viewpoint offers additional insight (Keulen and Kroeze 2011).

In addition, the anecdotes presented by gurus and leaders are neither platitudes nor are they free of engagement, because personal opinions present a personal identity that is a narrated collective identity, as Ricoeur (1984) has stated. Here we can learn from oral historians, who know that ‘personal narrative analysis can illuminate the operation of historical forces and of public or historical narratives as they influence people’s motivation and their self-understandings as historical agents’ (Maynes et al. 2008: 45). Thus, anecdotes tell us much because they are ‘tied to the period’ and represent the ‘climax’ of the memories of the interviewee on such a historical period (Ashplant 2004: 105). Anecdotes are in fact the best illustration the interviewee has to offer when explaining management. Therefore, in interviews the same anecdotes are repeated over and over again. This process can be clearly seen in conversations with leaders who are interviewed often (te Velde 2005). Those events, data and observations, retold again and again, often with exactly the same turns of phrase, form a kind of authorized biography. Thus, interviews can be seen as the constantly available memory of public figures, through which they are already delivering pieces of information to their biographers (Nora 1986: 1383). Only a narrative viewpoint makes these processes visible and shows how difficult it is to separate the historical evidence from narration and the narrative of a historical period.

The argument derived from oral historical research is strengthened by the notion that narration is the intertwining of multiple individual stories, because our individual identity acquires meaning through interactions and links with other characters in the narrative (Dauenhauer 2008). According to Ricoeur our individual identities are incorporable into a we-identity (Dauenhauer 2008). This interrelatedness makes it clear that interviewees (or writers) do not have total freedom to construct their own identity, or to make up anecdotes. This is because the narratives are ‘negotiated in interaction with the surrounding society’, even to the point that they can become a part of national history (Hansen 2007: 926–7). This shows that in the end neither individuals nor organizations can completely control or fabricate their own historical narratives. However, the logic behind many organizational theories makes it difficult for organizational scientists to accept and understand the attractiveness of anecdotes for organizational research and the explanatory power of historical narratives to present management behaviour and organizational structures.

When we look again at *In Search of Excellence*, this time from a narrative perspective, the popularity of the book makes more sense. Its persuasiveness is found in the stories told by Peters and Waterman that relate to management language and organizational behaviour in historical reality. Despite the fact that structured interviews were held in all companies, five of the 43 excellent companies are not mentioned in the book at all, and six companies are named only once. In the 322 pages we find 137 best-practice stories, mostly from only eight companies (Collins 2007: 132). One of those is Hewlett-Packard (HP); stories about this company cover almost 10 per cent of the book and are the ones that are remembered. For example ‘Managing by wandering around’ (MBWA) was one

of the specific management styles used by HP co-founder Bill Hewlett: and its content and use was exemplified by stories (Peters and Waterman 1982: 239–46). It was these stories that made the book.

Management gurus as barometers of the zeitgeist

In 2001 Tom Peters (2001) finally did admit that the book was all about the stories:

I confess: We faked the data. A lot of people suggested it at the time. The big question was, how did you end up viewing these companies as “excellent” companies? A little while later, when a bunch of the “excellent” companies started to have some down years, that also became a huge accusation: If these companies are so excellent, Peters, then why are they doing so badly now? Which I’d say pretty much misses the point. ... *Search* started out as a study of 62 companies. How did we come up with them? We went around to McKinsey’s partners and to a bunch of other smart people who were deeply involved and seriously engaged in the world of business and asked, “Who’s cool? Who’s doing cool work? Where is there great stuff going on?” ... Then, because McKinsey is McKinsey, we felt that we had to come up with some quantitative measures of performance. Those measures dropped the list from 62 to 43 companies.

In fact, Peters and Waterman asked their McKinsey colleagues which companies would give them the best and most inspiring stories, but they could not explain why they chose this approach in convincing scientific terms. However, Peters and Waterman implicitly did provide a clue when they pointed out that they wrote ‘stories’ about ‘who’s cool’ and the ‘great stuff’. *In Search of Excellence* was no microhistory nor fictional, but dealt with the problems and challenges big companies faced in their time. As the authors were not aware of the persuasiveness that lay behind their success, they were only willing to openly admit how they selected the data and companies under pressure and after years of criticism. This shows that Peters and Waterman thought that they could only be scientifically sound, convincing and relevant if they ‘faked’ the data in order to appear as non-historical, non-storytelling rational organizational scientists, who use quantitative methods to test their hypotheses. But the real success lay in the accessibility of their story, in which they dealt with the actual and relevant problems that organizations and managers were confronted with at the time.

The sensitivity of successful gurus to the zeitgeist becomes even clearer when we analyse the success of Lee Iacocca’s (1985) *An Autobiography*. In a time of economic difficulties in America and Japanese successes, Iacocca had an optimistic message for the USA: the American industry could compete with Japan and could be proud of itself. This explains why ‘America loves to listen to Lee’, as the heading of *Time Magazine* in 1985 (Andersen 1985) put it. *The Economist* saw Iacocca as ‘a man of his time... a modern American hero’ (Iacocca 1985: i). At the height of his success he received about 5,000 letters per month. American politicians and Iacocca’s co-workers saw a striking resemblance between the Chrysler chief executive officer (CEO) and the president. ‘Reagan and Lee are similar. Both say flat out what they think,’ stated Health Secretary Joseph Califano (Andersen 1985). Chrysler director Wendell Larsen said: ‘Some of the things Lee has tapped into are the same as Reagan. ... The nation has been looking for a leader who is sure of himself’ (Andersen 1985).

True enough, Reagan did use the same tone and message in his speeches. The historian Troy (2005: 12) dubbed this narrative as ‘Reagan’s storyline’. Reagan (1980) was indeed a storyteller about pride and recovery, a message that he kept repeating from the (very) first day of his candidacy:

They say the US has had its day in the sun; that our nation has passed its zenith. They expect you to tell your children... that the future will be one of sacrifice and few opportunities. My fellow Americans, I utterly reject that view.

In this story, Reagan (1980) portrayed the USA of the 1960s and 1970s as a country struggling with inflation, big government and humiliation from Iranian fundamentalists who expelled the Shah. But now it was 'Morning again in America', as Reagan's slogan for the 1984 elections ran. Under his leadership Americans would wake up in a country with low taxes, in which entrepreneurs had business opportunities, and where soldiers could be proud of. It was a message for everybody. Reagan purposely used examples, anecdotes and catchphrases from famous movies (Duffy 1992; Troy 2005). He used the same tone for blue-collar workers in Oklahoma as for top industrialists in Washington, whom he once told in a speech:

I keep thinking of that current movie hit "The Little Shop of Horrors". Now, the budget isn't exactly like the man-eating plant in that movie. It isn't mean, and it isn't green. It doesn't come from outer space. But it does only say one thing: "Feed me! Feed me! Feed me!" (Reagan 1985)

Reagan's stories resembled the spirit of the 1980s.

Gurus have a nose for the zeitgeist (*Economist* 1994; Miller and Hartwick 2002; Miller et al. 2004; Thomas 1989). Keith Grint (1994: 193) wrote that 'for the "plausibility" to occur the ideas most likely to prevail are those that are apprehended as capturing the *Zeitgeist* or "spirit of the times".' That is why Kieser concludes that of all the aspects of a management fashion (or guru concepts), for instance the catchy acronym, the stories, the well-known companies used as examples, and the mix of simplicity and ambiguity 'are useless if the timing is not perfect. The book must hit the "nerve of today's managers"' (Kieser 1997: 61).

This is coherent with what historians wrote about zeitgeist and societal change. Already in 1943 Johan Huizinga famously stated that you can find out much about an era when you look at the way in which it writes its history (Huizinga 1950). Cultural historian Lisa Jardine elaborated on this in the 2010 Huizinga lecture with a reference to Johan Huizinga: 'In every period a community decides what are its most important norms, searches those elements in its own history, and through the powers of imagination they construct a story that gives meaning to the present.' This is closely related to the findings of the German historian Reinhart Koselleck (2004: 223), who explains: 'Historical concepts, especially political and social concepts, are minted for the registration and embodiment of the elements and forces of history.' When one combines Czarniawska's (1997: 53) view on the relation between autobiographies and organizational identity as 'lives under construction' and her and Rhodes's research on the influence of popular culture on the practice and theory of management (Czarniawska and Rhodes 2006), one sees how the same conclusion can be drawn from an organizational studies viewpoint as well.

These findings have two consequences for gurus and historically interested management scientists alike. First, guru solutions and fashions are products of their age because they are a reaction to (important) changes in society. Therefore, their implications for management are only valid and relevant for a limited time, place and context. And as gurus are themselves not aware of their short-lived relevance, historical studies have to take this into account because gurus lack the expertise to convincingly explain how and why they selected, ordered and narrated their material in the way they did. After all, they are not historians.

Gurus are not historians

We have seen that Peters and Waterman in essence used a historical narrative, but were not aware of it – an ahistorical attitude they share with other management gurus.¹ A striking example of this is the best-seller *Good to Great* by Jim Collins (2001). With his level-5 leadership he presented an ideal leadership model with timeless qualities. This, as Collins (2001: 15) wrote, was even the objective of the whole book:

Yes, the world is changing, and will continue to do so. But that does not mean we should stop the search for timeless principles. Think of it this way: While the practices of engineering continually evolve and change, the laws of physics remain relatively fixed. I like to think of our work as a search for timeless principles – the enduring physics of great organizations – that will remain true and relevant no matter how the world changes around us. Yes, the specific application will change (the engineering), but certain immutable laws of organized human performance (the physics) will endure.

Many gurus seem not only to neglect the narrative characteristics of their work, but also that their narratives are products of their time.

Good to Great presents a very time-bound concept of success as it was based on shareholder value. At the end of the 1990s, when Collins started his research, and during the first years of the new millennium, shareholder value was indeed *the* way to find out how well a business organization performed. CEOs such as Cor Boonstra (Philips), Jeffrey Skilling (Enron), Louis Gerstner (IBM), Richard S. Fuld (Lehman Brothers) and Frederick Goodwin (RBS) were appreciated in their day, exactly because they took shareholder value as the point of reference for the success of their management and organization. When Collins's book first came out in 2001 the bubble of new economy had just burst, and the quote cited above was his reply to a worried executive of an internet company who asked him whether his study still applied. Collins argued that he presented 'timeless' principles of success, but he was not aware that shareholder value was now the new hype of his time. Shortly after the financial crisis of 2007 six of the 11 companies Collins had selected as 'great' were in trouble. The two best ones (Circuit City and Fannie Mae) went bankrupt, one was taken over (Gillette) and three others (Wells Fargo, Pitney Bowes and Nucor) saw a dramatic drop in the value of their shares.

That Collins's story is a product of its time is even more obvious in his marking Lee Iacocca as a bad leader. Iacocca's books may have inspired millions of managers in the 1980s and he may have saved Chrysler from bankruptcy and successfully denationalized the firm, but shareholder value stayed behind during his chairmanship. According to Collins (2001: 39, 2005: 142–3), Iacocca's successor Bob Eaton was very close to 'level-5 leadership': 'the type of leadership required to achieve greatness'. Eaton was responsible for the sale/merger of Chrysler with Daimler in 1998. According to the new CEO of Daimler-Chrysler, 'Mister Shareholder-Value' Jürgen 'Rambo' Schrempp: 'The share price is for us the best indicator of success' (Hawranek 2004: 82). Six years later the stock price had dropped by more than half, so that US\$40 billion had evaporated. Eaton and Schrempp were heavily criticized for the slump and depicted as 'amoral'. Schrempp's successor Dieter Zetsche, who denounced shareholder value, understands management much better, according to *Manager Magazine* (Hage 2008; Hawranek 2004). However, the question remains how long the applause for Zetsche will last. The conclusion of one reviewer of *Good to Great*, 'It's all about simple luck' (Papaikononou 2009), missed the point as the review was written in 2009 when everything had already been said and done. Collins and his critics were not aware that *Good to Great* mainly presented the indicators of business success of the 1990s and early 2000s.

Again a historical narrativist approach explains that management gurus and many of the reviewers active in the business literature have difficulties to explain their own fashions. Historians are well trained to point out the inadequacies of ahistorical hypes and management concepts. By comparing or confronting fashionable concepts with historical practices one can identify ideological prejudices, as Kieser (1994) and Brady (1997) suggested, exactly as the example of Collins illustrates. Debunking those trends has a purpose, but it is more interesting to understand its narratological nature, its time-bound success and its practical relevance.

Historians also have a second advantage when analysing management fashions in comparison with many gurus, because they do not treat history as something static. That is why Peters and

Waterman (1982: 62) make an inaccurate distinction between history and stories: ‘History doesn’t move us as much as does a good current anecdote (or presumably, a juicy bit of gossip).’ They view history as a quantitative science that provides sets of data available to test the ‘statistical validity’ of a research. This leads to a striking statement:

When we meet three friends in the space of a week in a hotel in Tokyo, we are more apt to think “how odd” than we are to muse on the probability that our circle of acquaintances tends to frequent the same places as we do.

They defend their position because they ‘lack sample size’ and if ‘two events even vaguely co-exist, we leap to conclusions about causality’. What Peters and Waterman do not seem to understand is that their arguments are in fact presented exactly via historical reasoning and narrative techniques. Sample size is for most historical research not definitive because of the historian’s tendency to assume a sub-intentional position. In the words of Geoffrey Elton (2002: 11), a historian has the ‘point of view of happening, change, and the particular’. Because historical difference lies at the heart of the discipline (Tosh 2010: 32) historians try to explain the ‘how odd’ and use narrative structures to relate events in context.

Of course data should not be faked, but what Peters and Waterman did was even worse. They felt compelled to use faked data in order to be perceived as sound, ‘rational’, quantitative, organizational scientists. Ironically, a closer look at the ‘fairy tales’ Peters and Waterman used shows that in fact they used genuine historical stories. ‘Fairy tales’, to Peters and Waterman (1982:75), were, created by ‘people who tell stories today about T.J. Watson [1874–1956] of IBM [but] have never met the man or had direct experience of the original more mundane reality’. Because of their lack of knowledge of historical reasoning and historical theory they could not really understand the reasoning behind those narratives, but treated them as fictional and named them fairy tales. However, Peters and Waterman did notice that those stories were important because they conveyed the organization’s culture and shared values. Had they only read some books on oral history, they would have known that references to the values of the founder or an important actor are very commonly heard in many old organizations (Courtney and Thompson 1996; Karsten et al., 2009; Keulen and Kroeze 2011; Perks 2010a, 2010b). The oral historians of Marks & Spencer, for example, found that:

it has this strong narrative sense of itself and it sees itself not just in terms of the future but also in terms of the past... in every department they have their own invested sense of the history of that department... that kind of history is part of the internal narrative of Marks and Spencer. (Perks 2010a: 46)

Because of their lack of historical awareness – or what history is and how it theoretically differs from science – gurus cannot explain their own fashions, nor do they fully understand their data and chosen approach.

Conclusion

The historic turn has resulted in more historical studies within organizational sciences, but one must conclude that it has caused much controversy, which has harmed its attractiveness. In this article we hope to have shown that the controversy surrounding the historic turn is best understood when the differences between organizational science and historical science are analysed. This is insurmountable as every discussion about proper history writing results in a debate on the right interpretation of historical method, theory, episteme and ethics. Therefore participating in organizational history

requires basic knowledge of theories of history, historiography and how history is (un)like social science. When the methodological and theoretical biases behind debates within organizational history are understood a convincing historic turn can be established. Then it becomes clear why among historical scientists the historic turn is disputed and confuses debates within organizational history, and how next steps to improve the field can be made.

A renewed interest in theory, historiography and cooperation between organizational and historical sciences seems fruitful if it is centred on narrative approaches. In fact, the historic turn, which was part of the cultural turn in history, was all about the question of narrative. Therefore up-to-date organizational history can hardly be separated from historical narrativism. Thus a convincing historic turn can be pursued via a narrative approach, because it helps organizational historians to catch up with the current state of affairs in historical sciences and the dominant cultural approach in organization studies.

Finally, a narrative approach is not only theoretically sound and methodologically up to date, but is convincing from a broader perspective. Already during the founding phase of the linguistic turn it was emphasized that the related new approaches were also important to improve the relevance of historical narratives for society. Again it makes clear that every theoretical debate about what history is, is also a debate about the use and relevance of history. Historical narrativism helps to understand interrelated dominant thinking about organizational behaviour and trends in management studies inside and outside academia.

This was illustrated by applying a historical narrative approach to management guru literature. From a critical perspective it becomes clear that the used methodology and the accounts produced by gurus are disputable. However, more striking is that their work has many characteristics of historical narratives as it is lacking a proper quantitative method, based on stories, broadly understandable, a product of its time and therefore only convincing for a certain period. This provides organizational historians who are dedicated to the historic turn with several advantages. They can use historical narrativism to improve the field of organizational history by writing scientific sound, up-to-date and relevant organizational history that deals with the big themes of the zeitgeist and that is based on the latest scientific insights, without using forced quasi-quantitative methods. Of course, one can use historical narrativism to criticize and debunk guru literature but in fact that is just as anachronistic as the work of management gurus themselves as it does not explain why in their time gurus were successful nor does it create awareness that organizational history is itself time biased. Above all a chance would be missed to use organizational history in a way relevant for management studies, boardroom and shop floor alike.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of the Management History Research Group of the workshop in St Andrews (July 2010) for their comments and lively debate on an earlier draft of this article.

Note

1. Peters and Waterman illustrated this point by re-publishing *In Search of Excellence* unchanged in 2004, stating that the book was still relevant. In their new foreword (2004: vii, viii) they now urge readers to read the theoretical chapters as the best illustration of the book's relevance after 30 years. According to the preface in the 1982 edition those chapters could be 'skipped'. Sales figures of the 2004 edition did not come up to expectations. Ironically, 'lay' reviewers on popular book sites such as Amazon understood the historical boundaries better. Many commentators caution that the book should be read from the perspective of the 1980s, stressing the relevance of the book in its time, and acknowledging its historical significance as one of the first management guru books.

References

- Abrahamson, E. 1996. 'Management Fashion.' *The Academy of Management Review* 21(1): 254–85.
- Abrahamson, E., and G. Fairchild. 1999. 'Management Fashion: Lifecycles, Triggers, and Collective Learning Processes.' *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44(4): 708–40.
- Amatori, F. 2009. 'Business History: State of the Art and Controversies.' *Enterprises et histoire* 55(2): 11–23.
- Andersen, K. 1985. 'A Spunky Tycoon Turned Superstar.' *Time Magazine*, 1 April, pp. 30–9. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,141447,00.html> (accessed February 2012).
- Ankersmit, F. R. 1983. *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Ankersmit, F. R. 1984. *Denken over geschiedenis: Een overzicht van moderne geschiedfilosofische opvattingen*. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff.
- Ankersmit, F. R. 2001. *Historical Representation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ankersmit, F. R. 2006. 'Analytische Politieke Geschiedenis.' In *Kossmann Instituut. Benaderingen van de geschiedenis van politiek*, edited by G. Voerman and D. J. Wolffram (pp. 55–61). Groningen: Kossmann Institute.
- Ashplant, T. G. 2004. 'Anecdote as Narrative Resource in Working-Class Life Stories.' In *Narrative and Genre: Contexts and Types of Communication*, edited by M. Chamberlain and P. Thompson (pp. 99–113). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Berghoff, H. 2008. 'Wozu Unternehmensgeschichte? Erkenntnisinteressen, Forschungsansätze und Perspektiven des Faches.' *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte* 49(2): 131–48.
- Bevir, M. 2000. 'Narrative as Form of Explanation.' *Disputatio* 9(November): 10–18.
- Booth C., and M. Rowlinson. 2006. 'Management and Organizational History: Prospects.' *Management & Organizational History* 1(1): 5–30.
- Brady, F. N. 1997. 'Finding a History for Management.' *Journal of Management Inquiry* 6(2): 144–59.
- Burke, P. 2005. *History and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Burke, P. 2008. *What is Cultural History Now?* Cambridge: Polity.
- Burrell, G. 1997. *Pandemonium: Towards a Retro-Organization Theory*. London: SAGE
- Business Week*, 1984. 'Oops! Who's Excellent Now?' *Business Week*, 5 November, pp. 46–54.
- Carr, D. 2008. 'Narrative Explanation and its Malcontents.' *History and Theory* 47(2): 19–30.
- Carroll, D. T. 1983. 'A Disappointing Search for Excellence.' *Harvard Business Review* 61(6): 78–88.
- Clark, P., and M. Rowlinson. 2004. 'Treatment of History in Organisation Studies: Towards an "Historic Turn"?' *Business History* 46(3): 331–52.
- Clark, T., and D. Greatbatch. 2004. 'Management Fashion as Image-Spectacle: The Production of Best-Selling Management Books.' *Management Communication Quarterly* 17(3): 396–424.
- Clark, T., and G. Salaman. 1998. 'Telling Tales: Management Gurus' Narratives and the Construction of Managerial Identity.' *Journal of Management Studies* 35(2): 137–61.
- Collins, D. 2004. *Organisational Change: Sociological Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Collins, D. 2007. *Narrating the Guru: In Search of Tom Peters*. London: Routledge.
- Collins, J. 2001. *Good to Great. Why some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Collins, J. 2005. Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve. *Harvard Business Review* 83(7/8): 136–46.
- Costea, B., N. Crump and J. Holm. 2006. 'Conceptual History and the Interpretation of Managerial Ideologies.' *Management & Organizational History* 1(2): 159–75.
- Courtney, C., and P. Thompson. 1996. *City Lives: The Changing Voices of British Finance*. London: Methuen.
- Cox, J. W., and J. Hassard. 2007. 'Ties to the Past in Organization Research: A Comparative Analysis of Retrospective Methods.' *Organization* 14(4): 475–97.
- Cummings, S., and T. Bridgman. 2011. 'The Relevant Past: Why the History of Management Should Be Critical of our Future.' *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 10(1): 77–93.
- Czarniawska, B. 1997. *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Czarniawska, B. 1998. *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies*. London: SAGE.

- Czarniawska, B., and C. Rhodes. 2006. 'Strong Plots: Popular Culture in Management Practice and Theory.' In *Management Education and Humanities*, edited by P. Gagliardi and B. Czarniawska (pp. 195–221). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Dauenhauer, B. 2008. 'Paul Ricoeur.' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/ricoeur> (accessed February 2012).
- de Haan, I. 2004. *Politieke reconstructie: Een nieuw begin in de politieke geschiedenis*. Utrecht: University of Utrecht.
- Delahaye, A., C. Booth, P. Clark, S. Procter and M. Rowlinson. 2009. 'The Genre of Corporate History.' *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 22(1): 27–48.
- Down, S. 2001. 'Knowledge Sharing Review: The Use of History in Business and Management, and some Implications for Management Learning.' *Management Learning* 32(3): 393–410.
- Drukker, J. W. 2006. *The Revolution that Bit its own Tail: How Economic History Changed our Ideas on Economic Growth*. Amsterdam: Aksant.
- Duffy, B. K. 1992. 'Foreword.' In *Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator*, edited by K. Ritter and D. Henry (pp. xiii–xvii). New York: Green Wood Press.
- Economist, The*. 1994. 'Management Theorists: Tom Peters, Performance Artist.' *The Economist*, 24 September, p. 73.
- Elton, G. R. 2002. *The Practice of History*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Førland, T. E. 2008. 'Mentality as a Social Emergent. Can the Zeitgeist have Explanatory Power?' *History and Theory* 47(2): 44–56.
- Fridenson, P. 2008. 'Business History and History.' In *The Oxford Handbook of Business History*, edited by G. Jones and J. Zeitlin (pp. 9–37). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gabriel, Y. 2000. *Storytelling in Organizations: Facts, Fictions and Fantasies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Galambos, L. 2003. 'Identity and the Boundaries of Business History: An Essay on Consensus and Creativity.' In *Business History around the World*, edited by F. Amatori and G. Jones (pp. 11–30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greatbatch, D., and T. Clark. 2005. *Management Speak: Why We Listen to What Management Gurus Tell Us*. London: Routledge.
- Grint, K. 1994. 'Reengineering History: Social Resonances and Business Process Reengineering.' *Organization* 1(1): 179–201.
- Guthey, E., T. Clark, and B. Jackson. 2009. *Demystifying Business Celebrity*. London: Routledge.
- Hage, S. 2008. 'Zetsche hat es begriffen.' *Manager Magazine*, 25 February. Available at: <http://www.manager-magazin.de/unternehmen/artikel/0,2828,536888,00.html> (accessed February 2012).
- Hansen, P. H. 2007. 'Organizational Culture and Organizational Change: The Transformation of Savings Banks in Denmark, 1965–1990.' *Enterprise & Society* 8(4): 920–53.
- Hawranek, D. 2004. 'Tag der Abrechnung.' *Der Spiegel*, 5 April, pp. 82–6.
- Hesse, J.-O., C. Kleinschmidt and K. Lauschke. 2002. 'Einleitung: Herausforderungen und Perspektiven der Unternehmensgeschichte.' In *Kulturalismus, Neue Institutionenökonomik oder Theorienvielfalt: Eine Zwischenbilanz der Unternehmensgeschichte*, edited by J.-O. Hesse, C. Kleinschmidt and K. Lauschke (pp. 9–19). Essen: Klartext.
- Hobsbawm, E. 1997. *On History*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Hood, C. 2005. 'The Word, the Movement, the Science.' In *Oxford Handbook Public Management*, edited by E. Ferlie, L. E. Lynn and C. Pollitt (pp. 7–26). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huczynski, A. 1993. *Management Gurus. What Makes Them and How to Become One*. London: Routledge.
- Huizinga, J. 1950. 'Over een definitie van het begrip geschiedenis.' In *Geschiedwetenschap/Hedendaagsche cultuur: Verzameld werk vii*, by Johan Huizinga (pp. 95–103). Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zonen.
- Iacocca, L. 1985. *Iacocca: An Autobiography*. Toronto: Bantam.
- Iggers, G. G. 1997. *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Jackson, B. 2001. *Management Gurus and Management Fashion: A Dramatistic Inquiry*. London: Routledge.
- Jacques, R. S. 2006. 'History, Historiography and Organization Studies: The Challenge and the Potential.' *Management & Organizational History* 1(1): 31–49.

- Jardine, L. 2010. *The Aftermath of Homo Ludens: From Huizinga to Zemon Davis and Beyond*. 39th Huizinga Lecture, 10 December, Leiden, the Netherlands.
- Karsten, L., S. Keulen, R. Kroeze and R. Peters. 2009. 'Leadership Style and Entrepreneurial Change: The Centurion Operation at Philips Electronics.' *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 22(1): 73–91.
- Keulen, S., and R. Kroeze. 2011. *De leiderschapscarroussel: Waarom iedere tijd zijn eigen leider vraagt*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Kieser, A. 1994. 'Why Organization Theory Needs Historical Analyses – and How This Should be Performed.' *Organization Science* 5(4): 608–20.
- Kieser, A. 1997. 'Rhetoric and Myth in Management Fashion.' *Organization* 4(1): 49–74.
- Kocka, J. 1995. 'Bodenverluste und Chancen der Wirtschaftsgeschichte.' *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 82(4): 501–4.
- Koselleck, R. 2004. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipartito, K. 2008. 'The Future of Alfred Chandler.' *Enterprise and Society* 9(3): 430–2.
- Lorenz, C. 1998. 'Can Histories Be True? Narrativism, Positivism, and the "Metaphorical Turn".' *History and Theory* 37(3): 309–29.
- Lorenz, C. 2008. *De constructie van het verleden. Een inleiding in de theorie van de geschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Lorenz, C. 2011. 'History and Theory.' In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, edited by A. Schneider and D. Woolf (pp. 13–35). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McClain, P. 1997. 'Top 100 Monographic Records in OCLC Libraries.' Available at: <http://www.oclc.org/research/top1000/monographs97.htm> (accessed February 2012).
- Maynes, M. J., J. L. Pierce and B. Laslett. 2008. *Telling Stories: The Uses of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Miller, D. and J. Hartwick. 2002. 'Spotting Management Fads: What Makes Them so Popular is What Undermines Them in the End.' *Harvard Business Review* 80(10): 26–7.
- Miller, D., J. Hartwick and I. Le Breton-Miller. 2004. 'How to Detect a Management Fad – and Distinguish It from a Classic.' *Business Horizons* 47(4): 7–16.
- Munslow, A. 2002. 'Where Does History Come From?' *History Today* 52(3): 18–21.
- Munslow, A. 2003. *The New History*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Nora, P. 1986. *Lieux de Mémoire. Volume II: La Nation*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Palonen, K. 2003. *Quentin Skinner. History, Politics, Rhetoric*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Papaikonomou, C. 2009. 'Good to Great... or Just Lucky?.' Available at: <http://www.happen.com/index.php/home/articles/39-good-to-great-or-just-lucky> (accessed February 2012).
- Partner, N. 2009. 'Narrative Persistence: The Postmodern Life of Narrative Theory.' In *Re-figuring Hayden White*, edited by F. Ankersmit, F. Domańska and H. Kellner (pp. 81–105). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Passmore, K. 2011. 'History and Social Science in the West.' In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, edited by A. Schneider and D. Woolf (pp. 199–219). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pedersen, S. 2004. 'What is Political History Now?' In *What is History Now?*, edited by D. Cannadine (pp. 36–57). Houndsmill: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Perks, R. 2010a. 'Corporations Are People Too! Business and Corporate Oral History in Britain.' *Journal of the Oral History Society* 38(1): 36–54.
- Perks, R. 2010b. 'The Roots of Oral History: Exploring Contrasting Attitudes to Elite, Corporate, and Business Oral History in Britain and the US.' *The Oral History Review* 37(2): 215–24.
- Peters, T. 1994. *The Pursuit of Wow! Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Peters, T. 2001. 'Tom Peters' True Confessions.' *Fast Company* 53(11): 80–9. Available at: <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/53/peters.html> (accessed February 2012).
- Peters, T., and N. Austin. 1985. *A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference*. New York: Random House.
- Peters, T., and R. H. Waterman. 1982. *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Peters, T., and R. H. Waterman. 2004. *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*. London: Profile Books.

- Pierenkemper, T. 2000. *Unternehmensgeschichte: Eine Einführung in ihre Methoden und Ergebnisse*. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Reagan, R. 1980. 'Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech.' 17 July. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25970> (accessed February 2012).
- Reagan, R. 1985. 'Remarks at the AT&T Technologies Plant in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.' 5 June. Available at: <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/60585a.htm> (accessed February 2012).
- Ricoeur, P. 1984. *Time and Narrative. Volume I*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ricoeur, P. 1994. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Rowlinson, M., and J. Hassard. 2011. *Historical Methods in Management and Organization Studies*. Gothenburg: European Group for Organizational Studies.
- Rowlinson M., and S. Procter, 1999. 'Organizational Culture and Business History.' *Organization Studies* 20(3): 369–96.
- Scranton, P. 2008. 'Beyond Chandler.' *Enterprise and Society* 9(3): 426–9.
- Sewell, W. H. 2005. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Siegenthaler, H. 1999. 'Geschichte und Ökonomie nach der kulturalistischen Wende.' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25(2): 276–301.
- Skinner, Q. 2002. *Visions on Politics. Volume I: Regarding Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, S., E. Bell and B. Cooke. 2009. 'Business History and the Historiographical Operation.' *Management & Organizational History* 4(2): 151–66.
- te Velde, H. 2005. 'Moeizaam fietsen met de wind mee: Wim Kok in het politiek bestuur.' In *Met Kok*, edited by P. de Rooy and H. te Velde (pp. 97–149). Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek.
- Thomas, A. B. 1989. 'One-Minute Management Education: A Sign of the Times?' *Management Learning* 20(1): 23–38.
- Toms, S., and J. Wilson. 2010. 'In Defence of Business History: A Reply to Taylor, Bell and Cooke.' *Management & Organizational History* 5(1): 109–20.
- Tosh, J. 2010. *The Pursuit of History: Aim, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*. Harlow: Longman.
- Troy, G. 2005. *Morning in America: How Reagan Invented the 1980s*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- van Duin, P. 2007. *Tegen de Geschiedenis: Pleidooi voor een toekomstgerichte samenleving*. Delft: Eburon.
- Watson, T. J. 2004. 'Managers, Managism, and the Tower of Bable: Making Sense of Managerial Pseudojargon.' *International Journal for Sociology of Language* 166: 67–82.
- Watson, T. J. 2009. 'Narrative Life Story and the Management of Identity: A Case Study in Autobiographical Identity Work.' *Human Relations* 62(3): 1–28.
- Watson, T. J., and F. Bargiela-Chiappini. 1998. 'Managerial Sensemaking and Occupational Identities in Britain and Italy.' *Journal of Management Studies* 35(3): 285–301.
- Weick, K. E. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- White, H. 1973. *Metahistory*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Author biographies

Sjoerd Keulen is a PhD candidate and teaches courses on Dutch history at the University of Amsterdam. His PhD research focuses on the history of policy and activities of Dutch public administration in relation to society, business and politics 1945–2000.

Ronald Kroeze is a lecturer and PhD candidate in political history at the VU University Amsterdam. His research focuses on the history of good governance, corruption and leadership in politics and business in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Together they worked on the project titled 'The history of Dutch leadership in business and politics 1980–2010', which was funded by The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).