

Review of *Organizations in Time*, edited by R Daniel Wadhvani and Marcelo Bucheli, Oxford University Press, 2014

This edited volume has a slightly misleading title as its various contributions explore the potential for more historical analysis in organization studies, rather than addressing issues associated with time and organizing. Hopefully this will not distract from the important achievement that this volume presents in further expanding and integrating business history in management and organization studies. For business historians, who are after all most likely to read this review, this is of great importance. The various contributions, elegantly tied together by R. Daniel Wadhvani and Marcelo Bucheli in their substantial introduction (which by the way presents a significant contribution in its own right) opens up new sets of questions, especially in terms of future methodological and theoretical developments in the field. This book also reflects the changing institutional location of business historians who increasingly make their careers in business schools rather than history departments, and this has reopened old questions of history as a social science. Despite many calls to teach more history in business education, such as the Carnegie Foundation report [2011], in the contemporary research-driven environment of business and management schools, historical understanding is unlikely to permeate the curricula if historical analysis cannot first deliver significant theoretical contributions. This is the central theme around which this edited volume revolves, and it sets a milestone in this ongoing debate. (In the spirit of full disclosure I should add that even though I have obviously not contributed to this volume, I have co-authored with several contributors to the volume and I view this book as central to my current research practice.)

Refreshingly, there are no tired references to the Chandlerian or even the post-Chandlerian paradigm, a rhetorical device that seems mostly designed to hide the fact that there really is no overarching research agenda. Instead what this book delivers is a solid transdisciplinary debate between business historians and organization scholars that sets out what different disciplinary origins mean when they argue for a historical analysis of organizations. And not all of this will be music to business historians' ears – because this book also highlights the drastically different epistemological aims that underpin research designs in the humanities and the social sciences. These chasms cannot always be overcome easily, and might well signal a significant reorientation for those business historians and organizational scholars who want to engage with the interdisciplinary space that is emerging under the label of management and organizational history. But equally I would not agree with Leblebici's quite negative conclusion that only a transdisciplinary collaboration between historians and social scientists is ultimately feasible and equitable. So the sum of its different perspectives is the overarching contribution of this edited volume: outlining a variety of positions that allows scholars to

trace possible future directions for a better integration of historical approaches in management studies. And this is a magnificent and timely achievement on which the editors should be congratulated.

Turning to the individual authors, the list of names reads like a who's who. Readers of this journal will be familiar with the business historians who contributed, such as Geoffrey Jones or JoAnne Yates, who in many cases have also published in leading management journals. However readers of this journal might be less familiar with some of the eminent organization theorists, for example Hüseyin Leblebici, Roy Suddaby, Howard Aldrich and John Hassard, who provide important insights into the contemporary social scientific understanding of history.

The book is split into three parts: History and Theory, Actors and Markets, Sources and Methods. The first and the last part are the most cohesive, while the middle part is the most diverse set of contributions in an edited volume that is overall unusually focused and tightly edited. The section on theory already suggests some of the key issues that consistently emerge in interdisciplinary work: the majority of contributors in this section are social scientists. The one collaboration between an organization scholar and a historian is Behlül Üsdiken and Matthias Kipping's historiography of the diverging paths of management history and management studies, so not theory in the strict sense of the word. Similarly, Michael Rowlinson and Hassard, albeit both trained sociologists, have each conducted historical and archival research, and present a critique of both fields, rather than a theoretical treatment. Thus while Üsdiken and Kipping trace the divergence and potential re-convergence of history and management, Rowlinson and Hassard critically dissect the "cultural turn" in management and in history, carefully identifying different ways in which scholars have tried to bridge the divide, especially from a deconstructionist perspective. Both pieces highlight that there is in fact a variety of tentative interdisciplinary research agendas evolving as part of the emerging field of management and organizational history.

The other contributions in this section are more clearly social scientific in orientation, and deal explicitly with theory. The absence of explicitly theoretical chapters written by historians underscores to some extent Leblebici's conclusions. He argues that historians approach "narrative as theory", as opposed to the "general theory" orientation of social scientists. He is of course one of only a few scholars with both a sophisticated understanding of historical research designs as well as the theory-driven research questions that organization scholars ask (p. 75). Business historians would not necessarily be familiar with his well-known historical account of the evolution of the radio industry in the US (Leblebici et al. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 36,3 [1991]). Its theory-driven narrative illustrates perfectly what social scientists mean when they say that their discipline needs more history – which does not necessarily match how historians would interpret this statement. He is skeptical

about the possibility of a greater integration between history and organization studies, arguing instead for “transdisciplinarity”, i.e. each side continues to deliver their research results on their terms. He underpins his argument with a detailed analysis of the relative failure of interdisciplinary journals (e.g. *Economic History Review*, *Business History Review*, *Business History*) to be cited within their main disciplines. This analysis should indeed give pause to everyone reading this journal, and even more so for journal editors. But I do disagree with his conclusions, firstly because I do not consider interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary agendas to be mutually exclusive, and secondly because for such as the standing working group on history at the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS), and relatively new journals such as *Management & Organizational History* have been very successful as platforms of interdisciplinary discourse. In fact, the EGOS track received over 50 submissions for only 25 slots in 2015, highlighting the increasing interest within organization studies for what historical approaches have to offer.

Leblebici’s contribution is followed by two interesting pieces that discuss the opportunities for interdisciplinary work within two major theoretical domains in organizational research: institutional theory and evolutionary theory. The chapter by Roy Suddaby, William Foster and Albert Mills introduces new institutionalism’s core concepts of institutional fields and isomorphism, as well as the more recent developments of institutional entrepreneurship and work. Institutions themselves are of course familiar to business historians, especially through economic history’s engagement with new institutional economics, but the sociological strand of institutional theory is certainly underappreciated. However, many of the above-mentioned concepts are far more suitable to the often qualitative and small-scale, yet very dense data collection techniques of business historians. Evolutionary theory, on the other hand, is better suited to either industry-level or very long time periods. Even though this approach is related to organizational ecology and corporate demography, it offers far better opportunities to integrate historical concepts and approaches, as Stephen Lippman and Howard Aldrich argue. On reading this chapter alongside the classic introductory text, *Organizations Evolving*, by Aldrich and Martin Ruef [2006], it is clear that it also offers useful concepts to business historians with a more structural history orientation. Concepts such as age, period and cohort effects allow both contextualization and comparison within and across a number of historical cases of firm evolution.

The next section on “Actors and Markets” features interesting pieces, but is overall more eclectic. What holds it together is that it represents attempts by historical researchers to conceptualize their research designs with social science theory. Jeffrey Fear reflects on the mutual relevance of organizational learning and detailed historical analysis, while Marcelo Bucheli and Jin Uk Kim review theoretical insights ranging from political science (selectorate theory) and organization

studies (legitimacy theory) which are relevant to business historians working on emerging economies. Somewhat different in nature is David Kirsch, Mahka Moeen and Wadhvani's discussion of the potential uses of stylized facts, which they classify as attenuated narratives. Particularly for cases of industry formation, where "start dates" can be hard to identify (a thorny issue for corporate demography for example, see Carroll and Hannan [2000]), this links historical insights to more social scientific research designs. The chapter by Wadhvani and Jones stands out because it might have been a better fit for the theory section, especially because it actually extrapolates historical theory and suggests applications to organizational research (in this case applying historical temporalities to entrepreneurship) rather than vice versa. Theory derived from history and applied to organizational theory is still very rare, and Wadhvani and Jones' s chapter suggests that interdisciplinary research has greater scope.

The book ends with an immensely useful methods section, which will likely be referenced frequently in the future, especially the pieces by Kenneth Lipartito, and Kipping, Wadhvani and Bucheli. For business historians, Yates' contribution is noteworthy, as she presents more or less the methodological counterpart to Leblebici's theoretical treatment of the differences between business history and organization studies. She compares and contrasts the different modes of presentation and the underlying methodological assumptions in the two domains. These are the visible differences that stem from Leblebici's two modes of theorizing, and their methodological implications go beyond just amending the representation of one's research towards greater reflection of research designs and objectives.

Considering the wealth and quality of contributions, *Organizations in Time* will likely become one of the most significant reference volumes for scholars interested in the "historic turn" in management and organization studies – be they business historians or organization scholars.

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