

**Clio's Toolkit:
Historical Methods Beyond Theory Building from Cases**

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Abstract: Historical research in organization and management studies continues to be described as a type of inductive theory building from cases. But historical epistemology and methodological practices are better understood as a form of situated scholarly inquiry in which the researcher interprets or analyzes the past from a position in the present through a process of abductive reasoning. This chapter elaborates on the implications of the situated character of historical reasoning for the nature of historical knowledge claims, and for the methodological practices involved in scholarly historical research, including the treatment of evidence, the establishment of explanations, the attempt at understanding, and the foundations for evaluative conclusions. It concludes by considering the implications for the role of historical discourse within management and organization studies more broadly.

Keywords: historical methods, organizational history, business history, abduction, inference to the best explanation, source criticism, triangulation, hermeneutics, narrative.

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Introduction

Historical research and reasoning are now flourishing in management and organization studies. The contention that history provides a unique scholarly perspective on organizations and organizing was made as early as the 1990s by Zald (1993) and Kieser (1994), but a clearly identifiable “historical turn” has taken place only in the last decade as a wave of publications have cumulatively elaborated on the nature of history and its value in organizational research (Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Wadhvani, R. Daniel et al., 2014a). The intellectual movement has spilled into the related fields of strategy (Ingram et al., 2012; Vaara et al., 2016), entrepreneurship (Lippmann et al., 2016; Wadhvani, R. Daniel et al., 2014b), international business (Jones et al., 2006), human resources (Bruce et al., 2011; Hassard, 2012), and business and society (Stutz et al., 2017).

Despite this significant progress, historical research methods and practices remain comparatively underdeveloped and under-articulated in management and organizational scholarship. The wave of scholarship at the intersection of history and organization studies over the last decade has proceeded in large part through conceptual analysis and synthesis of the relationship between the fields of history and organization studies (Godfrey et al., 2016). With notable exceptions (Decker, 2013; Kipping et al., 2014b; Yates, 2014), considerably less attention has been devoted to the grounded practices of historical inquiry and interpretation, and the problem-solving processes that confront researchers as they articulate questions, critique evidence, develop interpretations, and arrive at evaluative conclusions.

As a default, historical methods often continue to be inaccurately presented as a form of inductive theory building from cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser et al., 1967; Miles et al., 1994), an approach that typically removes the position and perspective of the researcher as an integral part of the knowledge claims produced and the methods used (Mantere et al., 2013). But historical epistemology and methods more typically acknowledge that historical perspective shapes historical knowledge claims, and employs methodological practices designed to deal with evidence, explanation, understanding, and evaluation reflexively (Kipping et al., 2014b). In contrast to other traditions of qualitative social science research methods that do reflect on the role of the researcher in the research process (Hatch et al., 2003), it is the position of the historical researcher in time that has methodological and at times theoretical implications (Wadhvani, R. Daniel et al., 2014a).

In this chapter we present a view of historical methods that foregrounds the position and perspective of the researcher in the historical research process. Such an approach emphasizes that historical research involves interpreting or analyzing the past from a position in the present through a process of reflexive, abductive reasoning, rather than through procedural, inductive methods. The title of the chapter refers to Clio, the muse of history in classical Greek mythology, and what we contend to be the practice-based, tool-creating nature of historical research processes, as a researcher grapples with examining, explaining, and evaluating events and

actions that lie in the past. In practice, historical research does not involve a procedural, step-by-step approach to interpretation and analysis aimed at deriving objective concepts and categories. Rather, it involves a series of methodological problems and solutions encountered by a situated historical researcher producing interpretations about events and actions in the past that is attentive to analyzing and interpreting empirical puzzles or phenomena in light of previous and extant explanations.

Such an approach necessarily begins by examining the question of the researcher's stance in the present in relationship to the production of historical knowledge about the past. As we highlight in the next section, it is by addressing the situated stance of the researcher that historical practices and methods differ from conventional case study methods. Building on the situated nature of historical researchers, we then explain the practices involved in the research process, including the production of evidence, the development of explanations, the attempt at understanding, and the evaluation of findings. We conclude by discussing how such a practice-based view of historical methods sheds light on the broader dialogue on historical approaches to management and organization studies.

The Situated Nature of the Historical Researcher

Reflecting on the situated nature of the historical researcher is important to understanding historical methods in practice, and to delineating the fundamental difference between historical research and traditional case study methodology in management and organizational research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). As Mantere and Ketokivi (2013) have pointed out, within organization science "methodological texts are written as if the reader were a rational actor who is able to overcome cognitive limitations through rigorous application of scientific reasoning principles." The researcher's stance and cognitive perspective on the subject are designed to be excluded from the analysis or interpretation through "computational" processes (Mantere et al., 2013) that allow for key constructs to emerge "inductively" from the case evidence.

In contrast, in historical reasoning the temporally situated perspective of the researcher – in which a scholar in the present develops interpretations about events and actions in the past – is inseparable from the historical knowledge claims developed (Danto, 1965; Gadamer, 1975). Unlike in cross-sectional and even conventional longitudinal case-study research, historical claims involve assigning significance to action or events in light of their consequences, a process that requires a retrospective point of view (Wadhvani, R. Daniel et al., 2014a). For instance, the introduction of the assembly line in automobile manufacturing in the 1910s can be analyzed historically in the context of the subsequent organizational, economic, social, and cultural consequences of the development of the mass market for cars over the course of the twentieth century. Such knowledge claims could not be proffered by a contemporary researcher studying Ford's assembly line in December 1913, nor by a conventional longitudinal study by researchers that tracked its development in subsequent months and years, for the consequences took decades

to unfold and had repercussions that contemporary researchers could not have anticipated. Historical knowledge claims interpreting and analyzing the consequences of the assembly line for the organization of cities, the development of car culture, and for its environmental repercussions can only be made once we take into account the temporal point of view of the researcher in the present looking back.

The situated stance of the historical researcher looking back is essential to the kinds of unique knowledge claims history allows scholars to make. The retrospective nature of historical inquiry, for instance, offers the opportunity to make claims about processes that take a long time to unfold, or social structures – such as institutions – that may be best observed in long historical view (Braudel, 1958). It allows scholars to consider contingencies, conjunctures, and events that shape the development of organizations and industries over time (Sewell, 2005). And it allows scholars to analyze and excavate patterns in meaning (Gadamer, 1975) and power (Foucault, 1991) that are rooted in the deep past and difficult to grasp when looking at the present.

Because the situated perspective of historical research is integral to the character of historical knowledge claims, historical research practices cannot be reduced to computational methods (Mantere et al., 2013) designed to objectively remove the researcher from the interpretation (Miles et al., 1994). Rather, the position of the researcher vis-à-vis the subject points to a need for reflective and critical examination of how one's perspective in the present shapes the process of through which knowledge claims are made, including how evidence is identified and interpreted as fact, explanations are derived, understanding is sought, and evaluations are made. Indeed, because historical inquiry arises in the present it suggests that the character of this reflexive process is ultimately formed through a dialogue of past and present, in which the preconceptions we hold in the present are challenged and revised through historical inquiry that confront us with surprising evidence and interpretations about the past. The essence of the reflexive historical process, therefore, is hermeneutical in that historical inquiry involves a dialogue between present and past in which research and reasoning renders new insights or challenges to what we previously thought we understood (Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 2004).

The situated nature of historical knowledge claims also points to their abductive, rather than inductive, character (Mantere et al., 2013). Peirce (1878) distinguished between induction, which he defined as “reasoning from particulars to the general law,” from abduction, which he defined as reasoning “from effect to cause.” Also known as “inference to the best explanation,” abductive reasoning involves considering alternative theoretical and conceptual explanations in light of evidence or observations, and arriving at the best explanation or best guess among many from the point of view of an epistemic community (Niiniluoto, 1999). Thus, abduction involves not only “discovery” of new explanations (Alvesson et al., 2007) but also confirmatory claims about the best or most truthful explanation (Niiniluoto, 1999). Historical research and reasoning typically follow abductive interpretive processes in that they examine empirical puzzles or phenomena and consider new explanations or understandings that explain the puzzle or phenomenon in a way that challenges the pre-conceived constructs and explanations we hold. In

this sense, historical reasoning inherently involves comparing multiple explanations of actions and events in the past, typically proceeding by challenging existing or taken-for-granted explanations by offering new ones, rather than purely inductive process by which explanations emerge from evidence separate from an existing explanation or theory that already claims to account for it.

Historical reasoning, in practice, is thus an inherently revisionist process, in which the researcher confronts an existing explanation and proffers an alternative one in light of a particular empirical puzzle or phenomena. Conceptual or theoretical advancement, in this sense, proceeds not by identifying and filling “gaps” in theory but by challenging, revising and replacing previous explanations or constructs within the historiography (i.e. the previous historical writing and explanation on the subject). Revisionism – a constant re-seeing or re-interpretation of the past – is hence an integral part of historical methods and practices, and integrally linked to the situated nature of the historical researcher constantly reconsidering the relevance of the past from the perspective of the evolving present (Ricoeur, 2004).

The reflexive, abductive, and revisionist nature of historical inquiry has implications for the methodological practices of how evidence is established as fact, how explanations are constructed, how understanding is sought, and how evaluations are determined. We turn to those processes in the next section.

Elements of Historical Practice

How does the situated perspective and reflexive, abductive process of historical reasoning shape research practices? Following Leblebici (2014), we use Runciman’s (1983) description of methodology as involving four aspects of the research process: *reportage*, or how research aims to accurately report the “facts” of social action from evidence; *explanation*, how it systematically accounts for cause and effect; *understanding*, how – if at all – it recounts the experience of human actors themselves; and *evaluation*, the basis on which resulting claims are judged.¹ Though there can of course be considerable variation in these practices within disciplines, the more functionally oriented social sciences *tend to* accomplish these methodological tasks by systematically collecting data based on observations (reportage), in order to test causal hypotheses rooted in theory (explanation), using assumptions about how humans act in relatively functionally consistent ways (understanding) in order to make judgments the behavior, event or action (evaluation).

Table 1 summaries our account of how these research processes are handled in historical practice. In the sections that follow, we explain how each of these practices grow out of the

¹ Runciman uses the term “description” rather than “understanding” to refer to the scholarly process of recounting the subjective experience of the actors being studied, but here we use “understanding” both because it is clearer and because others have also more often used the term. For a recent discussion of Runciman that influenced our own choice in using him to describe methodology, see Leblebici, 2014.

situated perspective involved in historical research, and provide explanations that describe and justify the methodological practice. In outlining these practices, we do not contend that all historians share a set of standardized assumptions and techniques for addressing the methodological elements of the research process. There is considerable methodological heterogeneity and diversity within history (De Jong et al., 2015; Decker et al., 2015), as there is within most vibrant scholarly disciplines. More importantly, as we explain above, historical practice has evolved and continues to evolve as historical researchers encounter the challenges and problems of exploring particular research subjects and domains. Instead, our goal is to point to a *range* of methodological practices that have developed within history to deal with the issues of reportage, explanation, understanding, and evaluation in recounting human action from the past and to emphasize their value of such practices in organizational research today.

Table 1: Elements of Historical Research Practice

Element	Practices
Reportage	Source Criticism Triangulation
Explanation	Periodization Narrative Construction
Understanding	Hermeneutics Critical Hermeneutics Foucauldian analysis
Evaluation	Theory Understanding Power

It is important to acknowledge and name these practices explicitly because many of them are otherwise not widely recognized in social science methodology due to the writing conventions of historical scholarship and because establishing an explicit methodological language is crucial to both interdisciplinary dialogue and to advancing historical research in management and organization studies (Decker, 2013; Kipping et al., 2014b; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Yates, 2014).

We begin by discussing historical methods of *reportage* in reconstructing facts and actions from primary sources. Next we discuss the contextualisation of historical events in time and place as a way to offer an *explanation* for causality, as opposed to the more reductive and parsimonious view of causality valued in the many of the other social sciences. Third, we point to the historical tradition's emphasis on reconstructing the subjective experience and cognition of

actors as essential to historical *understanding*. Finally, we show how this historical perspective or hindsight is both critical to the ways in which historical scholarship provides an *evaluation* of actions and developments in the past.

Reportage Through Reconstruction from Primary Sources

The historical tradition's particular concern with source analysis grows out of the fact that the phenomena being studied are not directly observed, and the traces it leaves are subject to selection, distortion, and de-contextualization with time (Howell et al., 2001; Kipping et al., 2014b; Lipartito, 2014). The problems of evaluating sources and using them to reconstruct events and actions (i.e. the facts of an historical account) have formed one set of important methodological issues in historical research. Thus, in contemporary historical terminology, primary sources are treated differently from data in that they represent only traces from the past rather than direct observations of it (Lipartito, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Reconstruction refers to the historical practice of reporting events and actions by identifying archives and sources (Decker, 2013). The selection of a source from an archive makes the source a piece of evidence. The evidence is then interpreted to establish historical facts. Factuality depends on source criticism, ideally triangulated between different sources, archives and accounts.

Kipping et al. (2014b) describe three aspects of *source criticism*: validity, credibility, and transparency. *Validity* refers to the authenticity and provenance of a source. It includes consideration of not only whether the source is genuine or not, but also evaluation of why and how a particular trace may have survived and what it tells us about what other sources did not. Thus, assessing validity involves considering the institutional setting in which a source is found, and the organizational structure of record keeping, the power relationships, and the institutional structures that have led to the existence or lack of existence of a documentary record (Lipartito, 2014; Schwarzkopf, 2013). As Decker (2013) points out, for example, organizational histories are fundamentally shaped by whether or not archives are kept and made available, and what kinds of histories we can and cannot tell as a result.

Assessing source *credibility* pertains to determining the relative "primacy" of a source in addressing the research question at hand. While in most social sciences, primary data is synonymous with facts or evidence, in historical research the relationship between primary sources and "facts" refers to its relative proximity to the event being studied and to acknowledgement that the event itself is never directly observed by the researcher. Contrary to the popular view of what makes a source primary, it is immaterial whether a source has been published or not; the defining feature is its closeness in time and space to the event, phenomena, or puzzle being examined. Classic primary sources are unique archival documents, as well as in some cases contemporary media reporting. Secondary sources are accounts based on primary sources. Also the definition of a primary source depends on the research subject. For example,

history textbooks for schools are tertiary sources relative to the historical events they recount (as they themselves are based on secondary academic accounts), but they are primary sources if the research question is how history was taught at a specific point in time (Lipartito, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Historical practice also values source *transparency*. Unlike in qualitative and even some forms of quantitative evidence, historical research standards require that the specific instances of actors, actions, and language conveyed in a historical account should be traceable to specific documentary sources, and verifiable by other researchers. Anonymization, except in exceptional cases, is considered invalid for several reasons. First, because historical research is based on specific empirical puzzles or phenomena, other scholarly readers expect and evaluate research based on the thoroughness with which extant documents on the empirical subject have been consulted. Second, source transparency emerged as an important aspect of the study of history, which conceived of itself initially as an empirical science distinct from rhetorical and popular uses of history, with its blurred lines between history-as-nonfiction and history-as-myth.

Historical researchers often rely on multiple sources to establish a pattern of facts related to the research question, a process sometimes referred to as *triangulation* (Kipping et al., 2014b). Within management and organization studies, triangulation often refers to using multiple types of data in order to converge on an “objective account” of what happened. While this is one way in which triangulation is used in historical practice, it also serves other, often more important purposes in the establishment of patterns of facts. For instance, triangulation is typically used because no single source can provide an adequately complete account of the actors, actions, and events involved in addressing an empirical question. Hence triangulation is employed as a way to establish a plausible pattern of facts that can address the research question as a whole. Just as importantly, triangulation in history is used to identify and understand *divergent* accounts of an event. Using multiple sources to study a labor strike or a shift in human resource policy from the perspective of workers and community members as well as from management’s perspective (Hassard, 2012), for instance, is not designed to establish convergence on what happened but rather to identify divergent perspectives and to explore how they mattered. Source criticism and triangulation, therefore, serve the crucial purpose of allowing the situated historical researcher to critically reconstruct facts from traces that have survived through time.

Explanation Through Contextualization

Contextualization plays a central role in historical methodology because it is through the placement of reconstructed events and actions in temporal context that they are given sense and significance (Kipping et al., 2014b; Wadhvani, R Daniel, 2016). Historical practice emphasizes contextualization of sources in time and place as a way of deriving the relation between an event or phenomenon and what happened before and after it (Danto, 1965). In short, contextualization is the most basic way in which historical research establishes explanation, or causation, in the Runciman (1983) sense. This may come as a surprise to many social scientists, who often see

context as “background” and hence a given condition. But, in historical practice, contexts are interpreted conditions that place an event or action into a causal or semantic relationship in time. It is by recounting of linked and related developments that preceded and came after a focal event in the flow of time that the event’s complex and contingent causes, significance, and consequences are established (Sewell, 2005). Hence the way in which different historians contextualize the same events or processes are subject to scholarly debate and often have theoretical implications.

Contextualization in time is established through the practices of *periodization* and *narrative construction*. *Periodization* is the process through which events or actions are organized into coherent periods, eras, or epochs (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Periods are determined iteratively, as the researcher moves between research questions, the historiography, and the sources (Kipping et al., 2014b; Lipartito, 2014). A research question focused on the origins of the Hawthorne studies (Hassard, 2012), for instance, would have a different periodization than a research question that considered the rise of big business in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chandler, 1977). In the process, a researcher may challenge the periodization used by other scholars in order to consider the event or development from an alternative perspective. Lamoreaux et al. (2003), for instance, challenge Chandler’s (1977) interpretation of the rise of big business by adopting a longer perspective that incorporates the eventual decline of the advantages of corporate scale in the late twentieth century.

Periodization matters for explanation because variations in how historical studies organize time allow the researcher to entertain different types of causal explanations. Periods that are short in duration and focus on events, for instance, typically assign agency to human actors and consider action at the individual, or sometimes group, level (Levi, 2012). Periodizations of longer duration, in contrast, allow historical researchers to consider structural factors shaping action. Studies of societal institutions and institutionalization, for instance, typically take at least a multi-decade duration in periodization to identify patterns of persistence and change (Baumol, 1990). Historians even consider periodization at geological time scales, in considering how geography shapes society and history (Braudel, 1958).

Particular studies may also combine or layer periodizations in order to identify complex causes and consequences of an event not only in the actions immediately preceding and coming after it, but also in its confluence with slowly unfolding social, political, and intellectual developments forming over decades, and even processes at work over centuries – what the historian Ferdinand Braudel called the “multiplicity of time” (Braudel, 1958). In this regard, the interpretation of complex periodizations account in part for why historical methods are particularly good for multi-layered and complex understandings of causality (Ingram et al., 2012; Sewell, 2005).

Narrative construction typically works in conjunction with periodization to establish causal explanation in historical practice. Like periodization, narrative organizes evidence in ways that assign causes and consequences to events and actions through their organization in time

(Danto, 1965; Ricoeur, 1984; White, 1975). Historical research typically uses narrative in different ways than it is employed in the social sciences (Rowlinson et al., 2014). As (Gaddis, 2002, 62) points out, whereas many social scientists “tend to embed narratives within generalizations,” historians often “embed our generalizations within our narratives.” In other words, while social scientists often provide a story to illustrate a generalization, the results of the analysis are not presented as a narrative. Historical narratives, in contrast, synthesize and represent the past, combining at minimum the description of the results with its analysis, and often a discussion of method may be inserted at specific points where the underlying evidence is more difficult to interpret. What is explained is the evidence, not the event as such (Megill, 2007, 128-131, 246 FN115). To explain the evidence, historical narrative proposes sequence, causality, or indeed interdependency and contingency. This means that the element that constitutes the interpretation through narrative can be separated from the underlying evidence, which can be interpersonally verified.

Though sometimes seen by other social scientists simply as a series of facts or events that “chronicle” developments, historical narratives are better understood as complex representations (Ankersmit), maps (Gaddis), or models of social action in time related to a research question or problem under consideration. In other words, historical narratives seek to provide a coherent and selective representation of the past, rather than a pure chronicle of all events and actions related to the topic (Danto, 1965; White, 1975). In this sense, historical narratives, unlike chronicles, are not simply arrangements of evidence but rather involve first the selection of relevant actors, actions, and events based on the judgments of the historical researcher, and second pulls these elements together in a plot that creates distinctly multi-causal and interdependent explanations. The goal of such a synthesis is to provide a more complete or alternative explanation to the ones offered by existing accounts. The resulting narrative “fits” together developments in a temporal order that accounts for phenomena under consideration and competes with alternative existing narrative accounts in explaining the historical phenomenon under consideration (Ricoeur, 1984). These competing historical narratives constitute the historiography of the field – the range of competing accounts. The value of the creation of new historical narratives, in this sense, is akin to the creation of new and alternative explanations of a phenomenon that once seemed familiar and explained by extant theory. In this sense it is through the construction of new narratives that historical reasoning engages in abduction and the establishment of revisionist explanations.

Given the limitations on sources and the creation of new data, how and why do new historical narratives develop? New narratives are possible for a number of reasons. Occasionally, the discovery of new or unused sources makes alternative historical accounts possible. More commonly, however, new historical narratives develop precisely because interpretations are open to new perspectives and developments that lead researchers to reconsider the narrative elements that matter and the temporal order that holds the narrative together. In other words, changes in historical perspective may lead to the creation of new narratives that emphasize actors, actions, and events that were once considered marginal or that reconfigure a temporal ordering that was once taken for granted.

The rise of developing countries and postcolonial movements, for instance, have played an important role in reshaping the once Eurocentric interpretations of world history (Appleby et al., 1995). This has had more wide-ranging methodological implications in terms of addressing how power relations are inscribed in the archives (Stoler, 2009). Within business history, the re-emergence of small entrepreneurial firms and the limited competitiveness of large, industrial enterprise in the late twentieth century have led historians to reconsider the Chandlerian narrative synthesis of the rise of big business (Lamoreaux et al., 2003). For instance, Sabel and Zeitlin (1997) explicitly acknowledge the importance of alternative narrative representation as a foundation for their challenge to the Chandlerian synthesis. In organizational history, reinterpretations of the role of the Hawthorne Studies, or the legacy of Mayo or Weber present revisionist narratives of commonly held beliefs (Bruce et al., 2011; Hassard, 2012; O'Connor, 1999).

Understanding Actors Through Hermeneutic Interpretation

A significant tradition in historical thought has contended that explanations of action (i.e. causality alone) are insufficient in historical methods, and that “historical science” required *understanding* evidence from the point of view and experience of actors as a basis for comprehending their actions (Collingwood, 1946; Dilthey, 2002 [1910]). This claim was based on both the idea that one needed to understand the perspective of actors in order to identify motives and causation, but also because understanding their experiences was an aim of social science in itself. Although strains of social and economic history have sometimes downplayed this methodological task, assuming instead that actions could be explained through universal behavioral principles (Hempel, 1942), the methodological requirement within most branches of mainstream history has in fact been to emphasize more heavily the importance of reconstructing the subjective basis of experience. In the second half of the twentieth century, this methodological concern evolved in ways that emphasized that historians’ attempts to understand their subject’s perspective should not come at the cost of denying one’s identity as a present-day researcher with present-day concerns (Danto, 1965; Gadamer, 1975). In this sense, historical methodology has become more sensitive to the historical researcher’s own position and perspective in time, as a product of the present.

Historical practice related to the task of understanding the subjects of research has in large part been shaped by hermeneutic thought (Gadamer, 1975). A body of theory and philosophy related to how meaning arises from texts, hermeneutics emphasizes the value of empathetic interpretation that seeks to understand a text from the point of view of the author producing the text (Stutz et al., 2017). In particular, hermeneutics emphasizes the process of interpreting a text by placing it within the broader contexts in which it was produced in order to understand authorial intent. Interpretation proceeds through the “hermeneutic circle” in which the researcher moves back and forth between text and context until a stable meaning is derived. Strictly speaking, hermeneutic philosophy sometimes posits that an interpreter in the present

cannot fully understand the perspective and meanings ascribed by actors in the past because of the fundamentally situated character of both the researcher and the subject, but in the process of seeking to understand a historical actor or text the interpreter may converge around a common “horizon” that casts light back on the present (Gadamer, 1975). Such hermeneutic interpretation is increasingly common in much of the historical research in organization studies (Kipping et al., 2014b; Stutz et al., 2017). For instance, it has been used to examine the perspective of oil industry executives during the oil crisis of the 1970s (Prasad et al., 2002) and to understand the changing ways in which art market actors valued modern Indian art in the late twentieth century (Khaire et al., 2010).

A related methodological practice is that of microhistory (Levi, 2012), today perhaps better known as ethnographic history (Rowlinson et al., 2014), which explains the relationship between the retrospective knowledge of the researcher and the cognition of the historical actors best. Ginzburg (2012) for instance described his approach with reference to the ethnographic categories of *emic* and *etic*: The first describes an attempt to access the perspective of those experiencing historical events, and is in essence a way to reconstruct the cognition of historical actors by understanding their context (Levi, 2012, 122). This approach does not deny the unique and present-centered position of the researcher, who represents the *etic* perspective by bringing in theoretical concerns and analytical tools that determine the shape of the narrative. Thus the strength of any historical narrative relies on its ability to balance the *etic* perspective, which through retrospective knowledge determines the periodization and plot, with an *emic* approach that seeks to reconstruct the cognition of historical actors by placing them in their proper space and time. Hence, historical work of those sort seeks balance between the past and the present – between the historian’s representation and the reality of the past (Gaddis, 2002, 123; Rahikainen et al., 2012, 33-34; Trouillot, 1995). Steedman (2002, 69), for example, refers to the past as something “which does not now exist, but which once did actually happen; which cannot be retrieved, but which may be represented.”

Related work has also explored the role of language in shaping meaning and the role of power within discourses of meaning. Hermeneutic concerns over the role of meaning brought considerable attention to how language and discourse comes to structure meaning and interpretation. Thus, the hermeneutic philosophical basis of historical practices directed at achieving understanding laid the foundations for the “linguistic turn” in historical research. Influenced by the work of Foucault, historical research has also become more attuned to analyzing how power is established through discourse and meaning (Foucault, 1991). Thus, historical practices shaped by hermeneutics have taken a critical approach to meaning in the last few decades. This has prompted important work in organizational history, such as Clark, McKinlay, and Rowlinson (2002) and Rowlinson and Hassard (1993).

Evaluation Through Hindsight

The previous sections explained that when engaging in the research tasks of reportage, explanation, and understanding, historical practice involves grappling with the opportunities and challenges presented by the historical researchers' own position in the future looking back. Hindsight also provides the perch from which historical researchers judge the "lessons" or conclusions of their histories for their audiences in the present. But the form and content of the lessons or conclusions may be shaped by a variety of different evaluative motives.

Within organization studies, where "theory building" is valued as paramount, much of the focus in recent years has been on the usefulness of *history to theory* (Kipping et al., 2014a). And, in fact, the hindsight that historical perspective provides is especially useful for several kinds of theory building. History, for instance, has long been recognized as uniquely suited for examining organizational and social processes (Langley, 1999; Maclean et al., 2016; Pettigrew, 1992), such as institutionalization (Suddaby et al., 2014) and organizational learning (Fear, 2014). In part that is because history provides the longer perspectives, accounts for the complex causal patterns, and incorporates the contingent events that short-term process research has difficulty studying. History is also increasingly recognized as a way to study the discursive and rhetorical construction of organizations and markets, as actors "use" history toward organizational ends (Hargadon et al., 2001; Schultz et al., 2013; Suddaby et al., 2010). And, historical evaluation and methods are also promising as a means of evaluating normative theoretical claims, such as those related to corporate social responsibility and the role of business in society (Stutz et al., 2017).

Considerably less well recognized within organization studies are the other (non-theory oriented) kinds of evaluative claims that historical research can make using hindsight. One such set of claims pertains to the use of historical inquiry to deepen *understanding* of situations or conditions in the present (Gadamer, 1975). The basic premise of this evaluative orientation is that to better recognize where we are and where you could go, we have to understand where we have been. Rather than focusing on the construction and evaluation of theoretical claims, such an approach uses historical narrative of the origins and evolution of a phenomena in order to deepen understanding of them in the present. Gompers (1994), for instance, examines the origins of venture capital as a way to understand the character of entrepreneurial finance in modern America, and McKenna (2006) examines the history of management consulting to better understand how it came to play such an important role in modern business enterprise. While historical narratives oriented toward deepening understanding of major conditions or problems that confront organizations are under-valued in organization studies, the evaluative orientation toward deeping understanding of a condition or problem in the present is very common in other fields, including in mainstream history.

History can also be used to *critique* sources of power in the present. An evaluative orientation toward critique typically focuses on examining the origins of power that is deeply rooted in knowledge and discourse that it is imperceptible to everyday actors in the present. It is only by examining the orgins and development of these discourses of power and patterns of disempowerment, and by comparing them to previous ways of asserting power and order that we

can begin to identify and critique it. Foucault (1991) for instance develops a “genealogical approach” to studying the origins of such forms of taken-for-granted power. While such a critical approach to history remains rare within organization studies, it has flourished around a few topics, such as those related to the developed the history of human resources and management (Braverman, 1974; Bruce et al., 2011; Hassard, 2012; O'Connor, 1999).

Conclusion: History Beyond Theory

Historical research introduces unique epistemological and methodological sensibilities into the practice of qualitative research in organization studies. In this chapter we focused in particular on the situated nature of the historical researcher in time, and the important methodological and intellectual implications of the retrospective nature of historical research design. In summary, historical research is reflexive, in that good historical practice is about a dialogue between the past and the present; abductive, as researchers iteratively seek out best explanations for empirical phenomena by drawing on or developing theory; and revisionist, in that historical knowledge advances through the evaluation of competing narratives about the past by a community of researchers. We unpacked this by focusing on Runciman’s description of methodology as addressing the following issues: reportage, explanation, understanding and evaluation. In historical practice, reportage is developed through source criticism and triangulation; explanation is based on contextualization using tools such as periodization and narrative construction; and understanding is developed through hermeneutical of Foucauldian analysis. Finally, evaluation does not always lead to theorization in the sense of organizational theory, but can focus on understanding unique events within their historical context and through the experience of historical actors, or in terms of power dynamics. For historians, theory also encompasses the explanation of unique events which may not be fully, or even not at all, generalizable to a broader category.

We focused on research practices because we believe they are crucial for unlocking the potential of using historical methods to develop organization theory. If history is to actually contribute to theory, it has to be practiced. To engage in the abductive reasoning processes that history requires, organization scholars will need to *apply* historical methods to empirical puzzles and phenomena in which alternative narratives are considered and existing understandings overturned. Revisioning the past, as we have claimed, is essential to historical research processes, but it is also important to seeing theory anew, and why historical revisionism is in fact inherently a theory building process.

But the chapter has also argued that much of the value of the historic turn lies beyond the “synthesis of history and theory” that has received much attention in recent years. Historical discourse plays a broader role in any community, whether it is a nation state, an ethnic group, or a professional association. Generating theoretical knowledge from history is only one of its discursive roles, aimed at considering and revising the epistemic constructs that are used in the

community. Equally important, and much less appreciated, are the other two roles that this paper suggests represent important paths forward for the role of history in qualitative organizational research. The first of these is to generate understanding for the community: where it and its objects of analysis came from. The other is to generate critique, particularly of the sources of power, in order to consider the community and its received constructs in ways that allow for the possibility of change. History has the potential to play these roles in management and organizational research, and the turn toward history remains as much promise as reality, until organization scholars embrace these other forms of historical knowledge, as much as they have embraced its value for understanding theory. We believe for this to be realized, greater attention needs to be paid to Clio's toolkit, by which we mean the array of historical research practices that offer methodological and theoretical opportunities to organizational research into the past.

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