CHAPTER 22

HISTORICAL METHODS FOR RESEARCHING IDENTITIES IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

The historic turn in organization studies has given rise to increasing interest in historical methods. In parallel, the cultural turn in business history is associated with concerns beyond narratives of corporate success or failure. But as yet there has been limited historical research on identities in organizations. This chapter sets out historical methods appropriate for examining identities, focusing on exemplars of ethnographic historical research. Whereas corporate history prizes historical sources such as company board minutes, and organizational identity can be researched from corporate communications such as company magazines, it is more difficult to compile a checklist of historical sources for examining identities in organizations. Historical research on clerks and entrepreneurs illustrates the range of sources that could be considered. However, the focus on such literate groups in society also highlights the problem of survivor bias in sources, which historians describe as the silence of the archives.

Introduction: The Historic Turn in Organization Studies

There is great opportunity for further historical research on identities and identity work in organizations in relation to the historic turn in organization studies (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Weatherbee et al., 2015), and the cultural turn in business history (Rowlinson and Delahaye, 2009; Rowlinson and Hassard, 2014). A cultural turn suggests less of a preoccupation with business history as a branch of economic history, and more

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concern for cultural history, including questions of identity. Cultural history is preoccupied with 'the trinity of identity categories'—gender, race, and class (Gunn, 2006: 130)—which are dealt with specifically by other chapters in this handbook. Business history, or management and organizational history, potentially offers a perspective on the mediation of the trinity of gender, race, and class identities through organizations, as well as professional and organizational identities. In order to facilitate a historical contribution to studying identities in organization studies, and an organizational perspective on identity in cultural history, in this chapter we will consider some exemplars for historical research. This allows for a discussion of how to interrogate sources (Decker, 2013), and present research appropriately for the genres of business history and organization studies (Rowlinson, 2004; Yates, 2014).

The historic turn is associated with growing interest in history from management and organization studies, with a series of special issues of leading journals focused on historical approaches (Godfrey et al., 2016; O'Sullivan and Graham, 2010; van Baalen and Bogenrieder, 2009). There are two aspects to the historic turn that could be termed structural and cultural. For the structural historic turn, which is predominant in strategy, the past constitutes an objective constraint on organizations and individuals in the present. History is said to matter (Ghemawat, 2002: 65) through path dependence (Greve and Seidel, 2015), and the related concepts of organizational inertia (Boeker, 1989; Kelly and Amburgey, 1991), and competence lock-ins (Malerba, Nelson, Orsenigo, and Winter, 1999).

There is more scope for considering identities in organizations in relation to the cultural historic turn, in which the past constitutes a resource that can be used strategically by actors and organizations (Suddaby et al., 2010). The cultural historic turn is aligned with a research agenda on the 'uses of the past' in organizations (Wadhwani et al., 2018). Here again, however, the main interest has been with identity work by organizations (Basque and Langley, 2018; Oertel and Thommes, 2018), rather than identities in organizations. The neglect of historical research on identities in organizations can partly be explained by methodological concerns.

For contemporary research, data can be generated from interviews (e.g. Petriglieri and Obodaru, 2018) and ethnographic observations (e.g. Alvesson et al., 2008; Humphreys and Brown, 2002). For historical research on organizational identity long runs of official publications such as company magazines can be used (Anteby and Molnar, 2012; Basque and Langley, 2018). Narratives of identity change in the relatively recent past can be reconstructed from interviews, as with Rao et al.'s (2003) interviews with French chefs and gastronomic critics, supplemented with secondary sources for previous changes. But for researching identities in organizations over a longer period, or going further back in time, data cannot be generated and appropriate sources are less readily identifiable from a pre-prepared checklist. Some engagement with historical methods and source criticism therefore becomes necessary.

Historical Methods in Organization Studies

Historical methods have not been widely used to research identities in organizations. An indication of this is that in comprehensive reviews of the literature on identities in organizations (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2015, 2019), history is hardly mentioned apart from a brief historical account of the concept of identity. Likewise in Kipping and Üsdiken's (2014) survey of historical research in leading management and organization journals, of the eighty-two articles selected for review Rao et al. (2003) is the only one that is explicitly concerned with identities in organizations. Rao et al.'s (2003) highly cited study of the changing role identity of French chefs since the 1960s is not cited in reviews of identity scholarship (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2015, 2019), possibly because it is primarily located in the literature on institutional logics rather than identities. Still more surprisingly, in Kipping and Üsdiken's (2014) review of historical research there is only limited consideration of history in the study of organizational identity.

However, as with historical research in general, there is probably more historical research on identities in organizations than initially meets the eye (Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014). There are two reasons for this lack of visibility: first, historical research does not always announce itself as such in organization studies; and second, identity does not appear to have been taken up explicitly as a research agenda in business history, as is evident from numerous reviews of the field (cf. Jones and Zeitlin, 2008; Maclean et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2016). Nor is identity prevalent in the emerging field of management and organizational history (cf. Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; McLaren et al., 2015). To the extent that there is interest in identity, it is mainly focused on how an organization's identity is partly constituted by narratives of its past (Foster et al., 2017; Mordhorst and Schwarzkopf, 2017; Zundel et al., 2016). One challenge, therefore, is to identify historical research that touches upon questions of identity even if they are not explicitly stated.

As with case studies and ethnography, there is an emerging discussion about a typology of history in organization studies. Historical research on organizations can be characterized as either corporate history, analytically structured history, serial history, or ethnographic history (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Corporate history, defined as 'a holistic objectivist narrative of a named corporate entity' (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 260), is probably the type of history that a non-historian would most readily expect to read about an organization. Many large organizations commission historians to write their history, and these commissioned histories are highly variable in their quality. Scholarly works have been written by leading business historians with a corporate commission (e.g. Jones, 2005b), but as business historians are all too aware many other commissioned histories fulfil their commemorative purpose without any academic pretensions (Jones and Sluyterman, 2003). Researching identities in organizations is unlikely to require the production of anything like a corporate history, and corporate histories may be of limited value themselves insofar as identity is unlikely to be their main concern.

Alfred Chandler's classic *Strategy and Structure* (Chandler, 1962) remains the best starting point for considering how history can be written in which corporate entity is subordinate to the exploration of concepts. Even so, this form of conceptual or 'analytically structured history' (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 263) is still largely concerned with the construction of a narrative and is rarely focused on identities. Serial history represents the standard alternative to narrative history, as the application of familiar techniques, such as event history analysis, to a chronological series of 'repeatable facts' found in archival sources (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 265). There is a constant tension between the tendency for serial history to eclipse narrative in order to satisfy the requirements for methodological legitimacy, especially from quantitative researchers in organization studies, and the expectation that history should produce some sort of narrative. This tension has probably obscured the possibility for producing historical research informed by questions of identity that is neither narrative nor serial history.

Ethnographic History

The form of history that is most conducive to exploring identities can be described as 'ethnographic history', which is 'derived from reading historical sources "against the grain" in order to recover practices and meanings from organizations' though this tradition 'is under-represented in organization studies' (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 251). Ethnographic history combines an ethnographic sensibility for what life was actually like, with an immersion in primary historical sources. We will consider two exemplars to illustrate ethnographic history as a research strategy (Rowlinson et al., 2014) that although not explicitly concerned with identity, nevertheless deal with related issues and highlight methodological concerns for historical research on identities in organizations. In the first exemplar, Childs (2002) studied the operations of a gold mine in Brazil during the nineteenth century, owned by the British St. John d'el Rey Mining Company. Although the company had been the focus of a detailed study before (Eakin, 1989), and features as an example of a successful British multinational enterprise (Jones, 2005a: 46), Childs focuses on the life of the slaves who worked in the mine. In particular he discusses a ritual that demonstrates how oppressed people can 'construct identity to counter their subordination' (Childs, 2002: 61). In a ritualized display of power, as described from 1867, 'on Sundays nearly 1,500 slaves from the mine, separated by sex, lined up in columns in front of the Casa Grande (big house) for a ceremony called the Revista (review)' (Childs, 2002: 43). Childs highlights how the slaves expressed their pride and shame through the ritual, and took any opportunity they could took to ridicule their masters.

In the second exemplar of ethnographic history McKinlay (2002) explores the careers of Scottish bank clerks in the twenty years before 1914. The clerks often worked under close scrutiny from each other in branches with a small number of employees. This 'scrutiny intensified the self-policing of identity through daily self-presentation' (McKinlay, 2002: 602). Neither Childs (2002) nor McKinlay (2002) are explicitly interested in questions of identity in organizations, but both take what could be called self-consciously 'angular' theoretical perspectives (Megill, 2007: 110–11). Childs' analysis is informed by Bakhtin (1968), whereas McKinlay (2002) takes his cue from Foucault's (1977) forays into the archives, as he explains in a later methodological reflection (McKinlay, 2013b). What this means is that both Childs and, more pointedly, McKinlay, distance themselves from 'conventional' or default corporate history that is preoccupied with explaining the success, or occasionally the failure, of a particular organization from the sources found in its archives (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 267).

As exemplars of ethnographic history both Childs and McKinlay touch on methodological issues that are particularly salient for historical research on identities in organizations. First, they are both predicated upon what historians recognize as the 'serendipity' of finding particular sources that have survived in the archives (Jordanova, 2006: 37). Second, they both rely on reading sources 'against the grain', as historians put it (Rowlinson et al., 2014:

256), when they use sources to reveal meanings that were not intended. Source criticism can involve a close reading of what the sources do not say as well as what they do say, in order to construct an 'argument from silence' (Howell and Prevenier, 2001: 74).

A distinction can be made between different types of historical sources. The term 'sources' emphasizes that historians are reliant on finding archival records since they cannot construct data in the present (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 255). Narrative or literary sources are presented in a narrative form (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017), such as articles in company magazines. Remnants are the left-over remains from some process in the past. Strictly speaking a 'remnant' is said to be, 'any source which cannot have been exposed to subjective distortion' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017: 137). But in practice 'a source can be both a remnant and a narrating source', for example 'minutes constitute a remnant of a meeting', as evidence that it took place and who was in attendance, 'but also a narrating source *about* the same meeting', summarizing a discussion about a decision that was made (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017: 138).

Remnants, such as the records of decisions taken in board minutes, might be best for tracing the actual course of events, and the statistical records of production, sales, and revenue are invaluable for assessing the performance of an organization, as would be expected for a narrative corporate history. Legal documents, such as wills, mortgages, share certificates, or transfers of ownership are the closest equivalent in business to the diplomatic sources prized by professional political historians, 'which document an existing legal situation or create a new one' (Howell and Prevenier, 2001: 21). These sources may be useful in the sense of establishing the basis for identity in organizations. Feminist researchers, for example, have used women's wills and share registers to establish that women made up a significant proportion of UK investors during the nineteenth century (Rutterford and Maltby, 2007). But researchers turn to women's correspondence and novels to figure out what share ownership might have meant for women (Maltby and Rutterford, 2006; Rutterford and Maltby, 2006). Likewise, remnants are unlikely to provide sufficient evidence to infer identities in organizations from the past, as opposed to narrative sources.

Almost all organizations produce narrative sources, such as company magazines or published histories that express their own identities (Delahaye et al., 2009), and these can be analysed using concepts from history such as invented tradition (Rowlinson and Hassard, 1993), or imagined community (Heller and Rowlinson, 2019), as well as the familiar concept of organizational identity (Hatch and Schultz, 2017). Narrative sources, especially company magazines, often give information about individuals, allowing further research into their identities. However, as both Childs (2002) and McKinlay (2002) illustrate, the narrative sources that might be more appropriate for looking at identities in organizations may be more idiosyncratic, with little prospect of being able to make a checklist of what to look for before going into an archive. Childs' account of slaves at the gold mine in Brazil relies heavily on inferences from a fifty-page *Circular to the Proprietors of the St. John d'el Rey Mining Company* that was sent out to stockholders in 1850, assuring them of the 'humane and generous . . . measures already adopted . . . to render them [the slaves] as contented and happy as men can be expected to be, whose lot is to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow' (quoted in Childs, 2002: 48). Childs cites the *Circular* over twenty times, and it is clearly an intriguing narrative source. But the *Circular* is the outcome of a particular process that arose in the St. John d'el Rey Mining Company, so it would be difficult to say researchers should look out for similar sources in other archives.

Childs' (2002) reliance on the *Circular* along with the company's annual reports and minutes of board meetings illustrates several aspects of what historians call 'the silence of the archives' (Decker, 2013). Firstly, these sources are written about the slaves, and the voice of the slaves themselves is not recorded. Their thoughts and feelings can only be inferred from what the slaveholders wrote about them, which is difficult to read without irony.

Beyond the interpretation of surviving sources, there is the serendipity of their survival. The St. John d'el Rey Mining Company Archive is held by the University of Texas at Austin, and as such was available for Childs' (2002) research. There is no particular reason to think that the slaves at the mine would have been very different to slaves at other mines, but the distinctive British character of the company explains the nature of the sources and why they were kept. The lives of other slaves went unrecorded, or at least are unrecorded in such accessible sources.

Clerical Workers

McKinlay's (2002) account of bank clerks does include the actual voice of at least one clerk from the archives, in the form of a ledger filled with cartoons drawn by one of the clerks who worked for the bank from 1899 to 1930. The cartoons made fun of the clerk's colleagues and the bank manager, who was portrayed as Napoleon. McKinlay (2013b) advises researchers to compensate for the silence of the archives on the subaltern, the neglected subordinates in organizations, by looking out for instances where the subaltern disrupts accepted knowledge, as in the cartoons drawn by the bank clerk. From visiting bank archives ourselves, it appears to be common knowledge that bored bank clerks whiled away their time writing or drawing in the margins of the bank ledgers, but archival marginalia are rarely considered significant in conventional corporate history.

McKinlay has extended his research on bank clerks with a detailed account of Mr Notman, a bank clerk who was overlooked for promotion and was refused permission to marry by the Commercial Bank of Scotland several times between 1934 and 1938 (McKinlay, 2013a). Notman eventually won a legal challenge against the bank's refusal to let him marry, which was a watershed in changing the degree of control banks exercised over their clerks' lives and careers. McKinlay's research demonstrates how telling the story of a particular event can draw upon a range of sources, such as newspaper reports and court records, as well as the internal staff records of the Commercial Bank of Scotland, and the minutes of meetings at the National Union of Bank Employees where his case was discussed. But this was a rare if significant instance where the lives of bank clerks featured in national newspapers.

McKinlay's research on bank clerks contributes to a rich seam of historical research that touches on the identities of clerks in the UK, albeit that the literature on identities in organizations is hardly referred to by historians. The effort of managers to prove their masculinity in post-war Britain was brilliantly researched through long in-depth interviews by Roper (1994), who highlights the richness of the life history method for looking at subjectivities in the past. But the life history method is necessarily restricted to the relatively recent past, with Roper's research starting from 1945, almost forty years before his book was published.

For an earlier period Heller's (2011, 2008, forthcoming) research on British male clerical workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century illustrates the variety of sources and how they could be read in relation to identities, even though identity is not his explicit focus. Heller notices that narrative corporate sources such as company magazines change in form over time (Heller and Rowlinson, 2018, 2019). In the late nineteenth century some of the earliest company magazines, such as the *London County Council Staff Gazette*, were actually written by clerks themselves, albeit with approval from their employers. In these magazines the clerks, who were still predominantly men, expressed pride in their work and a sense of public service. The satisfaction of the clerks writing in their staff magazines can be contrasted with the general dissatisfaction expressed by novelists and journalists who recounted their experiences of working as clerks during the same period. George Bernard Shaw, for example, worked as a clerk in Dublin for four years (Heller, 2011: 79).

Heller (2011: 15) demonstrates how oral history interviews collected in the 1970s, which are held in the British Library, can be revisited to give an insight into an earlier period. These sources are a valuable counterweight to the didactic tone of more traditional primary sources such as government and company reports, company magazines, and their counterpart trade union magazines. Another source Heller (2011: 16) uses extensively as a counterweight to more conventional sources are five diaries written by London clerks. Only one of these was published, with the rest held by various local government archive collections in and around London. Again, it is difficult to say how such sources can be found, other than the serendipity of looking through the catalogues of local archives with the skills of a historian who knows what to look for.

Novels are a rich source for considering the identities of clerks. Heller's (forthcoming) discussion of the rites and rituals of clerical life begins with an illustration from the classic comic novel *The Diary of a Nobody*, by the brothers George and Weedon Grossmith (1998 [1892]), of how the family and suburban life of the clerk was seen as theatre. Theatre and performance lay at the heart of the Grossmiths' farcical account of the mishaps and minor adventures of Charles Pooter, senior clerk at the City firm Perkupps and proud tenant of 'The Laurels', Brickfield Terrace, Holloway, North London. Novels also illustrate the dilemmas of masculinity for clerks. For manual working-class men physical strength was seen as a defining feature of their work. Middle-class men felt that their work lacked the requirement for physical strength, but aspired to be free from dependence and servility. They were also better paid, which enabled individuals to exert power and status.

The clerical worker was trapped between these two ideals of masculinity. He was servile and told what to do by other men, he purportedly produced nothing of value, being seen as pushing paper rather than producing goods, and he was depicted as being weak in body and stature (Heller, 2008: 604). Clerks are said to have suffered a crisis of masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was compounded by social ridicule. This crisis was played out in the early twentieth-century British novel, *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk*, by Shan Bullock (1907), a former clerk and civil servant. When Thorne was told by his wife that that he was capable of being a man as well as a clerk, his answer bore testament to the crisis of masculinity that male clerks supposedly felt:

> Ah, but can we Nell? That's just the point. Don't we lose our manhood? What do we see of real life? What do we know of the world? What do we know of anything? . . . We're a small breed. We aren't real men. We don't do men's work. Pen drivers – miserable little pen drivers – fellows in black coats with inky fingers and shiny seats on their trousers – that's what we are. Oh you may laugh, Nell, but it's true all the same. Think of crossing t's and dotting i's all day long. No wonder bricklayers and omnibus drivers have contempt for us. We haven't even health. That fellow turning an organ outside is more of a man.
>
> (Bullock, 1907: 275–6)

There are overlaps between Heller's (2011) historical research on clerks and Wild's (2006) account of how clerks were portrayed in English literature, focused on London between 1880 and 1939. Wild argues that novels about clerks, mainly set in London, constitute a genre of English literature that has been overlooked in literary history. In the genre of the clerical novel the clerk, almost exclusively male, was the protagonist and his home and office were centre-stage. Wild looks at a range of novelists such as Arnold Bennett, Walter Besant, the Grossmiths, Jerome K. Jerome, William Pett Ridge, Shan Bullock, Frank Swinnerton, and E. M. Forster whose fiction focused on London clerks, and was widely read when it first appeared. While some writers such as Gissing and Forster created narratives of emasculation, in which clerks were mocked for their intellectual and cultural pretensions, there were other more affectionate portrayals of clerks from former clerical workers such as Pett Ridge and Swinnerton. Wild also points to the emergence of a new type of clerk in the Edwardian clerical novel, who was portrayed as physically strong, capable, singular in his ambition, and successful in his career. All of this highlights the potential value of novels as historical sources for considering identities.

The Silence of the Archives

The idea of the silence of the archives derives from post-colonial studies, and the question of whether the subaltern can speak (Spivak, 1988). This rather dense argument on the nature of the archives kept by British colonial bureaucracies translates to corporate archives, where the construction and survival of sources reflects the priorities of directors rather than employees. Archives cannot simply be reported, especially as research moves away from conventional corporate history towards an ethnographic approach dealing with questions of identity. As Decker explains, it is as if the archive itself has a voice, and the first archive that spoke to her, from a British multinational operating in West Africa during the 1950s, 'was unmistakably racist, sexist, elitist, Anglo-Saxon and of a bygone era where one referred to one's peers and employees as "chaps" and said things like "cheerio" without any irony' (Decker, 2013: 167; 2010).

The silences of corporate archives are echoed in all the sources discussed so far. The prevalence of research on the identity of male clerks, for example, reflects the greater surveillance of these workers, but also their propensity to produce narrative accounts of their own lives. There appear to be less abundant sources for women in clerical jobs, or for manual workers. There are silences in the classic accounts of the life and work of manual workers, such as the portrayal of decorators in Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. The book was the product of a lean, sober, and bookish strain in working-class socialism (Shipley, 1983: 31). This 'atheist-puritan tradition' was always 'ill at ease with popular pastimes like boxing, beer drinking, dancing and football' (Shipley, 1983: 31), which suggests that identities which conflicted with this tradition were unlikely to be portrayed favourably. Harker's (2003) detailed study of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* considers whether it fulfilled the author's stated intention 'to present, in the form of an interesting story, a faithful picture of working-class life – more especially of those engaged in the Building trades' (quoted in Harker, 2003: 48). Harker identifies the fictional town of Mugsborough in the novel as Hastings and checks with contemporary sources such as newspapers to date the setting of events. Overall, Harker confirms details in the novel such as hours of work and general standard of living. But, more interestingly from the point of view considering identities, he accepts the implication of the novel that 'the ideology of the nuclear family' would have been hegemonic in Mugsborough (Harker, 2003: 51).

The inner life of less literate professions than clerks is elusive, and subject to the vagaries of historians. Rose's (2002) highly cited book on *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* appears to be at pains to establish that a small number of voracious British autodidacts from the early twentieth century read more than the average undergraduate in the early twenty-first century. This is a book that romanticizes the atheist-puritan tradition in working-class life. However, Rose (2002: 418) also notes that there was some truth in Lord Salisbury's widely quoted sneer that the new journalism of the early twentieth century was 'Written by office boys for office boys', as opportunities increased for clerks to find outlets for their writing. Thus, even in a book about the working class in general, clerks appear as the most prevalent non-elite readers as well as writers. Subaltern identities are subordinated in almost all sources, from archival remnants such as board minutes, through to narrative sources such as novels.

Summary and Conclusion

Historical research on identity in organizations brings history and organization studies together and exposes the distinctive character of both. The craft nature of historical research means that historians are not expected to articulate their methods in the same way as social scientists, at least not for qualitative narrative history. However, the historic turn in organization studies has led historical researchers to express their methods in a style that is more appropriate for social science journals, with a separate and readily identifiable methods section, and author–date references instead of endnotes giving details of sources (Rowlinson et al., 2014). There is appropriate attention to historical methods in at least one of the leading textbooks on research methods for business and management (Bryman et al., 2011), as well as reflexive accounts of historical research (Adorisio and Mutch, 2013; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017; Decker, 2013; Rowlinson, 2005), and guides from historians

(Kipping et al., 2014; Lipartito, 2014; Yates, 2014). This leads to an expectation that in the context of organization studies qualitative historical research should be presented with an explication of methods that situates the research strategy in relation to alternatives, along similar lines as the presentation of ethnographic and case study research.

Increasingly, it is expected that historical research in organization studies should meet the criteria for 'dual integrity' (Maclean et al., 2016), in other words that it should fulfil the requirements for research in both history and social science. This means that details of all sources need to be given in order to fulfil the 'verification logic' of history, as well as the details of how the sources were found and turned into data in order to fulfil the 'replication logic' of management and organization studies (Rowlinson et al., 2014: 258). In practice, the journals in each field have their own expectations expressed through styles guides and the norms of reviewing, and more particularly through genres of writing (Yates, 2014).

The research by historians discussed in this chapter, which has mostly been published in history journals, could meet the expectations for research in management and organization studies journals if it was more explicitly engaged with questions of identity. The difficulty is that the rich narrative sources that have been found for looking at the identity of clerks, such as diaries and novels, might not be suitable for examining other professions or in different time periods. The location of sources, such as the clerks' diaries in archives, provides for verification logic, but there is less replication logic in terms of explaining how such sources can be found in the first place or how they can be read against the grain.

The research on clerks in London and Scotland that we have highlighted lends itself to considerations of identity and is indicative of how research on other occupational groups could proceed. Recent research on entrepreneurship, for example, highlights the value of alternative sources. Reveley (2010) analyses an 'entrepreneur's narrative identity' through reading his autobiography. Reveley highlights the potential for using narrative sources when he notes that although, 'the autobiography does not meet the business historian's need for objective data . . . it is precisely the access an autobiography affords to its author's subjectivity that makes it an invaluable source'. This allows Reveley to examine the 'personal self-identity' of an entrepreneur. Amatori (2016) also touches on questions of identity in his discussion of the short memoir written by Leopoldo Pirelli, who was CEO of the eponymous rubber company from 1965 to 1992. Popp and Holt (2013) consider the 'narrative identity' of entrepreneurship through the letters written to each other by John and Elizabeth Shaw, a husband and wife who were involved in setting up a business trading hardware in the North of England in the nineteenth century. They offer two readings of these sources, one which confirms the conventional view of entrepreneurship, and the other which ruptures such a neat interpretation.

Organization theorists have sometimes been seduced by the idea of systematically analysing long-running periodicals, such as company magazines, to explore organizational identity. However, the vagaries of rooting around in archives, the serendipity required to find idiosyncratic sources, and the silence of the archives, may have dissuaded organization theorists from looking at identities in organizations from the past. Having highlighted the potential richness of historical sources, we hope that organizational researchers will be more likely to consider such sources to explore identities.

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