Using history in the creation of organizational identity

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Using history in the creation of organizational Identity Mike Zundel, Robin Holt & Andrew Popp   Using history in the creation of organizational identity

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Organizations frequently draw on history as a resource, for instance when attempting to establish or maintain identity claims. However, little has been done to review the advantages and problems of such use of history and it is not clear how using history impacts on the appreciation of history itself and, ultimately, on the insights that may be gained when engaging with the past. To begin to address these questions we distinguish two related uses of history as a resource for organizational identity: as a means of committing external audiences and, as a way of finding inward commitment. We theorize these two uses by drawing on speech act theory to develop a taxonomy of uses of history and to elaborate the opportunities and challenges that come when historical narratives are fashioned in the service of identity. We conclude with a further insight gained from speech act theory that suggests an engagement with history that requires sensitivity to prevailing conventions at the moment of these historical acts. We argue that appreciation of asynchronous historical conditions and contexts affords new insights through the difference these pose to current and instrumental concerns that otherwise guide the fashioning and interpretation of historical 'facts.'

There are differences in how historians and organizations understand history. Where historians strive for rigorous narrative reconstructions of the past (Rowlinson, Hassard, and Decker 2014), organizations often use the past as a resource, carrying the evidential burden more lightly (Suddaby, Foster, and Quinn Trank 2010). As resource, history can induce coherence in times of crisis, uncertainty and challenge (Chreim 2005; Ravasi and Schultz 2006; Whetten 2006); help clarity of communication at moments demanding focus (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000; Taylor and Freer 2002); facilitate learning (de Holan and Phillips 2004); and provide guidance in the formulation of strategy (Parker 2002).

Organizational uses of history are most often apparent in the context of organizational identity. Creating and maintaining identity is becoming more difficult yet increasingly important in an economic environment where liquidity is as much an ontological condition as it is a term referring to the availability of money (Bauman 2000). Continually changing consumer brands, shifting company affiliations, rapid dissemination of stories through global media, mobile careers, the politicization of ethnic status and religious practice, dramatic shifts in the nature of our natural environment, and rapid technological change, all conspire in making identity an inimitable and valuable, but also inherently dynamic phenomenon (Giddens 1991; Gioia et al. 2000; Pratt and Foreman 2000; Brown 2001).

Faced with these environmental forces and demands it is not surprising to find

organizations marshalling historical resources to forge identities and actively manage the perceptions of internal and external audiences (Gioia et al. 2010; Howard-Grenville, Metzger, and Meyer 2013) or find inspiration for strategic deliberation concerning what the organization is about (Oliver 1991; Ravasi and Schultz 2006).

History and identity may be particularly strongly linked given the centrality of narrative and storytelling to identity formation (Ricoeur 1991). However, little work has been done to conceptualize organizational uses of history. First, how can history become productive when used by organizations in the service of establishing and maintaining an identity and what kinds of advantages and problems may such use entail? Second, how do instrumental uses of history impact upon our appreciation of history itself: is it diminished as a resource configured by utility? To begin to address these questions, we distinguish two uses of history to create identity. In what we call Use 1, history is used to address the perceived expectations and demands placed on the organization by its environment. The primary audience addressed is external to the organization. In such 'mimetic' (Scott 2001) endeavors, the production of 'rhetorical histories' (Suddaby et al. 2010) is common. These are less attempts at objectively collecting and analyzing historical evidence than interpretations of 'malleable' facts (Gioia, Corley, and Fabbri 2002, 622) as a means of conveying to wider audiences a reputational sense of what an organization is or is becoming (Gioia et al. 2000, 71). The considerable space devoted to corporate history on the website of Hewlett Packard (http:// www8.hp.com/us/en/hp-information/about-hp/history/history.html) is one such highly purposeful example of reputation building. In what we call Use 2, history is used to create inward commitment, providing inspiration to employees about what the organization can be. For instance, Schultz and Hernes (2013, 6) argue that, in attempting to 'revitalize' itself, the Danish toy manufacturer Lego deliberately invoked textual, material, and oral memories to reconstruct its identity, garner inner commitment and re-configure its strategic direction. We draw on speech act theory to conceptualize these uses. Speech act theory attends to how language performs, it is possible to 'do things with words' – speech *acts* (Austin 1962/1975, 221). In management settings, the performative power of language has been investigated in the context of shifting professional labels, from administrator, to manager, to leader, and the wider assumptions and expectations that are thereby invoked (Sillince 1999; Learmonth 2005). Similarly, it has been noted how speech becomes integral to organizational coordination, for instance in terms of how individuals feel motivated by others' utterances, and how their understanding of their own positions and roles, and the expectations tied to these, emerge from communicative exchange (Weick and Roberts 1993; Ford and Ford 1995; Quinn and Dutton 2005; Sillince and Mueller 2007). Even when communication is unclear it still acts, for example when people use ambiguous statements to afford others latitude in supporting the status quo, or to facilitate emergent processes of strategic action (Sillince, Jarzabkowski, and Shaw 2012).

If speech acts, then speech act theory is not only a useful way of theorizing the performative role of history in the context of organizational identity, it also challenges the ideal of history being a collection of 'existing evidence' awaiting discovery. In being stated and discussed, historical facts become prominent, but

often in the company of utterances whose meaning comes from the act of speaking itself, for example promising support for someone's position. To declare oneself for one side or other of an argument over strategic direction, say, often requires a propositional authority as though the declaration could be verified, yet such a commitment cannot be true or false (Austin 1962/1975, 223). Those making the promise of support are doing rather than saying something, and as such are historically placed against backgrounds of prevailing conditions and other commitments that are themselves entirely historical in nature (Flores 1998). Speech act theory is therefore sensitive to a complex process of interaction between truth, conduct, value and situation, historical facts cannot live alone, and history cannot be studied as though they do. Using speech act theory we find organizational identity emerging from recursive historicizing exchanges in which the organization, understood as a social actor, is continually subjected first to environmental forces that give rise to meaning-giving backgrounds (Gioia et al. 2010), and second to the subtle, imaginative, and even accidental alterations made possible through the specific and unique occasions of language use. Our study elaborates the aforementioned two uses of history. First to gain commitment with external audiences, and second to gain internal commitment, through explicitly considering the meaning–making backgrounds against which historical speech acts are constructed and understood. Further, we set both uses of history in relation to two possible historical sources: either the organization's own history or wider historical patterns. Both Use 1 and 2 begin with problems and concerns perceived in the present, against a background of conventions and understandings that make sense to actors steeped in and sensitized to current organizational demands and expectations (c.f. Skinner 1970). For example, Suddaby, Foster, and Quinn Trank (2010, 156), in their outline of rhetorical productions of history, refer to an outfit called 'The History Factory,' whose value proposition consists in developing historical accounts to, *inter alia*, aide leadership, diversity management, and negotiate a raft of strategic aims. It is easy to see how in such deliberate processes of history facts themselves can become eclipsed by present-day demands and intentions. Uses of history become pragmatic, instrumental, and abstract; extracting history from its setting, subjugating it to the interpretive and purposeful frames that govern contemporary concerns. Nietzsche (1873–1876/1995, 95) ponders what would happen if we widen this purposeful frame as far as possible, simply asking: 'if we could at least learn how to pursue history better for the purpose of life!'. Uses 1 and 2 are always set within the limits of contemporary frames of understanding, unable to exceed or revise them because they are always already geared toward the performative end of acquiring or divesting assets efficiently (least cost) and effectively (maximal productive output). Nietzsche's insistence that history may address the 'purposes of life' indicates there may be more to be had from engagement with history, throwing up a third way that avoids current interests and problems and instead immerses studies in the events, characters, and background contexts that gave rise to historical conventions and demands *of the time*. Use 3 is not merely a hermeneutic exercise, a hankering after interpretations of 'what it was like' (c.f. Kittler 1986/1999; Ernst 2013). In addition, Use 3 garners awareness of the historical mediation of commitments, affects and identities in speech acts *as they then existed* and uses this awareness in counterpoise to how we now live. To study

historical events, ideas and characters with sensitivity to their own contextual setting can expose historical study to complex and sometimes wholly alien conventions (Skinner 1970, 136), offering insight into how we live now precisely because of their asynchronicity with current interpretive spaces. Use 3 challenges a widespread performative view in business and management studies that knowledge should be directly and obviously useful (Rowlinson et al. 2010, 76) by encouraging curiosity, speculation, and a concern for history that simply reveals possibility.

Scholars have long been interested organizations' relationships with the past. Walsh and Ungson's (1991) study of organizational memory, for instance, accords the past a highly stable and hyper-available status. Yet scratch the surface and this idea of a stable past becomes contested. Even at the level of gathering raw historical evidence there is acknowledgment of an inherent looseness to historical events. Rowlinson et al. (2014) describe how the seemingly objective histories of organizations generated by academics often depend upon a gaining access to archives, which involve compromises. The archive is not a neutral space; it represents long-term processes of exclusion, excision, disposal, censorship, categorization, sorting, ordering, and ranking (Trouillot 1995); and, quite often, the subjective imposition of linearity and continuity by glossing over discontinuities, gaps and absences, silence and ruptures (Ernst 2013, 113).

Many studies in the field of organizational identity appreciate history as a scene of multiple pasts available through texts whose representation and evocation of events, characters, and ideas constitute the very history 'about' which they are being gathered (Suddaby et. al. 2010). Some lament that historical narratives are mere 'verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences' (White 1978, 42). Others reject the encroaching of subjectivity on different grounds, whenever historical artifacts are taken to be 'carriers of experiences and meanings' because the past can no longer be re-enacted (Ernst 2013, 133). This relationship to the past as a subject of change finds the accuracy of any historical account giving way to the efficacy of using historical narratives to attain particular ends; ends governed by preferences, blind spots and the prevailing zeitgeist. Norman (1991) elaborates on this 'interpretative violence,' acknowledging how in historical narrative facts are selected, and closure achieved by weaving together beginnings and endings. Historical narratives, governed by the needs of those using history, create 'unity and coherence that are … foreign to the past itself' (Norman (1991, 121). Emplotted accounts of the past resist standard forms of verification and demur from being simple representations of what once was. Their primary purpose is as 'practically oriented attempts to reshape our collective understanding of the past' displaying 'discursive virtues such as coherence, comprehensiveness, and followability' (Norman 1991, 128, 130).

This understanding of history carries three implications for its conceptualization as an organizational resource. First, historical events, images, and figures are attributed a specific utility; they are selected for their compelling authenticity which stems from the rhetorical power of 'the past,' through which actors might better elicit

emotive commitment from different audiences. Second, the motives for selecting and interpreting historical facts lie in the present. Durepos et al. (2008, 67) argue that organizational histories 'cannot be divorced from the context and atmosphere in which the history is tailored,' and thereby emphasize the influencing role of the organizational context in which any historical knowledge claim is situated, and from out of which historical narratives are purposefully constructed. Third, the degree of interpretive freedom correlates with levels of control over historical sources and their archival reconfiguration (including the erasure, discarding, and elimination of sources), as well as the scope and subjective charging of the historical narrative, either narrowly focused on the organization's past, or tapping into collective historical events. All three of these implications gather around questions of organizational identity. It is in studies of organizational identity that the active use of history is most apparent. History most obviously acts when being invoked to create or recreate an identified sense of organizational presence, direction, and ambition. The identity acts as a rhetorical means to gather and manage audiences of the organization, its authority is legitimated through a strategic concern for current and emerging problems facing the organization, and it is secured by appeal to earlier sources, either those of the organization or its wider associations. It is then, through an appreciation of organizational identity, that we might approach the questions of how history is used productively, and how this influences our sense of history itself.

The importance of identity in enlisting commitment from external and internal stakeholders has been documented on individual and organizational levels (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Baumeister and Leary 1995; Hatch and Schultz 2002). Public commitment can have tangible, commercial effects. Echoing institutional theorists' emphasis on category membership as a means of inferring legitimacy (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005), Zuckerman (1999) has shown that a firm's fate is crucially determined by its reputation as a player in a specific product market, and that firms lacking sufficiently stable identities are penalized by their audiences. Similarly, the success of business strategies in start-up companies (Baron, Hannan, and Burton 1999), innovation decisions (Rao 2001), or resource utilization (Oliver 1997) are arguably strongly connected with legitimacy, and thus with how others perceive the desirability, properness, and appropriateness of the organizational identity emerging from such initiatives (Suchman 1995, 574). A substantive identity (Seidl 2005) is also integral to internal alignment, allowing members to shape their commitment and involvement by asking questions such as 'Who are we becoming?' (Gioia et al. 2000, 76), and thus aide the interpretation of information, problems, and roles across the organization's structure (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997).

Current debates focus on the stability of such a construct. Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition of identity as a central, distinctive, and enduring organizational feature, while setting the stage for ensuing debates, is increasingly critiqued. The static view of identity as unitary and agreed has attracted numerous critics latching onto the possibility there is no substance to identity outside of its being claimed in discursive settings. If, however, self-conception is tied intimately to its public expression, more dynamic understandings of identity are required (Gioia et al. 2000). Organizational identity studies have therefore begun to investigate processes of

identity construction and management (Gioia et al. 2010, 2013), raising interest in hybrid and multiple identities (Pratt and Foreman 2000): how, for example, having differing identities for different audiences creates conflict in commitment, notably if apparent contradictions are not actively managed (Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997), or how organizations react in the aftermath of accidents or scandals and the release of information contravening the desired public image (Warren 2007). Historical narratives are often involved in this dynamic construction. Following our earlier arguments, this use is informed by their emotive power and legitimacy with differing audiences, by the nature of the present situation into and from which an organizational identity is being woven, and with regard for the malleability and control over the historical sources from which an identity might take form. In identity creation historical narratives are spoken and written as part of a performance; history acts.

Identity and speech act theory

To help form an understanding of how historical narratives act we turn to speech act theory. Speech act theory emerged from the ordinary language philosophical movement centered on philosophers J.L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle and Peter Strawson. Studying how words are used in the stream of life, these philosophers studied associated expression, situation, and meaning in everyday activity. Their particular concern was for utterances (including those inscribed into documents, artifacts, and symbols). What interested them was how utterances, rather than reporting on states of affairs (language was not a medium for representing things), were the things themselves. An apology, for example, binds two actors into a relationship, creating commitments containing expectations as well as duties, leading, in due course, to new affects, social arrangements, and identities (Austin 1962/1975; Flores 1998, 353). Saying 'sorry' does not correspond to a state of affairs (i.e. it is not reporting on events or some inner feeling), rather it constitutes the occurrence (it is the event). As such it is a performance, bringing others into rule-bound structures by which the performance is judged good or bad, or in Austin's (1962/1975, 224–225) words, felicitous or infelicitous. Our everyday language is peppered with such utterances, indeed so much so that we might call most ordinary speech performative. We make promises to one another, we commit, seeding expectations that become habits: punctuality, courtesy, economic contracting, scientific methods, judicial procedures, technical instruction, executive agreements, and so on. Indeed the structures and efforts that mark out what organization is, has been, and might become are created through these forms of performative utterance judged within wider conventional structures (Cooren 2004; Llewellyn 2008; Thomas, Sargent, and Hardy 2014). Here an utterance (talk, instruction, document, or symbol) 'acts' not on its own, but creates commitments amid different actors in various relationships and situations (Cooren 2004, 382), that through time coalesce as organization.

The felicity of any utterance is a socially negotiated process where the joint action of actors continually modulates meaning, set within often long-standing traditions. Infelicitous utterances take different forms. Firstly they misfire. Saying sorry without an addressee. The misfire means the act simply does not occur. Secondly there can

be misunderstandings. Apologizing for a successful and perfectly legitimate tackle in a ball game for example, or to a machine, or doing it repeatedly so as to dilute completely the effect. Thirdly they can be unhappy: being forced to say sorry and genuflect to a tyrant. Fourthly they can be insincere. Saying sorry when you deliberately blundered into someone, which is an act of ironic aggression, and, as with unhappy infelicitous acts, can often colored by attendant affects of insecurity and resentment (Austin 1962/1975, 225–229). There are no hard and fast distinctions between the forms. For example, if a corporation apologizes for pollution caused by an industrial accident the apology becomes sticky, as reconciliation is hard to come by and the prospects for apology, though met formally, can somehow unravel in misfire (for example, can a corporate form experience the necessary shame to enact an apology?) or unhappiness and insincerity (for example, when the apology is used egregiously to mitigate possible legal damages or in an attempt to elicit sympathy for the corporation's senior management as they wrestle with the aftermath while feigning ignorance of the offending event). Yet further opacity emerges because within such a situation it is hard to discern performative utterances from factual claims. Trying to parse locutionary statements (knowledgeable verdicts and appraisals such as the environmental extent of the pollution) from illocutionary acts (performances such as apologizing in different institutional environments – to local communities, legal and regulatory bodies, stock exchanges, etc.) is itself a process of gathering commitment from stakeholders with differing interests. The distinction is possible, but moving from verdicts and appraisals toward commitments is always accompanied by ambiguity, and often this ambiguity exploited, reveled in even (Austin 1962/1975, 234).

So to effect organizing the utterances have to hit home, their felicity is a collective achievement of committing others, a process that absorbs statements of fact as aspects of a performance. Are the knowledge claims accurate, germane, exaggerated, otiose, cruel, fair, clear, and so on? Speech act theory finds statements carrying factual value and utterances carrying use value sharing common performative features, the two joined by what Cavell (2002, xix) notices as perlocutionary affect. The upshot is speech acts become a melange of locution (knowledge statements), illocution (forceful utterances in concrete situations), and perlocutionary effects (anxiety, indifference, excitement).

Identity and commitment

Considering organizational uses of history to create identity, the performative force of such speech acts populate an interpretive space that lies beyond the immediate act itself; speech is acted out in wider grammatical and non-grammatical, historically evolving contexts (Davies and Harre 1990; Calas and Smircich 1991). It is because of this sensitivity to context and effect, without losing perspective on actors' saying and doing things, that speech act theory helps explain why it is so difficult to establish and maintain identities. The (illocutionary) force of a speech act depends not only on what is said, or by extension, on the artifact or symbol employed, but also on the lineage and constancy of largely tacit background conventions (Skinner 1970) that

afford the act its resonance; event, utterance, and emotion gather together and vie with one another, to secure commitments in varying contexts. The distinction between fact and value is inherently undecided, the force of an act is not equivalent to its meaning as the illocutionary and perlocutionary forces shape the commitments by which any historical event or figure might be said to matter, and how. Historically speaking, Foreman and Whetten (2002) highlight that while there are widely diverging definitions of commitment in relation to organizational identity, studies looking to the past have largely focused on mixtures of attitude, split between, on the one hand, emotional or affective attachments elicited through tradition or inspiration, and on the other, more calculative commitments to mutually advantageous behaviors linked to perceived interests (Johnson, Chang, and Yang 2010). These commitments can be internally or externally directed.

Externally, commitments are secured through acts like publicity or lobbying, as well as reputation garnered by the efficient and effective provision of useful goods and services. Salmon (2010) for example, argues many organizations have become successful at implicating their customers in the 'story' of the organization and its outputs so that their lives become mutually implicated (Belk and Tumbat 2005). Organizations face a double bind however: they have to maintain an identity stable enough to warrant sustained involvement from others such as suppliers, customers, regulators (Zuckerman 1999), while remaining alive to a shifting multiplicity of standards and expectations demonstrated by these others, all of which demand (differing forms of) adherence.

Internally, high levels of commitment are connected with a secure and stable workforce, effectiveness, and goal attainment (Randall 1987). Relatedly it has been argued that decision- makers such as strategists prefer working in conditions of stability and predictability (Zucker 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983), and when faced with dynamic and uncertain contexts they often exert effort in establishing the 'illusion or reality of control and stability over future organizational outcomes' (Oliver 1991, 170). Moreover, the sense of distinctiveness and continuity arising from a stable and coherent internal identity can allow an organization to sustain itself in the face of necessary adaptations to external forces (Whetten 2006). Finally, in newer firms or industries internal identity work remains pivotal in alleviating the ambiguity associated with what is being done (Clegg, Rhodes, and Kornberger 2007). So even where it is accepted that conversations concerning the nature of an organization's identity can be productive, it is often argued that internal agreement, and a stable view of an organization's basic, enduring and distinctive values aids productivity (Voss, Cable, and Voss 2006). However, increasingly dynamic organizational contexts (Giddens 1991), changing work patterns (Adam 1992), as well as more precarious contractual arrangements combined with increased professionalism and mobility among the workforce, have made internal commitments in the form of enduring bonds between employees and organization, as well as between the organization and its external environment, more difficult to establish and, especially, to maintain over longer periods of time (Grant, Dutton, and Rosso 2008). A further problem is the prevailing disagreement about what constitutes such commitment in the first place. Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield (2012,

137) argue for a narrow conception, including only those bonds in which employees 'make a conscious choice to care about and dedicate him/herself' to an organizational target.' This definition downplays the affective/attitudinal aspect of a committed relationship; others have highlighted that in addition to such explicit reflexive awareness, commitment depends strongly on pre-reflexive and often tacit aspects of meaning-making (Kuhn 2006).

This latter, softer and more holistic perspective on commitment, whether external or internal, suggests the importance of explicit and implicit understandings an individual holds about an organization, and that these can be influenced by the organization's internal and external image. For instance, in a study of social workers, Carmeli (2005) found that the perceived external prestige influenced the affective relationship of employees with the organization. Similarly, Sinha, Inkson, and Barker (2012) report a case where the appointment of a 'celebrity CEO' led to overcommitting by and over-confidence in internal and external audiences, that expressed themselves through intricate interactions between decision-makers, intermediaries, stakeholders, and the media in a subsequent strategic acquisition. This wider definition of commitment chimes with the premises of speech act theory that emphasize the importance of the interpretive spaces provided by conventions that make up the background against which actors can first begin to make sense of and judge factual claims, utterances, artifacts, and symbols, so that performance can elicit commitment (Skinner 1970; Flores 1998).

Two uses of history as speech acts

Following this general outline of the workings of speech acts, and the role of commitments in organizational identity, we turn to the more specific question of how using history, as a speech act, becomes an organizational resource in securing commitment. We begin discussing two uses to which historical speech acts are put for organizational identity: to generate external, reputational commitment (Use 1) or to attain internal commitment (Use 2).

Use 1: use of history for outward commitment

History provides a source of events and characters that can be used in creating an identity (Gioia et al. 2000, 2002; Suddaby et al. 2010), which can then be played back into what counts as the organizations' history, what it stands for and how current audiences might further contribute to its development (Deal and Kennedy 2000). Because they are selective, these uses can be as oblique as they are direct (Skinner 1970, 25). For example, the Academy of Management's website highlights an existence dating back to 1936 (http://aom.org/About- AOM/History.aspx) and with this fact is conveyed a non-avowed but still intended impression of pedigree garnered from long-standing status; those coming into contact with the organization can rely on it; its matured sobriety exudes wisdom and dependability. Such uses of history (whether direct or oblique) appeal to the interpretive backgrounds of external audiences with the intention of creating relational commitments (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005).

However, using history in this way places an organization's identity at continued risk, as the narratives being created are dependent on the adequacy of their expression found in their illocutionary and perlocutionary force. The reputational force of history as a speech act depends on sensitivity to the (often multiple) audience backgrounds by which speech acts gather meaning. Moreover the constitution of these audiences, and their own environments, are also subject to continuous re-evaluation as events unfold, as much as history secures in constancy, it offers room for recoil and revolt. Those attempting to create an identity may make infelicitous utterances: their identification of an audience may err, or their sense of what is appropriate become anachronistic, or their claims stretch too far the credulity of those whose everyday contact with the organization suggests something different. Even if the initial identity claims resonates, once publicized, any account of history lies largely outside of a firm's control (Muralidharan, Dillistone, and Shin 2011), and may be further developed or modified in the sphere of public discourse, or come into conflict with itself even when the organization is faced with having to appeal to a variety if institutionally distinct audiences (Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997). The performance is neither stable nor singular.

Use 2: use of history for inward commitment

A second use of history affords internal commitment, allowing employees to 'recognize ourselves in a changing community' (Flores 1998, 354). Use 2 historical speech acts concern 'What the organization can be,' often based on what it 'has been' giving less consideration to public opinion than Use 1. The idea that history can play an important role in internal development has perhaps been most discussed in the context of the resource-based view of the firm. Here, a firm's history may itself be a valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable source of competitive advantage (e.g. Barney 1991). More apparently, and occasionally, in times of strategic change, attending to inward commitments affords the possibility of searching and enlisting the past in the (re)creation of coherent and imaginative identities from which footing envisaged futures become less opaque. In Use 1, the felicitous grounding for historically-configured identity claims comes with a supple awareness of different factual claims and how selections of these might be coupled to the background understandings and commitments of the organization's different audiences. In Use 2, the felicitous grounding emerges from a sustained narrative foray into the organization's sense of self coupled to and awareness of the current concerns and understandings of employees/members: for instance Lego's identified need of revitalization (Schultz and Hernes 2013, 6), which in turn guided the selection and interpretation of historical 'facts.' Yet, as with external commitment, it seems clear that the propensity for 'getting it wrong' and thus reaping scorn or cynicism (see, for instance, Zuckerman 1999) still looms. A further risk stems from insularity, as too inward a sense of commitment creates rigidities as the intense enthusiasm and skills development make their relevance hard to discern as connections to the outside world grow dim (Grove 1999, 110).

Mapping uses of history in organizational identity: two uses and two sources

With both uses of history we can make a further distinction of emphasis depending on whether the identity claim takes the source of historical narrative from either the organization's own history, or wider historical patterns. Is the utterance invoking a larger social and economic project, or is it evoking the history of a singular organizational form? Though positions of emphasis rather than strict distinction, this further elaboration allows us to place studies of using history along axes, depending on whether they find organizations concentrating on internal or external commitment, and whether they look to their own historical narrative or invoke broader histories of which they are a part. In this section, we will examine cases falling into each quadrant. Populating the quadrants is carried out in an indicative, rather than exhaustive, way. The quadrants are not designed to create a complete categorization; instead they help structure the speech acts in ways that maintain their distinctiveness, while still acknowledging their relatedness. So while many of the studies we looked at found history being used to appeal to both internal and external audiences alike, and while the historical narratives being invoked carried elements of the organization's own story and wider social narratives, we were still able to make distinctions based on performative emphasis and reception.
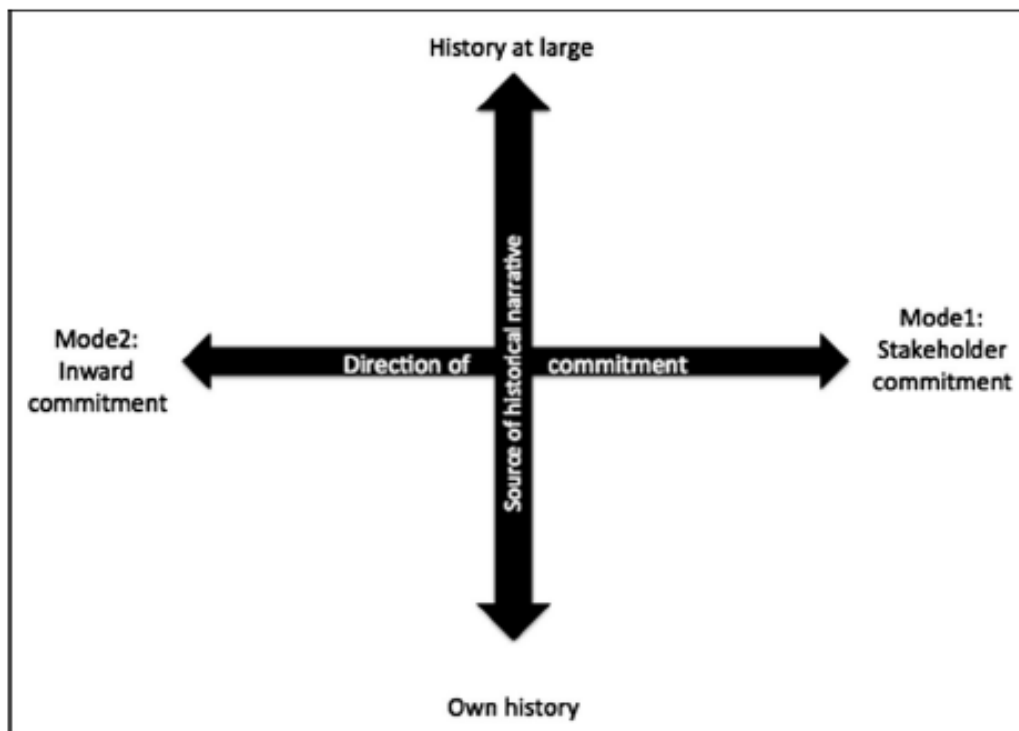
Use 1: use of history for outward commitment

In line with Suddaby et al.'s (2010) observation that many organizations have taken to the production of histories to foster identity claims vis-à-vis stakeholders (our aforementioned Use 1), we have found a large number of studies fitting into the bottom right quadrant of Figure 1. Here, it is the organizations' own histories being used to build identities to help foster commitment among external audiences, so investing in publicity to create a distinct reputation. For example, the chemical firm Rohm and Hauss commissioned historian Regina Lee Blaszczyk (2009) to write a carefully researched corporate history on the occasion of its centenary. This narrative purposively celebrates the firm's growth, longevity, and achievements for consumption by a range of internal and external audiences. There are many such 'popular' corporate histories and they represent a significant sub-genre of business texts. Yet how widely and enthusiastically they are taken up is a moot point, perhaps relying for their illocutionary force on the weightiness of the analysis, its detailed factual presence carrying sufficient perlocutionary weight to create a sense of lasting reputation simply on the basis of a sustained and large presence.

The commissioned corporate biography is but one way of using an organization's own history to build reputation among external audiences. Rowlinson and Hassard (1993), for example, investigate how the confectionary manufacturer Cadbury established a corporate museum and other visitor attractions to influence external perceptions of internal company history in order to reinforce standing and commitment with consumers, acknowledging the changing structural capacity for leisure, as well as the background associations of sweet food and happiness. Brunninge (2009) details the use of history via a range of media to legitimize strategic changes when a bank invoked its traditional branch structure to justify the introduction of a new Internet banking system. Brunninge also records the more or

less deliberate act of letting aspects of an organization's past lapse and become forgotten, deliberately using an historical speech act of ambiguity to press home the illocutionary force. Chreim (2005, 586) details how selective locutionary historical claims (events chosen from 176 years of a bank's history compressed into one paragraph) are intended to portray consistency in innovative ability running from the past to the present. In this instance, history was being invoked through utterances in a series of annual reports. Kroeze and Keulen (2013) show how organizations not only make use of history to achieve stability or invoke change, but also how historical narratives are purposefully invented, revised, or abandoned over time, making historical accounts often little more than 'rationalized myths' of homogeneity and persistence to satisfy perceived audience demands (Burrell 1988; Townley 2002).

Figure 1.

Mapping studies of history as resource.

In many organizational settings history might be drawn on in a quite natural way; it is the history with which employees/members are familiar or is most amenable to

'management.' However, in addition to drawing on organizational histories for outwardly directed purposes, a significant number of studies can be located in the top right quadrant of Figure 1, with history at large being used to build identities able to help foster commitment among external audiences. Van Driel and Dolfsma (2009), for example, accord significant importance to wider contexts in the evolution of production systems at Toyota. A further invocation of history at large is suggested by Marrewijk (2009) who shows how organizations employ architectural themes in the design of their headquarters to signify wider messages about their aspirations and values. Not only does the background tradition of the built environment become a repository for a organization's changing identity, but also the history imbued in different architectonical styles is actively invoked by the organization as part of its identity claims as part of a modern nation. Karsten et al. (2009) show how the firm Philips even took recourse to Greek mythological history, attempting to reach far beyond itself to warrant a series of harsh changes and cuts to the unions and broader Dutch public. In any such use, different audience views of historical meaning are unavoidable. For example, Parker's (2002) study of the relationship between culture and strategic change in a regional UK building society, situating the firm's history against a background of intersecting class, religious, and regional influence, found the past being highly contested among different constituencies within and without the organization. Mordhorst (2014) similarly found contestation in studying the use of history at Danish dairy co-operative Arla. Here too the status of the past is contested, but with the history invoked not only largely derived from the wider setting but almost exclusively being addressed to a wider population, the Danish public. In this context Arla appeared relatively powerless to deploy the past as resource on its own terms, or, at least, to achieve the performative effects intended, an infelicity emerging from a misunderstanding as to the wider public resonance of appeals to agricultural tradition and large co-operative movements.

Another example is Taylor and Freer's (2002) study of the processes that lay behind the writing of a history of the Hanford plutonium plant in the US, which acknowledges Hanford's history was part of a wider public history concerning the nuclear weapons project, the cold war, the post-cold war settlement, and the emergence of an environmental movement. Drawing on these wider links, Hanford's managers participated in the construction of public historical narratives in ways that sought to satisfy audience expectations about truth, legitimacy, and authority, a narrative addressed to 'larger and viscerally felt issues of how an organization and its industry are to be remembered' (2002, 564). Unsurprisingly for Hanford and all those endeavoring to write its history, use of the past as resource was far from straightforward. Contestation was also to the fore in Hansen's (2012) study of the narratives and sense-making that took place around crisis at the Danish Landmandsbanken, which unfolded not as an isolated organizational event but in the context of national debate around financialization. The selective engagement with wider history is furthermore illustrated by Rowlinson and Hassard (1993), who comment on the wider histories that were conspicuously eschewed by the British confectionary firm Cadbury in their creation of a corporate heritage. Some elements of the wider history of which Cadbury was a part, namely slavery and colonialism, remained conspicuously absent. An opposite approach, often in the form of

commissioned corporate histories, comes in the form of a *mea culpa*. Exemplary is Feldman's (2001) study of the Allianz insurance company and its association with German National Socialism. These studies are predicated on a forensic examination of an organization's role in a disturbing national story, an attempt to acknowledge rather than conceal locutionary meaning that relies on the illocutionary force of its being timely to do so, and the perlocutionary effects that such an apology might carry.

Use 2: use of history for inward commitment

A significant number of studies emphasize the use of history in securing an overtly inward commitment. For many concerned with recreating an organizational identity, such clues are found in the organization's own histories and would thus be located in our bottom left quadrant. An example here is Apple's well-known return to its old values in the wake of its CEO's return (Howard-Grenville et al. 2013). Similarly, Yates' (1990) study of the development of organizational memory at Du Pont is a story of emergent internal capabilities of middle and high-ranking management questing to control an organization growing in scale and complexity. This is supported in Schein's (1990) findings that corporate culture's historically derived effects are largely internally oriented, notably in creating reassurances that well-regarded continuities will persist in the wake of strategic change processes. A specifically purposeful use of historical information is reported by Schultz and Hernes (2013). In what Rowlinson et al. (2010, 78) refer to as a 'hypothetical' construction of reality, Schultz and Hernes (2013) report how, for LEGO, memories were individualistic and in this case spatio-temporally specific acts of communication. The purposefulness of this exercise is evident in the reported recognition by the LEGO CEO of the importance of memory and the translation of this insight into a memory-recalling 'task force,' all the while raising the question whether, given the scant regard for locutionary appraisals of past events, the illocutionary force of this performance is not likely to strip any memories recollected of their all-important historical and social context. Yet the use bore fruit as the authors (2013, 4) find the organization rejuvenated by this performative foray into the past. Newly minted commitments became possible as the company revisited its origins as a toy brick maker and began again. Other attempts at using history to secure internal commitment are detailed by de Holan and Phillips (2004) on a Cuban hotel chain, Popp (2000) at the pottery firm Minton, and Drakopolou Dodd, Anderson, and Jack (2013) on a range of family firms. Again, it becomes clear that internal commitment and outward reputation overlap in practice; these are positions on continua rather than exclusive contradistinctions. For example, even though Sieloff (1999) and Fleming (2002) both trace innovation at Hewlett Packard from largely internal perspectives, the company clearly used their new-found internal direction and cohesion to influence wider audiences. A related case is provided in Seeger et al. (2005) study of Cantor Fitzgerald, a brokerage firm who lost almost 700 of its then 1000 employees in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. The loss marked a change in strategic direction from the pursuit of profit to helping with crisis management. This profound reframing in light of the company's losses, necessary to its very survival, and necessarily drawing on the past in almost pre-lapsarian terms, also led to public support and goodwill. Equally, the

contestation over past as resource uncovered by Wolfram-Cox (1997) at 'Canco' took place largely within the boundaries of the firm, though the events described, involving significant redundancies, carried considerable public salience. Another example of an organization using history both to renew its internal commitment as well as addressing other audiences is Myrick, Mills, and Mills's (2013) 'ANTI-History' account of history making in the Academy of Management, which draws on internal archives and journal articles directed at establishing both internal identity in emerging identity alongside peer recognition.

Finally, albeit in much smaller number, there are studies populating our top left quadrant. These draw on wider histories at large to build identities to help foster commitment among internal audiences. Woodham (1996), for example, investigates how misunderstood speech acts from the UK design council, attempting to instill modernist reform in industrial design were resisted, then gradually subsumed, by a counter illocutionary utterances steeped in habituated affection for the 'red, gold and glamour of tradition.' This use of history took various forms: the regalia associated with Guilds, the imprimatur of Royal association, or even the rose-strewn trellis iconography of village life, all of which provided historical associations available to British companies to achieve internal commitment and as a means of promoting themselves (often abroad): felicity emerged from infelicity. Another felicitous example of the blending of an organization's own and its wider historical context in the search for internal commitment is detailed by Yakob (2012), who shows how generational succession in context of external crises involved the renegotiation of a corporation's national identity in a colonial/post-colonial context, leading to resilience, renewal, and longevity. Howard-Grenville et al. (2013) show how a city gains renewed vigor by restaging sports events to rekindle memories of a glorious past, and how such resurrection of identity can be orchestrated and managed through effective leadership.

A looser example comes with Umbach's (2002) study of the *Werkbund* movement in Germany, which actively associated the quality of craftwork with the mechanized efficiency of machine production, invoking a historical concern for creating well-made, functional objects (Cattin, Jolibert, and Lohnes 1982, 40–42). Member organizations, such as AEG, Mercedes- Benz, and Bosch all deliberately invoked and promoted what became a national reputation for high-quality, mass production using the identifying utterance 'Made in Germany' (the felicitousness of this being up for debate in the wake of Volkswagen's recent emissions fiddling). The original stipulation to label products 'made in Germany' had come from the British who, conscious of their pre-eminence in global trade at end of nineteenth century, had sought to stymie rival economies by insisting that goods were labeled with their origin of manufacture. Seeing Germany on the label would be enough, it was mistakenly assumed, for loyal customers to do the right thing and eschew foreign goods in favor of those carrying the tradition of an Empire pedigree. Yet, argues Umbach (2002), the British authorities' utterance had the contrary effect, Far from being pejorative, the label became associated with products of high functional and aesthetic value, so much so that British manufacturers started forging the labels to use on their own goods, attempting cunning appropriation of the Werkbund's

felicitous use of history. Umbach (2002) also notes how the 'made in Germany' utterance contributed to a wider sense of self-belief, contributing to a domestic imperialist assertiveness that helped galvanize a readiness for war; felicity never lasts.

Discussion: the effective use of history as a resource

We began with the question of the use of history as a resource and, specifically, how history can become productive when used by organizations to establish and maintain an identity. We also suggested two sources of such uses (own history – history at large), deployed along two dimensions (internal – external commitment) and we have plotted key studies within the ensuing quadrants. Together these quadrants constitute the aspects of speech acts by which an identity conveys meaning, finds force and has affect over time. We now discuss the efficacy of different positions in relation to these quadrants. Then we turn to a further characterization of history as a resource before we sketch out the third use of history, not as resource, but as being historical.

Coherence of history and identity

Based on our typology we can investigate the limits of the malleability of historical accounts used to bolster organizational identities by moving to a more general assessment of the utility of particular positions in relation to the two axes outlined in Figure 1. First, referring to the vertical axis, comes the relationship between an organizations' own historical accounts and wider historical contexts. We suggest discrepancies between speech acts invoking historical events and character and the wider audience's commitments concerning these historical conditions are likely to generate identity problems as audiences become unclear about the present problem being addressed by the selective isolation of specific historical events and characters, to the ignorance or deliberate exclusion of others. One such example is the German publisher Bertelsmann (Booth et al. 2007), for whom a historical narrative was cultivated suggesting the company's neutrality, if not resistance, to Nazi influence. In a post-Nazi Germany, this historical account served for a long time as a means of gaining public commitment. Booth et al. (2007, 630), for instance, cite the then CEO of Bertelsmann invoking this history with the words: 'Bertelsmann's continuing existence was a threat to the Nazi attempt to control freedom of expression.' However, recently, Bertelsmann was found to have actively supported National Socialism, and to have substantially profited from publication of anti-Semitic and other Third Reich propaganda. The initial, insincere narrative of 'resistance' was identified as an attempt at appeasing occupying Allied forces in the war's aftermath. The illocutionary and perlocutionary force lasted for as long as the meaning did not give way, and once other meanings surfaced the utterance became an unhappy failure. The fashion label Boss has become equally mired in such undisclosed pasts, with its reputation for smart, functional clothing being tarnished by revelations in 1997 of its having made uniforms for the German SS, Wehrmacht and Hitlerjugend (Galster and Nosch 2010). A further example is provided by Durepos et al. (2008), who detail the struggles of Pan Am airline's management when attempting to

produce a founder-centered corporate history. They describe a highly politicized process that involved a number of writers and historians shying away from the unhappy task, and much political power and financial effort expended for a book that took nineteen years to get published. Again, the felt discrepancy between the founder's sanctioned or imagined history, and the wider meaning of historical events surrounding Pan Am's early years as perceived by the historians involved posed a major problem for this project.

Second, referring to the horizontal axis in Figure 1, we can begin to investigate the degree of performative alignment between internal and external commitments created by historical utterance. Identity researchers have outlined problems emerging from inconsistent, contradictory, hybrid, or multiple identities, including internal role conflicts and conflicts of commitment (Albert and Whetten 1985; Golden Biddle and Rao 1997). It has also been argued that identities poorly aligned with wider environmental settings can be rejected or, at least, subject to realignment (Gioia et al. 2013), even though in other cases these become a source of new opportunities (Kodeih and Greenwood 2014).

In similar vein, following our review, we suggest identity emerging in part from continual conjunctions of externally held understandings and those proffered by historical speech acts. A felicitous conjunction comes with the previously mentioned brokers Cantor Fitzgerald whose historical narrative became intimately connected with the historical event of 9/11, and whose inward commitment was mirrored by the outside perception of the firm's integrity in its stance to grow stronger from the attack (Seeger et al. 2005).

Less successful examples include Arla, where attempts to leverage Danish national history and culture, aligning them with the firm's own history, were poorly received by the Danish public, who remained skeptical of and resistant to these claims (Mordhorst 2014). In identifying the organization with an agricultural co-operative movement and with the historical importance of farming in Denmark's heritage (i.e. a Use 1 identity claim), Arla's managers misjudged the current concerns and commitment in Danish society which not only had moved away from its agricultural past, but also had come to understand the behaviors of large co-operatives such as Arla as incommensurate with those of locally committed groups, and synonymous with those of any other international corporation, so that the illocutionary force of the historical speech act remained impotent. We therefore conjecture that an alignment of internal and external commitment along with an organization's own history and its wider historical context allows for richer, more sustained commitments in creating an organizational identity. This amounts to a middle position on Figure 1, where inconsistencies that may otherwise constrain or reverse the force of historically-based identity speech acts are minimized. Infelicity emerges from misunderstood utterances because they are delivered to inappropriate or unresponsive audiences, or ones, that are unhappy because they entail an active manipulation of perspectives that can be resented, or ones that are insincere, especially if locutionary statements of fact are continually ignored or repressed. Our suggestions are, of course, not entirely new. Boothet al. (2007, 627) cite Hannah

(1986), suggesting that 'some delighted companies find their corporate culture reinforced by the historical record.' However, speech act theory allows us to enrich this claim as it suggests that there is no such thing as a definitive, neutral and true 'historical record,' but rather that meaning lives within the force and affects of its being expressed as such. Any active management of history is riven with potential difficulties because neither the source organization nor the audience are static or distinct and indeed are themselves being constituted in the very acts of utterance by which history is invoked. So even when organizations' historical speech acts and the external (Use 1) or internal (Use 2) conditions are in seeming alignment, the difficulty of stabilizing the claim on history remains. The past, like identity, is subject to continual revision. Using history to create and sustain identity is a process of securing cohesion that as often goes awry even as it succeeds in gaining sufficient commitment to legitimate what an organization is, has been or will become. This means that even if organizations seem to 'get it right' when constructing a particular historical association, these speech acts can become infelicitous. An example here is Cadbury (Rowlinson and Hassard 1993), where the invocation of its 'Britishness' was particularly 'successful' by linking the firm's own history with that of the Empire. In Cadbury's case, problems arose when the US company Kraft foods set out to acquire the company in 2011 and 2012 and Cadbury's British heritage became difficult to align with that of a large American multi-national, giving the public and workers alike scope for critical commentary. The greatest source of this instability is history itself. Each passing moment, as with landscapes seen from a speeding train, reveals a new panorama of the past. Evoking history in the service of building identity today is a temptation many cannot resist, and they often do so with considerable success, but in doing they also unavoidably expose the organization to being out of place as they extract from the interpretive ground against which history was played out.

The character of history as a resource

These last points bring us back to the question of the character of history when used to create organizational identity. We have suggested that historical speech acts use narratives as malleable factors that can be more or less readily invented, bent, and abandoned, in line with current needs and shifting tastes. Such uses of history seem particularly common in organization and business studies. Accordingly, for Lawrence, history is 'raw material' (1984, 307), and likewise Carroll positions the past as 'a resource for articulation' available for 'strategic appropriation' (2002, 558 and 557). For Ooi, the past even has sufficient agency to actively 'offer' its valuable assets as 'resource pool that offers stories and messages to strategically mobilize various stakeholders' (2002, 607). In their investigation of how organizations construct their own corporate histories, Suddaby et al. (2010, 156) seem to go even further, though are less sanguine, detecting a stronger spirit of manipulation, so that it is not just the meaning of events, but the facts themselves that become subject to 'active management,' resulting in highly utilitarian accounts. Studies of organizational memory concur, suggesting organizations often choose what to remember or to forget, leading to a strongly politicized process of remembering (Nissley and Casey 2002).

For Rowlinson et al. (2014) organization and management studies perpetuate this trend by focusing exclusively on aspects of history and memory that can be directly linked with organizational success, while suppressing negative associations. Within organizations and some business and management studies history is regarded not so much as accounts whose meaning is open to conjecture, but events-as-means arranged in light of the useful ends they have seemingly produced, it becomes all about illocutionary force, with no consideration for fact – an outcome akin to what James March (2006) identifies as patterns of use governed by a consequentialist logic: history only exists insofar as it can be used in broader strategies concerning the efficient and effective allocation of resources. Even studies that recognize the past as ambiguous, malleable, contested, or heavily constructed, and which offer a critical stance on its use, still begin from the premise that 'organizational history can be a resource' (Parker 2002, 589). Can speech act theory also show how organizational identity might emerge from a different, less instrumental way of *being historical?*

Toward use 3: being historical

We can begin with what seems to be a fine line between using history as a resource and the possibility of gaining insight from what we call 'being historical.' One example might be drawn from a micro-historical study of four decades of letters between John and Elizabeth Shaw (Popp and Holt 2013), husband and wife 'entrepreneurs' who grew their factoring business during the first half of the nineteenth century. Here, family values and roles come into contrast with modern industrial life, prolonged business travels, economic pressures and opportunities, and entrepreneurial ambition. Yet, rather than being displaced by an increasingly modern life, John and Elizabeth, drawing on centuries- old modes, take to handwritten letters. Through these letters they negotiated a stream of intermingled identities: son/daughter; husband/wife; father/mother; business owners and entrepreneurs; from young to old; from ambitious to settled; from progenitors of a business enterprise to its stewards. Their lives were lived historically, and being so became indivisible from entrepreneurial ambition, the accretion of organizational solidity, and, eventually, generational bequest, into which qualities it becomes entirely arbitrary to introduce a performative cause or end point. Critically, as they grew older together in life and enterprise, while their memory rose to the surface, and circled back round further and more often, never was history harnessed merely to strategic ends. Instead, as it was lived, it added burnished resonance and meaning, affording the business power without invoking purposes or goals. The expressiveness of their communication emerges out of the lived dissonance between the practice of handwritten letter exchanges, the subjectivity and intimacy of the expression of an inner life-world from one person to another, and the increasingly standardized and mechanized business operations; the former, while briefly allowing for a view of the epochal changes induced by the latter, was soon to disappear; being swallowed up by type-written and semi-automated ways of communicating that make 'everyone look the same' (Heidegger, in Kitter 1986/1999, 199). The condition of being historical is again unveiled as contingent and inherently open in Scranton's (2013) study of jet engine propulsion based on cold war documents.

Scranton contrasts the efforts of French and US developments in jet engine development, the former producing booklets with largely handwritten notes detailing meticulously recorded life histories of individual engines, their performance, use, faults, and repairs (Scranton 2013, 117). The US, by contrast, used higher levels of aggregation, largely quantitative measures, and operated on a much larger scale. At the brink of the shift from craftsmanship to mass production, Scranton (2013, 135), sees in the US approach 'a military-industrial culture of affluence, urgent, diversified innovation, recursive technological practice and, it must be said, if often unavoidable waste.' Where this approach indicated the 'traditions of the new' (Scranton 2013, 137) – the then present realities of a growing and affluent economic superpower – the French approach not only represented a response to the present circumstances of an 'under-funded and unstable Fourth Republic' (Scranton 2013, 121), but was nested in an earlier historical way of working; one in which resources were conserved and where produced artifacts were of individual importance, 'derived from constant use and refinement' (Scranton 2013, 137) which helped French engineers make sense of their work while subject to immense social and political pressures and without knowing where their work was taking them. They, like their engines, were thrust forward on empty air, amounting to an immense but open engineering effort fueled by enthusiasm, curiosity, and geo-political anxiety.

We will end with a final example that is even more readily resonant with questions of identity, spanning a number of contextual shifts. Edith Penrose, in her study of the Hercules Powder Company (1960, contemporaneously published with *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm*), shows us a series of selective uses of history in what we have called Uses 1 and 2. Historical 'events' become used like other intangible resources, and may be transformed and developed to yield a number of specific services (c.f. Penrose 1959) for prevailing interests (Burrell 1988). But she also finds instances of the past constraining development, forcing it down certain paths, and at one and the same time acting as a wellspring for the *imaginative* use of resources to yield different products and services (1960, 19).

Penrose tell us implicitly about how decisions in Hercules are infused with representations of history. For example, Hercules's growth coincided with the rise of the automobile, the introduction of plastics and synthetic rubber, as well as the transformation of the food industry toward highly processed products. With this came not only vast market possibilities for Hercules's lacquer ingredients, petrochemicals, and food additives, but also an ethos of entrepreneurship, curiosity, inventiveness, and the expectation of endless opportunities, coupled with the real-life experience of transforming life patterns; chemicals do not just add to life, they can shift what is meant by life. The herculean task for Hercules' management was to go with the times and, in so doing, imagining a future that could not directly be distilled from the past (Paul Valery 1962). They developed new chemical products and only then asked customers what these could be used for (Penrose 1960, 8). Granted, Hercules' past accretes around its organization through processes of selection and path-dependence, made manifest in the unavoidable necessity of fixed assets, sunk costs, and resources committed. Yet, such material historical

dependencies are merely the flipside of a dependency on the entrepreneurs' (as Penrose calls them) imagination on historical representations: Who or what Hercules can be is intimately entwined with a sense of what it was and is; and here we find a curious openness of imagination. Penrose shows the past acting forwards, pushing from behind, urging the company to act in spite of current events rather than because of them. To sediment our understanding of the difference between studies of being historical (Use 3) and those of (and sometimes uncritically invoking) utilitarian uses of history (Uses 1 and 2), we can return to speech act theory. Skinner's (1970) reading of Austin (1962/1975) provides us with a historically sensitive version of speech act theory that requires exponents investigate both the act (the intention-in-action) and illocutionary and perlocutionary force (the e/ affect on others, which is heavily context dependent). With its emphasis on meaning-as-use within the flow of time, speech act theory requires studies become sensitive to prevailing conventions at the moment of these historical acts, as distinct from the conventions prevailing at the time of any historical investigation. For Skinner, the mistake is to conflate these by transplanting current conventions/context into the force of the (past) speech acts. The job of historical investigation is to bring the speech act into its historical context, examining its possible force, whether in sustaining, extending or upending conventions. This is especially important for studies of Use 3, where history is no longer a matter of resuscitating a desired past from a current stand-point, and thus with future ends in mind, but one where through immersion in past one gains a sense of the constraints and (open) possibilities existing for people in that period. This sympathetic identification can then afford glimpses into the conditions that structure *our* current life, without these ever being instrumentally configured in terms of their potential productive efficiency or effectiveness. Here we glimpse an engagement with history that is not subservient to performative concerns with reputation and commitment. It is instead something sensitive to Nietzsche's concern that history might better serve life simply be opening up possibility for tings being otherwise. What is at stake here are neither perceptions of audiences' current commitments and concerns, nor an organization's situational needs, but a willingness to investigate (sometimesstrange) historical conventions and circumstances on their own terms, from which awareness comes open possibility, should one choose to speculate on rather than oppose the commitments sedimented in the past.

Conclusions

Organization and business scholars increasingly acknowledge that the ways in which history is invoked in organizational contexts differs from the accounts produced by historians. The utility of an instrumentally designed organizational history may best be understood with sensitivity to the purposes for which managers emplot histories (Rowlinson et al. 2014). Understood as rhetorical devices (Suddaby et al. 2010), historical speech acts can be powerful organizational resources to serve a range of organizational ends. Drawing on speech act theory, and in the context of organizational identity, we first proposed two related forms of using history as a resource to gain internal and external commitment, and set these in relation with two possible sources. We developed a taxonomy of uses of historical speech act,

corresponding to external and internal commitment and correlated to the possible sources for such acts, which lie either in an organization's own past or in wider pasts. In all such uses, historical speech acts were minded continually of the instrumental uses to which history might be invoked to create and sustain an identity both within and beyond the organization, illocutionary uses that were always situated in present-day concerns, and which were far from shy from a highly selective locutionary gathering and presenting of historical fact. We have argued that while in some cases the performances worked well it creating or revivifying a sense of identity, incoherencies between an organization's historical claims and wider and widely accepted historical narratives, as well as between internal and external understandings, can have serious detrimental effects for the force and utility of the speech act. We have gone on to argue that historical identity claims understood as performances are hard to divorce from the interpretive grounding from which they emerge and into which they are being repeatedly set (Flores 1998). The inherently illocutionary nature of speech acts, in which utterances merge and vie with facts continually, means managing such speech acts can only occur from within the act itself, and is an ongoing achievement, rather than a one off or something that to be revised periodically. While, as we have shown, actors are apparently (on the surface) relatively free in constructing historical speech acts (what historical events and figures to choose and repress, and which audiences to engage), the interpretive background against which such performances gain traction and force, remains largely beyond organizational control. The force of an historical speech act in the service of identity creation and maintenance has less to do with what happened in the past, and more with the appropriate and flexible judgment of the present conventions and circumstances of external audiences (Use 1), or situational conventions and circumstances (Use 2). Finally, we have argued for third use of history (Use 3) which takes its leave from present concerns and commitments, and thus does not abide by the means-ends instrumentalism and the 'interpretive violence' characterizing history used to satisfy today's concerns (Norman 1991). We termed Use 3 'being historical.' What connects these cases of 'being historical' is a concern for context-dependence and the simultaneous transgression of epochal strictures by recourse to history. The Shaw's hundreds of letter exchanges represented both a quaint foil against the onset of machinization, and a way of being historical by writing against the efficient purposes of the time. The French aircraft engineers, likewise, produced detailed handwritten ledgers as they did in times where craft production meant that each product bore the mark of its maker. Against a new world of mass production, tight tolerances, and exchangeable components, their efforts equally appear to be without purpose, the efficacy of their practices becoming manifest only after a long while and against the, then, commonsensicality of resource-intensive innovation. Through Hercules, finally, Penrose shows us the continuous transgression of historical certainties by an organization whose identity remained largely unsettled and full of possibility. What cuts across all three examples is awareness that, 'being historical' thrives on anomaly, disjuncture, and asynchronicity that is offered when the past is understood as an altogether foreign country. This is not simply a hermeneutic exercise. The utility of being historical, unlike that of using history as a resource, is not an immediate solution to already identified and understood problems that impose on the organization's present.

Being historical means being sensitive to historical contexts; how they fix the shape and hue of speech acts as they are uttered, while themselves remaining fluid and forever beyond our full grasp (Skinner 1970). Here we cannot straightforwardly see how speech *acts*, because even though we may understand particular utterances, the underlying commitments and conventions that make up their historical interpretive background remain alien to us. Acknowledging historical differences and distances, ironically, strengthens the sense of living historically. We become aware of asymmetry in worldviews, able then to consider how these differences might alter prevailing academic understanding. For example, in light of the Shaws' letters, the French engineers' drawings, and Hercules' open exploration, how might we understand prevailing meanings in the fields of entrepreneurship (with its emphasis on deliberate opportunity discovery), design innovation (with its emphasis on technology), and strategy (with its emphasis on defined goals and attaining distinctiveness)?

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