



Review

Taking historical embeddedness seriously: Three historical approaches to advance strategy process and practice research

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Abstract:	<p>Despite the proliferation of strategy process and practice research, we lack understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices. In this paper, we present three historical approaches with the potential to remedy this deficiency. First, realist history can contribute to a better understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes; in particular, comparative historical analysis can explicate the historical conditions, mechanisms, and causality in strategic processes. Second, interpretative history can add to our knowledge of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices, and microhistory can specifically help to understand the construction and enactment of these practices in historical contexts. Third, poststructuralist history can elucidate the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses, and genealogy can in particular increase our understanding of the evolution and transformation of strategic discourses and their power effects. Thus, this paper demonstrates how in their specific ways historical approaches and methods can add to our understanding of different forms and variations of strategic processes and practices, the historical construction of organizational strategies, and historically constituted strategic agency.</p>

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**TAKING HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS SERIOUSLY: THREE
HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO ADVANCE STRATEGY PROCESS AND
PRACTICE RESEARCH**

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3 **TAKING HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS SERIOUSLY: THREE**
4 **HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO ADVANCE STRATEGY PROCESS AND**
5 **PRACTICE RESEARCH**
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10 **Abstract**

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12 Despite the proliferation of strategy process and practice research, we lack
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14 understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices. In
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16 this paper, we present three historical approaches with the potential to remedy this
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18 deficiency. First, realist history can contribute to a better understanding of the
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20 historical embeddedness of strategic processes; in particular, comparative historical
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22 analysis can explicate the historical conditions, mechanisms, and causality in strategic
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24 processes. Second, interpretative history can add to our knowledge of the historical
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26 embeddedness of strategic practices, and microhistory can specifically help to
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28 understand the construction and enactment of these practices in historical contexts.
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30 Third, poststructuralist history can elucidate the historical embeddedness of strategic
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32 discourses, and genealogy can in particular increase our understanding of the
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34 evolution and transformation of strategic discourses and their power effects. Thus,
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36 this paper demonstrates how in their specific ways historical approaches and methods
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38 can add to our understanding of different forms and variations of strategic processes
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40 and practices, the historical construction of organizational strategies, and historically
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42 constituted strategic agency.
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50 **Keywords:** comparative history, discourse, embeddedness, genealogy, microhistory,
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52 practice, process, strategy, strategy-as-practice, strategy process
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3 **TAKING HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS SERIOUSLY: THREE**
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8 The very beginning of strategic management research was closely linked with
9 historical analysis (Chandler, 1962, 1977), and later on landmark studies have been
10 based on longitudinal case studies (Burgelman, 1983; Pettigrew, 1985). However, it is
11 fair to say that strategic management research and business, economic and social
12 history have remained largely separate areas of research with few intersections
13 (Ericsson, Melin & Popp, forthcoming; Kahl, Silverman & Cusumano, 2012; Kipping
14 & Üsdiken, 2014; Thomas, Wilson, & Leeds, 2013). Thus, strategic management
15 research, like management research more generally, has lacked historical
16 comprehension and sensitivity (Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014; Clark & Rowlinson,
17 2004; Rowlinson, Hassard & Decker, 2014; Kieser, 1994; Zald, 1990). This has
18 hampered our understanding of key issues such as the historical embeddedness of
19 strategic processes and practices: We know little about how historical conditions
20 shape strategic processes or their causal effects, how strategic practices are linked to
21 their socio-historical contexts and enacted in situ, or how strategic discourses are
22 products of historical evolution with implications for what is seen as important or
23 appropriate in the strategy field and profession.
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44 Hence, the purpose of this paper is to explicate how historical research can
45 contribute to our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes
46 and practices and our conceptions of them. We focus on strategy process and practice
47 research that deals with the forms and dynamics of strategy-making in and around
48 organizations, including intentional strategic decision-making, planning or
49 implementation, and other forms of strategy work processes and practices. Together
50 with more critical analyses, strategy process and practice studies have formed a
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3 vibrant sociologically and organizationally oriented alternative to conventional
4 perspectives on strategic management (Floyd et al., 2011; Hutzschenreuter &
5 Kleindienst, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2007). However,
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7 understanding of historical embeddedness has remained limited in this body of work,
8
9 which has constrained its potential to deepen our grasp of the social, cultural and
10 sociopolitical nature of strategy-making. While strategy process studies have
11 emphasized the role of context (Child, 1972; Child & Smith, 1987; Pettigrew, 1987,
12 2012; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006), its historical underpinnings and
13 implications are only partially understood. Although strategy-as-practice research has
14 argued that practices take different forms depending on context, there is a paucity of
15 knowledge of the historical construction of these practices and their enactment in situ
16 (Ericsson et al., forthcoming; Whittington, Cailluet & Yakis-Douglas, 2011). While
17 some critical studies have examined the historically constructed nature of strategic
18 discourses (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Thomas et al., 2013), there is a need to go
19 further and examine both the formation and implications of these discourses in
20 various socio-historical contexts.
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38 By historical embeddedness, we mean the ways in which strategic processes
39 and practices and our conceptions of them are embedded in socio-historical
40 environments, and defined by them. We argue for a strong emphasis on historical
41 embeddedness: One should not merely place processes and practices in context, but
42 also understand their inherent historical nature and construction. Thus, like Kipping
43 and Üsdiken (2014) in their overall review of history in management research, we
44 strive for a ‘history-in-theory’ approach by focusing on how history can be a key part
45 of our theoretical understanding of strategy rather than serve ‘merely’ as empirical
46 evidence of context.
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3 We propose and elaborate on three approaches that can be used to add to our
4 understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, practices, and
5 discourses: realist history, interpretative history, and poststructuralist history. While
6 there are other ways of distinguishing historical traditions and methods (e.g.,
7 Rowlinson et al., 2014), we focus on these three as they provide distinctively different
8 onto-epistemological alternatives for examining the historical embeddedness of
9 strategic processes, practices, and discourses. Their philosophical commitments are
10 very different; they are not merely resources in an historian's toolbox but represent
11 fundamentally different ways to approach and make sense of history. First, we focus
12 on historical realism, which can enhance our understanding of the historical
13 embeddedness of strategic processes. Historical realism is based on a realist onto-
14 epistemological understanding of social reality that aims to reconstruct past events
15 and to provide explanations of historical processes and mechanisms. Historical case
16 studies have played a key role in strategic process research (Burgelman, 1983, 2002a,
17 b; Pettigrew, 1973, 1985), thus bringing context-specific understanding into strategic
18 process research. To provide an example of a useful, but largely untapped method in
19 historical realist analysis, we point to comparative historical analysis, which has
20 become an increasingly popular perspective in economic history and historical
21 sociology (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Comparative historical analysis aims at
22 a systematic analysis and comparison of historical events and processes to elucidate
23 patterns and causality in them (Mahoney, 2003). It can help to identify the historical
24 conditions, mechanisms, and causation in strategic processes, and thus contribute
25 especially to strategy process research.

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54 Second, we introduce interpretative history (Collingwood, 1946) as an
55 approach that helps us to understand the historical embeddedness of strategic
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3 practices. Interpretative history emphasizes the role of the historian-researcher in
4 interpreting the importance of historical events in situ (Collingwood, 1946; White,
5 1975), and by so doing usually reflects a constructionist understanding of social
6 reality. In particular, we focus on microhistory as a useful but largely ignored method
7 in management research (Magnusson & Szijarto, 2013). Through the close analysis of
8 specific events, actions and practices, microhistory seeks to identify larger socio-
9 historical patterns and their characteristics (Ginzburg, 1993; Peltonen, 2001). We
10 argue that it can explicate the historical construction and enactment of strategic
11 practices in context and thus specifically add to strategy-as-practice research.
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23 Third, we present the poststructuralist historical approach as a way to increase
24 understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses and their
25 implications. Poststructuralist history is based epistemologically on radical
26 constructionism and aims at a deconstruction of historical conceptions and a critical
27 scrutiny of generally held assumptions. In this case, we focus on genealogy (Foucault,
28 1977) as a methodology that uncovers and problematizes conventionally held
29 assumptions of knowledge and their power effects in strategic discourses. We argue
30 that this method can elucidate the construction of historical truths and subjectivities as
31 well as their implications, and thus add especially to critical studies of strategic
32 management.
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45 Our analysis contributes to theory-building in strategy process and practice
46 research by highlighting the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, practices,
47 and discourses. In particular, it shows how in their specific ways, historical methods
48 can add to our understanding of various forms of strategic processes and practices and
49 the variations in them, the historical construction of organizational strategies, and
50 historically constituted strategic agency. By so doing, this paper helps to theoretically
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3 advance strategy process and practice research as well as research on strategic
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5 management more generally. Furthermore, by highlighting the value of specific
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7 approaches and methods, it contributes to the discussion of new forms of management
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9 and business history (Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014; DeJong & Higgings, forthcoming;
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11 Jones & Zeitlin, 2008).

12 13 14 **HISTORY IN STRATEGY PROCESS AND PRACTICE RESEARCH**

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17 In recent years we have seen a proliferation of research on strategic management that
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19 shares an interest in the processes and practices of strategic management. In the focus
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21 of this analysis is strategy-making, by which we mean all kinds of processes,
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23 activities, and practices involved in strategy formation or implementation in and
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25 around organizations. This body of work includes strategic process research, strategy-
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27 as-practice research as well as more critical, often discursive analysis of strategic
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29 management. While these streams of research have distinct roots and characteristics
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31 of their own, they share a sociological and organizational orientation in their analysis
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33 of strategic phenomena. Furthermore, they are increasingly seen as forming a body of
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35 knowledge – as indicated in recent reviews (Floyd et al., 2011; Vaara & Whittington,
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37 2012; Whittington, 2007), in special issues (Balogun et al., 2014), or in calls for them
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39 (e.g., a special issue on process and practice research in the *Strategic Management*
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41 *Journal*).

42 43 44 **Strategic Processes**

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47 Strategy scholars have focused attention on the social and organizational processes
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49 through which strategies have been realized since the 1970s (Farjoun, 2002;
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51 Mintzberg, 1978; Nutt, 1987; Pettigrew 1973, 1992; Van de Ven & Huber, 1990).
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53 Interestingly, some of these studies – in particular Pettigrew’s (1973, 1985) detailed
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55 analyses of decision-making and Burgelman’s research on strategy-making (1983,
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3 2002a, b) – reflect an historical orientation by virtue of their longitudinal approach.
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5 These studies have found that strategies are not always planned or formulated, but
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7 evolve from bottom-up initiatives (Burgelman, 1983) or emergent (Mintzberg &
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9 Waters, 1982, 1985) processes. According to this view, organizational members
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11 participate in strategy-making through a myriad of organizational interactions over
12
13 time (Bourgeois & Brodwin, 1984; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Wooldridge, Schmidt &
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15 Floyd, 2008; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindiest, 2006). Recent contributions have focused
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17 on topics such as autonomous strategy work (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013) and
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19 temporality (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013). Inspired by the revived interest in
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21 organizational process studies (Langley et al., 2013), we have also seen the
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23 emergence of a new stream of more philosophical process research (Chia & Holt,
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25 2006; Rasche & Chia, 2009). This work has been closely linked with strategy-as-
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27 practice research and critical perspectives on strategic management to which we will
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29 turn next.
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34 Context has played an important part in these studies (for a review, see
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36 Hutzschenreuter & Kleindiest, 2006). In particular, Child (1972) has elaborated on
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38 outer structuration, Mintzberg (1977) conceptualized strategy-making as an historical
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40 process, and Pettigrew explicated the outer context (Pettigrew, 1997, 2012).
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42 Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the historical aspects of strategic processes are only
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44 partially understood, and thus scholars such as Pajunen (2005) have called for the use
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46 of new historical methods to promote historical understanding in this stream of
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48 research.
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51 **Strategic Practices**

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54 Closely related to strategic process research, a growing interest in the detailed
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56 activities and practices of strategy has led to a proliferation of strategy-as-practice
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3 research (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Johnson, Melin &
4 Whittington, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). In this view, strategy is seen as
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6 situated activity that both shapes and is shaped by its context (Seidl & Whittington,
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8 2014; Whittington, 2006). This stream has focused on the activities and practices
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10 engaged in by managers when they strategize or conduct strategy work. A part of this
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12 stream of research has explicitly drawn on theories of practice (Orlikowski, 2000;
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14 Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). For instance, Whittington (2006) and
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16 Jarzabkowski (2008) have used Giddens's structuration theory and Jarzabkowski
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18 (2010) has provided an overview of how activity theory can be used in strategy-as-
19
20 practice research. Recent studies have also drawn from Foucault (Allard-Poési, 2010)
21
22 and Bourdieu (Gomez, 2010), thus linking strategy-as-practice with critical
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24 management studies. In essence, these studies have shown that social practices enable
25
26 and constrain organizational strategy work (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). These
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28 practices include discursive (Balogun et al., 2014) but also sociomaterial practices
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30 such as strategy tools (Dameron, Lê and LeBaron, 2015; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan,
31
32 forthcoming; Kaplan, 2011). By so doing, this stream of research has provided
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34 insights into phenomena such as the role and identity of the strategists (Mantere,
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36 2008) and engagement and participation (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). Despite these
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38 inputs, this stream of research has also been criticized for an overly empirical focus
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40 and even methodological individualism (e.g., Carter, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008).
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47 Context has played an important role in these studies in the sense that case
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49 analyses and especially ethnographic methods have gained ground (Golsorkhi et al.,
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51 2010). This has resulted in a rich understanding of various forms of strategic practices
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53 and strategy-making (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). However, the historical embeddedness
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55 of strategic practices has remained poorly understood in this stream of research;
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3 despite a few exceptions (Whittington et al., 2011), history has played a limited role
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5 in this stream of research. Hence scholars such as Chia and MacKay (2007) have
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7 called for shifting the focus of analysis from individual strategists to the historically
8
9 and culturally transmitted fields of practice. In a recent paper, Ericson et al.
10
11 (forthcoming) have in turn proposed ways to include history in strategy-as-practice
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13 research, including microhistory, as we will explain later.
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16 **Strategic Discourses**

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18 Related to more general interest in critical management studies, we have seen a
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20 stream of critical reflections explicitly or implicitly linked with strategy process and
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22 practice research. These studies have often drawn from discourse analysis (Grandy &
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24 Mills, 2004; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008, 2010; Vaara, 2010). In particular, Knights
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26 and Morgan's (1991) genealogical analysis of strategic management has served as a
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28 landmark for critical strategy studies as well as processual and practice-based work on
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30 discourse, as shown for example in the recent special issue by Balogun et al. (2014) in
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32 the *Journal of Management Studies*. There is also more recent critical work that has
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34 focused on the role of history in strategy, and a special issue of *Business History*
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36 (Carter, 2013) provides examples on how to conduct critically oriented historical
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38 strategy research. This includes papers by Kornberger (2013) and Thomas et al.
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40 (2013) that we shall return to later.
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45 In all, strategy process and practice research has offered an alternative to the
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47 performance-oriented mainstream of strategy research by bringing sociological and
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49 organizational insights into the mainstream of strategy research. These studies have
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51 emphasized the role of context in various ways. However, with few exceptions, the
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53 historical nature and construction of strategic processes and practices has received
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55 little attention in this body of work (Carter, 2013; Ericson et al., forthcoming;
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3 Whittington et al., 2011). While longitudinal analysis of processes and detailed micro-
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5 level study of practices in context may be seen as characteristics of an historical
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7 interest, the fact remains that we know little of the historical embeddedness of
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9 strategic processes and practices. Moreover, although the more critical analyses have
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11 introduced insights into the historical construction of strategic discourses, this work
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13 has remained limited in its scope. This lack of understanding of historical
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15 embeddedness is a deficiency *per se*, and it has also kept this body of work from
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17 achieving its full potential with respect to the theoretical understanding of strategic
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19 processes and practices and our conceptions of them.
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22 23 **THREE APPROACHES TO HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS**

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25 In the following, we elaborate on three onto-epistemologically and methodologically
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27 different approaches that can advance our understanding of the historical
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29 embeddedness of strategic processes, practices and discourses: realist history,
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31 interpretative history and poststructuralist history. Our reasons for focusing on these
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33 three are two-fold. First, we wish to present distinct onto-epistemological and
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35 methodological alternatives that historical research, not limited to business history,
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37 provides for elucidating the embeddedness of strategic processes, practices and
38
39 discourses. As has been called for, we highlight fruitful intersections rather than offer
40
41 a comprehensive account of a full range of historical methods (Bucheli & Wadhvani,
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43 2014; Jones & Zeitlin, 2008; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Second, we wish to do this in a
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45 way that coheres with the onto-epistemological and methodological discussion in
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47 management and organization studies (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hassard & Cox,
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49 2013; Newton, Deetz & Reed, 2011). For example, in the paradigm model of Hassard
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51 & Cox (2013), realist history resonates with structuralism, interpretative history with
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53 anti-structuralism, and poststructuralist history with post-structuralism. Presenting and
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3 elaborating on distinct approaches is important for advancing a multifaceted
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5 understanding of historical embeddedness that does justice to the alternative
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7 epistemological and methodological understandings of organizational phenomena – in
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9 our case processes, practices and discourses. Table 1 below summarizes the
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11 characteristic features of the three approaches.
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14 Insert Table 1 around here
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16 **Historical Realism and Embeddedness of Strategic Processes**

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18 **Onto-epistemological basis.** Historical realism in general and realist case studies and
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20 comparative historical analysis in particular can advance our understanding of the
21
22 historical embeddedness of strategic processes. Historical realism is an umbrella
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24 concept for analyses that aim at reconstruction of past events by using historical
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26 sources. Hence, historical realism may include several perspectives and methods of
27
28 historical analysis. Onto-epistemologically, historical realism means accurate and
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30 authentic reconstruction of events and processes from the perspective of an external
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32 observer (Steinmetz, 1998). For example, Kuzminski (1979: 329) sees realism as
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34 “descriptive accounts [as] self-validating; that is, that their truth-value is manifest in
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36 the face of appropriate evidence.” This is the approach often taken in traditional
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38 corporate histories (Ericson et al., forthcoming; Rowlinson et al., 2014).
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43 Historical realism can also involve an attempt to go beyond this ‘surface’ as in
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45 a transcendental understanding of history and social reality. This reflects the
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47 philosophical foundations of scientific realism (Bhaskar, 1975; Reed, 2005) in that it
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49 focuses attention on structures, processes, and mechanisms. This is often the case in
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51 historical sociology and economic history and close to what Rowlinson et al. (2014)
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53 call analytically structured business history: “Analytically structured history thus uses
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55 analytic constructs [...] to search archival sources, enabling the construction of a
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3 narrative of structures and events that may not even have been perceived as such by
4 actors at the time [...] driven by concepts, events, and causation” (Rowlinson et al.,
5 2014). Arguably, most existing historical strategy research follows a realist approach
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10 (Ingram, Rao & Silverman, 2012; Kipping & Cailluet, 2010).

11 **Methodology.** Realist history is often conducted in the form of historical case
12 studies that focus on processes, structures and patterns that are assumed to exist
13 independently of the researcher’s imagination (Kuzminski, 1979; Steinmetz, 1998).
14 Management research and especially business history provide numerous examples of
15 such studies. Ericson et al. (forthcoming) put it as follows: “The emergent discipline
16 of business history is closely related to the development of the case method,
17 according to which strategy is framed as something made through isolated moments
18 of intentional decision making that provide a critical turning point in a chronological
19 narrative flow of events. The narrative leads up to the moment of a strategic decision,
20 ushering in the future, shaped by the strategic decision taken.”
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34 For our purposes, it is important to note that several landmark strategy process
35 studies are essentially realist historical case studies. Pettigrew’s (1973) work on the
36 politics of organizational decision-making provides an early exemplary study in
37 which the historical detail is remarkable. His long-term work on continuity and
38 change in ICI provides another exemplary study (Pettigrew, 1985). These studies have
39 paved the way for theoretical analysis of context and embeddedness (Pettigrew, 1987,
40 2012). Pettigrew (1997) has also reflected on how to conduct (historically-oriented)
41 process studies. Burgelman offers another key example in his long-term work on Intel
42 (1983, 1994, 2002a, b). His analysis highlights the dynamics of emergent strategy or
43 autonomous strategy work as embedded in specific historical contexts. In particular,
44 Burgelman (2002b) provides an illuminating longitudinal case study where he
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3 compares Intel's strategy-making under Andy Grove's leadership with the
4 characteristics of the previous period. Based on a combination of interviews and
5 historical study of corporate documents, the analysis details the differences in
6 strategy-making in these time periods and also describes their linkages with the
7 overall organizational and technological changes. On this basis, the analysis explains
8 how Intel's strategy moved away from the 'internal-ecology' model towards the
9 'rational-actor' model. It also elucidates how the positive environmental feedback
10 associated with the new strategic orientation created a coevolutionary lock-in that had
11 a major impact on development of the corporation. Later, Burgelman (2011) has also
12 offered explicit reflections on the merits and challenges of longitudinal case studies,
13 calling for deeper historical reflection and more systematic processual analysis.
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27 Furthermore, there are some explicitly historical case studies that illuminate
28 the dynamics of strategic processes (Kipping & Cailluet, 2010; Rowlinson, 1995). In
29 particular, Kipping and Cailluet (2010) have examined the interplay of deliberate
30 versus emergent strategy-making at Alcan between 1928 and 2007. Their analysis
31 shows how the company gradually moved from emergent to more deliberate strategy-
32 making, although external forces continued to influence its decisions. Such historical
33 case studies can thus be used to explicate the dynamics of strategic processes and
34 especially their contextual embeddedness (Pettigrew, 1987, 1992). They also
35 exemplify the importance of long-term historical analysis – often based on years of
36 engagement – and authenticity in such studies.
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49 There are, however, other historical methods such as comparative historical
50 analysis that can help us to go further in the analysis of historical embeddedness.
51 Comparative historical analysis has developed in recent years into a vibrant analytical
52 methodology in history and historical sociology (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).
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3 In essence, this method takes realist historical case studies further in its more
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5 systematic causal analysis and comparison. According to Mahoney and
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7 Rueschemeyer (2003), the three identifying issues of historical comparative research
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9 are causal relationships, processes over time, and comparisons. As they (Mahoney &
10
11 Rueschemeyer, 2003: 48) put it: “Comparative historical inquiry is [...] concerned
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13 with explanation and the identification of causal configurations that produce major
14
15 outcomes of interest [...] analyze historical sequences and take seriously the
16
17 unfolding of processes over time [...] engage in systematic and contextualized
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19 comparisons of similar and contrasting cases.”
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23 Despite its potential, comparative historical analysis has not yet been fully
24
25 applied in strategy process research. Pajunen (2005), nevertheless, provides an
26
27 illuminating reflection and example of what that could entail. He underscores the need
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29 to examine strategic actions and decisions systematically to be able to comprehend
30
31 their strategic impact. This involves comparison across cases to be able to distinguish
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33 more general patterns from case-specific idiosyncratic features. This should then lead
34
35 to an elaboration of the key causal mechanisms at play in these strategic processes.
36
37 Pajunen applies it to an analysis of two decline and turnaround cases in the paper and
38
39 pulp sector in Finland. Based on a detailed historical analysis of key events, he
40
41 establishes understanding of ‘event causality,’ that is how specific strategic decisions
42
43 and actions influenced the course of events, and then compares the cases. On this
44
45 basis, he proposes that in the context of decline, strategic processes involve several
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47 causal mechanisms related to signals of poor performance and external reactions.
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52 While almost non-existent in strategy process research, there are, however,
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54 examples of comparative historical analysis in adjacent fields (Lamberg et al., 2006;
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56 Finkelstein, 2006; Murmann, 2013). In particular, Murmann’s (2013) study of
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3 industrial coevolution illuminates the potential of comparative historical analysis. His
4
5 analysis focuses on the development of the synthetic dye industry over a 60-year
6
7 period. Based on a vast amount of systematically collected historical material, the
8
9 analysis focuses on how the interactions between the company and the research
10
11 community steered the development of the synthetic dye industry and the companies
12
13 involved. Essential in the analysis is the condensing of the empirical material into key
14
15 events and actions and their subsequent comparison across several company cases in
16
17 five countries. As a result, Murmann identifies three causal mechanisms – exchange
18
19 of personnel, commercial ties, and lobbying – in determining the coevolutionary
20
21 trajectory. While the study does not focus on strategy-making, it illuminates how
22
23 these interactions influenced the strategic decisions of the companies and reveals
24
25 differences across the companies and countries studied.
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29 **Contribution: Historical embeddedness of strategic processes.** Realist historical
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31 research in general and comparative historical analysis in particular can advance our
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33 understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and thus
34
35 contribute to research on the role of context in strategy process studies (Child, 1972;
36
37 Hutzschenreuter & Kleindiest, 2006; Pettigrew, 1987). First, comparative historical
38
39 analysis can highlight the characteristic features of strategic planning and other forms
40
41 of strategy-making across contexts. Socio-historical or cultural differences in strategic
42
43 processes have not generated a great deal of interest in strategy process research in
44
45 spite of calls for analysis of context and embeddedness (Floyd et al., 2011;
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47 Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Pettigrew, 1997, 2012). A comparative
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49 historical perspective can significantly broaden the research agenda in this respect.
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51 Such analysis involves not only an identification of the general social or
52
53 organizational dynamics of strategic processes, but an inherent interest in the
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3 differences and variations of these processes across historical time periods and
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5 contexts. Such analysis can focus attention on processes that have not been labeled as
6
7 ‘strategic’ and thus expand our understanding of the forms and variations in strategy-
8
9 making. This can involve analysis of strategic processes in contexts that have not
10
11 been characterized by strategic planning as we nowadays tend to see it. For instance,
12
13 studies of strategy-making before the 1960s are likely to reveal significant differences
14
15 when compared with those following the spread of strategic planning since the 1960s.
16
17 Strategic processes also appear to be very different in nature when one compares
18
19 those in the American or British institutional and cultural contexts – which we know
20
21 most about – with those in other places in Europe or in Asia in different time periods.
22
23 This is also the case with different sociopolitical contexts that have received little
24
25 attention in strategy research; for instance, one could compare strategic planning
26
27 processes in the West with those in the Eastern Block during the Cold War or with
28
29 those of American, Chinese and Japanese corporations in various time periods. In
30
31 addition to highlighting overall differences, such analysis could focus on specific
32
33 issues such as the relative importance of top-down formal vs. autonomous strategy
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35 work (Kipping & Cailluet, 2010; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013) in different socio-
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37 historical contexts.
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43 Second, such analysis can contribute to a better understanding of historical
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45 conditions as triggers and determinants of strategic processes. Strategic processes,
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47 involving more formal, planned or top-down and especially emergent processes often
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49 result from environmental changes. This is evident in the historical case studies
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51 referred to above. For example, Burgelman’s studies on Intel’s history reveal that the
52
53 emphasis on an autonomous (1994) or induced (2002a) mode of strategizing
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55 depended on the interplay between the competitive environment and the corporation’s
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3 actions as well as on the actions of the executives in charge. Comparative historical
4
5 analysis can further elucidate the interconnectedness of corporate strategic processes
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7 with the broader historical development of the industry and thus contribute to our
8
9 understanding of the evolution of strategic processes – which is one of the key issues
10
11 in strategy process research (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006). Like Murmann’s
12
13 (2013) study, such historical analysis may capture long process cycles with a
14
15 beginning and end, and thus enable systematic identification and comparison of the
16
17 dynamics of strategic processes. This is essential to be able to understand phenomena
18
19 such as path dependency or coevolution or to assess the outcomes of strategic
20
21 processes. In particular, careful causal analysis of key events and patterns can clarify
22
23 the extent to which corporate strategy-making reflects the more general trends or
24
25 changes in the environment (e.g., technological or sociopolitical changes) or the
26
27 extent to which corporate strategy-making may create truly novel strategic ideas and
28
29 trigger new developments. Thus, such analysis can help to identify turning points in
30
31 strategy-making and relate them to broader field-configuring events and processes.
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36 Third, comparative historical analysis can also elucidate the ‘embedded
37
38 agency’ of the strategic actors involved, which is yet another key issue in strategy
39
40 process studies (Floyd et al., 2011: 941). By embedded agency, we mean the
41
42 historical and contextual influence exercised by top executives or others to impact the
43
44 strategies of the organization (Lamberg & Pajunen, 2010). This key issue in strategy
45
46 process research has not received the attention it deserves, at least in part because of a
47
48 lack of conceptual and methodological tools for contextualization. Pettigrew’s
49
50 (Pettigrew, 1987, 2012) and Burgelman’s (1983, 2002a) studies highlight top
51
52 managerial agency in key turning points of corporate evolution, and more recent
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54 process studies elaborate on the dynamics related to this agency (Denis et al., 2011;
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3 Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013). Comparative historical analysis provides additional
4 means to elucidate such agency in an explicit manner as in the systematic examination
5 of key decisions, actions, and their consequences in Pajunen (2005) or Murmann
6 (2013). This can also involve explicit counterfactual reasoning, that is, analysis of
7 what would have happened had the top managers or other actors not acted in the way
8 they did (Ferguson, 1997; Tetlock & Belkin, 1996). Although such counterfactual
9 analysis can take many forms, it must be systematic and explicit (Durand & Vaara,
10 2009).¹ Thus, comparative historical analysis of managers' actions, decisions and
11 choices can improve our understanding of the extent to which they were indeed
12 'strategic' in the course of the historical evolution of an industry, economy, or
13 society.
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27 **Interpretative History and Embeddedness of Strategic Practices**

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29 **Onto-epistemological basis.** The interpretative approach in general and microhistory
30 in particular can advance our understanding of the historical embeddedness of
31 strategic practices by placing strategic actions and associated practices in their
32 historical context. Interpretative history is a broad concept referring to studies that are
33 based on an intensive qualitative examination of historical sources with a focus on
34 understanding the meaning of the events in question (Carr, 1986; Iggers, 2005).
35
36 Collingwood's famous concept of 're-enactment' literally means thinking through the
37 thoughts of past actors (Collingwood, 1946). As he explains it, the historian's "work
38 may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must
39 always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think
40 himself into the action, to discern the thought of its agent" (Collingwood, 1946: 142).
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Onto-epistemologically, interpretative history may reflect several kinds of

¹ Durand and Vaara (2009) provide a template that can be useful in systematic counterfactual analysis in strategy studies. The stages in their model include the identification of critical events, specification of causal processes and mechanisms, and the use of counterfactuals to establish causation.

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3 positions (see e.g., Kuzminski, 1979; White, 1975). However, it is usually based on
4
5 some kind of social constructionist or hermeneutic understanding of history. On the
6
7 one hand, the focus is on the meaning of specific events or actions for the actors
8
9 involved. This makes interpretative history an approach that resonates with studies of
10
11 strategic practices in context. On the other hand, interpretative history involves
12
13 awareness of the researcher's constructions of episodes and historical narratives
14
15 (Ankersmit, 2013). For example, White (1975) sees all historical research as narrated
16
17 and dependent on the writer's embeddedness in her social and intellectual context.
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21 **Methodology.** Interpretative history is pursued across several fields of contemporary
22
23 history research, but is particularly widespread in social and cultural history that in
24
25 general seek to understand the meaning of actions in context. The key methodological
26
27 characteristic of interpretative historical work is the aim to arrive at an empathetic
28
29 understanding of the actions of individuals and the meanings of these actions when
30
31 contextualized in a specific setting. While interpretative history may take different
32
33 forms, we will focus in the following on microhistory as a particularly fruitful method
34
35 to better understand the historical embeddedness of strategic practices.
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39 Microhistory aims to elucidate historical patterns and social structures
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41 (Ginzburg, 1993; Peltonen, 2001) through the close analysis of specific events,
42
43 actions or practices. This has been done in a variety of ways in for example historical
44
45 micro-analysis (Stewart, 1959) or cultural history (Ginzburg, 1993). Although the
46
47 term 'micro' implies an empirical focus on the detail, micro-historians emphasize that
48
49 they are interested in 'big' issues. Joyner (1999) has famously stated that
50
51 microhistorians need to ask "large questions in small places." Magnussen and Szijarto
52
53 (2013: 327) explain the essence of contemporary microhistory as follows:
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55 "Microhistory [...] pursues the idea that a small unit can reflect a larger whole [...] in
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3 the most successful instances the microhistorian's subject is deconstructed within its
4
5 own framework; a large range of factors that relate to the subject are examined and
6
7 analysed." Microhistory can thus focus on the everyday trivialities, anomalies, and
8
9 grassroots processes to reveal long-term social dynamics and structures in which the
10
11 local and temporal activities and practices are embedded (Peltonen, 2001). It is
12
13 characteristically based on ethnographic-type of data – observation or historical
14
15 materials revealing authentic experiences – and thus what Rowlinson et al. (2014)
16
17 label ethnographic history.
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21 Microhistory may take various forms, ranging from intensive synthesis of rich
22
23 historical data to interpretation of specific instances of historical information. For
24
25 instance, Stewart's (1959) classic analysis of the Battle of Gettysburg ("Pickett's
26
27 Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863") is an early
28
29 inspirational example of how specific decisions and actions at a particular point in
30
31 time help to explain the bigger picture. It literally focuses on one day of fighting
32
33 during the US Civil War, and by analogy it exemplifies the opportunities and
34
35 challenges of the microhistorical approach for strategy research. The book consists of
36
37 description and analysis of the actions of General Lee and his Confederate army at
38
39 Gettysburg. The book is an example of microhistorical workmanship in many
40
41 respects. It is based on extensive material of oral history accounts, memoirs, diaries,
42
43 correspondence, and published research. The amount of material allows a detailed,
44
45 minute-by-minute description of the micro-actions during the day but also embeds
46
47 these micro-actions in the larger context of the war as well as the cultural contexts
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49 that are reflected in the values and shared understandings of the rules of the game.
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51 The book thus provides a thick description of strategizing and its contextual
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53 embeddedness. In particular, it describes in detail how generals were unaware of the
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3 morale and physical condition of the troops, how brigadiers did not foresee the
4 actions of neighboring regiments, and how most of them were misinformed about the
5 enemy's strengths and operational capabilities.
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10 The more culturalist tradition in microhistory has in turn emphasizes the
11 historian's constructions of events and actions. In the classic works by Ginzburg
12 (1993) and Levi (1991), the starting point was a collection of material that allowed the
13 microscopic scrutiny of particular processes in a distant past. In this view, the aims of
14 the microhistorical movement are not only methodological but also theoretical and
15 political as summarized in an influential book review (Gregory, 1999: 101): "[B]y
16 dramatically shrinking the arena of investigation, the practitioners of
17 *Alltagsgeschichte* [i.e. the German version of microhistory) and *microstoria* [the
18 Italian version] questioned the purported teleology of modernizing historical
19 processes. Their diverse, detailed results suggest that developments such as
20 industrialization and bureaucratization should be rethought as contingent and uneven.
21 At the same time, meticulous attention to human interaction on the micro-scale
22 preserves the agency of ordinary people. Reversing the views of social historians who
23 saw teleology "on their side," this vision suggests hope for an undetermined future
24 insofar as it finds contingency in the past."
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43 Microhistorical analyses of strategic practices have, however, been lacking. In
44 a rare exception, Ericsson et al. (forthcoming) argue that its "focus on micro-scale
45 moments and events" suggests "an obvious affinity with the interest of Strategy as
46 Practice in the quotidian." They also exemplify microhistory's method and potential
47 with reference to Popp and Holt's study (2013) of leadership succession strategy at
48 Wedgwood and Sons in the late 18th century. Interestingly, the whole study is based
49 on a letter written by founder Josiah Wedgwood to his son Josiah II reflecting upon
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3 the succession of the business. The analysis focuses on the content of the letter, while
4
5 at the same time contextualizing it, to illuminate the specificities of the historical
6
7 context with its different layers. Hence this study exemplifies how microhistories can
8
9 be constructed on the basis of seemingly small pieces of empirical data.
10

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12 Microhistory may, however, also be based on larger sets of empirical material
13
14 that are used in condensed presentations of micro-level activities and practices. This is
15
16 the case with recent business histories that reflect a microhistorical way of presenting
17
18 the actions of the key persons in context. For instance, Stiles' (2009) biography of
19
20 Cornelius Vanderbilt provides a thick description of the strategizing of the 'first
21
22 tycoon' in historical context. In particular, the book provides several microhistorical
23
24 illustrations of strategy-making that reveal how Vanderbilt was both enabled and
25
26 constrained by the prevailing industrial and organizational practices. Furthermore,
27
28 these instances illuminate how Vanderbilt at times broke the rules-of-the-game and
29
30 established new strategic practices. Thus, Stiles's study is a particularly interesting
31
32 example of the opportunities of the microhistorical approach as it exemplifies how the
33
34 practices of competitive strategy may be studied as part of a multi-faceted historical
35
36 analysis.
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41 Simon's (2011) business history of the Finland-based Kone Corporation in
42
43 turn elaborates on the practices of strategy-making in another cultural historical
44
45 context: that of the Cold War. The book starts with an illuminating example of
46
47 decision-making about an unprecedented acquisition by the Finnish company in
48
49 Sweden. This microhistorical episode is described and analyzed in depth, and it
50
51 highlights how the key decision-makers were operating in a very specific environment
52
53 constituted by Cold War Finland and its political decision-making practices and the
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55 traditions of the family business. The analysis in particular illuminates how the roles
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3 and identities of the actors were linked with these practices.
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5 **Contribution: Historical embeddedness of strategic practices.** Interpretative
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7 historical research in general and microhistory in particular can add to our
8
9 understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices and thus
10
11 contribute especially to strategy-as-practice research. First, microhistory can help us
12
13 to better comprehend the historical nature of strategic practices. This can add to our
14
15 understanding of what is general or typical in strategic practices in particular
16
17 historical settings. Following the tradition of research on social practices, strategy-as-
18
19 practice research has focused on both the apparent and deeper-level practices and
20
21 their implications. While these studies have placed practices in context, they have
22
23 rarely elaborated on the historical aspects of these practices (Vaara & Whittington,
24
25 2012; Whittington et al., 2011). It is, however, important to highlight the multifaceted
26
27 nature of these practices and compare how practices may differ from one historical
28
29 time period and socio-cultural context to another. For example, strategic planning had
30
31 been practiced long before the label of 'strategic planning' became widespread
32
33 (Whittington et al., 2011). Similarly, the ways in which managers strategize have
34
35 certainly changed over time; compare for example decision-making in the early 1900s
36
37 with the post-WWII or Cold War eras or the distributed work practices offered by the
38
39 new technologies in contemporary organizations. In future research, it would be
40
41 interesting to focus not only on the most apparent practices, but also examine
42
43 controversial or 'illegitimate' practices, including for example empire-building,
44
45 gender discrimination or nepotism, and how they are defined across socio-historical
46
47 contexts as exemplified by Stiles (2009) or Simon (2011). By 'zooming in and out,'
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49 microhistory can thus add to our understanding of forms or strategic practices and
50
51 uncover 'layers' of embeddedness.
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3 Second, microhistory explicates the actions of managers and how they make
4 sense of strategic issues in specific socio-historical settings. Thus it can highlight how
5 strategic practices are enacted or how actors make use of them in concrete instances
6 of strategizing or strategy work. This can involve close analysis of episodes of
7 strategy-making work as in Stiles (2009) or Simon (2011). This kind of analysis helps
8 to place particular events or episodes in their wider social, cultural and sociopolitical
9 contexts and thus extend the scope of strategy-as-practice research. For instance,
10 although strategy meetings and workshops have received special attention in strategy-
11 as-practice research (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Johnson et al., 2010), we do not
12 know how such meetings and workshops and their functions or rituals have changed
13 over time – and thus about the ways in which managers and other organizational
14 members are enabled or constrained by the practices of particular settings.
15
16 Furthermore, microhistorical analysis can elucidate the use of strategy tools in context
17 (Dameron et al., 2015; Kaplan, 2011; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, forthcoming). For
18 instance, Kaplan (2011) has demonstrated the central role of PowerPoint in strategy-
19 making in that it focuses attention on specific issues and not others and favors specific
20 actors and not others. However, various tools and technologies have been used in
21 different ways in specific time periods, which is another key issue that microhistory
22 could highlight. This kind of analysis can also help us to understand how managers
23 and other actors may go against prevailing practices, break the rules-of-the-game, or
24 invent new ones – thus highlighting their embedded agency.

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27 Third, interpretative history in general and microhistory in particular can
28 increase our understanding of the roles and identities of the strategists and how they
29 are adopted and constructed in different historical settings. In addition to highlighting
30 the role of top managers, such analysis can also help us to comprehend the actions of
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3 middle managers in different socio-historical contexts and thus add to the discussion
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5 of the roles and identities of the strategists (Mantere, 2008; Wooldridge et al., 2008).
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7 Furthermore, interpretative historical analysis can help us to better understand how
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9 prevailing practices enable or impede engagement or participation of non-managerial
10
11 actors (Mantere & Vaara, 2008).
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14 **Poststructuralist History and Embeddedness of Strategic Discourses**

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16 **Onto-epistemological basis.** Poststructuralist history in general and genealogy in
17
18 particular can advance our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic
19
20 discourses as well as their truth and power effects. Poststructuralist history focuses on
21
22 the construction of historical understanding that is then deconstructed in analyses that
23
24 are often critical in spirit (Rowlinson & Hassard, 2014). This approach can take
25
26 different forms, and it is not only pursued by historians but also by philosophers and
27
28 social scientists of a poststructuralist orientation.
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32 Onto-epistemologically, poststructuralist history is based on radical
33
34 constructionism and is closely connected to poststructuralism and postmodernism in
35
36 the social sciences (Flynn, 2005), including organization studies (Hassard, 1994;
37
38 Hassard & Cox, 2013). In poststructuralism, the key notion is that of discourse, which
39
40 is usually understood as the fundamental element in the social construction of reality.
41
42 Accordingly, poststructuralism focuses on uncovering dominant discourses and their
43
44 implications on social reality and especially power. Unlike historical realism or
45
46 interpretative history, poststructuralist analysis problematizes and deconstructs
47
48 prevailing historical narratives (Durepos & Mills, 2012). This also means an emphasis
49
50 on reflexivity in terms of how researchers themselves portray and present historical
51
52 material and interpretations, resulting in ways of reporting that may be characterized
53
54 by criticality and irony.
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3 **Methodology.** Methodologically, poststructuralist history can take several forms. In
4
5 business history, Lipartito and Sicilia (2004) have outlined a poststructuralist
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7 approach that questions the predominance of economic perspectives that has led to a
8
9 limited understanding of the corporation as a socio-political actor. In a similar spirit,
10
11 Rowlinson and Hassard (2014) present deconstruction and narrative deconstruction
12
13 and reconstruction as methods for culturally oriented business history. Durepos and
14
15 Mills (2012) in turn call for historiography informed by Actor Network Theory.
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19 In the following, we concentrate on genealogy as a particularly fruitful
20
21 methodology to analyze the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses and their
22
23 power effects. Genealogy focuses on the historical evolution of concepts and
24
25 discourses, and it is mainly associated with Foucauldian discourse analysis (1977).
26
27 However, genealogical discourse analysis may also include other historically-oriented
28
29 forms of critical discourse analysis or combinations thereof (Anaïs, 2013; Wodak,
30
31 2001).² Genealogy includes the use of historiographical methods, but in a very
32
33 specific manner. Central to this method is the idea of ‘archaeology,’ which Foucault
34
35 initially developed in “The Order of Things” (Foucault, 1973) and “Archeology of
36
37 Knowledge” (1972). In essence, archaeology means historiographical analysis of
38
39 knowledge that is not based on the primacy of the knowing subject, but where
40
41 knowledge in itself is constructed in discourses. Whereas archaeology helps to focus
42
43 on and compare the discourses of specific time periods, it does not as such explain
44
45 shifts from one period to another, for which purpose Foucault developed his
46
47 ‘genealogical’ view in the landmark book “Discipline and Punish” (Foucault, 1977).
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52
53 ² Genealogy originates from the philosophical work of Nietzsche, from which Foucault drew his
54
55 inspiration (1994). At times, Foucauldian discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis,
56
57 especially Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003), are seen as
58
59 epistemologically distinctively different alternatives. However, like Anaïs (2013) or Wodak
60
(2001), we argue that forms of critical discourse analysis build on Foucault’s work and
specifically advance our empirical understanding of discursive phenomena such as
interdiscursivity or recontextualization.

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3 The key idea in genealogy is that the discursive and other practices as we
4 observe them have evolved over time in the course of history on the basis of existing
5 practices and transformations in them. In this view, discourses play a central role in
6 the social construction of reality; they “systematically form the objects of which they
7 speak” (Foucault, 1972: 49). A key point in genealogical analysis is therefore to
8 examine the prevailing discourses of specific time periods and to elaborate on their
9 implications for subjectivity and power (Foucault, 1994). Thus, although the
10 development of practices is path-dependent, it also involves ‘accidentalities’ as new
11 ideas may emerge and transform prevailing practices, often with far less deliberation
12 or intentionality than we tend to attribute to human and social action (Poster, 1982).
13 In all this, critical reflection upon the dominant historical constructions and their
14 implications for the subjectivities of actors and the power relations between them is
15 essential. In fact, Foucault (1994) provocatively saw genealogy as ‘anti-history’ when
16 reflecting upon Nietzsche’s contributions that problematized prevailing historical
17 constructions.

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Genealogical methods have been used in different areas and disciplines extensively, and this is also the case with management and organization studies (Hassard & Rowlinson, 2002; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998). Foucauldian genealogy has been applied in the critical stream of strategy and process studies. In particular, Knights and Morgan’s (1991) genealogical study tracks down the emergence of strategic management discourse and helps us to understand how it developed in the post-war era mainly in the US and thereafter gained ground globally. Economic growth and the development of multinational corporations created a need to manage increasingly complex organizations, and strategic discourse emerged as an answer to this demand. This coincided with the development of business schools, leading to the

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3 emergence of strategic management as a discipline and field of research. Not least
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5 because of the promise of control inherent in strategic discourse, it has thereafter been
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7 spread to all kinds of organizational and cultural contexts. The analysis of Knights
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9 and Morgan (1991) helps us not only to understand this development, but also its
10
11 implications. In particular, their analysis highlights the power effects of this
12
13 discourse, which include the following: “(a) It provides managers with a
14
15 rationalization of their successes and failures; (b) It sustains and enhances the
16
17 prerogatives of management and negates alternative perspectives on organizations; (c)
18
19 It generates a sense of security for managers; (d) It reflects and sustains a strong sense
20
21 of gendered masculinity for male management; (e) It demonstrates managerial
22
23 rationality to colleagues, customers, competitors, government and significant others in
24
25 the environment; (f) It facilitates and legitimates the exercise of power; (g) It
26
27 constitutes the subjectivity of organizational members as particular categories of
28
29 persons who secure their sense of reality through engaging in this discourse and
30
31 practice” (Knights & Morgan, 1991: 262-263).
32
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35

36 Others have followed this path and complemented Knights and Morgan’s
37
38 (1991) analysis. For example, Kornberger (2013) provides an insightful analysis of
39
40 von Clausewitz’s work on strategy and its power effects in Foucauldian spirit. This
41
42 account focuses both on the initial text and how it has been subsequently interpreted
43
44 among strategy scholars. This reveals quite distinctive ways in which proper
45
46 strategizing and being a strategist are constructed. Thomas et al. (2013) in turn
47
48 provide a critical discursive analysis of the history of the academic discipline of
49
50 strategic management. They examine the ways in which ‘histories’ of this field
51
52 construct what is seen as ‘strategic’ or relevant for strategic management. They
53
54 maintain that central in these representations is the tendency to reconstruct the field as
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1
2
3 progressing in a teleological fashion and to distinguish it from other fields in order to
4
5 emphasize the importance of strategic management over other forms of management
6
7 or organizing.
8

9
10 Still others such as Ezzamel and Willmott (2008, 2010), Rasche and Chia
11
12 (2009), and Hardy and Thomas (2014) have used Foucauldian discourse analysis in
13
14 studying organizational strategy-making, though the genealogical historical aspects of
15
16 their analyses have been less important than their explicit reflections on the power
17
18 effects of strategic discourse in context. Thus, the potential of genealogical analysis
19
20 has not been fully realized in strategy process and practice research (see also Allard-
21
22 Poési, 2010).
23

24
25 **Contribution: Historical embeddedness of strategic discourses and their power**
26
27 **effects.** We thus argue that future research can go further in poststructuralist analysis
28
29 of strategic discourses and their power effects and thus contribute especially to critical
30
31 analyses of strategic management. First, although the studies mentioned above have
32
33 highlighted important aspects of the historical evolution of strategic management, for
34
35 example Thomas et al. (2013) have stated that we have only begun to understand the
36
37 historical canonization and institutionalization of strategic management as a
38
39 discipline. We maintain that the focus should not only be on what is explicitly called
40
41 ‘strategic management’ but also on other strategic discourses in other contexts. Thus,
42
43 future research should examine the dominant discourses of specific historical contexts
44
45 and periods that have been left with little attention when focusing on the western
46
47 conceptions of ‘strategic planning’ or ‘strategic management.’ Furthermore, future
48
49 research can specifically highlight the historically produced interdiscursivity of
50
51 strategic management discourses, that is, how discourses are interlinked in context
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54
55
56 (Vaara, 2010). In addition to the linkage to post-war corporate development – as
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1
2
3 highlighted by Knights and Morgan (1991) – or its militaristic origins – as explained
4
5 by Kornberger (2013), there are other discursive aspects of contemporary strategic
6
7 management that deserve special attention. These include its post- and neo-colonial
8
9 aspects, which have received little explicit recognition (Prasad, 2003). For instance,
10
11 we can view strategic discourse as part of a neo-colonial globalization project linked
12
13 with Americanization (Djelic, 1998). As Knights and Morgan (1991) have showed in
14
15 their genealogical analysis, the historically constructed American influence is central
16
17 in contemporary strategic management discourses. Future research could go further
18
19 by elucidating how this is shown in discourses about planning, participation,
20
21 reporting, or corporate governance and variations and nuances in these discourses. We
22
23 thus maintain that future genealogical research can go beyond the classic analysis of
24
25 Knights and Morgan (1991) in elaborating on the various interdiscursive aspects of
26
27 strategic management and their implications in different socio-historical contexts.
28
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31
32 Second, genealogical analysis can also be applied to better understand the
33
34 recontextualizations or translations of strategic discourses in various socio-historical
35
36 contexts (see also Vaara, 2010). This is a key aspect of embeddedness that has
37
38 received little attention in previous research. Careful discourse analysis can help us to
39
40 understand for example how strategic management has spread to public sector
41
42 organizations such as universities, hospitals, schools, kindergartens, and been linked
43
44 with specific traditions of bureaucracy or professionalism in various socio-historical
45
46 settings. Specific inter-discursive combinations and their tensions are particularly
47
48 interesting objects of study – both historically and for comprehension of
49
50 contemporary power and ideological struggles.
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54 Third, genealogical analysis can specifically highlight the truth effects of
55
56 strategic discourses – or ‘strategic truths.’ Thus, it can help us to understand the
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1
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3 institutionalization of particular forms of knowledge, dominant logics in them as well
4
5 as fads and fashions in strategic management (Abrahamson, 1991, 1996). This is not a
6
7 trivial matter, but a key aspect in the development of the body of knowledge of
8
9 strategic management – with respect to what we regard as proper knowledge. As
10
11 shown by Thomas et al. (2013), such analysis can span both academic and more
12
13 popular forms of knowledge, including critical reflection on their ideological
14
15 underpinnings and power effects.
16
17

18
19 Fourth, genealogy is especially suitable for the analysis of the subjectivities
20
21 constructed for strategic actors (Knights & Morgan, 1991), which helps to advance
22
23 our understanding of strategy as a profession. In a rare analysis of the evolution of the
24
25 strategy profession, Whittington et al. (2011) argue that strategy is a ‘precarious
26
27 profession’ that is subject to shifts in societal and organizational power. They
28
29 maintain that this precariousness has increased over time with more open forms of
30
31 strategy-making, transparency, and inclusion gaining ground. On this basis, they call
32
33 for more research on this topic. Genealogical analysis of the development of strategic
34
35 discourses can be seen as a particularly suitable method for this purpose as it helps to
36
37 elucidate how prevailing discourses of strategy-making and strategic management
38
39 more generally construct structures of rights and obligations for various actors, thus
40
41 defining and redefining who can be seen as strategy professionals or allowed to
42
43 engage in strategy-making and on what terms. A part of all this is how specific
44
45 companies and managers may emerge as exemplars and heroes to be followed by
46
47 others (Paroutis, McKeown & Collinson, 2013).
48
49
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51
52 Fifth, related to the previous point, genealogical analysis can help us to better
53
54 understand various forms of engagement and participation in organizational strategy-
55
56 making (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). In addition to elaborating on the roles and identities
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1
2
3 of various actors as discussed above in the case of microhistory, genealogical analysis
4
5 can elucidate how specific actors may in particular organizations become strategists –
6
7 and how this may be facilitated or impeded. In addition to highlighting the
8
9 subjectivities and power relations of top and middle managers, such analysis can
10
11 focus on non-managerial decision-makers and add to our knowledge of the various
12
13 forms and dynamics of engagement, participation, and resistance (Ezzamel &
14
15 Willmott, 2008, 2010). Genealogical analysis for instance allows one to see resistance
16
17 as a productive force, which is an issue that has received very little attention in prior
18
19 research. This is the case although for example creative dialogue may require
20
21 alternative viewpoints or autonomous strategy-making stem from resistance to
22
23 prevailing strategies (Dick & Collings, 2015; Laine & Vaara, 2007). Genealogical
24
25 studies could elaborate on the multiple ways in which participation is discursively
26
27 constructed in various socio-historically embedded discourses, thus extending the
28
29 research agenda in strategy-making.
30
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33

34 Sixth, and finally, Foucauldian genealogical analysis is often seen ‘merely’ as
35
36 textual analysis that does not connect with material reality. This, however, is a
37
38 misunderstanding as in this method the discursive practices may be closely linked
39
40 with sociomaterial practices. This is clear in Foucault’s original work and for instance
41
42 in CDA-type of discourse analysis (Vaara, 2010). Thus, genealogical analysis can
43
44 also extend our understanding of how strategy tools and other sociomaterial practices
45
46 have shaped strategy-making over time (Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski and
47
48 Kaplan, forthcoming; Wright et al., 2013). While current literature on sociomateriality
49
50 has already helped us to understand how specific tools may enable or constrain human
51
52 actors, genealogical analysis can add to this knowledge by illuminating the role of
53
54 strategy tools in strategic discourses. For instance, it would be important to examine
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1
2
3 how specific strategy tools have been developed, used, and become institutionalized
4
5 in different socio-historical contexts. It would also be interesting to study the ways in
6
7 which the tools themselves have been key parts in constituting strategic truths and
8
9 fashions or shaping the evolution of the strategy profession. For example, five-year
10
11 planning, the BCG matrix or Porter's five forces have undoubtedly had a crucial role
12
13 in the development of strategic management as a field and profession. Moreover,
14
15 'open strategy' or the 'massification' of strategy (Whittington et al., 2011;
16
17 Whittington, 2015) would not been possible without technologies enabling
18
19 widespread information gathering and participation.
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21
22

23 24 **HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS AS A BASIS FOR HISTORICALLY** 25 **INFORMED STRATEGY PROCESS AND PRACTICE RESEARCH** 26

27
28 The three approaches and the associated methods reviewed above explain how
29
30 historical analysis can advance our understanding of historical embeddedness in
31
32 strategy process and practice research. In the following, we discuss the need for
33
34 methodological alternatives and taking their onto-epistemological commitments
35
36 seriously, elaborate on key aspects of historical embeddedness and their implications
37
38 for theory development in strategy process and practice studies, and finally reflect
39
40 upon the application of historical methods with an example.
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43 **Methodological Alternatives and Onto-epistemological Commitments** 44

45
46 We have presented realist history, interpretative history, and poststructuralist history
47
48 as distinctive approaches and offered specific methods to uncover aspects of historical
49
50 embeddedness. We underscore that these approaches are based on fundamentally
51
52 different ontological assumptions and epistemological commitments that reflect
53
54 different paradigms in management and organization research (Burrell & Morgan,
55
56 1979; Hassard & Cox, 2013; Newton et al., 2011; Tsoukas & Chia, 2011). These three
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1
2
3 approaches by and large cohere with those in Hassard & Cox's (2013) recent
4
5 paradigm model that is based on Burrell & Morgan's (1979) initial work. Like them,
6
7 we emphasize the importance of making analytical distinctions between traditions
8
9 when developing theorizations of processes, practices and discourses in historical
10
11 context – even if they can inform each other or might even be combined in specific
12
13 studies (Hassard, 1991). Thus, the three historical approaches that we elaborate on
14
15 should not merely be seen as part of a toolkit of historical methods without
16
17 consideration of what they stand for.
18
19

20
21 More specifically, these approaches reflect fundamentally different
22
23 assumptions about key aspects of historical analysis (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014;
24
25 Rowlinson et al., 2014; Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014) of which truth, temporality, and
26
27 narrative representation are central for our purposes. In realist history, the intention is
28
29 to present strategic processes and events as accurately and authentically as possible
30
31 and to uncover underlying causal mechanisms. In interpretative history, the focus is
32
33 on the reconstruction and re-enactment of strategy-making and associated contextual
34
35 practices in situ. In contrast, the objective in poststructuralist history is to
36
37 problematize historical truths about strategic management and to focus on their
38
39 implications (Kuukkanen, 2015). In fact, poststructuralist history may be used to
40
41 criticize conventional realist historical analysis.
42
43
44

45
46 As to temporality, realist history sees time primarily as chronological as the
47
48 focus is on dynamic strategic processes and their causal mechanisms; the time horizon
49
50 is usually relatively long especially in comparative historical analysis. Interpretative
51
52 history concentrates on time in situ and the construction of meaning for the actors
53
54 involved in strategy-making; this may involve constructions of the past, present and
55
56 future as part of the strategy-making of the moment in historical context.
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1
2
3 Poststructuralist history in turn focuses on spatio-temporal reconstructions and
4
5 deconstructions where the present implications can only be understood by unraveling
6
7 the historical evolution of the strategic discourses (Jordheim, 2014).
8

9
10 As to historical narratives, realist history usually involves representation that
11
12 aims at generalizations in terms of temporal causal patterns, interpretative history at
13
14 re-enactment of past actions and practices in situ, and poststructuralism at critical
15
16 deconstruction of such narratives. The narrative representations in each of these
17
18 approaches may thus look very different, which should also be reflected in the writing
19
20 of these analyses (Kuukkanen, 2012; Zagorin, 1999). In all, elucidating these
21
22 differences is important as it helps to specify the alternative ways of conducting
23
24 historically informed strategy process and practice research – as has recently been
25
26 called for in management history more generally (Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014;
27
28 DeJong & Higgins, forthcoming; Rowlinson et al., 2014).
29
30

31 32 **Facets of Historical Embeddedness and Implications for Theory-Building**

33
34 We have argued that historical embeddedness involves three facets that can be
35
36 analyzed and understood with specific historical approaches and methods: the
37
38 historical embeddedness of strategic processes, strategic practices, and strategic
39
40 discourses. In the spirit of the Special Topic Forum, we have highlighted particular
41
42 intersections of historical approaches and streams of strategy process and practice
43
44 studies. As elaborated in the previous sections, this analysis of historical
45
46 embeddedness helps to provide new answers to existing research questions and to
47
48 pose new ones. In particular, it adds to our understanding of at least three fundamental
49
50 issues in strategic management: forms of strategic processes and practices,
51
52 construction of organizational strategies, and strategic agency.
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56
57 First and foremost, analysis of historical embeddedness advances our
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1
2
3 understanding of how forms of strategic processes and practices differ across socio-
4
5 historical settings and their implications for strategy-making. Overall, an historical
6
7 perspective can broaden the scope of strategy process and practice research; what is
8
9 ‘strategic’ does not have to be limited to what is nowadays explicitly called ‘strategic’
10
11 and can encompass various kinds of strategic processes and practices. Furthermore,
12
13 historical analysis helps to open up the time horizon: It is not only the contemporary
14
15 cases and phenomena that deserve scholarly attention, but also those that have taken
16
17 place earlier or even in the distant past. Examining the embeddedness of strategic
18
19 processes highlights the close connection between organizational strategy-making and
20
21 broader historical conditions and industrial and technological changes. Here
22
23 comparative historical analysis can play a major role in uncovering long-term
24
25 processes as well as in explicit comparison between cases. Analysis of the
26
27 embeddedness of strategic practices can in turn elucidate the historical specificity of
28
29 key practices in different social, cultural and sociopolitical settings – including
30
31 practices that may not be perceived as ‘strategic’ – as highlighted by microhistory.
32
33 Focus on the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses in turn contributes to our
34
35 understanding of the various ways in which prevailing societal discourses or zeitgeist
36
37 allow for specific forms of strategy-making to develop and at times change, with
38
39 implications for the development of the field and profession (Whittington et al.,
40
41
42
43
44
45 2011).

46
47 Second, analysis of historical embeddedness adds to our understanding of the
48
49 construction of organizational strategies or their emergence in context. Emergence is
50
51 a key issue in strategic process research (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Mirabeau &
52
53 Maguire, 2013), and analysis of the embeddedness of strategic processes can add to
54
55 existing research by showing how strategies emerge in and through historical
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1
2
3 processes. Analysis of the embeddedness of strategic practices can in turn explain
4
5 how specific strategies are constructed in situ in relation to various practices that
6
7 enable or constrain strategy-making (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Finally, analysis of
8
9 the embeddedness of historical discourses highlights how conceptions of strategies
10
11 and strategy-making are reproduced and transformed over time as well as their
12
13 implications.
14

15
16 Third, agency is a key issue in social studies more generally, but we focus
17
18 here on strategic agency, i.e., the ability of managers or other organizational actors to
19
20 influence the strategic processes or trajectories of an organization. Conventionally,
21
22 strategy research has treated this question almost as a non-issue as strategic managers
23
24 have been viewed as actors that can and should control organizations via strategic
25
26 decision-making. Research on strategic processes and practices has, however,
27
28 provided understanding of how this agency is enabled or constrained by the prevailing
29
30 context (Floyd et al., 2011; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The historical analysis we
31
32 call for adds to this understanding by highlighting how strategic agency is conditioned
33
34 by historically embedded processes and how historically embedded practices enable
35
36 or constrain this agency in a given historical period or point in time. Furthermore,
37
38 analysis of the historically embedded discourses contributes to our understanding of
39
40 the subject positions that are constructed for managers and other actors (Knights &
41
42 Morgan, 1991), and future research can go further in elucidating how conceptions of
43
44 ‘strategists’ are constructed in a particular socio-historical setting and what these
45
46 constructions imply for issues such as participation or resistance in strategy-making.
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51 **Application of Historical Methods**

52
53 These approaches involve specific methods, and we have highlighted those with the
54
55 potential to uncover particular facets of historical embeddedness. While strategy
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1
2
3 process studies have already made use of naturalistic historical case studies, we offer
4
5 comparative historical analysis as a method for going further into the historically
6
7 embedded processes and causal mechanisms involved. Although strategy practice
8
9 research has frequently used interpretative case studies and ethnographic methods
10
11 (Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2010), historical analyses have been rare (Ericson et al.,
12
13 forthcoming; Whittington et al., 2011). We have suggested microhistory as a
14
15 particularly fruitful method not least because microhistory is close to historical
16
17 ethnography (Rowlinson et al., 2014) and thus appears as the natural extension of
18
19 ethnographically-oriented strategy-as-practice research (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek &
20
21 Spee, 2014; Vesa & Vaara, 2014). Though scholars have already used methods such
22
23 as genealogy in critical analyses of strategic processes and practices (Knights &
24
25 Morgan, 1991), we have offered ideas for taking such analyses further in order to
26
27 highlight how strategic phenomena are discursively constructed and to explain their
28
29 implications both at the field and organizational level.
30
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32

33
34 Thus, we call for specific applications of historical analysis depending on the
35
36 research context and questions at hand. It is also important to note that the typical
37
38 research designs and the ways of analyzing historical data may differ significantly.
39
40 For comparative historical analysis, longitudinal case comparisons would usually be a
41
42 key part of the research design. For microhistory, the focus is usually on specific
43
44 cases and episodes in them. Genealogy can then be used to analyze discursive
45
46 phenomena at the field level or across cases, but it may also be applied to examine
47
48 individual cases.
49
50

51
52 Each of these methods can thus highlight particular aspects of strategy-making
53
54 in historical context. Burgelman's (1983, 1994, 2002a, b) research on Intel – which
55
56 we referred to in the previous sections – serves as an illuminative example. Although
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1
2
3 a great deal is already known about strategy-making in Intel, historical analysis can
4
5 significantly add to our understanding of the embedded of strategic processes and
6
7 practices. As to realist history, Burgelman's (1983, 2002b) work already provides
8
9 insights into the processes and mechanisms of strategy-making. In particular, it
10
11 highlights how the strategic processes under Andy Grove ('microprocessor company,'
12
13 'vector model') differed from those of the previous period ('memory company,'
14
15 'ecological model'). However, a comparative historical analysis could juxtapose
16
17 Intel's case with other companies in the US, Japan or Taiwan in both eras and
18
19 specifically highlight how Intel's decisions differed from those of its direct or indirect
20
21 competitors (see e.g., Wu, Hung & Lin, 2006). This would elucidate the 'strategic
22
23 nature' of specific decisions as well as provide possibilities for contrasting
24
25 counterfactual scenarios, i.e., reflecting upon what Intel's development could have
26
27 been without specific key decisions such as investing in microprocessors or in RISC
28
29 technology or delays in moving into networks. It is through such comparative
30
31 historical contextualization that we can also better understand the strategic agency of
32
33 the key managers such as Moore or Grove at such turning points – in contrast to
34
35 strategic actions in other contexts and eras.

36
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39
40 Microhistory would then be able to 'dig deep' into the strategic actions and
41
42 practices of strategy-making in situ. While Burgelman's work has provided us with
43
44 detailed understanding of the dynamics of strategy-making, less is known about
45
46 episodes of strategy-making in their historical context. Burgelman's book (2002a)
47
48 does offer some insights into Andy Grove's character and style, but top
49
50 management's activities and practices are not described and analyzed in situ. Yet, it
51
52 would be important to understand how the top managers met, what tools and
53
54 frameworks they used, and how they involved or did not involve others – and how
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1
2
3 this changed in Intel over time. In addition, it would be interesting to learn more about
4
5 the practices of upper middle managers and how they approached strategy-making,
6
7 especially given their key role in autonomous strategy-making, which eventually
8
9 turned Intel into a microprocessor corporation. As discussed above, such
10
11 microhistorical analysis can concentrate on important events, even turning points, but
12
13 it can also focus on the more ‘mundane’ strategy work. The latter may be especially
14
15 useful in bettering our understanding of the crucial role of middle managers in Intel’s
16
17 history. Like historical analysis more generally, historical study of this kind should
18
19 place activities and practices in their socio-historical context. For instance, it seems
20
21 that the strategy-making practices of Intel reflect what has been characteristic of high
22
23 tech companies in Silicon Valley and the prevailing financial and other control
24
25 practices and popular ways of organizing strategy work in American corporations. A
26
27 closer look into the Intel case also suggests that the ability to act as strategists was
28
29 closely related to technological competence on the one hand and the ability to master
30
31 strategic planning practices on the other. The Intel case appears to tell us that the
32
33 former skills were more important in the first part of the company’s history whereas
34
35 the latter skills became more accentuated later on. It is through such historical
36
37 analysis that we can also better understand the roles and identities of the key
38
39 managers as well as their agency in terms of being enabled and constrained by
40
41 the context-specific practices.
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47 Finally, genealogy can help to understand yet other aspects of Intel’s strategy-
48
49 making. In general, the way in which strategies have been made sense of at Intel is
50
51 related to the dominant discourses. One of the key questions is to which extent Intel’s
52
53 case – and the way it is narrated – relates to the dominant strategic truths or fashions.
54
55 Like that of many companies, Intel’s strategy-making apparently reflects the key
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1
2
3 wisdoms or zeitgeist of the specific time periods. Intel also served as an example for
4
5 others as its top managers (especially Grove in the 1990s) received great media
6
7 attention – not unlike Bill Gates or Steve Jobs later on. Thus, poststructuralist analysis
8
9 helps to understand how Intel’s case is part of more popular as well as academic
10
11 discourses constructing the strategy profession. In addition to the heroification of top
12
13 managers, it illuminates how and under what terms others were able to emerge as key
14
15 strategists. It is interesting to note that the actions of middle managers as strategists
16
17 were widely approved and recognized only after they had successfully paved the way
18
19 to the strategic reorientation of Intel and been legitimated in Grove’s period. A closer
20
21 look at Intel could also help us better understand seemingly counterintuitive
22
23 phenomena such as how middle management’s resistance contributes to strategy-
24
25 making – as it did in terms of ‘autonomous’ strategy work. Finally, genealogical
26
27 analysis of Intel – as many other cases – may also explicitly criticize prevailing ways
28
29 of making sense of strategy-making, including elements such as western
30
31 ethnocentrism, financial preoccupation, gendered orientation, or accentuated
32
33 individualism.
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38

39 **CONCLUSION**

40
41 In this paper, we have presented three historical approaches that can be pursued to
42
43 deepen our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and
44
45 practices: realist history, interpretative history, and poststructuralist history. In the
46
47 spirit of the Special Topic Forum, we have thus provided ideas and suggestions for a
48
49 ‘creative synthesis’ of strategy process and practice research and historical analysis.
50
51 Like Kipping and Üsdiken (2014) and Rowlinson et al. (2014), we maintain that it is
52
53 important not to view history as a mere temporal variable or historical analysis as the
54
55 sheer use of archival data. Instead, we have highlighted the potential of alternative
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1
2
3 forms of historical analysis to further develop our theoretical understanding of the
4
5 historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices and conceptions of them.
6

7 By offering a multifaceted view of historical embeddedness, our analysis
8
9 contributes to theory-building in strategy process and practice research (Floyd et al.,
10
11 2011; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). In
12
13 particular, we have pointed to specific intersections of historical approaches and
14
15 strategy process and practice research: Realist history in general and comparative
16
17 historical analysis in particular can elucidate our understanding of the historical
18
19 embeddedness of strategic processes, including historical conditions as triggers and
20
21 determinants of strategic processes, historical mechanisms and causality in strategic
22
23 processes, and comparison of patterns and characteristics of strategic processes across
24
25 historical contexts, thus contributing especially to our understanding of context in
26
27 strategic process research (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Pettigrew, 1987).
28
29 Interpretative history in general and microhistory in particular can add to our
30
31 knowledge of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices, involving the
32
33 historical nature and construction of strategic practices and the enactment of strategic
34
35 practices in historical contexts, contributing specifically to strategy-as-practice
36
37 research, which has lacked understanding of historical embeddedness (Ericson et al,
38
39 forthcoming, Whittington et al., 2011). Poststructuralist history in general and
40
41 genealogy in particular can in turn contribute to our understanding of the historical
42
43 embeddedness of strategic discourses by dealing with questions such as the historical
44
45 production of strategic truths and fashions and the historical construction of subject
46
47 positions, thus advancing especially critical research on strategic management
48
49 (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2010; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Thomas et al., 2013). In all,
50
51 these approaches and methods, in their specific ways, shed light on key issues such as
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1
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3 the forms of strategic processes and practices across socio-historical contexts, the
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5 historical construction of organizational strategies, and historically constituted
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7 strategic agency.
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10 We maintain that by so doing our analysis can also advance historically
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12 informed strategic management research more generally. Although research on
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14 strategic management has from its inception included historical analyses (Chandler,
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16 1962, 1977), the historical connection was at least partially lost when strategic
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18 management research developed into a separate discipline (Ericson, forthcoming;
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20 Kahl et al., 2012, Thomas et al., 2013). Thus, strategy scholars across the field have
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22 called for an integration of historical methods and theories into contemporary research
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24 on strategic management (Ingram et al., 2012; Kahl et al., 2012; Whittington et al.,
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26 2011). By focusing on the key issue of historical embeddedness in strategy process
27
28 and practice research, we have elucidated the importance and usefulness of historical
29
30 analysis and thus attempted to respond in part to this call. We also maintain that the
31
32 points about historical embeddedness may, with due caution, benefit other areas of
33
34 strategic management and even process and practice-based management and
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36 organization studies more generally. For instance, the resource based view (Priem &
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38 Butler, 2001) or research on dynamic capabilities (Augier & Teece, 2006) may be
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40 enriched by analysis of the historical embeddedness of resources or capabilities.
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42 Research on strategic and organizational change can benefit from a deeper
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44 understanding of historical embeddedness in terms of the process dynamics and
45
46 causality in them (Jacobides, 2005; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997), including topics
47
48 such as path dependency (Schreyogg & Sydow, 2011). Such analysis may also inform
49
50 new forms of process analysis (Langley et al., 2013). Finally, analysis of the historical
51
52 embeddedness of strategic discourses might also be extended to other topics and
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3 areas.

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5 Our analysis can also help to advance historical research and especially
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7 business history. Calls have recently been made for more integration of business
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9 history with management research (Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014; Kipping & Üsdiken,
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11 2014; Leblebici, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014; O'Sullivan & Graham, 2010), and we
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13 have attempted to do just that in the case of strategy process and practice research.
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15 Following the example of others (Rowlinson et al., 2014), we have underscored that
16
17 this should involve an historiographical understanding of the onto-epistemological
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19 basis of different historical approaches. Business historians have argued for the need
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21 to develop new methods (Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014; DeJong & Higgings,
22
23 forthcoming; Jones & Zeitlin, 2008). In this spirit, we have pointed to the potential of
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25 largely under-utilized methods such as comparative historical analysis, microhistory,
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27 and genealogy.
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32 Finally, this analysis has limitations that warrant attention. Although our
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34 analysis indicates a specific resonance between realist history and strategy process
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36 research, interpretative history with strategy-as-practice studies, and poststructuralist
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38 history with a critical analysis of strategic phenomena and knowledge, these
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40 approaches and methods can also be applied in other intersections. For instance,
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42 realist comparative analysis may benefit strategy-as-practice research, microhistory
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44 combined with poststructuralist analysis, or genealogy used to elucidate the historical
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46 embeddedness of strategic practices. With due caution, these epistemologically
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48 different approaches might even be combined (Hassard, 1991). We have focused on
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50 specific historical approaches and methods, but there are many others that strategy
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52 scholars can benefit from (see e.g., Jones & Zeitlin, 2008; O'Sullivan & Graham,
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54 2010). Strategy scholars can also otherwise learn from historical analysis and
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3 historiographical reflection. This is especially the case with source criticism, i.e., a
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5 critical perspective on any specific source of evidence, and authenticity, i.e., an effort
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7 to place cases, facts and findings as much as possible in their original historical
8
9 context. There are also new opportunities for historical analysis that are linked with
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11 the digitalization of archives and web-based analysis methods. These trends make
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13 historical data more accessible and are thus likely to support historically informed
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15 strategy research. In all, we have argued for taking historical embeddedness seriously
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17 in strategy process and practice research and hope that this analysis can also inspire
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19 historically oriented strategic management research more generally.
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TABLE 1 Historical Approaches for Analyzing the Embeddness of Strategic Processes and Practices

	Onto-epistemological basis	Methodological characteristics	Exemplary method	Contribution to analysis of historical embeddedness	Research questions
Realist history	Historical realism: usually reflects scientific realism, although other types of positions also exist	Focus on accurate and authentic representation of historical events and processes	<p><i>Historical case study:</i> Baseline method in historical analysis, especially business history</p> <p><i>Comparative historical analysis:</i> Roots in economic history and historical sociology; Aims at using historical data to identify more general patterns; Systematic historical analyses based on various sources of data; Focus on historical processes and mechanisms and causality in them; Comparison across historical contexts</p>	<p><i>Historical embeddedness of strategic processes:</i> Comparison of patterns and characteristics of strategic processes across historical contexts: Historical conditions as triggers and determinants of strategic processes; Historical mechanisms and causality in strategic processes; Historically embedded agency of strategic actors</p>	<p>What are the patterns and dynamics of strategic processes in different socio-historical contexts? What is the relative importance of top-down formal and autonomous strategy work in different socio-historical contexts? How do different historical conditions impact the evolution of strategic processes? How do broader environmental changes influence the content and processes of strategy-making? How do corporate managers emerge as strategic agents and what are truly strategic decisions in given time periods?</p>

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Interpretative history	Social constructionism and interpretative traditions in history	Focus on actions and meaning; Reflexive understanding of historians' own narratives of significant historical events and processes	<i>Microhistory:</i> Roots in cultural and social history; Focus on micro-level historical events, actions and practices; Historical 'zooming in and out' to better understand the 'bigger picture'	<i>Historical embeddedness of strategic practices:</i> Historical construction of strategic practices; Enactment of strategic practices in historical contexts; Historically constructed roles and identities for strategic actors	To which extent and how are strategic practices products of their historical time periods? How have strategic practices and tools of strategy-making changed over time? How do episodes of strategy work reflect various layers of contextual embeddedness? How are managers and other organizational actors enabled or constrained by the prevailing practices such as strategy tools? How can prevailing practices be transformed in specific socio-historical contexts? How are the roles and identities of the strategists constructed and enacted in specific contexts?

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Poststructuralist history	Radical social constructionism and poststructuralism	Problematization of historical truths; Deconstruction of historical representations; Criticality as a general methodological feature	<i>Genealogy:</i> Focus on the historical evolution of specific discourses and their truth effects; Can involve ‘anti-historical’ stances; Emphasis on the power effects of discourses, but may also focus on the accidentalities and transformations in them; Can involve ironic representations	<i>Historical embeddedness of strategic discourses:</i> Historical construction of strategic discourses and their inter-discursive features; Recontextualization of strategic discourses; Historical production of strategic truths and fashions; Historical construction of subject positions and the strategy profession; Construction of forms of engagement, participation and resistance; Sociomateriality as a key part of strategic discourses	What are the historically produced interdiscursive features of strategic discourses and how do they differ from one context to another? How are strategic discourses recontextualized in particular socio-historical settings and with what power effects? How are strategic truths and fashions constructed? How has strategy as a profession been constructed and with what implications? Are conceptions of engagement, participation and resistance dependent on the socio-historical context and how? What is the role of strategy tools in strategic discourses?
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