

## **Call for Papers – Special Issue for *Organization***

### **NARRATIVES AND MEMORY IN ORGANIZATIONS**

**Deadline: June 1, 2012**

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Knowingly or unknowingly, organizations use memory and history every day in branding and in constructing their culture and identity. Through this process, organizations make sense of the present, creating new knowledge but also oblivion through the narratives of their past. The process of remembering and forgetting is inevitably selective, whether conscious or unconscious, as organizations continually make and remake their history, lest others create it for them. Organizations are enabled and constrained by these critical narratives of their past, with potentially profound implications for the identity projects of those who engage or are engaged with those narratives, i.e., from the individual employee level through to the consumers of the grand narratives of capitalist value and worth.

Narratives may become official histories constructed through mnemonic practices such as commemorative memorabilia, naming buildings and institutions after prominent organization members (e.g., the John F. Welch Learning Center), or names that give an aura of longevity, constructing 'places of identity,' such as company museums (e.g., Hormel Corporation's SPAM Museum or The Henry Ford museum complex), commissioning monumental commemorative corporate histories, centenary celebrations, and so on: activities that may ultimately serve to soften or constrain the harsher face of corporate operations. Narratives may also be constructed and reconstructed through ongoing commemorative processes in organizations occurring as part of orientations of new members, strategic planning sessions, and organizational change endeavors. For their part, organization members often remember very different versions of the past, with mnemonic practices that are less likely to be recorded, such as retirement or leaving parties. Narratives are also used to 'store' organizational knowledge, and while counternarratives will always exist in organizations, an understanding of the dominant narrative can be used to trace, analyze, and understand the distribution of power in organizations and its contribution to grand narratives of capitalism.

The field of social memory studies has expanded rapidly, with its own specialist journals and edited collections, but the study of remembering and forgetting in organizations can still be expanded and drawn into organization studies. For its part, social memory studies focuses on the family, ethnicity, and nation as mnemonic communities, with little regard for the way in which corporations have increasingly appropriated social memory. In relation to management and organizational learning, the functional managerialist perspective has received increasing critical attention, especially with regard to organizational memory being seen as a repository of knowledge that can be drawn on by managers in order to aid decision making and improve performance. As David Boje argued in *Storytelling Organizations*, the knowledge management and story consulting fads treat stories,

memory, and history instrumentally, as “knowledge assets” to be tapped as and when required. But collective memory isn’t like a book or a computer. The mechanical or storage bin model of memory has been widely criticized, and it is generally accepted in psychology that experiences are recreated or reconstructed rather than retrieved through memory. Following Barry Schwartz, sociological theories of collective memory differentiate between commemoration and history.

In this special issue, the performativity of narratives—and repositories of narratives such as architecture, design, artifacts, and texts—will be explicitly addressed. Narratives have long claimed attention in the humanities, and over the last 10 to 20 years the social sciences have picked up on the topic, thus taking a critical position towards the ontological and epistemological positions of realist ideas of the role of narratives as presentations of social reality. Scholars such as David Boje, Barbara Czarniawska, and Karl Weick have addressed the role of narratives in organizational culture, knowledge, and change, and in this special issue of *Organization* we invite contributions that apply theoretical insights from the humanities and social sciences with empirical evidence from public and private organizations. We consider organizational narratives as essentially historic, and to a large degree memory is stored and circulated by narratives but also by artifacts. We particularly invite contributions that consider the performativity of memory, history, and narratives in organizational learning, knowledge, culture, power, and change. The relationship between organizational narratives and the materiality of organizational design and architecture is also of interest.

We aim to publish primarily theoretically informed empirical studies, and we are open to diverse methodological approaches. The following themes should suggest our interests but are not intended to restrict imaginative submissions:

- Imagination and representation of the past by and for organizations, in literature, buildings, and landscapes
- Heritage and the corporate appropriation of the past, through corporate sponsorship and collections, as well as company museums
- Mnemonic practices in the construction of organizational identity, e.g., the socialization of new members, events to celebrate longstanding or leaving members, as well as organization members who are forgotten
- The uses of history and narratives in organizations—with respect to power, learning, knowledge management, culture, and change, as well as resistance to change
- The role of organizations’ historical narratives (who they are and where they come from) in empowering and constraining strategic and organizational changes, including mergers and acquisitions
- The role of narratives in organizational learning and knowledge transfer
- Narrative and semantic struggles in organizations—including topics such as how management and subcultures within and outside of organizations compete for power through narratives
- The interplay of organizational narratives with larger societal narratives or discourses
- The relationship between material artifacts and organizational history and narratives
- The interplay between contextual changes and the need for re-storying organizational narratives
- The dynamic tension between commemoration and history and organizational identity and identification processes in organizations

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Submission: Papers must be sent electronically by June 1, 2012 via the *Organization* manuscript submission website: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization>.

Papers should be between 5000 and 8000 words and will be blind reviewed following the journal's standard peer review process. Accepted papers will be published in January 2014.

For further information contact the special issue guest editors.