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

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Despite the proliferation of strategy process and practice research, we lack understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices. In this article 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, and comparative historical analysis in particular can explicate the historical conditions, mechanisms, and causality in strategic processes. Second, interpretive history can add to our knowledge of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices, and microhistory can specifically help us understand the construction and enactment of these practices in historical contexts. Third, poststructuralist history can elucidate the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses, and genealogy in particular can increase our understanding of the evolution and transformation of strategic discourses and their power effects. Thus, this article 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.

The very beginning of strategic management research was closely linked with historical analysis (Chandler, 1962, 1977), and later landmark studies were based on longitudinal case studies (Burgelman, 1983; Pettigrew, 1985). However, it is fair to say that strategic management research and business, economic, and social history have remained largely separate areas of research with few intersections (Ericson, Melin, & Popp, 2015; Kahl, Silverman, & Cusumano, 2012; Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Thomas, Wilson, & Leeds, 2013). Thus, strategic management research, like management research more generally, has lacked

historical comprehension and sensitivity (Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014; Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Kieser, 1994; Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014; Zald, 1990). This has hampered our understanding of key issues, such as the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices. We know little about how historical conditions shape strategic processes or their causal effects, how strategic practices are linked to their sociohistorical contexts and enacted in situ, and how strategic discourses are products of historical evolution with implications for what is seen as important or appropriate in the strategy field and profession.

Hence, the purpose of this article is to explicate how historical research can contribute to our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices and our conceptions of them. We focus on strategy process and practice research that deals with the forms and dynamics of strategy-making in and around organizations, including intentional strategic decision making, planning, or implementation, and other forms of strategy work processes and practices. Together with more critical analyses, strategy process and practice studies have formed

a vibrant sociologically and organizationally oriented alternative to conventional perspectives on strategic management (Floyd, Cornelissen, Wright, & Delios, 2011; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2007). However, our understanding of historical embeddedness has remained limited in this body of work, which has constrained its potential to deepen our grasp of the social, cultural, and sociopolitical nature of strategy-making. While strategy process studies have emphasized the role of context (Child, 1972; Child & Smith, 1987; Pettigrew, 1987, 2012; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006), its historical underpinnings and implications are only partially understood. Although strategy-as-practice researchers have argued that practices take different forms depending on context, there is a paucity of knowledge of the historical construction of these practices and their enactment in situ (Ericson et al., 2015; Whittington, Cailluet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011). While some critical studies have examined the historically constructed nature of strategic discourses (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Thomas et al., 2013), there is a need to go further and examine both the formation and implications of these discourses in various sociohistorical contexts.

By historical embeddedness, we mean the ways in which strategic processes and practices and our conceptions of them are embedded in and defined by sociohistorical environments. We argue for a strong emphasis on historical embeddedness: one should not merely place processes and practices in context but also understand their inherent historical nature and construction. Thus, like Kipping and Üsdiken (2014), in their overall review of history in management research, we strive for a "history-in-theory" approach by focusing on how history can be a key part of our theoretical understanding of strategy, rather than serve "merely" as empirical evidence of context.

We propose and elaborate on three approaches that can be used to add to our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, practices, and discourses: realist history, interpretive history, and poststructuralist history. While there are other ways of distinguishing historical traditions and methods (e.g., Rowlinson et al., 2014), we focus on these three because they provide distinctively different ontoepistemological alternatives for examining the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, practices, and discourses. Their philosophical commitments are very different;

they are not merely resources in a historian's toolbox but represent fundamentally different ways to approach and make sense of history.

First, we focus on historical realism, which can enhance our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes. Historical realism is based on a realist ontoepistemological understanding of social reality that aims to reconstruct past events and to provide explanations of historical processes and mechanisms. Historical case studies have played a key role in strategic process research (Burgelman, 1983, 2002a,b; Pettigrew, 1973, 1985), thus bringing context-specific understanding into strategic process research. To provide an example of a useful but largely untapped method in historical realist analysis, we point to comparative historical analysis, which has become an increasingly popular perspective in economic history and historical sociology (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Comparative historical analysis aims at a systematic analysis and comparison of historical events and processes to elucidate patterns and causality in them (Mahoney, 2003). It can help to identify the historical conditions, mechanisms, and causation in strategic processes and, thus, can contribute especially to strategy process research.

Second, we introduce interpretive history (Collingwood, 1946) as an approach that helps us understand the historical embeddedness of strategic practices. Interpretive history emphasizes the role of the historian-researcher in interpreting the importance of historical events in situ (Collingwood, 1946; White, 1975) and, by so doing, usually reflects a constructionist understanding of social reality. In particular, we focus on microhistory as a useful but largely ignored method in management research (Magnússon & Szijártó, 2013). Through the close analysis of specific events, actions, and practices, microhistorians seek to identify larger sociohistorical patterns and their characteristics (Ginzburg, 1993; Peltonen, 2001). We argue that microhistory can explicate the historical construction and enactment of strategic practices in context and, thus, can specifically add to strategy-as-practice research.

Third, we present the poststructuralist historical approach as a way to increase understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses and their implications. Poststructuralist history is based epistemologically on radical constructionism and aims at a deconstruction of

historical conceptions and a critical scrutiny of generally held assumptions. In this case we focus on genealogy (Foucault, 1977) as a methodology that uncovers and problematizes conventionally held assumptions of knowledge and their power effects in strategic discourses. We argue that this method can elucidate the construction of historical truths and subjectivities, as well as their implications, and, thus, can add especially to critical studies of strategic management.

Our analysis contributes to theory building in strategy process and practice research by highlighting the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, practices, and discourses. In particular, it shows how, in their specific ways, historical methods can add to our understanding of various forms of strategic processes and practices and the variations in them, the historical construction of organizational strategies, and historically constituted strategic agency. By so doing, this article helps to theoretically advance strategy process and practice research, as well as research on strategic management more generally. Furthermore, by highlighting the value of specific approaches and methods, it contributes to the discussion of new forms of management and business history (De Jong & Higgins, 2015; Jones & Zeitlin, 2008; Wadhwani & Bucheli, 2014).

HISTORY IN STRATEGY PROCESS AND PRACTICE RESEARCH

In recent years we have seen a proliferation of research that shares an interest in the processes and practices of strategic management. Such research focuses on strategy-making, by which we mean all kinds of processes, activities, and practices involved in strategy formation or implementation in and around organizations. This body of work includes strategic process research and strategy-as-practice research, as well as more critical, often discursive analysis of strategic management. While these streams of research have distinct roots and characteristics of their own, they share a sociological and organizational orientation in their analysis of strategic phenomena. Furthermore, they are increasingly seen as forming a body of knowledge—as indicated in recent reviews (Floyd et al., 2011; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2007), special issues (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014), or calls for them (e.g., a special issue

on process and practice research in the *Strategic Management Journal*).

Strategic Processes

Strategy scholars have focused on the social and organizational processes through which strategies have been realized since the 1970s (Farjoun, 2002; Mintzberg, 1978; Nutt, 1987; Pettigrew 1973, 1992; Van de Ven & Huber, 1990). Interestingly, some of these studies—in particular, Pettigrew's (1973, 1985) detailed analyses of decision making and Burgelman's research on strategy-making (1983, 2002a,b)—reflect a historical orientation by virtue of their longitudinal approach. These studies have shown that strategies are not always planned or formulated but evolve from bottom-up initiatives (Burgelman, 1983) or emergent (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982, 1985) processes. According to this view, organizational members participate in strategy-making through a myriad of organizational interactions over time (Bourgeois & Brodwin, 1984; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008). Recent contributions have focused on topics such as autonomous strategy work (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013) and temporality (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013). Inspired by the revived interest in organizational process studies (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013), a new stream of more philosophical process research has also emerged (Chia & Holt, 2006; Rasche & Chia, 2009). This work has been closely linked with strategy-as-practice research and critical perspectives on strategic management, to which we turn next.

Context has played an important part in these studies (for a review see Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006). In particular, Child (1972) elaborated on outer structuration, Mintzberg (1977) conceptualized strategy-making as a historical process, and Pettigrew (1997, 2012) explicated the outer context. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the historical aspects of strategic processes are only partially understood, and, thus, scholars such as Pajunen (2005) have called for the use of new historical methods to promote historical understanding in this stream of research.

Strategic Practices

Closely related to strategic process research, strategy-as-practices research has proliferated

as scholars' interest in the detailed activities and practices of strategy has grown (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara 2010; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). In this view, strategy is seen as situated activity that both shapes and is shaped by its context (Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Whittington, 2006). This research stream has focused on the activities and practices engaged in by managers when they strategize or conduct strategy work. A part of this stream of research has explicitly drawn on theories of practice (Orlikowski, 2000; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). For instance, Whittington (2006) and Jarzabkowski (2008) used Giddens' structuration theory, and Jarzabkowski (2010) provided an overview of how activity theory can be used in strategy-as-practice research. Recent studies have also drawn from Foucault (Allard-Poési, 2010) and Bourdieu (Gomez, 2010), thus linking strategy-as-practice with critical management studies.

In essence, these studies have shown that social practices, including discursive (Balogun et al., 2014) but also sociomaterial practices such as strategy tools (Dameron, Lê, & LeBaron, 2015; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011), enable and constrain organizational strategy work (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). By so doing, this research has provided insights into such phenomena as the role and identity of the strategists (Mantere, 2008) and engagement and participation (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). Despite these inputs, this stream of research has also been criticized for an overly empirical focus and even methodological individualism (e.g., Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008).

Context has played an important role in these studies in the sense that case analyses and especially ethnographic methods have gained ground (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). This has resulted in a rich understanding of various forms of strategic practices and strategy-making (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). However, the historical embeddedness of strategic practices has remained poorly understood; despite a few exceptions (Whittington et al., 2011), history has played a limited role. Hence, scholars such as Chia and MacKay (2007) have called for shifting the focus of analysis from individual strategists to the historically and culturally transmitted fields of practice. Recently, Ericson et al. (2015) proposed ways to include history in strategy-as-practice research, including microhistory, as we will explain later.

Strategic Discourses

Related to more general interest in critical management studies is a stream of critical reflections explicitly or implicitly linked with strategy process and practice research. These studies have often drawn from discourse analysis (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008, 2010; Grandy & Mills, 2004; Vaara, 2010). In particular, Knights and Morgan's (1991) genealogical analysis of strategic management has served as a landmark for critical strategy studies as well as processual and practice-based work on discourse, as shown, for example, in the recent special issue by Balogun et al. (2014) in the *Journal of Management Studies*. There is also more recent critical work focusing on the role of history in strategy, and a special issue of *Business History* (Carter, 2013) provides examples of how to conduct critically oriented historical strategy research. This includes papers by Kornberger (2013) and Thomas et al. (2013), which we will return to later.

In all, strategy process and practice research has offered an alternative to the performance-oriented mainstream strategy research by bringing in sociological and organizational insights. These studies have emphasized the role of context in various ways. However, with few exceptions, the historical nature and construction of strategic processes and practices have received little attention (Carter, 2013; Ericson et al., 2015; Whittington et al., 2011). While longitudinal analysis of processes and detailed microlevel study of practices in context may be seen as characteristics of a historical interest, the fact remains that we know little of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices. Moreover, although the more critical analyses have introduced insights into the historical construction of strategic discourses, this work has remained limited in its scope. This lack of understanding of historical embeddedness is a deficiency per se, and it has also kept this body of work from achieving its full potential with respect to the theoretical understanding of strategic processes and practices and our conceptions of them.

THREE APPROACHES TO HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS

In this section we elaborate on three ontoepistemologically and methodologically different approaches that can advance our understanding

of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, practices, and discourses: realist history, interpretive history, and poststructuralist history. Our reasons for focusing on these three are twofold. First, we wish to present distinct ontoepistemological and methodological alternatives that historical research, not limited to business history, provides for elucidating the embeddedness of strategic processes, practices, and discourses. As has been called for, we highlight fruitful intersections rather than offer a comprehensive account of a full range of historical methods (Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014; Jones & Zeitlin, 2008; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Second, we wish to do this in a way that coheres with the ontoepistemological and methodological discussion in management and organization studies (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hassard & Cox, 2013; Newton, Deetz, & Reed, 2011). For example, in the paradigm model of Hassard and Cox (2013), realist history resonates with structuralism, interpretive history with antistructuralism, and poststructuralist history with poststructuralism. Presenting and elaborating on distinct approaches is important for advancing a multifaceted understanding of historical embeddedness that does justice to the alternative epistemological and methodological understandings of organizational phenomena—in our case, processes, practices, and discourses. Table 1 summarizes the characteristic features of the three approaches.

Historical Realism and Embeddedness of Strategic Processes

Ontoepistemological basis. Historical realism in general and realist case studies and comparative historical analysis in particular can advance our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes. Historical realism is an umbrella concept for analyses that aim to reconstruct past events by using historical sources. Hence, historical realism may include several perspectives and methods of historical analysis. Ontoepistemologically, historical realism means accurate and authentic reconstruction of events and processes from the perspective of an external observer (Steinmetz, 1998). For example, Kuzminski saw realism as "descriptive accounts [as] self-validating; that is, that their truth-value is manifest in the face of appropriate evidence" (1979: 329). This is the

approach often taken in traditional corporate histories (Ericson et al., 2015; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Historical realism can also involve an attempt to go beyond this "surface," as in a transcendental understanding of history and social reality. This reflects the philosophical foundations of scientific realism (Bhaskar, 1975; Reed, 2005) in that it focuses attention on structures, processes, and mechanisms. This is often the case in historical sociology and economic history and is close to what Rowlinson et al. call analytically structured business history:

> Analytically structured history thus uses analytic constructs . . . to search archival sources, enabling the construction of a narrative of structures and events that may not even have been perceived as such by actors at the time . . . driven by concepts, events, and causation (2014:).   AQ: 1, 2

Arguably, most existing historical strategy research follows a realist approach (Ingram, Rao, & Silverman, 2012; Kipping & Cailluet, 2010).

Methodology. Realist history is often conducted in the form of historical case studies that focus on processes, structures, and patterns that are assumed to exist independently of the researcher's imagination (Kuzminski, 1979; Steinmetz, 1998). Management research and especially business history provide numerous examples of such studies. Ericson et al. put it as follows:

> The emergent discipline of business history is closely related to the development of the case method, according to which strategy is framed as something made through isolated moments of intentional decision-making that provide a critical turning point in a chronological narrative flow of events. The narrative leads up to the moment of a strategic decision, ushering in the future, shaped by the strategic decision taken (2015: 507).

For our purposes, it is important to note that several landmark strategy process studies are essentially realist historical case studies. Pettigrew's (1973) work on the politics of organizational decision making provides an early exemplary study in which the historical detail is remarkable. His long-term work on continuity and change in ICI provides another exemplary study AQ: 3 (Pettigrew, 1985). These studies have paved the way for theoretical analysis of context and embeddedness (Pettigrew, 1987, 2012).

Pettigrew (1997) also has reflected on how to conduct (historically oriented) process studies. Burgelman (1983, 1994, 2002a,b) offers another key

TABLE 1
Historical Approaches for Analyzing the Embeddness of Strategic Processes and Practices

	Ontoepistemological 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	*Historical case study:* Baseline method in historical analysis, especially business history *Comparative historical analysis:* • 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	*Historical embeddedness of strategic processes:* 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	• What are the patterns and dynamics of strategic processes in different sociohistorical contexts? • What is the relative importance of top-down formal and autonomous strategy work in different sociohistorical 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?
Interpretive history	Social constructionism and interpretive traditions in history	• Focus on actions and meaning • Reflexive understanding of historians' own narratives of significant historical events and processes	*Microhistory:* • Roots in cultural and social history • Focus on microlevel historical events, actions, and practices • Historical "zooming in and out" to better understand the "bigger picture"	*Historical embeddedness of strategic practices:* • 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

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	Ontoepistemological Basis	Methodological Characteristics	Exemplary Method	Contribution to Analysis of Historical Embeddedness	Research Questions
					prevailing practices such as strategy tools? • How can prevailing practices be transformed in specific sociohistorical contexts? • How are the roles and identities of the strategists constructed and enacted in specific contexts?
Poststructuralist history	Radical social constructionism and poststructuralism	• Problematization of historical truths • Deconstruction of historical representations • Criticality as a general methodological feature	*Genealogy:* • Focus on the historical evolution of specific discourses and their truth effects • Can involve "antihistorical" stances • Emphasis on the power effects of discourses, but may also focus on the accidentalities and transformations in them • Can involve ironic representations	*Historical embeddedness of strategic discourses:* • Historical construction of strategic discourses and their interdiscursive 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 sociohistorical 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 sociohistorical context and how? • What is the role of strategy tools in strategic discourses?

example in his long-term work on Intel. His analysis highlights the dynamics of emergent strategy or autonomous strategy work as embedded in specific historical contexts. In particular, Burgelman (2002b) provides an illuminating longitudinal case study comparing Intel's strategy-making under Andy Grove's leadership with the characteristics of the previous period. Based on a combination of interviews and historical study of corporate documents, the analysis details the differences in strategy-making in these time periods and also describes their linkages with the overall organizational and technological changes. On this basis, the analysis explains how Intel's strategy moved away from the "internal ecology" model and toward the "rational actor" model. It also elucidates how the positive environmental feedback associated with the new strategic orientation created a coevolutionary lock-in that had a major impact on development of the corporation. Burgelman's (2011) later work also offers explicit reflections on the merits and challenges of longitudinal case studies, calling for deeper historical reflection and more systematic processual analysis.

Furthermore, there are some explicitly historical case studies illuminating the dynamics of strategic processes (Kipping & Cailluet, 2010; Rowlinson, 1995). In particular, Kipping and Cailluet (2010) examined the interplay of deliberate versus emergent strategy-making at Alcan between 1928 and 2007. Their analysis shows how the company gradually moved from emergent to more deliberate strategy-making, although external forces continued to influence its decisions. Such historical case studies can thus be used to explicate the dynamics of strategic processes, especially their contextual embeddedness (Pettigrew, 1987, 1992). They also exemplify the importance of long-term historical analysis—often based on years of engagement—and authenticity in such studies.

There are, however, other historical methods, such as comparative historical analysis, that can help us to go further in the analysis of historical embeddedness. Comparative historical analysis has developed, in recent years, into a vibrant analytical methodology in history and historical sociology (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). In essence, this method takes realist historical case studies further in its more systematic causal analysis and comparison. According to Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, the three identifying issues of

historical comparative research are causal relationships, processes over time, and comparisons. As they put it:

> Comparative historical inquiry is . . . concerned with explanation and the identification of causal configurations that produce major outcomes of interest, . . . analyze historical sequences and take seriously the unfolding of processes over time . . . [and] engage in systematic and contextualized comparisons of similar and contrasting cases (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003: 48).

Despite its potential, comparative historical analysis has not yet been fully applied in strategy process research. Pajunen (2005), nevertheless, provides an illuminating reflection and example of what that could entail. He underscores the need to examine strategic actions and decisions systematically to be able to comprehend their strategic impact. This involves comparison across cases to be able to distinguish more general patterns from case-specific idiosyncratic features. This should then lead to an elaboration of the key causal mechanisms at play in these strategic processes. Pajunen applies it to an analysis of two decline and turnaround cases in the paper and pulp sector in Finland. Based on a detailed historical analysis of key events, he establishes understanding of "event causality"—that is, how specific strategic decisions and actions influenced the course of events—and then compares the cases. On this basis he proposes that in the context of decline, strategic processes involve several causal mechanisms related to signals of poor performance and external reactions.

While almost nonexistent in strategy process research, there are, however, examples of comparative historical analysis in adjacent fields (Finkelstein, 2006; Lamberg, Näsi, Ojala, & Sajasalo, 2006; Murmann, 2013). In particular, Murmann's (2013) study of industrial coevolution illuminates the potential of comparative historical analysis. His analysis focuses on the development of the synthetic dye industry over a sixty-year period. Based on a vast amount of systematically collected historical material, the analysis focuses on how the interactions between the organization and the research community steered the development of the synthetic dye industry and the companies involved. Essential in the analysis is the condensing of the empirical material into key events and actions and their subsequent comparison across several company cases in five countries. As a result, Murmann

identifies three causal mechanisms—exchange of personnel, commercial ties, and lobbying—in determining the coevolutionary trajectory. While the study does not focus on strategy-making, it illuminates how these interactions influenced the strategic decisions of the companies involved and reveals differences across the companies and countries studied.

Contribution: Historical embeddedness of strategic processes. Realist historical research in general and comparative historical analysis in particular can advance our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and therefore contribute to research on the role of context in strategy process studies (Child, 1972; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Pettigrew, 1987). First, comparative historical analysis can highlight the characteristic features of strategic planning and other forms of strategy-making across contexts. Sociohistorical or cultural differences in strategic processes have not generated a great deal of interest in strategy process research, despite calls for analysis of context and embeddedness (Floyd et al., 2011; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Pettigrew, 1997, 2012). A comparative historical perspective can significantly broaden the research agenda in this respect. Such analysis involves not only an identification of the general social or organizational dynamics of strategic processes but an inherent interest in the differences and variations of these processes across historical time periods and contexts. This type of analysis can focus attention on processes that have not been labeled as "strategic" and can thus expand our understanding of the forms and variations in strategy-making. This can involve analysis of strategic processes in contexts that have not been characterized by strategic planning as we nowadays tend to see it. For instance, studies of strategy-making before the 1960s are likely to reveal significant differences from those following the spread of strategic planning since the 1960s. Strategic processes also appear to be very different in nature when one compares those in the American or British institutional and cultural contexts, which we know most about, with those in other places in Europe or in Asia in different time periods. This is also the case with different sociopolitical contexts that have received little attention in strategy research; for instance, one could compare strategic planning processes in the West with those in the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War or with those of American, Chinese, and Japanese

corporations in various time periods. In addition to highlighting overall differences, such analysis could focus on specific issues, such as the relative importance of top-down formal versus autonomous strategy work (Kipping & Cailluet, 2010; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013) in different sociohistorical contexts.

Second, such analysis can contribute to a better understanding of historical conditions as triggers and determinants of strategic processes. Strategic processes, involving more formal, planned, or top-down and especially emergent processes, often result from environmental changes. This is evident in the historical case studies referred to above. For example, Burgelman's studies on Intel's history reveal that the emphasis on an autonomous (1994) or induced (2002a) mode of strategizing depended on the interplay between the competitive environment and the corporation's actions, as well as on the actions of the executives in charge. Comparative historical analysis can further elucidate the interconnectedness of corporate strategic processes with the broader historical development of the industry and thus contribute to our understanding of the evolution of strategic processes—which is one of the key issues in strategy process research (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006). Like Murmann's (2013) study, such historical analysis may capture long process cycles with a beginning and end, therefore enabling systematic identification and comparison of the dynamics of strategic processes. This is essential for understanding such phenomena as path dependency or coevolution or for assessing the outcomes of strategic processes. In particular, careful causal analysis of key events and patterns can clarify the extent to which corporate strategy-making reflects the more general trends or changes in the environment (e.g., technological or sociopolitical changes) or the extent to which corporate strategy-making may create truly novel strategic ideas and trigger new developments. Hence, such analysis can help to identify turning points in strategy-making and relate them to broader field-configuring events and processes.

Third, comparative historical analysis can also elucidate the "embedded agency" of the strategic actors involved, which is yet another key issue in strategy process studies (Floyd et al., 2011: 941). By embedded agency, we mean the historical and contextual influence exercised by top executives or others in order to impact the strategies of the

organization (Lamberg & Pajunen, 2010). This key issue in strategy process research has not received the attention it deserves, at least in part because of a lack of conceptual and methodological tools for contextualization. Pettigrew's (1987, 2012) and Burgelman's (1983, 2002a) studies highlight top managerial agency in key turning points of corporate evolution, and more recent process studies elaborate on the dynamics related to this agency (Denis, Dompierre, Langley, & Rouleau, 2011; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013). Comparative historical analysis provides additional means to elucidate such agency in an explicit manner, as in the systematic examination of key decisions, actions, and their consequences in Pajunen (2005) or Murmann (2013). This can also involve explicit counterfactual reasoning—that is, analysis of what would have happened had the top managers or other actors not acted the way they did (Ferguson, 1997; Tetlock & Belkin, 1996). Although such counterfactual analysis can take many forms, it must be systematic and explicit (Durand & Vaara, 2009).[1] Thus, comparative historical analysis of managers' actions, decisions, and choices can improve our understanding of the extent to which they were indeed "strategic" in the course of the historical evolution of an industry, economy, or society.

Interpretive History and Embeddedness of Strategic Practices

Ontoepistemological basis. The interpretive approach in general and microhistory in particular can advance our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices by placing strategic actions and associated practices in their historical context. Interpretive history is a broad concept referring to studies that are based on an intensive qualitative examination of historical sources, with a focus on understanding the meaning of the events in question (Carr, 1986; Iggers, 2005). Collingwood's (1946) famous concept of "reenactment literally means thinking through the thoughts of past actors. As he explains it, the historian's

work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into the action, to discern the thought of its agent (Collingwood, 1946: 142).

Ontoepistemologically, interpretive history may reflect several kinds of positions (see, for example, Kuzminski, 1979, and White, 1975). However, it is usually based on some kind of social constructionist or hermeneutic understanding of history. On the one hand, the focus is on the meaning of specific events or actions for the actors involved. This makes interpretive history an approach that resonates with studies of strategic practices in context. On the other hand, interpretive history involves awareness of the researcher's constructions of episodes and historical narratives (Ankersmit, 2013). For example, White (1975) saw all historical research as narrated and dependent on the writer's embeddedness in his or her social and intellectual context.

Methodology. Interpretive history is pursued across several fields of contemporary history research but is particularly widespread in social and cultural history where, in general, seek to understand the meaning of actions in context. The key methodological characteristic of interpretive historical work is the aim to arrive at an empathetic understanding of the actions of individuals and the meanings of these actions when contextualized in a specific setting. While interpretive history may take different forms, we focus in the following on microhistory as a particularly fruitful method to better understand the historical embeddedness of strategic practices.

Microhistorians aim to elucidate historical patterns and social structures (Ginzburg, 1993; Peltonen, 2001) through the close analysis of specific events, actions, or practices. This has been done in a variety of ways in, for example, historical microanalysis (Stewart, 1959) or cultural history (Ginzburg, 1993). Although the term *micro* implies an empirical focus on detail, microhistorians emphasize that they are interested in "big" issues. Joyner famously stated that microhistorians need to ask "large questions in small places" (1999:). Magnússen and Szijártó explain   AQ:4
the essence of contemporary microhistory as follows:

> Microhistory . . . pursues the idea that a small unit can reflect a larger whole. . . . in the most successful instances the microhistorian's subject is

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[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.

deconstructed within its own framework; a large range of factors that relate to the subject are examined and analysed (2013: 327).

Microhistory can thus focus on the everyday trivialities, anomalies, and grassroots processes to reveal long-term social dynamics and structures in which the local and temporal activities and practices are embedded (Peltonen, 2001). It is characteristically based on ethnographic-type data—observation or historical materials revealing authentic experiences—and, thus, what Rowlinson et al. (2014) label ethnographic history.

Microhistory may take various forms, ranging from intensive synthesis of rich historical data to interpretation of specific instances of historical information. For instance, Stewart's (1959) classic analysis of the Battle of Gettysburg (*Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863*) is an early inspirational example of how specific decisions and actions at a particular point in time help to explain the bigger picture. The book literally focuses on one day of fighting during the U.S. Civil War, and, by analogy, it exemplifies the opportunities and challenges of the microhistorical approach for strategy research. The book consists of description and analysis of the actions of General Lee and his Confederate army at Gettysburg.

This book is an example of microhistorical workmanship in many respects. It is based on extensive material, including oral history accounts, memoirs, diaries, correspondence, and published research. The amount of material allows a detailed, minute-by-minute description of the microactions during the day but also embeds these microactions in the larger context of the war, as well as the cultural contexts that are reflected in the values and shared understandings of the rules of the game. The book thus provides a thick description of strategizing and its contextual embeddedness. In particular, it describes in detail how generals were unaware of the morale and physical condition of the troops, how brigadiers did not foresee the actions of neighboring regiments, and how most of them were misinformed about the enemy's strengths and operational capabilities.

The more culturalist tradition in microhistory has, in turn, emphasized the historian's constructions of events and actions. In their classic works, Ginzburg's (1993) and Levi's (1991) starting point was a collection of material that allowed the

microscopic scrutiny of particular processes in a distant past. In this view, the aims of the microhistorical movement are not only methodological but also theoretical and political, as summarized in Gregory's influential book review:

> By dramatically shrinking the arena of investigation, the practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* [the German version of microhistory] and *microstoria* [the Italian version] questioned the purported teleology of modernizing historical processes. Their diverse, detailed results suggest that developments such as industrialization and bureaucratization should be rethought as contingent and uneven. At the same time, meticulous attention to human interaction on the micro-scale preserves the agency of ordinary people. Reversing the views of social historians who saw teleology "on their side," this vision suggests hope for an undetermined future insofar as it finds contingency in the past (1999: 101).

Microhistorical analyses of strategic practices have, however, been lacking. In a rare exception, Ericson et al. argue that its "focus on micro-scale moments and events" suggests "an obvious affinity with the interest of strategy as practice in the quotidian" (2015: 511). They also exemplify microhistory's method and potential with reference to Popp and Holt's study (2013) of leadership succession strategy at Wedgwood and Sons in the late eighteenth century. Interestingly, the whole study is based on a letter written by founder Josiah Wedgwood to his son Josiah II reflecting on the succession of the business. The analysis focuses on the content of the letter, while at the same time contextualizing it, to illuminate the specificities of the historical context with its different layers. Hence, this study exemplifies how microhistories can be constructed on the basis of seemingly small pieces of empirical data.

Microhistory may, however, also be based on larger sets of empirical material that are used in condensed presentations of microlevel activities and practices. This is the case with recent business histories that reflect a microhistorical way of presenting the actions of the key persons in context. For instance, Stiles' (2009) biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt provides a thick description of the strategizing of the "first tycoon" in historical context. In particular, the book provides several microhistorical illustrations of strategy-making that reveal how Vanderbilt was both enabled and constrained by the prevailing industrial and organizational practices. Furthermore, these instances illuminate how Vanderbilt at times broke

the rules of the game and established new strategic practices. Thus, Stiles' study is a particularly interesting example of the opportunities of the microhistorical approach since it exemplifies how the practices of competitive strategy may be studied as part of a multifaceted historical analysis.

Simon's (2011) business history of the Finland-based KONE Corporation, in turn, elaborates on the practices of strategy-making in another cultural historical context: that of the Cold War. The book starts with an illuminating example of decision making about an unprecedented acquisition by the Finnish company in Sweden. This microhistorical episode is described and analyzed in depth, and it highlights how the key decision makers were operating in a very specific environment constituted by Cold War Finland and its political decision-making practices and the traditions of the family business. The analysis in particular illuminates how the roles and identities of the actors were linked with these practices.

Contribution: Historical embeddedness of strategic practices. Interpretive historical research in general and microhistory in particular can add to our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices and thus contribute especially to strategy-as-practice research. First, microhistory can help us better comprehend the historical nature of strategic practices. This can add to our understanding of what is general or typical in strategic practices in particular historical settings. Following the tradition of research on social practices, strategy-as-practice research has focused on both the apparent and deeper-level practices and their implications. While these studies have placed practices in context, they have rarely elaborated on the historical aspects of them (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington et al., 2011). It is, however, important to highlight the multifaceted nature of these practices and compare how practices may differ from one historical time period and sociocultural context to another. For example, strategic planning had been practiced long before the label "strategic planning" became widespread (Whittington et al., 2011). Similarly, the ways in which managers strategize have certainly changed over time; compare, for example, decision making in the early 1900s with the post-WWII or Cold War eras or the distributed work practices offered by the new technologies in contemporary organizations. In future research it would be interesting not only to focus on the most apparent practices but also to examine controversial or "illegitimate" practices, including, for example, empire building, gender discrimination, or nepotism, and how they are defined across sociohistorical contexts as exemplified by Stiles (2009) or Simon (2011). By "zooming in and out," microhistory can add to our understanding of forms of strategic practices and uncover "layers" of embeddedness.

Second, microhistory explicates the actions of managers and how they make sense of strategic issues in specific sociohistorical settings. Hence, it can highlight how strategic practices are enacted or how actors make use of them in concrete instances of strategizing or strategy work. This can involve close analysis of episodes of strategy-making work, as in Stiles (2009) or Simon (2011). This kind of analysis helps to place particular events or episodes in their wider social, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts and, thus, extend the scope of strategy-as-practice research. For instance, although strategy meetings and workshops have received special attention in strategy-as-practice research (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Johnson, Prashantham, Floyd, & Bourque, 2010), we do not know how such meetings and workshops and their functions or rituals have changed over time, and thus do not know about the ways in which managers and other organizational members are enabled or constrained by the practices of particular settings. Furthermore, microhistorical analysis can elucidate the use of strategy tools in context (Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011). For instance, Kaplan (2011) has demonstrated the central role of PowerPoint in strategy-making, in that it focuses attention on specific issues and not others and favors specific actors and not others. However, various tools and technologies have been used in different ways in specific time periods, which is another key issue that microhistory could highlight. This kind of analysis can also help us understand how managers and other actors may go against prevailing practices, break the rules of the game, or invent new ones—thus highlighting their embedded agency.

Third, interpretive history in general and microhistory in particular can increase our understanding of the roles and identities of the strategists and how they are adopted and

constructed in different historical settings. In addition to highlighting the role of top managers, such analysis can also help us comprehend the actions of middle managers in different sociohistorical contexts and therefore add to the discussion of the roles and identities of the strategists (Mantere, 2008; Wooldridge et al., 2008). Furthermore, interpretive historical analysis can help us better understand how prevailing practices enable or impede engagement or participation of nonmanagerial actors (Mantere & Vaara, 2008).

Poststructuralist History and Embeddedness of Strategic Discourses

Ontoepistemological basis. Poststructuralist history in general and genealogy in particular can advance our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses, as well as their truth and power effects. Poststructuralist history focuses on the construction of historical understanding that is then deconstructed in analyses that are often critical in spirit (Rowlinson & Hassard, 2014). This approach can take different forms, and it is pursued not only by historians but also by philosophers and social scientists with a poststructuralist orientation.

Ontoepistemologically, poststructuralist history is based on radical constructionism and is closely connected to poststructuralism and postmodernism in the social sciences (Flynn, 2005), including organization studies (Hassard, 1994; Hassard & Cox, 2013). In poststructuralism the key notion is that of discourse, which is usually understood as the fundamental element in the social construction of reality. Accordingly, poststructuralism focuses on uncovering dominant discourses and their implications for social reality and especially power. Unlike historical realism or interpretive history, poststructuralist analysis problematizes and deconstructs prevailing historical narratives (Durepos & Mills, 2012). This also means an emphasis on reflexivity in terms of how researchers themselves portray and present historical material and interpretations, resulting in ways of reporting that may be characterized by criticality and irony.

Methodology. Methodologically, poststructuralist history can take several forms. In business history, Lipartito and Sicilia (2004) outline a poststructuralist approach questioning the predominance of economic perspectives that has led to a limited understanding of the corporation as a sociopolitical actor. In a similar spirit, Rowlinson and Hassard (2014) present deconstruction and narrative deconstruction and reconstruction as methods for culturally oriented business history. Durepos and Mills (2012), in turn, call for historiography informed by actor network theory.

In the following, we concentrate on genealogy as a particularly fruitful methodology to analyze the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses and their power effects. Genealogy focuses on the historical evolution of concepts and discourses, and it is mainly associated with Foucauldian discourse analysis (Foucault, 1977). However, genealogical discourse analysis may also include other historically oriented forms of critical discourse analysis or combinations thereof (Anaïs, 2013; Wodak, 2001).[2] Genealogy includes the use of historiographical methods, but in a very specific manner. Central to this method is the idea of "archaeology," which Foucault initially developed in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *The Order of Things* (1973). In essence, archeology means historiographical analysis of knowledge that is not based on the primacy of the knowing subject but where knowledge in itself is constructed in discourses. Although archeology helps us focus on and compare the discourses of specific time periods, it does not as such explain shifts from one period to another, for which purpose Foucault developed his genealogical view in the landmark book *Discipline and Punish* (1977).

The key idea in genealogy is that the discursive and other practices as we observe them have evolved over time in the course of history on the basis of existing practices and their transformations. In this view, discourses play a central role in the social construction of reality; they "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972: 49). A key point in genealogical analysis is therefore examining the prevailing discourses of specific time periods and elaborating on their implications for subjectivity and power (Foucault, 1994). Thus, although the development of practices is path dependent, it

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[2] Genealogy originates from the philosophical work of Nietzsche, from which Foucault (1994) drew his inspiration. At times, Foucauldian discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, especially Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis, are seen as epistemologically distinct alternatives. However, like Anaïs (2013) or Wodak (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.

also involves "accidentalities," since new ideas may emerge and transform prevailing practices, often with far less deliberation or intentionality than we tend to attribute to human and social action (Poster, 1982). In all of this, critical reflection on the dominant historical constructions and their implications for the subjectivities of actors and the power relations between them is essential. In fact, Foucault (1994) provocatively saw genealogy as "antihistory" when reflecting upon Nietzsche's contributions that problematized prevailing historical constructions.

Genealogical methods have been used extensively in different areas and disciplines, 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 understand how it developed in the postwar era, mainly in the United States, 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 emergence of strategic management as a discipline and field of research. Not least because of the promise of control inherent in strategic discourse, it has spread to all kinds of organizational and cultural contexts.

The analysis of Knights and Morgan (1991) helps us understand not only this development but also its implications. In particular, their analysis highlights the power effects of this discourse, which include the following:

(a) It provides managers with a rationalization of their successes and failures; (b) It sustains and enhances the prerogatives of management and negates alternative perspectives on organizations; (c) It generates a sense of security for managers; (d) It reflects and sustains a strong sense of gendered masculinity for male management; (e) It demonstrates managerial rationality to colleagues, customers, competitors, government and significant others in the environment; (f) It facilitates and legitimates the exercise of power; (g) It constitutes the subjectivity of organizational members as particular categories of persons who secure their sense of reality through engaging in this discourse and practice (Knights & Morgan, 1991: 262–263).

Others have followed this path and complemented Knights and Morgan's (1991) analysis. For example, Kornberger (2013) provides an insightful analysis of von Clausewitz's work on strategy and its power effects in a Foucauldian spirit. This account focuses both on the initial text and how it has been subsequently interpreted among strategy scholars. This reveals quite distinctive ways in which proper strategizing and being a strategist are constructed. Thomas et al. (2013), in turn, provide a critical discursive analysis of the history of the academic discipline of strategic management. They examine the ways in which "histories" of this field construct what is seen as "strategic" or relevant for strategic management. They maintain that central in these representations is the tendency to reconstruct the field as progressing in a teleological fashion and to distinguish it from other fields in order to emphasize the importance of strategic management over other forms of management or organizing.

Still others, such as Ezzamel and Willmott (2008, 2010), Rasche and Chia (2009), and Hardy and Thomas (2014), have used Foucauldian discourse analysis in studying organizational strategy-making, although the genealogical historical aspects of their analyses have been less important than their explicit reflections on the power effects of strategic discourse in context. Thus, the potential of genealogical analysis has not been fully realized in strategy process and practice research (see also Allard-Poési, 2010).

Contribution: Historical embeddedness of strategic discourses and their power effects. We thus argue that future research can go further in poststructuralist analysis of strategic discourses and their power effects and so contribute especially to critical analyses of strategic management. First, although the studies mentioned above have highlighted important aspects of the historical evolution of strategic management, Thomas et al. (2013), for example, have stated that we have only begun to understand the historical canonization and institutionalization of strategic management as a discipline. We maintain that the focus should be not only on what is explicitly called "strategic management" but also on other strategic discourses in other contexts. Thus, future research should examine the dominant discourses of specific historical contexts and periods that have been given little attention when the focus has been on the Western conceptions of strategic planning or strategic management.

Furthermore, future research can specifically highlight the historically produced interdiscursivity of strategic management discourses—that is, how discourses are interlinked in context (Vaara, 2010). In addition to the linkage to postwar corporate development—as highlighted by Knights and Morgan (1991)—or its militaristic origins—as explained by Kornberger (2013)—there are other discursive aspects of contemporary strategic management that deserve special attention. These include its postcolonial and neocolonial aspects, which have received little explicit recognition (Prasad, 2003). For instance, we can view strategic discourse as part of a neocolonial globalization project linked with Americanization (Djelic, 1998). As Knights and Morgan (1991) showed in their genealogical analysis, the historically constructed American influence is central in contemporary strategic management discourses. Future research could go further by elucidating how this is shown in discourses about planning, participation, reporting, or corporate governance and variations and nuances in these discourses. We therefore maintain that future genealogical research can go beyond the classic analysis of Knights and Morgan (1991) in elaborating on the various interdiscursive aspects of strategic management and their implications in different sociohistorical contexts.

Second, genealogical analysis can also be applied to better understand the recontextualizations or translations of strategic discourses in various sociohistorical contexts (see also Vaara, 2010). This is a key aspect of embeddedness that has received little attention in previous research. Careful discourse analysis can help us understand, for example, how strategic management has spread to public sector organizations, such as universities, city organizations, hospitals, schools, and kindergartens, and has been linked with specific traditions of bureaucracy or professionalism in various sociohistorical settings. Specific interdiscursive combinations and their tensions are particularly interesting objects of study, both historically and for comprehension of contemporary power and ideological struggles.

Third, genealogical analysis can specifically highlight the truth effects of strategic discourses—or "strategic truths." Thus, it can help us understand the institutionalization of particular forms of knowledge and dominant logics in them, as well as fads and fashions in strategic management (Abrahamson, 1991, 1996). This is not a trivial matter but, rather, a key aspect in the development of the body of knowledge of strategic management—with respect to what we regard as proper knowledge. As shown by Thomas et al. (2013), such analysis can span both academic and more popular forms of knowledge, including critical reflection on their ideological underpinnings and power effects.

Fourth, genealogy is especially suitable for the analysis of the subjectivities constructed for strategic actors (Knights & Morgan, 1991), which helps to advance our understanding of strategy as a profession. In a rare analysis of the evolution of the strategy profession, Whittington et al. (2011) argue that strategy is a "precarious profession" that is subject to shifts in societal and organizational power. These scholars maintain that this precariousness has increased over time, with more open forms of strategy-making, transparency, and inclusion gaining ground. On this basis, they call for more research on this topic. Genealogical analysis of the development of strategic discourses can be seen as a particularly suitable method for this purpose since it helps to elucidate how prevailing discourses of strategy-making and strategic management more generally construct structures of rights and obligations for various actors, thus defining and redefining who can be seen as strategy professionals or who can be allowed to engage in strategy-making and on what terms. A part of all this is how specific companies and managers may emerge as exemplars and heroes to be followed by others (Paroutis, Mckeown, & Collinson, 2013).

Fifth, and related to the previous point, genealogical analysis can help us better understand various forms of engagement and participation in organizational strategy-making (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). In addition to elaborating on the roles and identities of various actors as discussed above in the case of microhistory, genealogical analysis can elucidate how specific actors may become strategists in particular organizations—and how this may be facilitated or impeded. In addition to highlighting the subjectivities and power relations of top and middle managers, such analysis can focus on nonmanagerial decision makers and can add to our knowledge of the various forms and dynamics of engagement, participation, and resistance (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008, 2010). Genealogical analysis, for instance, allows us to see resistance as a productive force, which is an issue that has received very little attention in prior research. This is the case although, for example, creative dialogue may require alternative viewpoints or

autonomous strategy-making resistance to prevailing strategies (Dick & Collings, 2014; Laine & Vaara, 2007). Genealogical studies could elaborate on the multiple ways in which participation is discursively constructed in various sociohistorically embedded discourses, thus extending the research agenda in strategy-making.

Sixth and finally, Foucualdian genealogical analysis is often seen as "merely" textual analysis that does not connect with material reality. This, however, is a misunderstanding, since in this method the discursive practices may be closely linked with sociomaterial practices. This is clear in Foucault's original work and, for instance, in CDA-type discourse analysis (Vaara, 2010). Thus, genealogical analysis can also extend our understanding of how strategy tools and other sociomaterial practices have shaped strategy-making over time (Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Wright, Paroutis, & Blettner, 2013). While the current literature on sociomateriality has already helped us understand how specific tools may enable or constrain human actors, genealogical analysis can add to this knowledge by illuminating the role of strategy tools in strategic discourses. For instance, it is important to examine how specific strategy tools have been developed, used, and become institutionalized in different sociohistorical contexts. It would also be interesting to study the ways in which the tools themselves have been key parts in constituting strategic truths and fashions or in shaping the evolution of the strategy profession. For example, five-year planning, the BCG matrix, and Porter's five forces have undoubtedly had a crucial role in the development of strategic management as a field and profession. Moreover, "open strategy" or the "massification" of strategy (Whittington, 2015; Whittington et al., 2011) would not have been possible without technologies enabling widespread information gathering and participation.

HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS AS A BASIS FOR HISTORICALLY INFORMED STRATEGY PROCESS AND PRACTICE RESEARCH

The three approaches and the associated methods reviewed above explain how historical analysis can advance our understanding of historical embeddedness in strategy process and practice research. In the following we discuss the need for methodological alternatives and for

taking their ontoepistemological commitments seriously, elaborate on key aspects of historical embeddedness and their implications for theory development in strategy process and practice studies, and, finally, reflect on the application of historical methods with an example.

Methodological Alternatives and Ontoepistemological Commitments

We have presented realist history, interpretive history, and poststructuralist history as distinctive approaches and have offered specific methods to uncover aspects of historical embeddedness. We underscore that these approaches are based on fundamentally different ontological assumptions and epistemological commitments that reflect different paradigms in management and organization research (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hassard & Cox, 2013; Newton et al., 2011; Tsoukas & Chia, 2011). These three approaches by and large cohere with those in Hassard and Cox's (2013) recent paradigm model based on Burrell and Morgan's (1979) initial work. Like them, we emphasize the importance of making analytical distinctions between traditions when developing theorizations of processes, practices, and discourses in historical context—even if they can inform each other or might even be combined in specific studies (Hassard, 1991). Thus, the three historical approaches that we elaborate on should not merely be seen as part of a toolkit of historical methods without consideration of what they stand for.

More specifically, these approaches reflect fundamentally different assumptions about key aspects of historical analysis (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Wadhwani & Bucheli, 2014), of which truth, temporality, and narrative representation are central for our purposes. In realist history the intention is to present strategic processes and events as accurately and authentically as possible and to uncover underlying causal mechanisms. In interpretive history the focus is on the reconstruction and reenactment of strategy-making and associated contextual practices in situ. In contrast, the objective in poststructuralist history is to problematize historical truths about strategic management and to focus on their implications (Kuukkanen, 2015). In fact, poststructuralist history may be used to criticize conventional realist historical analysis.

As for temporality, realist historians see time primarily as chronological since the focus is on

dynamic strategic processes and their causal mechanisms; the time horizon is usually relatively long, especially in comparative historical analysis. Interpretive historians concentrate on time in situ and the construction of meaning for the actors involved in strategy-making; this may involve constructions of the past, present, and future as part of the strategy-making of the moment in historical context. Poststructuralist historians, in turn, focus on spatiotemporal reconstructions and deconstructions where the present implications can only be understood by unraveling the historical evolution of the strategic discourses (Jordheim, 2014).

As for historical narratives, realist history usually involves representation that aims at generalizations in terms of temporal causal patterns, interpretive history at reenactment of past actions and practices in situ, and poststructuralism at critical deconstruction of such narratives (see also Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016). The narrative representations in each of these approaches may thus look very different, which should also be reflected in the writing of these historical analyses (Kuukkanen, 2012; Zagorin, 1999). In all, elucidating these differences is important because it helps to specify the alternative ways of conducting historically informed strategy process and practice research—as has recently been called for in management history more generally (Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014; De Jong & Higgins, 2015; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Facets of Historical Embeddedness and Implications for Theory Building

We have argued that historical embeddedness involves three facets that can be analyzed and understood with specific historical approaches and methods: the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, strategic practices, and strategic discourses. In the spirit of the special topic forum, we have highlighted particular intersections of historical approaches and streams of strategy process and practice studies. As elaborated in the previous sections, this analysis of historical embeddedness helps provide new answers to existing research questions and poses new ones. In particular, it adds to our understanding of at least three fundamental issues in strategic management: forms of strategic processes and practices, construction of organizational strategies, and strategic agency.

First and foremost, analysis of historical embeddedness advances our understanding of how forms of strategic processes and practices differ across sociohistorical settings, as well as our understanding of their implications for strategy-making. Overall, a historical perspective can broaden the scope of strategy process and practice research; what is "strategic" does not have to be limited to what is nowadays explicitly called strategic and can encompass various kinds of strategic processes and practices. Furthermore, historical analysis helps open up the time horizon; it is not only the contemporary cases and phenomena that deserve scholarly attention but also those that took place earlier or even in the distant past. Examining the embeddedness of strategic processes highlights the close connection between organizational strategy-making and broader historical conditions and industrial and technological changes. Here comparative historical analysis can play a major role in uncovering long-term processes, as well as in explicitly comparing cases. Analysis of the embeddedness of strategic practices can, in turn, elucidate the historical specificity of key practices in different social, cultural, and sociopolitical settings—including practices that may not be perceived as strategic—as highlighted by microhistory. A focus on the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses, in turn, contributes to our understanding of the various ways prevailing societal discourses or zeitgeist allows for specific forms of strategy-making to develop and, at times, change, with implications for the development of the field and profession (Whittington et al., 2011).

Second, analysis of historical embeddedness adds to our understanding of the construction of organizational strategies or their emergence in context. Emergence is a key issue in strategic process research (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013), and analysis of the embeddedness of strategic processes can add to existing research by showing how strategies emerge in and through historical processes. Analysis of the embeddedness of strategic practices can, in turn, explain how specific strategies are constructed in situ in relation to various practices that enable or constrain strategy-making (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Finally, analysis of the embeddedness of historical discourses highlights how conceptions of strategies and strategy-making are reproduced and transformed over time, as well as their implications.

Third, agency is a key issue in social studies more generally, but we focus here on strategic agency—that is, the ability of managers or other organizational actors to influence the strategic processes or trajectories of an organization. Conventionally, strategy research has treated this question almost as a nonissue, since strategic managers have been viewed as actors that can and should control organizations via strategic decision making. Research on strategic processes and practices has, however, provided an understanding of how this agency is enabled or constrained by the prevailing context (Floyd et al., 2011; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The historical analysis we call for adds to this understanding by highlighting how strategic agency is conditioned by historically embedded processes and how historically embedded practices enable or constrain this agency in a given historical period or point in time. Furthermore, analysis of the historically embedded discourses contributes to our understanding of the subject positions that are constructed for managers and other actors (Knights & Morgan, 1991), and future research can go further in elucidating how conceptions of "strategists" are constructed in a particular sociohistorical setting and what these constructions imply for issues such as participation or resistance in strategy-making.

Application of Historical Methods

These approaches involve specific methods, and we have highlighted those with the potential to uncover particular facets of historical embeddedness. While in strategy process studies researchers have already made use of naturalistic historical case studies, we offer comparative historical analysis as a method for going further into the historically embedded processes and causal mechanisms involved. Although strategy practice researchers have frequently used interpretive case studies and ethnographic methods (Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2010), historical analyses have been rare (Ericson et al., 2015; Whittington et al., 2011). We have suggested microhistory as a particularly fruitful method not least because microhistory is close to historical ethnography (Rowlinson et al., 2014) and, thus, appears as the natural extension of ethnographically oriented strategy-as-practice research (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek & Spee, 2014; Vesa & Vaara, 2014). Scholars have already used methods such as

genealogy in critical analyses of strategic processes and practices (Knights & Morgan, 1991), but we have offered ideas for taking such analyses further in order to highlight how strategic phenomena are discursively constructed and to explain their implications both at the field and organizational level.

Thus, we call for specific applications of historical analysis depending on the research context and questions at hand. It is also important to note that the typical research designs and the ways of analyzing historical data may differ significantly. For comparative historical analysis, longitudinal case comparisons are usually a key part of the research design. For microhistory, the focus is usually on specific cases and episodes in them. Genealogy can then be used to analyze discursive phenomena at the field level or across cases, but it may also be applied to examine individual cases.

Each of these methods can therefore highlight particular aspects of strategy-making in historical context. Burgelman's (1983, 1994, 2002a,b) research on Intel, which we referred to in the previous sections, serves as an illuminative example. Although a great deal is already known about strategy-making in Intel, historical analysis can significantly add to our understanding of the embeddedness of strategic processes and practices. As to realist history, Burgelman's (1983, 2002b) work already provides insights into the processes and mechanisms of strategy-making, in particular highlighting how the strategic processes under Andy Grove ("microprocessor company," "vector model") differed from those of the previous period ("memory company," "ecological model"). However, a comparative historical analysis could juxtapose Intel's case with other companies in the United States, Japan, or Taiwan in both eras and could specifically highlight how Intel's decisions differed from those of its direct or indirect competitors (see, for example, Wu, Hung, & Lin, 2006). This would elucidate the strategic nature of specific decisions, as well as provide possibilities for contrasting counterfactual scenarios—that is, reflecting on what Intel's development could have been without specific key decisions, such as investing in microprocessors or in RISC technology, or delays in moving into networks. It is through such comparative historical contextualization that we can also better understand the strategic agency of such key managers as Moore or Grove at such turning

points—in contrast to strategic actions in other contexts and eras.

Microhistory would then be able to "dig deep" into the strategic actions and practices of strategy-making in situ. While Burgelman's work has provided us with a detailed understanding of the dynamics of strategy-making, we know less about episodes of strategy-making in their historical context. Burgelman's book (2002a) does offer some insights into Andy Grove's character and style, but top management's activities and practices are not described and analyzed in situ. Yet it is important to understand how the top managers met, what tools and frameworks they used, and how they involved or did not involve others—and how this changed in Intel over time. In addition, it would be interesting to learn more about the practices of upper middle managers and how they approached strategy-making, especially given their key role in autonomous strategy-making, which eventually turned Intel into a microprocessor corporation. As discussed above, such microhistorical analysis can concentrate on important events, even turning points, but it can also focus on the more "mundane" strategy work. The latter may be especially useful in bettering our understanding of the crucial role of middle managers in Intel's history. Like historical analysis more generally, historical study of this kind should place activities and practices in their sociohistorical context. For instance, it seems that the strategy-making practices of Intel reflect what has been characteristic of high-tech companies in Silicon Valley and the prevailing financial and other control practices and popular ways of organizing strategy work in American corporations. A closer look into Intel also suggests that the ability to act as strategists was closely related to technological competence on the one hand and the ability to master strategic planning practices on the other. The Intel case appears to tell us that the former skills were more important in the first part of the company's history, whereas the latter skills became more accentuated later on. It is through such historical analysis that we can also better understand the roles and identities of the key managers as well as their agency in terms of being enabled and constrained by the context-specific practices.

Finally, genealogy can help us understand yet other aspects of Intel's strategy-making. In general, the way strategies have been made sense of at Intel is related to the dominant discourses. One of the key questions concerns to what extent Intel's case—and the way it is narrated—relates to dominant strategic truths or fashions. Like that of many companies, Intel's strategy-making apparently reflects the key wisdoms or zeitgeist of specific time periods. Intel also served as an example for others since its top managers (especially Grove in the 1990s) received great media attention, not unlike Bill Gates or Steve Jobs later on. Thus, poststructuralist analysis helps us understand how Intel's case is part of more popular as well as academic discourses constructing the strategy profession. In addition to the heroification of top managers, it illuminates how and under what terms others were able to emerge as key strategists. It is interesting to note that the actions of middle managers as strategists were widely approved and recognized only after they had successfully paved the way to the strategic reorientation of Intel and had been legitimated in Grove's period. A closer look at Intel could also help us better understand seemingly counterintuitive phenomena, such as how middle management's resistance has contributed to strategy-making—as it did in terms of "autonomous" strategy work. Finally, genealogical analysis of Intel—as in many other cases—may also explicitly criticize prevailing ways of making sense of strategy-making, including elements such as Western ethnocentrism, financial preoccupation, gendered orientation, or accentuated individualism.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have presented three historical approaches that can be pursued to deepen our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices: realist history, interpretive history, and poststructuralist history. In the spirit of the special topic forum, we have thus provided ideas and suggestions for a "creative synthesis" of strategy process and practice research and historical analysis. Like Kipping and Üsdiken (2014) and Rowlinson et al. (2014), we maintain that it is important not to view history as a mere temporal variable or historical analysis as the sheer use of archival data. Instead, we have highlighted the potential of alternative forms of historical analysis to further develop our theoretical understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes and practices and our conceptions of them.

By offering a multifaceted view of historical embeddedness, our analysis contributes to theory building in strategy process and practice research (Floyd et al., 2011; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). In particular, we have pointed to specific intersections of historical approaches and strategy process and practice research. Realist history in general and comparative historical analysis in particular can elucidate our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic processes, including historical conditions as triggers and determinants of strategic processes, historical mechanisms and causality in strategic processes, and comparison of patterns and characteristics of strategic processes across historical contexts, thus contributing especially to our understanding of context in strategic process research (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Pettigrew, 1987). Interpretive history in general and microhistory in particular can add to our knowledge of the historical embeddedness of strategic practices, involving the historical nature and construction of strategic practices and the enactment of strategic practices in historical contexts, contributing specifically to strategy-as-practice research, which has lacked an understanding of historical embeddedness (Ericson et al., 2015; Whittington et al., 2011). Poststructuralist history in general and genealogy in particular can, in turn, contribute to our understanding of the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses by dealing with such questions as the historical production of strategic truths and fashions and the historical construction of subject positions, thus advancing especially critical research on strategic management (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2010; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Thomas et al., 2013). In all, these approaches and methods, in their specific ways, shed light on key issues, such as the forms of strategic processes and practices across sociohistorical contexts, the historical construction of organizational strategies, and historically constituted strategic agency.

We maintain that by so doing our analysis can also advance historically informed strategic management research more generally. Although research on strategic management included, from its inception, historical analyses (Chandler, 1962, 1977), the historical connection was at least partially lost when strategic management research developed into a separate discipline (Ericson et al., 2015; Kahl et al., 2012, Thomas et al., 2013).

Thus, strategy scholars across the field have called for an integration of historical methods and theories into contemporary research on strategic management (Ingram et al., 2012; Kahl et al., 2012; Whittington et al., 2011). By focusing on the key issue of historical embeddedness in strategy process and practice research, we have elucidated the importance and usefulness of historical analysis and, thus, attempted to respond in part to this call. We also maintain that the points about historical embeddedness may, with due caution, benefit other areas of strategic management, even process and practice-based management and organization studies more generally. For instance, the resource-based view (Priem & Butler, 2001) or research on dynamic capabilities (Augier & Teece, 2006) may be enriched by analysis of the historical embeddedness of resources or capabilities. Research on strategic and organizational change can benefit from a deeper understanding of historical embeddedness in terms of the process dynamics and causality in them (Jacobides, 2005; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997), including topics such as path dependency (Schreyogg & Sydow, 2011). Such analysis may also inform new forms of process analysis (Langley et al., 2013). Finally, analysis of the historical embeddedness of strategic discourses might also be extended to other topics and areas.

Our analysis can also help advance historical research, especially business history. Scholars have recently called for more integration of business history with management research (Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014; Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Leblebici, 2014; O'Sullivan & Graham, 2010; Rowlinson et al., 2014), and we have attempted to do just that in the case of strategy process and practice research. Following the example of others (Rowlinson et al., 2014), we have underscored that this should involve a historiographical understanding of the ontoepistemological basis of different historical approaches. Business historians have argued for the need to develop new methods (De Jong & Higgins, 2015; Jones & Zeitlin, 2008; Wadhwani & Bucheli, 2014). In this spirit, we have pointed to the potential of largely underutilized methods, such as comparative historical analysis, microhistory, and genealogy.

Finally, this analysis has limitations that warrant attention. Although our analysis indicates a specific resonance between realist history and strategy process research, interpretive history and strategy-as-practice studies, and poststructuralist history and a critical analysis of strategic

phenomena and knowledge, these approaches and methods can also be applied at other intersections. For instance, realist comparative analysis may benefit strategy-as-practice research, microhistory combined with poststructuralist analysis, or genealogy used to elucidate the historical embeddedness of strategic practices. With due caution, these epistemologically different approaches might even be combined (Hassard, 1991). We have focused on specific historical approaches and methods, but there are many others that strategy scholars can benefit from (see, for example, Jones & Zeitlin, 2008, and O'Sullivan & Graham, 2010). Strategy scholars can also otherwise learn from historical analysis and historiographical reflection. This is especially the case with source criticism—that is, a critical perspective on any specific source of evidence—and authenticity—that is, an effort to place cases, facts, and findings as much as possible in their original historical context. There are also new opportunities for historical analysis that are linked with the digitalization of archives and web-based analysis methods. These trends make historical data more accessible and, thus, are likely to support historically informed strategy research. In all, we have argued for taking historical embeddedness seriously in strategy process and practice research and hope that this analysis can also inspire historically oriented strategic management research more generally.

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