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War and peace in organizational memory

Book

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Special Issue: War and Peace in Organizational Memory

Introduction

This special issue of *Management and Organizational History* is prompted by a public celebration. It is timed to coincide with 11th November 2018 as the 100-year anniversary of Armistice Day. Articles in this issue of the journal examine the impact that war, as a social, economic and political event, had upon organizational identity and organizational memory. They speak to the broader questions of how organizations understood and rationalized their national, regional, religious or racial identity and behavior in times of conflict, and afterwards in times of peace. Who or what objects, rituals and ceremonies did organizations use to remember and commemorate the lives lost in war – if at all? To what extent were memorials or commemorations special or unique to organizations themselves? Were they embedded within wider systems of meaning? How does the end of conflict and peacetime change these gestures or attitudes towards other nations or groups? To what extent did remembering, or the memory of war, impact upon organizational identity and behavior after conflict ended?

This style of analysis and the themes discussed here have an established track record in management and organizational studies. Since the 'historic turn' in organizational studies, a shift has taken place whereby business historians, and historical analysis more generally, has taken a greater role in explaining shifts and organizational change. Using history in forming organizational identity often involves sense-making by companies (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Zundel et al make an important distinction between those firms that focus on the history of the corporation itself and those that see the organization's history as part of a wider nation or international historical context, or history 'at large' (Zundel et al., 2016, pp. 221–222). Recent research has included analysis of ceremonies, rituals and objects. Rituals, as historic events, contain rich levels of symbolism and follow a set of established conventions (Dacin et al., 2010). Objects, such as ornaments, portraits, other paraphernalia, and even architecture or museums, exist as a manifestation of a collective memory, a historical record of the organization's past (Decker 2014; Suddaby, Foster and Quinn Trank 2016; Barnes and Newton, 2017). They serve as 'talking points' to explain organizational culture, an event, or the meaning of an act which has taken place (Ames, 1980; Rafaeli and Pratt, 1993(Barnes and Newton, 2018)). Textual and oral memory forms can be used as memory cues, which enable those in the present to construct organizational identity that complies with current and future requirements (Schultz and Hernes 2013, 4). Moreover, while the past can be used, interpreted and manipulated, it is not always controlled by those with power at the top of the hierarchy (Rowlinson and Hassard 1993; Cox, 2008; Maclean et al. 2014).

There is also a wealth of literature on the memory and memorialization of war at the individual, national, European and international level. Mosse (1990) examines the commemoration of soldiers after war, and the role this has in turning war into a sacred event. Winter has written on the importance of war in the collective memory and national identity (Winter, 2006;Winter, 2014). The role that remembering war has in creating both national and European identities is considered by Niznik (2013). Muller (2002) also asserts that commemorating war has had a key a role in influencing post-war European politics. Others

consider an international perspective (Sumartojo and Wellings, 2014), whilst the role of museums in remembering war is considered by Williams (2007) and Kjeldbaek (2009).

Despite interest from historians in the memorialization and commemoration of war, much less has been written about how organizations and corporations remember war, and how remembering (or forgetting) has an influence upon their identity. The articles in this special issue tie the two literatures and two subjects together. The six articles in this issue each have a focus on war, memory and organizations in the twentieth century. We now discuss the contents and themes in more detail.

The contestation between an organization's identity as a public or private entity is theme that is well noted by several articles. It was not clear where the boundaries were between organization, society and the state. Barnes and Newton show that while the Bank of England was a private company at this stage in its history, it identified as a public, national or state entity. It followed the patterns and approaches seen in national memorialization and the activities of public national institutions. The organization behaved in a manner that was evident in organizations controlled and owned by the government and local governments. In Vincent's article, an Onondaga Pottery company operating in the state of New York, deliberately blurred the lines between the nation's interests and the company's own private interest. The company supplied the United States military with both tableware and ceramic landmines during World War Two. Afterwards, the company's management invoked the memory of this service to the nation when lobbying the post-war government to protect the firm from the cheap imports that threatened their profitability and existence. Companies played on the traditional dichotomy between public and private interests in an effort to unify or manipulate responses. The staff members, who made decisions and lobbied for change within the organization, were not insulated from debates in wider society about patriotism, national identity and war. The conversations that took place within the organization or about its business were often part of this general sentiment.

The second theme, which is touched upon be several authors, is that of power and control within the organization. Cox shows that archives, museums and staff run journals were a way of investing in organizational memory and a memory store. They were methods of creating a collective identity among staff members. In particular, the staff magazine played a key role. This was a 'bottom up' initiative in that the company magazine emerged from correspondence of staff serving in the First World War. It was not an effort that was driven by senior management nor were ideas pushed upon the workforce. Ordinary employees at both British American Tobacco therefore had a strong voice in forming collective organizational memory. This was also apparent at the Bank of England. Barnes and Newton, moreover, note the role of staff, as opposed to senior management within the Bank, in coordinating their agenda. Overall, the movement to commemorate war and remember other staff members, who had died in the war, was bottom-up. A different story appears in Vincent's work. She examines the role of corporate participation in wartime production in the formation of a post-war corporate identity. The organizational voice, which appears in this paper, emanates from the managerial level of the firm. It is this voice rather than that of the worker's voice which lobbies the United States government.

A third topic is one of conflict between classes, genders and races. These issues are for most of the articles here not discussed explicitly. For Barnes and Newton, Cox and Vincent, the discussion of power is linked to discussion of hierarchy and the struggle within the organization itself rather than the groups outside of it. Despite their internal focus, these articles show that the organization cannot be separated so easily from that of wider society and culture. Deal et al and Hahn consider issues associated with inequality in an overt fashion. Hahn focuses upon the organizations involved in mediating the disputes over the memorialization of the American Civil War. Members of the community no longer see monuments, memorials and statutes of Confederate leaders as suitable for a society which is still divided by racial inequality. These historic artefacts remain problematic in a society that still feels the effects of the outcome of the Civil War and the enslavement of groups and classes of people. While Hahn tackles the issue of race and discrimination, Deal et al consider gender. In particular, Deal et al explores how a masculine culture and gender discrimination arose in this company, in part, from outcomes of the First World War. The practice of war was gendered and the activities undertaken in the predecessor companies that went on to form the post-war British Airways Limited were carried into the new organization – through culture and memory. The paper shines a light on the women involved in early British civil aviation who have been largely overlooked by other studies. In contrast to the other papers in this special issue, Deal et al considers those staff with a very limited voice – women – who have often been overlooked.

Another theme, which is noticeable, is the emotional response. Feelings of shame, guilt, weakness, pride, victory and triumph were ever present. Most of the papers which appear here adopt an Anglo-American or Commonwealth approach. This perhaps tells us more about this group and, in particular, the ways in which it has singled out the First and Second World Wars as events that it continues to mark, draw attention to and celebrate to this day. As is often said, history is written by winners. It is perhaps more accurate to say that by remembering, re-telling these stories, and recounting the narrative, history is written first, then re-written and re-remembered by the winners. Even so, Cox's analysis uncovers the very different organizational history in the British American Tobacco Company of the First and Second World War. Collective memory was formed within British American Tobacco much more readily during the first global conflict than the second for a variety of reasons. The Second World War was not the triumphant victory we might assume that it would be – or, indeed, that it was in say the example of the Bank of England or the American pottery industry.

In Hahn's piece, the debates involved around the memorials to the American Civil War are marked by discord and hostility. These objects are numerous and give rise to conflicting accounts of the war and memory of American history. The feelings and emotions, which emanate from the viewing of these artefacts, are directly linked to past treatment, present circumstances and the perception of inequality today. Past and present behavior, which might be considered just or fair by one group, is denounced as shameful by another. While Hahn's memories of war and the meanings of war memorials are disputed, in Paulson's study of SMEs in Germany and the United Kingdom, the emotional reaction to war was largely accepted. The case study firms in Germany were required to rebuild and rejuvenate after the war, in a defeated nation dealing with its shameful recent past, as well as having to

focus on a difficult economic, political and social recovery. The firms, despite, or because of, feeling a strong sense of victimhood, reacted to the post-war environment with entrepreneurial creativity. This is contrasted with the United Kingdom where firms and their buildings were not damaged physically. Yet the emotional response in the SMEs examined was one of entitlement, which led to complacency and a lack of motivation amongst staff. Paulson links the cultural differences between United Kingdom and German firms, a culture shaped by their experiences of the Second World War and the ensuing peace.

The articles in this special issue take the form of discussion pieces. They are well-placed to raise issues and further discussion; none are intended as a single or definitive answer in this debate about the way organizations chose to use, remember and forget their past. All have significant contributions to make to the analysis of organizational memory. In this regard, organizations are well-known for marking their own centennial, bicentennial and other anniversaries. Recent examples include publicity around the 70th anniversary of the National Health Service in the United Kingdom in 2018; Guinness's celebration of its 250th anniversary in 2009; and Google's use of anniversary dates on their logo. These celebrations are opportunities for organizations to reflect and look back on their history. When academic scholarship is commissioned, it usually takes the form of corporate history. The work that stems from these events helps the organization to understand its past and the way that it has changed or evolved over time. This mode of inquiry can be used in external communications; to form part of its marketing strategy; and to convince consumers of the organization's long-standing strengths (Suddaby, Foster and Quinn Trank 2010). Corporate and business history can also be used internally as a way to strengthen organizational identity. The past and longevity confers legitimacy upon the present day activities and aims of the organization (Roowaan, 2009).

Other dates, anniversaries, commemorative practices, memorials and remembrance ceremonies are of similar meaning. While these are not the traditional focus of business historians, they are studied here. These special occasions, while understudied in the fields of business and organizational history, are nevertheless important. They present a unique insight into a wider phenomenon. National social events were observed by businesses, societies and organizations as part of their efforts to participate in the wider social process of celebration and remembering. Their contributions are especially apparent in the recent commemoration of legal landmarks and historic victories for minority groups, the experience of war and conflict and, as we have seen more recently, the commemoration for those who lost their lives in terrorist attacks and the war on terror (for example, see Frew and White, 2015). Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, business and other organizations mimicked the patterns that they saw in society; they internalized memories and copied the strategies of national or government bodies. It is clear that those in organizations sometimes did this for benign purposes, perhaps because they felt part of something or simply because they wanted to feel part of the movement. It is also evident that they behaved in this manner for their own private benefit; to gain market share and outcompete their rivals.

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