

**‘BUSINESS HISTORY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES:
Space, time and temporality’**

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This panel brings together four scholars who all work on the boundaries of management and business history and organisational theory. Each has published extensively in both fields, offering a range of alternative research agendas that seem rich with potential. The aim of the session is to bring together these fresh perspectives and offer a range of methodologies that could well invigorate business history research. It is also noticeable that two of the contributors have never attended an EBHA event before, thereby extending its influence into new fields.

The session will start with a presentation from the Peter Clark and Giuliano Maielli, looking at the interface between business history and the social sciences, and especially the issue of temporality-space-place and the relative extent to which future scenarios might be shaped by the past and present. This will be followed by John Wilson’s examination of the utility of history as a predictive tool, while Mick Rowlinson will examine the links between business history and organisational memory.

Our aim in bringing these scholars together in a single session is [1] to offer a multidisciplinary perspective on the conference theme; and [2] to stimulate debate about the nature and utility of business history as a component of the social sciences. Given the vital role played by information – in the past, present and future – it is essential that we consider the way in which business history is interconnected with other disciplines and approaches. This will also help to set future research agendas, possibly provoking editors of business history-related journals to reconsider the kind of material they would like to see submitted. In the year when *Business History* celebrates its 50th anniversary, this debate would be extremely timely.

**AMERICA'S REFOLDING MARKET EMPIRE,
CONSUMER POLITY & COLONIZING CORPORATIONS: TIME-PLACE
PERIODS AS CASES**

Peter Clark & Giuliano Maielli (Queen Mary, Univ. London)

At the interface between business history and the social sciences there is the issue of temporality-space-place and the relative extent to which future scenarios might be shaped by the past and present. In the social sciences relational theories have sought to explore the interface between history and both sociology (e.g. Elias; Giddens; Haydu) and the revisions to path dependency in political science (e.g. Mahoney; Pierson). Fifty years ago this issue was cautiously prized open by Cochrane and Hofstadter (Stern 1960a) yet robustly contested in France between Braudel and Gurvitch (Stern 1960b). Currently business school research and theorising is scrutinizing the claims of critical realists to have resolved the differences between the social sciences and history through the 'in time' approach of Archer to morphogenesis. However, it is the notion of time-place periods as cases and the claim that periods could be distinguished by types of problem solving which is moving to centre stage (Haydu). This has been applied to the history of Rover from 1896-1982 (Whipp & Clark 1986) and to the examination of impossible historical trajectories. Henry Ford could not have started out from the home of flexibility in West Midlands of England nor by Benetton from the home of knitwear in the English East Midlands (Clark 1987, 1997, 2000). Equally, it is argued that neither American Football nor the American funeral with the open casket and embalmed body funeral could have emerged until after the Civil War. These examples underline the issue of how hegemonic problem solving emerges and how it is reproduced in path dependent cycles or collapses in discontinuous development.

Our paper applies the notion of hegemony and passive revolution to the periodization of America's evolving role in the global economy. Gramsci's original contribution was in interpreting the causal relationship between Italian business enterprises and regional politics in terms of the global situation which he foresaw in the 1920s as being shaped by American business and cultural practices. For example, the relationship between Croce as a 'liberal' intellectual and Agnelli's regime at Fiat. Gramsci's anticipations were both similar and different from those of de Grazia's (2005) claim that American hegemony was constructed in Europe.

How should American problem solving be characterised into periods and what role did the establishment of American internal hegemony after the Civil War play in the American Century? Central to our approach is how American problem solving radically diverged from the European habitus and – within the framework of capitalism – established distinctive notions of owning, purposefully designing, occupying and commodifying time-space. Thus our perspective is closer to the revisionist analysis of 19th and 20th century America internally and externally (e.g. Lamereaux; Roy; Shenhav; Scranton) and differs from the analytically structured narratives advanced by the Chandlerian School. The periodization treats each of the cases in [Exhibit 1](#) as a time-place America case which is different from those cases before and following. The American experience of the making and refolding of hegemony and of passive revolutions is both distinctive and globally consequential for its colonizing corporations, its consumer polity (c.f. Cohen) and the institutions of the market empire.

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Organisational theories of emergence and the 'History Turn'. Critical Realism. Processual time frames and strategic time reckoning. Structural repertoires and assembly. Revisionist organisational and management histories of America. Transatlantic diffusion of innovations.

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EXHIBIT 1

AMERICA BECOMING & EMERGING:
TIME-PLACE PERIODS OF SEQUENTIAL
PROBLEM SOLVING AS CASES

1630s-1780s. DEPENDENT SPECIALIZATION IN THE ATLANTIC ECONOMY: COLONIZING, COMMODIFYING, CONSUMING & CONTENDING WITH LONDON.

1780s-1860s. USA: INDEPENDENT, LOOSELY COUPLED SPECIALIZATION & CIVIL WAR.

1860s-21stC. CONSUMER POLITY & INSTITUTIONS OF HIERARCHICAL CO-ORDINATION.

1890s-1960s. MARKET EMPIRE & GLOBAL STRETCHING.

1950s-1990s. COLD WAR PASSIVE REVOLUTION: TIMED-SPACE, SYMBOLIC ANALYSTS, SEDUCTIVE SPECTACLES & SCENARIOS.

1990s-21stC: NEO-LIBERALISM, MARKET STATE NOTIONS & BEYOND

20/21stC: CORPORATE COLONIZING: HYBRIDS, RESISTANCE & CHALLENGES

Is the Future as Clear as the Past? - A Framework for Analysis

John Wilson (University of Central Lancashire)

Andrew Thomson (Open University Business School)

While some argue that there is a reasonable degree of clarity in the past, we would argue that this has not been the case, and indeed that the past has been both cloudy and under-analysed in the study of British management. We therefore propose a framework for analysing the past which we would argue can be projected into the future. Our paper is an extension of the arguments in our book (Wilson and Thomson 2006a) in which the central question was to examine 'why corporate management structures developed so impressively in countries like the USA, Germany and Japan, while in Britain relatively little progress was made in this respect' (Wilson 1995; 134). Neither the book nor this paper is a study in economic history, but it is an implicit argument of both that there is a strong correlation between this central question and overall economic development.

The central focus in the paper is the range of drivers which influence the way in which management can develop; they can either encourage change or restrain it. In addition the drivers can themselves change both in the extent of influence and in their direction; moreover drivers which are relevant at one point in time may not be so at another, while new drivers may need to be considered as time moves on. The number of drivers can be almost indefinite, but we have identified thirty-one which we believe to have played a significant role in the historical development of management. Because thirty-one is too many to handle separately for discursive purposes, they can be broadly categorized into three main groupings: market-cum-technological influences which can vary between industries; cultural/institutional influences which are likely to operate at the societal level; and business policy and practice which relates to the internal issues and dynamics of the firm. The degree and direction of influence of each driver is judged subjectively in the absence of more specific measures. In an ideal world, we would like to be able to measure the weighting of each driver in order to carry out statistical analyses, but this would require much more sophisticated data than we have available.

It is important that the framework can be comparative in nature, rather than solely referring to the British context, and in previous work we have used the drivers for this purpose. There are two main ways in which we have used the drivers. One is through the use of Levin's force-field model to identify diagrammatically those drivers which have encouraged and those which have restrained change at any given point in time (Wilson and Thomson 2006a; Wilson and Thomson 2006b). The other is to describe the state of play for each driver separately in 1950 for each country which is examined. 1950 is taken as the point of comparison because it was the end date of the historical analysis of the United States, Germany and Japan in the book, and to bring the comparisons up to date would be beyond our current capabilities. Much of the paper is taken up with presenting and discussing these two modes of analysis, especially the second one, which for reasons of space could not be included in the book, while we conclude by suggesting that they can also be used to project into the future.

And how does the past relate to the future? If we have an idea of the main drivers that have influenced management in the past, we have at least a starting point for considering the future. The drivers will not necessarily be the same, nor will their degree of influence, and as a result the themes we identified are not necessarily relevant any longer. Nevertheless we would argue that the framework is still relevant, and that there are no simplistic answers; rather there is a set of complex inter-relationships between a wide range of drivers. We would also argue that while there may be a trend towards convergence in what management means across the world, there is still a need to be aware of the drivers in their historical context as well as their modern one, because echoes of the past still impinge upon many of the values, processes and policies of the present. In this paper we have looked into the past and seen which drivers were positively influencing change and which were restraining change in the four countries, and the balance of these helps us to understand why Britain was relatively retarded at that time and indeed for some time to come after that. It was the change in these which helped Britain to improve both its management performance and its broader economic performance in the last few decades. And the argument with which we started must be the argument with which we finish. The more we know about the past, the more understandable the future becomes because the more identifiable the drivers which have influenced the future in the past are.

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Business History and Social Memory Studies
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Insofar as business history has paid any attention to organizational memory, the storage bin model proposed by Walsh and Ungson (1991) has been accepted uncritically. Business historians are keen to make the case that history is useful for managers, that ‘good history is good business’ (Ryant 1988: 563), that history can help managers by ‘getting things into the shared memory (Tedlow 1986: 82). Kransdorff (1998: 158), a consultant and corporate historian, argues that if the precepts of knowledge management are accepted, then corporate history is ‘the most efficient and portable repository’ of organizational memory. Kransdorff (1998) maintains that corporate history is ‘one of the most devalued of corporate tools’ in British businesses, and that as a result British businesses, and business schools, suffer from ‘corporate amnesia’, unlike their American counterparts. Here the repository image of memory militates against an interpretive historical approach. This reflects the preoccupations of business historians, who are, as Kipping (2003) argues, mainly oriented towards economic concepts such as transaction costs and the efficiency of business, rather than interpretive sociology or cultural studies (Galambos 2003). This has meant that business history is largely cut off from the growing field of social or collective memory studies, which include contributions to from historians concerning the heritage debate (Lowenthal 1985) and invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), as well as the broader sociological literature derived from Halbwachs (1992). A more critical historical perspective is offered by Gough (2004), in a study of corporate war memorials. Gough argues that the repository model often strips “memory” of ‘any historical context, or, indeed, of much meaning: other, that is, than in a normative way that suggests organisations might lose something of possible future use to them if they do not maintain an archival memory’ (Gough 2004: 444). For their part social memory studies have neglected business organizations, even though, as the sociologist Zerubavel acknowledges, ‘The social commemoration of “origins” is not confined in any way to nations or religious communities and is just as evident in the various anniversaries through which cities, colleges, and companies celebrate the historic moments when they were founded’ (Zerubavel, 2003: 102). According to Zerubavel, the “sites” of social memory, ‘as well as some useful means of studying it’, can be constituted by: ‘Libraries, bibliographies, folk legends, photo albums, and television archives ... history textbooks, calendars, eulogies, guest books, tombstones, war memorials, and various Halls of Fame. Equally evocative in this regard are pageants, commemorative parades, anniversaries, and various public exhibits of archaeological and other historical objects’ (Zerubavel, 2002: 6). Many of these phenomena are manifested in business organizations. This paper seeks to expand the connection of business history with social memory studies.

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