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Habitus, doxa, and saga: applications of Bourdieu's theory of practice to organizational history

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ABSTRACT

Using the concept of 'organizational saga' as a guide, this article presents Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice as an analytical tool capable of advancing insights into organizational behavior and related social phenomena. Responding to the question of what makes an organization's inherently historical saga 'knowable', illustrated are conceptual and methodological considerations derived from key concepts in Bourdieusian social theory, namely habitus and doxa, that offer lenses with which organizational culture, identity, and belief can be more thoughtfully engaged. Expanding the theoretical scope beyond saga, recent contributions to management and organizational history are presented throughout as topical and methodological frameworks for future analytical application of habitus, doxa and other concepts. As such, it is argued that Bourdieu can reformulate or uncover knowledge of specific case studies in management and organizational history, as well as reexamine theories of history and institutional cultures.

KEYWORDS

Organizational theory; Bourdieu; habitus; organizational culture; higher education

Introduction

Whether maple-kissed zephyrs that envelope teeming quads from Ann Arbor to Amherst each fall or the meandering whine of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* that echoes throughout marbled halls from Boston to Berkeley each spring, sociologist Burton Clark offers an argument positing that the 'air about the place' (Clark 1972) undergirds the seemingly irrational loyalty of faculty, students, and alumni to their college alma maters or places of employment. By tracing the inception and realization of unique historical and emotional narratives as material resources at three liberal arts colleges, Clark delineates the phenomenon termed *organizational saga*, of which collective belief serves as the fundamental social unit of a formal group. As a cultural product exposed to internal and external agents that are inexradicably linked to institutions and to various other agents, sagas, even supported by so-called objective history, are nonetheless subject to the confines of networks of people and places that affect individual participation and emotions about the nature of participation and of the organization itself. What then are the conditions that support belief in a saga? While Clark details the structurally dependent processes of *initiation* and *fulfillment* that are required for the development and sustainability of a cohesive organizational idea, the kinetic

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nature of the actors involved and the temporal aspect of the development of a saga warrant further theoretical consideration. That is to say, if one were to begin to address empirical concerns about why a college fight song affects student retention or how a charismatic dean influences alumni donations, the question of what makes an organizational saga *knowable* emerges as a point of contention not directly explored in Clark's original paper.

A line of argumentation detailed in Pierre Bourdieu's seminal *Outline of a Theory of Practice* offers one such perspective to work through this particular inquiry. Though Clark frames his research as providing a 'nonstructural and nonrational' (Clark 1972) take on organizational behavior distinct from the dominant strategic management and Carnegie School paradigms of the era, it is an assuredly objectivist approach to the study of culture. The term saga itself is even noted as invoking the Old Norse lore of valiant medieval triumphs, a valid historical allusion that nevertheless illustrates Bourdieu's initial methodological critique. True in the early 1970s and still today, disciplined interpretative methods cultivated in the formal training programs of social scientists situate the researcher in a manner that fails to fully insulate ideology in relation to the object of analysis. Like the privileging of 'communicative functions' (Bourdieu 1977, 2) that belies anthropological research as a result, I argue that Burton Clark's study of Reed, Antioch, and Swarthmore colleges is limited in its ability to present its observation of a cultural phenomenon as 'a representation' (Bourdieu 1977, 2) in the Bourdieusian sense. Fundamental in its importance to the scholarship of higher education, however, the basic idea of organizational saga cannot and should not be simply cast aside, but rather, reconstituted through the lens of practice. In this article, I attempt to do just that, by first outlining Clark's argument and then following Bourdieu's methodological critique through to its more technical conceptual components, engaging with the idea of saga along the way. In doing so, a Bourdieusian reading of organizational saga offers a unique lens to expand upon understandings of structural determinants of narratives within and between people, organizations, and society.

How to treat saga

Is saga a concept? A theory? An idea? Andrew Pettigrew in another influential paper on organizational culture refers to the 'system of collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group', saga, as simply a 'term' (Pettigrew 1979). Though just one scholar's interpretation, the distinction is important. Like the economist's moral hazard or consumer surplus, organizational saga fits into a mode of *objectivist* knowledge in which terms like these provide relational evidence for cleavages with practice and representations of practice, more pointedly, 'primary knowledge … of the familiar world' (Bourdieu 1977, 3). By theoretical definition, research applications in the objectivist tradition persist unconcerned with the Kantian question of the conditions of possibility of primary experience. It follows that Clark's empirical investigation centers its analytical focus not on the experiences of students, faculty, and alumni at Swarthmore et al., but on the development of the object of saga itself. Grounded in group unanimity and a public expression of that consensus, the reification of a saga depends on the historicity of an organization's sense of accomplishment and the emotive force of its devotees under specific structural conditions. From quality and place in the luxury wine market (Beverland 2005) to temporality (Schultz and Hernes 2013), scholars have explored a variety of elements of an organization's historical

dialectic that contribute to aspects of certain identities held by group members. For saga, these conditions are the aforementioned phases of initiation and fulfillment.

It is by no mistake that Clark chose three distinct institutions to illustrate the object of saga, as the enterprise of higher education in the United States is unmatched in its diversity of organizational cultures. Liberal arts colleges, which maintain modern missions as closely linked to the seventeenth-century variant of Harvard as any sector of postsecondary education, are particularly susceptible to strong sagas, in part because of continuities in institutional mission, be it curriculum or student life, but also because of the varied historical contributions of colonial and early Republican patrons (Thelin 2011). Coupled with institutional peculiarities and the romantic individualism embodied in singular founding figures was an administrative structure ripe for the visionary agency that serves as Clark's first setting of saga *initiation*. Here, Reed College's William T. Foster is exhibited as a young, Harvard and Bowdoin-trained idealist who shucked the turn-of-the twentieth-century East Coast higher education establishment for the uncultivated Portland, Oregon suburbs. In 2017, Reed still undoubtedly embodies Foster's academic project – perhaps a nod to Clark's general diagnosis of the phenomenon. Antioch College is the least known of the three sites examined, representing the second form of initiation of a saga as an 'established organization in crisis or decay' (Clark 1972). The singular figure in this environment resembles a revolutionary and the notion of rescue and transformation is at the heart of a saga initiated in dire straits. Lastly, a third mode of initiation is modeled by Swarthmore College, where a collective belief in accomplishment stems not from genesis or crisis, but from ecological shifts mostly within the boundaries of a traditional institutional culture. Returning to this paper's question of how believers in a saga come to believe, Clark presents *fulfillment* as the second stage of its development. The question to keep in mind in conceptualizing fulfillment, however, is that of the 'theoretical and social conditions of possibility of objective apprehension' (Bourdieu 1977, 3) and varied practical limitations.

The 30-floor limestone tower at the center of the University of Texas at Austin campus and the gates of Harvard Yard are examples of the fulfillment of organizational sagas, though the more mundane – a gold-leafed ginkgo tree, a dimly lit aisle in the library stacks – may also arouse belief among group participants in and curiosity among interlopers about a college's historical evolution and contemporary reputation. The seeming irrationality of such a feeling speaks to Clark's initial aim of interpreting the object of organizational saga using a distinct methodology, though this analytical focus devolves into a rote taxonomy of organizational characteristics – professional personnel, academic programming, student culture, alumni, and imagery – in which explicating saga fulfillment is simply an act of partitioning cultural artifacts into categories illustrated with now dated and overly specific examples. Painted for the reader by Clark is a sepia-toned idealization of practices like honor codes and the socialization of new students, as well as symbols and ceremonies 'invested with meaning' (Clark 1972). Together with initiation, a strong fulfillment of a saga is said to powerfully bind believers to other believers and mediate internal and external groups around shared historical and affective communication (Clark 1972). Such a cultish following allows organizations characterized by strong sagas to leverage believers as economic resources, which makes cultivating loyalty and ideological harmony among group members a primary task for an organization's marketing and management personnel. To that end, a natural byproduct of a strong saga is personal pleasure in the belief and camaraderie enjoyed by individual members. Blurry still, however, is the progression from definition of the term saga

to any real knowledge of the object outside a 'particular standpoint' (Bourdieu 1977, 2) taken up by one sociologist in 1972 and more pointedly, *why* such knowledge of an object becomes institutionalized as a strong saga. Irrespective of twenty-first century critiques of research design and methodology, the conclusions reached from the empirical evidence supporting organizational saga fail to provide much in the way of a deep theoretical understanding of group interaction, culture, or structure. Two essential questions thus emerge – (1) in what ways does an objectivist approach to saga prove problematic and (2) how can Bourdieu's theory of practice help work through these methodological and theoretical concerns in order to elucidate greater understanding of organizational histories?

Introduction to a theory of practice

Resisting the urge to contest each of Clark's assumptions and inferences hinges on the significance of first interpreting Bourdieu's core methodological critique in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. At odds for Bourdieu is the very tradition of anthropological research (and social science broadly) embodied in the French academy, a tradition that in positioning the analyst as observer in a foreign system inherently violates the theoretical assumptions necessary to produce scientific representations of social practices. Obfuscated by this, the researcher is consigned to production of a 'predetermined set of discourses and actions appropriate to a particular stage-part' (Bourdieu 1977, 2). Beneath the sometimes esoteric language is a relatively straightforward argument against the false dichotomy laid bare in attempts at rigorous social science, the choice of methodological individualism or orthodox structuralism.

The catchall of 'culture' that has invited the curiosity of Western intellectuals since Marx via Hegel and Kant engenders this specific kind of methodological debate concerned with the accessibility of multiple forms of knowledge. In addition to the objectivist approach already touched on in this article, Bourdieu is concerned with the phenomenological, or ethnomethodological, dealing with unreflective truths of primary experience, and with a reversed form of objectivism that constitutes an innate practical knowledge culled through a 'rigorous science of practices' (Bourdieu 1977, 4). The latter primarily separates itself from the objectivist and the ethnomethodological in its engagement with the question of the conditions of possibility of primary experience, a process that forms a fundamental methodological break with the other modes. In the cases of casting aside the question of the conditions of possibility (ethnomethodological) and revealing that posing the question answers the question in the negative (objectivist), the anthropologist or sociologist fails to generate an apprehension of the social world that goes beyond lived experience and constructed objects, respectively. Bourdieu proposes that a third-order knowledge obtained through theoretical and social integration of the objects constructed up against the truths of primary experience, which, contra Schutz ('constructs of the constructs') and Garfinkle ('accounts of the accounts') (Bourdieu 1977, 21), transcends binary analytical approaches to structure and agency. The result is a theory of practice that moves toward a causal account of the social world. Through two ideas specifically, habitus and doxa, Bourdieu conceptualizes systems of human interaction in which history has an unmistakable power in shaping lived experiences and collective belief.

For the researcher then, the empirical task becomes applying a theory of practice to an 'objective analysis of practical apprehension', as made possible by incorporating/

transcending two dominant modes of theoretical knowledge and methodological strategy. How might this be accomplished? Take for instance Bourdieu's enumeration of the forms of capital. Economic theory and its singular reductionist focus on commercial exchange between self-interested parties inherently overlooks the dialectical relationship with other forms of exchange that necessarily makes constitution of the 'universe of bourgeois production' (Bourdieu 1986) possible. Consideration of social and cultural capital, and their relations to and between economic capital, then, is required of scientists aiming to capture a representational account of structural determinants of social phenomena. Simple consideration of the inefficacy of certain aspects of a mode of *knowledge*, be it neoclassical economic theory or something else, however, does not in and of itself produce findings that reveal anything resembling an objective truth about the practice in question. Quoting Wittgenstein's critique of Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu's methodology hinges on the notion of the rules of the game itself being distorted by anthropological myopia. Thus transforming scientific truths into a practice is a theoretically untenable stance – 'So how am I to determine the rule according to which he is playing? He does not know himself'. (Bourdieu 1977, 29) That is to say, conceptual focus on the *product* takes for granted the practices of *production* and *reproduction*. Engaging the theory of practice then as an analytical framework requires passage from *opus operatum* to modus operandi, a tenet of which is one of Bourdieu's foremost contributions to social theory.

To illustrate this point, let us revisit the delimited subgroups that help fulfill an organizational saga. Whether faculty or alumni base or students, Clark's argument is that each individual saga believer is a participatory agent in the constitution of their subgroup that along with more abstract qualities (academics, imagery, etc.) effectuate an organization's sense of accomplishment and emotional appeal. As with the idea of saga itself, the critique of Clark's representation of groups that help fulfill a saga is not necessarily about the respective (human and abstract) players. Rather, Clark's focus on the *opus operatum*, the result (fulfillment) of the cultural production process, fails to fully capture the underlying conditions that are essential to understanding the social object of analysis. Take, for instance, a reconstruction of the college alumni base as a *practical group*, as opposed to the *representational group* (Bourdieu 1977, 35) outlined by Clark. Representationally, the alumni are a nostalgic bunch that exist solely to uphold their fetishized view of the organization, the strength of which is positively correlated with fulfillment of a saga. The practical alumni group would exist in direct concert with the material aspects that are spawned and reified by that group's belief in a saga, aspects inherent in its production. These beliefs ultimately depend on a 'community of dispositions', a *habitus* that forms the 'basis of perception and appreciation' (Bourdieu 1977, 78) of a saga or any other lived experience. The methodological point here is the notion of acknowledging objective relations that result from an objectivist epistemology in order to then supersede them by analyzing the capitalist processes that bring about such relations. In doing so, the social scientist continues to develop the dialectical relationship between the 'internalization of externality and the externalization of internality' (Bourdieu 1977, 72), a relationship exemplified in habitus.

Habitus

The median strong believer faculty member (MSBF) at an elite small liberal arts college in the 1960s presents a necessary opportunity to examine of the concept of habitus in relation

to organizational saga. Hailing from Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia, the MSBF was educated at Andover before continuing on to Swarthmore, already a strong believer in its saga due to his status as a third-generation legacy. Majoring in the literature, the MSBF went straight through for a PhD at Penn or Princeton before immediately returning to the college as a faculty member. Preaching the canon to future MSBFs and upholding collegial values together with the school's president, a former MSBF himself, the MSBF is a product of structural conditions that color his view of the social world in a unique manner free of any deliberate conformity to rules, a product of a habitus that itself reproduces the structural conditions that make possible an organization's saga. And while the MSBF likely holds afternoon office hours over tea in an eighteenth-century manse adjacent to campus, practices like these produced by a habitus are not as preordained as they may appear.

Though Bourdieu continually attaches new phrases to the concept habitus, its relation to practice as a 'strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu 1977, 72) is most helpful in working through its theoretical and methodological emanations. Though habitus is the wellspring for the specific actions outlined in the fictional vignette above, there is no 'strategic intention' (Bourdieu 1977, 73) attached to its engagement (though, it is not to say that habitus is completely devoid of strategy or free will). This is in direct opposition to schools of social science that are heavily dependent on the observation of fixed fields of interaction between agents consigned to various predetermined objectivist models and roles. What results is a science of practice that takes into account social, structural, and situational variables, which, independent of positivist rules, can be analyzed according to a 'whole body of wisdom' (Bourdieu 1977, 77) capable of more precisely assessing motives for individual action than either rigid objectivist or ethnomethodological frameworks. At the heart of this science is the notion that the practices produced by habitus serve to reproduce the objective conditions that undergird the strategy-generating process that drives situational action. On this point, the indivisibility of objective structural conditions supporting the strategy-generating process of habitus proves meaningful when considering how one might begin to analyze, empirically or otherwise, practice. Bourdieu (1977, 78) more succinctly notes, 'In practice, it is the habitus, history turned into nature …'

As such, habitus is certainly an unnamed force in the initiation and fulfillment of organizational saga. Participants in a saga, Clark argues, occupy a space 'between the coolness of rational purpose and the warmth of sentimentality' (Clark 1972), a space that is a product of the organizational history of which they are an active party. Framing saga as a rationalizing instrument is another example of how the *opus operatum* overlooks vital social and structural phenomena that make possible such a totalizing force. Instead of treating belief in saga as an intentioned act, as Clark does, how might habitus influence saga? Establishing that belief in a saga is a result of economic and social conditions, as the modus operandi outside of the formal group, implies that practices contained in initiation and fulfillment are not products of strategic intention. Thus, commitment to an organization, whether in the capacity of an employee, alumni, student, etc., does not necessarily suggest consciousness of the meaning of one's belief. In this context, habitus serves to mediate practices as '"sensible" and "reasonable"' (Bourdieu 1977, 79) as opposed to rationalization mediating practice. Also exhibited here is the dialectical nature of habitus in that, as a 'product of history, [habitus] produces individual and collective practice, and hence history' (Bourdieu 1977, 82). Believers belief in a saga is mediated by habitus, historically produced, that in itself produces practices that

contribute to the history of an organization based on historical structural conditions. Situations of saga then – e.g. William T. Foster's founding of Reed or a student's emotional connection with a crisp fall breeze – are dialectically linked to a habitus by the very material/structural conditions that account for practices produced by a habitus. The reproductive aspect of this dialectic introduces another Bourdieusian concept pertinent to belief in a formal group.

Doxa

Swarthmore College is ranked as the nation's fourth best liberal arts college in the most recent *U.S. News & World Report* (*USN*) 'Best Liberal Arts Colleges' rankings, a thread that in today's higher education landscape could perhaps entirely frame an empirical investigation of organizational saga in colleges and universities. With peers like Middlebury, Bowdoin, Amherst, and Pomona colleges, most casual higher education observers would agree with the statement that the *USN* rankings constitute a 'practical definition' (Posner 2016) of quality or prestige or status. Why is this? The complicated answer, which has been extensively investigated empirically (e.g. Askin and Bothner 2016; Espeland and Sauder 2007; Rivera 2011), begins with the 'casual higher education observer'. It is in the misrecognition of college rankings as accurate representations of ordinal quality or status that in turn allows reproduction of the power relations that contribute to the recognition of the 'arbitrariness on which they are based' (Bourdieu 1977, 164). In the case of the *USN* rankings, metrics like undergraduate acceptance rates, research funding, and endowment management have come to dominate institutional missions and administrative behavior in support of those missions, a 'naturalization of arbitrariness' (Bourdieu 1977, 164) directly resulting from the forced order of rankings. Case studies of Dutch microbreweries (Kroezen and Heugens 2012) and the Canadian donut shop Tim Horton's (Foster et al. 2011) document similar instances in which organizations leverage consumer candor to embellish or misrepresent historical narratives. The dialectical relationship that emerges out of such circumstances is that of the sense of reality based on the ratio between 'objective chances and the agent's aspirations' (Bourdieu 1977, 164).

Journalistic investigations have shown that 'gaming' of the rankings system by university administrators represents a situation in which the objective chances appear well within the realm of the aspirational (Gans 2015), but the multitude of quality and prestige metrics inherently prohibit a 1:1 relationship and thus, a fully naturalized 'reality' of an established order. When it comes to organizational saga, however, Clark (1972) notes that, like certain utopian communities or fundamentalist religious sects, colleges and universities possess the capability of producing a 'striking distortion, with the organization becoming the only reality, the outside world becoming illusion'. Likewise, in less extreme cases, saga still acts as an organization's ideological mooring through which actions of its strongest believers, as well as its agnostic interlocutors, are collectively structured. Again, it has been belabored that Clark takes an objectivist approach to describing how such a distortion of reality takes place and that it fails to fully account for the conditions of possibility of such a distortion. Following a theory of practice, the argument can be made that the term 'organizational saga', as an ideological framing rather than an alternate or false reality, represents a phenomenon philosophically more akin to the Bourdieusian concept of *doxa*. Without constituent practical elements, however, Clark's saga as doxa falls short of achieving its intended purpose.

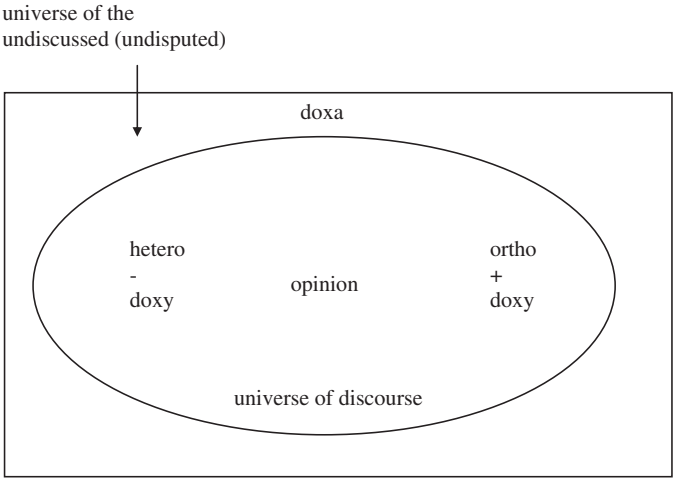

Figure 1. Bourdieu's representation of doxa.

Volatility of an organizational saga is inversely correlated with the stability of the structural components of the formal group, which in turn affect structural reproductions of the habitus of individual members. The same is true for doxa, defined by Bourdieu (1977, 164) as the 'quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of an organization' in which 'the natural and social world appears as self-evident'. The doxic relation to the social world therefore impedes disagreement evident in other social and organizational structures in which the established order is just one of many (e.g. *USN*, *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*, *QS World University Rankings*). Congruency of group member habitus furthermore allows for the proliferation of practices (components of fulfillment) and institutional support that reproduce and reinforce collective belief of the doxic experience, or in this argument, a strong organizational saga. Each of the structural components of fulfillment of a strong saga, then, can be seen as active agents in helping 'the world conform to the myth' (Bourdieu 1977, 167). The result is 'the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness' (Bourdieu 1977, 168) by failing to even recognize the question of legitimacy, a point visible in the overall methodological critique of objectivism. Returning to the original question of this essay, Clark's objectivist approach to organizational saga proves problematic in that it fails to *fully* account for the negative constitution of saga, which according to Bourdieu is necessary to reveal the truth of doxa.

Negative constitution of doxa is achieved through the field of opinion, a political space of competing discourses that through objective crisis challenges the self-evidence purported by doxic social and institutional structures. Crisis in and of itself is not enough to produce practically critical discourse, rather, class struggle in the form of the division between doxa and the field of opinion provides such conditions. Here, the dominated class assumes the party of opposition to the misrecognized arbitrariness of the doxa against a bourgeoisie firmly invested in maintaining such a perception of the natural social world. Armed with the proper tools of critique, the dominated class is able to dissolve the doxa at the moment that the dominant class recognizes the unnatural dichotomous social arrangement of the formerly self-evident established order. Orthodoxy then becomes the method

of delimitation of possible discourse by establishing false notions of 'right' (orthodox) and 'other' (heterodox) opinion, which in turn censors thought itself. Figure 1 is a representation of Bourdieu's original configuration of doxa, showing the structural relationship between argument and the undisputed. How might the idea of organizational saga fit into this theoretical equation?

While there are elements of crisis present in Clark's study in reference to the initiation of a saga, lacking is the aspect of class struggle required to challenge the misrecognized arbitrariness dividing doxa from the field of opinion. In reality, this surely exists. Reiterating a critique discussed throughout, it seems as much a methodological point as a theoretical one, given the analytical focus on the object of saga itself. Notably, Bourdieu's concept of fields, the 'social space' in which actors 'play the game' (Bourdieu 1989), offers one such entry point for researchers aiming to introduce doxa into analyses of organizational history. While an empirical investigation of the reconstitution of saga as doxa with a proper field of opinion is out of the scope of this article, perhaps the primary thesis of a future analysis is the introduction of class struggle into the methodological and theoretical assumptions of the idea of organizational saga.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to illuminate why Burton Clark's objectivist framing of organizational saga is problematic and how Bourdieu's theory of practice can shed light on theoretical and methodological techniques to combat that problem. While concepts such as habitus, doxa, capital, and fields can and have provided sociologists and management and organizational scholars with tools to flesh out empirical and theoretical questions related to structure and agency, this analysis still leaves the issue of a 'right' or 'correct' epistemological framing for the study of organizational culture somewhat opaque. Given the influence of saga in organization studies and higher education research over the past 45 years, I have not intended to offer a unique claim to such knowledge. Nevertheless, I do argue that erring on the side of Bourdieu in deferring to the idealist conception of the 'knowing subject', in which practices are constituted 'as an object of observation and analysis, a representation' (Bourdieu 1977, 2), seems a cautious approach to studying organizational saga in higher education or other empirical settings; variation, of course, certainly exists based on the object under investigation and the questions asked.

To that end, application of Bourdieusian thought to the concept of organizational saga has broader implications for how organizations use history and how researchers can investigate change and development over time. For example, Hatch and Schultz (2017) in a recent study of the Carlsberg Group introduce authenticity as a component of a broader social narrative that demonstrates the agency of history itself, which coincides with previously documented micro-level processes of legitimation and sensemaking that precipitate an individual actor's activation of organizational history. As those experiences are indivisible from structural relationships to power and organizational identity, it is argued that managers wishing to use history strategically should therefore align an organization's interests with history rather than the opposite (Hatch and Schultz 2017). Returning to the arguments of this paper, recontextualizing authenticity as part of a strategic use of history, then, may present one example of serving as a moment of crisis that allows for the 'questioning of doxa' (Bourdieu 1977, 169) required to activate a critical discourse in which the truths sustaining

an organizational saga are revealed. Accordingly, the notion of *history itself* as what makes a saga knowable materializes. Conceptualizing organizational change as a function of 'history-as-power', outlined by Suddaby and Foster (2017) as one of four models commonly employed in the literature, furthermore provides the element of class struggle that is demanded by a Bourdieusian understanding of structures and fields of discourse.

Although using Burton Clark's organizational saga as an analytical foil for application of Bourdieu's theory of practice is the primary focus of this paper, the example above shows that a deeper engagement with Bourdieu among management and organizational historians provides a fruitful ground for future historical analyses and other empirical research designs. As documented in applications of actor-network theory (Corrigan and Mills 2012; Hartt et al. 2014), post-colonial theory (Decker 2013), and Foucault (Booth and Rowlinson 2006), the potential contributions to organizational research from the theoretical and methodological insights contained in the concepts of habitus and doxa, let alone Bourdieu's theories of the 'economy of cultural goods' (Bourdieu 1984) or reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), are numerous. Not celebrated as a philosopher of history in the same manner as Foucault, extant applications of Bourdieu's social theory in institutional analyses have nonetheless demonstrated inherent consciousness to historical questions (e.g. Battilana 2006; Oakes, Townley, and Cooper 1998). It becomes imperative then to consider not only how Bourdieu can reformulate understandings of specific case studies in management and organizational history, but also how theories of history and institutional cultures can be improved or reexamined within a Bourdieusian framework.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Austin Lyke will be a PhD student in Education at the University of California, Los Angeles as of September 2017. He holds an MEd from the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education. His research focuses on interactions between higher education and society across space and time.

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