Chapter 3
Organizational Fields as Mnemonic Communities

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Network Structure and Collective Cognition

The concept of the organizational field is central to organization theory. Despite its influence, the construct suffers from a lack of precise definition. Most theorists accept structuration as the core dynamic through which fields emerge (Scott, 1994) and, as a result, most definitions of organizational fields contain an element of *structure* or *place*, on one hand, and an element of collective *meaning* or *cognition* on the other. These two components of organizational fields—place and meaning—have an uncomfortable relationship with each other. Although most definitions of fields acknowledge that organizational fields are simultaneously spatial patterns of interaction of participants and their common meaning systems, there is no clear understanding of how a shared network structure can lead to collective cognition. As a result, most empirical applications of organizational fields tend to emphasize one element (structure or cognition) over the other.

We seek to address this issue by introducing time, history and, most importantly, memory as the bridging mechanism that connects the structural and cognitive elements of organizational fields. We observe that institutional theorists have traditionally adopted the metaphor of fields as either geographical or symbolic structures, but largely neglected the understanding that fields are also temporal structures. As Barley and Tolbert (1997, p. 99) have argued, institutions are "*historical accretions of past practices* and understandings that set conditions on actions" as they "gradually acquire the moral and ontological status of taken-for-granted facts" (emphasis added). We apply this insight to the construct of fields, arguing that fields are

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historically embedded processes that are, in equal part, the product of collective action, collective meaning, and collective remembering.

The core of our argument is that the spatial metaphor of organizational fields pays insufficient attention to temporality, and thus lacks the ability of theorizing important issues involved in processes of field creation and reproduction. We propose a new way of understanding organizational fields—as imagined communities that are bounded by collective practices of remembering. These *mnemonic fields* are founded in a collective act of remembering that binds actors together in a common fate. Once created, mnemonic fields provide individual actors with the contents and frameworks of remembering. They define the practices and categories actors use to remember the past, make sense of the present, and imagine the future. Field mnemonics are thus the link between the structure and the cognitive system of meanings in place in an organizational field.

Three main dimensions can be distinguished in every mnemonic field. The genealogical, or non-narrative, dimension accounts for the material practices and artifacts transmitted from the past to the present. The narrative, or symbolic, dimension comprises the narrative practices attached to forms of cultural and communicative memory. The moral, or normative, dimension of the field encompasses the remembrance and forgetting of the good and the bad, as well as the moral appropriateness of the practices and frameworks of remembering. This redefinition of organizational fields as communities of remembrance offers an enriched view of organizational fields and provides an innovative path to the development of research on the reproduction and change of organizational fields and institutions over time.

Our paper proceeds in three parts. First, we review the literature on organizational fields. Then, we introduce collective remembering as a critically important but overlooked element of organizational fields. We review the literature on organizational and collective mnemonics and demonstrate how adopting a tempo-historical consciousness can deepen our understanding of how collective assumptions of place can create collective meaning. We conclude with a discussion of how the implications of viewing the organizational field as a mnemonic structure can generate future research.

Organizational Fields

The field is a central element of institutional theory. Organizational fields are most typically defined as "those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148). The construct emerged out of a recognition of the limitations of the concept of environment in traditional contingency theory, which assumed an ontological separation between an organization and its external environment. Institutional theory challenged this assumption with the observation that organizations largely exist in environments comprised of other organizations. As a result, organizations often respond, not to the technical demands of their economic environment, but rather to the social

pressures of the environment described by the other organizations that surround them (Evan, 1965; Scott & Meyer, 1991; Suddaby, 2013).

The many attempts to classify and define the factors that characterize organizational fields have produced multiple, sometimes contradictory definitions. Most of these, however, do acknowledge that organizations in a common field share both patterns of structural interaction—in other words, a collective geography or place—and patterns of shared meanings or symbolic systems—in other words, a collective cognition. This assumed binary nature of the construct is perhaps best captured by Scott's (1994, pp. 207−208) definition of organizational fields as "a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field."

Despite this clear understanding that organizational fields are constituted by shared structural interactions and common cognitions, most empirical applications of the construct seem to privilege one component of fields over the other. Below we describe four common empirical applications of the construct.

The first two adopt the metaphor of the field as place—that is, as a structured pattern of interactions between organizations. The first, which we term a *functional* approach, narrowly focuses on economic interactions as the primary determinant of the network structure. The second, which we term a *relational* approach, offers a somewhat broader analytic focus on both economic and social interactions between organizations as the defining unit of analysis for the field.

The second two types of applications tend to view the field as defined largely by shared cognitions and focus on the shared meaning systems that generate common rules or governance structures for communities of organizations. The first type, which we term *ideational*, views fields as forming around singly contested issues or ideas. The second type, which we call *cultural,* adopts a somewhat broader lens of multiple shared values, norms, and beliefs that define a common cultural community. We elaborate each of these views below.

Functional Organizational Fields

The most common criterion researchers have used to define an organizational field is its function within a broader social or economic structure (Scott & Meyer, 1991). This has been translated into a focus on the products and services offered by different sets of organizations as well as the inflows and outflows of goods and information. This approach has more generally crystallized with regard to industries (Porter, 1980). An industry involves a group of organizations or sectors that are subject to similar legal, political, social, cultural, and environmental forces and whose existence and activity are linked due to rivalry dynamics within the market for a given product or service. The boundaries in this case are premised on the social structures separating these segments from others within large economic sectors. They make

broader societal influences dismissible and account for most of the internal variation and resilience of relationships over time (McGahan & Porter, 1997).

Relational Organizational Fields

Another common criterion used by researchers to distinguish the boundaries of an organizational field focuses on the network of relationships established among organizations. The field is based on the level of interconnectedness among different groups of companies in what Kenis and Knoke (2002) have relabeled as "organizational field-nets." Due to the networked configuration of organizational fields, they are assumed to exhibit the same properties and share similar features with other kinds of networks. Among the most important issues dealt with by the literature on organizational networks are the assumptions about organizational embeddedness (Dacin, Ventresca, & Beal, 1999; Granovetter, 1985) and the structural composition of fields (DiMaggio, 1986). The embeddedness thesis argues that organizational economic activity depends on and is developed within social frameworks of patterned relations among actors within bounded social contexts. The networked nature of organizational fields makes them amenable to the kind of analysis developed in other social networks. Measures of density and dispersion, centralization and decentralization, and cohesiveness and "betweeness" are some of the tests this sort of analysis is able to provide to inform the theorizing about the dynamics of the field in relation to innovation (Gibbons, 2004; Powell, Koput, & Doerr, 1996), economic performance (Uzzi, 1996), and corporate philanthropy (Galaskiewicz & Wasserman, 1989).

Ideational Organizational Fields

More recently, a distinct approach to the study of organizational fields has emerged around the notion of issue-based fields (Hoffman, 1999). This approach minimizes the importance of previous relationships among actors and a common reference structure of norms and meanings to focus on the grouping effects of actors' collective attention around a common issue (Anand & Peterson, 2000). Also identified as a first step in a longer process of field emergence and sedimentation (Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue, & Hinings, 2017), this view of organizational fields highlights the temporally based and nonguaranteed aspects of field formation usually assumed by the other approaches. In this case, the field might or might not evolve into a full-fledged field with a well-defined set of norms and meanings, based in repetitive and standardized relationships among the actors. Here, the field is depicted more as a temporary collective arrangement of actors dragged together by an attention vortex created by environmental jolts and field-configuring events, such as conferences (Garud, 2008; Hardy & Maguire, 2010), ceremonies (Anand & Jones,

2008; Anand & Watson, 2004), crises (Desai, 2011; Sine & David, 2003), and other kinds of social and natural events (Glynn, 2008; Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013) that bring actors together in space and time and reinvigorate existing structures and relationships (Panitz & Glückler, 2017).

Cultural Organizational Fields

A fourth criterion is based on the cultural-cognitive dimension of institutions (Scott, 2008). This approach states that organizations are bound together by a *common meaning system* that actors use to make sense of their realities and in which they ground their actions. The focus on shared meanings refers, first, to a particular language, which includes a vocabulary of motives (Mills, 1940), as well as specific sets of categories and typifications of actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Second, the shared meanings among actors in a field encompass scripted behavior in the form of mental schemes and associated rules and routines that define the standards of microritualized behavior. Third, the cognitive-cultural view of organizational fields emphasizes the prominence of discursive activity within the field, as well as the shared frames and narratives that lie at the base of collective action. The importance of this symbolic dimension of organizational fields can be seen in Zilber's (2006) analysis of the Israeli field of high-technology and in the translation processes that connect field-level meanings and institutions with broader sociocultural frameworks at the social level and provide meaningful practices and structures to guide actions within the field.

This brief explanation of the way organizational fields have been and continue to be conceptualized demonstrates that traditional views have emphasized the role of place (i.e., structure) and meaning (i.e., cognition), but fail to offer any coherent explanation for how these two critical elements of fields mutually constitute each other. We note that social geographers have made significant progress toward bridging place and cognition by demonstrating how a shared set of geographical constraints correlates with shared cognitions (e.g., Glückler, 2013; Glückler, Lazega, & Hammer, 2017). However, most prior conceptualizations of fields have an implicit teleological understanding of time. That is, traditional approaches have privileged a synchronic view of fields as either an unfolding evolution of actors in a process of gradually increasing complexity of structured interaction or as a revolutionary field-configuring event that crystallizes shared meanings and cognitions.

However, even though these approaches each recognize that fields evolve over time, there is little sophistication in how time, history, and collective memories of actors contribute to the structuration of fields. Theories of organizational fields lack a "historical consciousness" (Suddaby, 2016). Past and current research on organizational fields offers little recognition of the role that temporality or history play in the emergence, maintenance, and decay of organizational fields (Suddaby, Foster, & Mills, 2014).

In the balance of this paper we present the theoretical foundation of a conception of organizational fields as the recurrent reconstruction of social structures and meanings through mnemonic practices—that is, practices of remembering, forgetting, and using the past. We argue that although meaning and structure are important components of organizational fields, both are not essentialist or universal elements of fields, but are instead each inseparable from their mutual reproduction over time. Nor is time a universal or essentialist phenomenon, but rather, itself, created through processes of social reproduction and construction—by processes of collective remembering (Halbwachs, 1992). Our core thesis, thus, is that organizational fields are largely mnemonic communities—in other words, historically contingent structures that reflect the collective memory of their participants. We elaborate this argument in the next section.

Mnemonic Fields: Reconceptualizing Organizational Fields as Mnemonic Communities

There is a growing awareness that much of our memory is collective (Halbwachs, 1992), cultural (Sturken, 1997), or constituted at social levels beyond individual recollection (Olick & Robbins, 1998). To capture this notion, Zerubavel (1996) coined the term "mnemonic communities," with which he meant to capture the idea that broader social structures, such as the family, organization, ethnic group, and nation, all engage in practices of commemoration (cooperative remembering) that serve to define a common identity and delineate the boundaries of a specific social institution. Mnemonic communities, thus, are aggregates of social actors bound together by common frameworks of remembering and shared memories of past practices, identities, and collective meanings (Connerton, 1989; Zerubavel, 2003).

We contend that organizational fields are also mnemonic communities. Fields are constituted through acts of remembering by participating actors that engage in a collective process of institutional reflexivity (Suddaby, Viale, & Gendron, 2016) about the past that resignifies and recontextualizes the present in the light of a reconstructed past and a reimagined future. In so doing, actors redeploy historical artifacts, reenact material practices, and recreate cultural narratives that bring together a new social order and a new spatiotemporal nexus connecting the past-present-future of the community, redrawing its boundaries, and reshaping the collective identity of the field. In order to better understand how processes of collective mnemonics occur, however, we must first revisit research on organizational memory.

Organizational Mnemonics

Early studies of organizational memory (OMS) were based in the context of organizational learning and knowledge management. Here organizational memory is conceived of as a property or capacity—that is, a type of "storage bin," filled with the information needed for future strategic use in organizational planning and decision making (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). More recent views of organizational memory based on social or cultural approaches have been proposed (e.g., Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Rowlinson, Booth, Clark, Delahaye, & Procter, 2010). These recent efforts eschew the functional models of memory as a capacity for storing and retrieving information and, instead, view organizational memory as a dynamic process occurring within a specific social context.

Despite the shift in recent OMS research away from functionalist models of memory, most current OMS research is limited by its focus on a rational systems approach to the study of organizations (Scott & Davis, 2007). Most OMS researchers approach organizations as "a highly special type of collective, which is deliberately at the service of a clearly specified cause, e.g. profit maximization or problem solving" (Aksu, 2009, p. 322). As a result, this research falls victim to some of the same criticisms that plagued previous discussions of memory in knowledge management and organizational learning: That organizations are composed of relationships and activities that produce diverse social groups and individuals embedded in broader sociocultural and historical environments (Scott & Davis, 2007). To develop an alternative and more encompassing framework for the study of social mnemonics and organizations we need to address three main limitations of current OMS research.

The first is the methodological, individualist approach to the problem of organizational memory. Most OMS research conceives organizational memory as an aggregate of organizational members' memories. This "collected memory" approach (Olick, 1999) reduces organizational memory to the sum of individual memories. Instead, some authors (Rowlinson et al., 2010) argue that a more convincing and accurate conception of organizational memory is as a collective phenomenon that is qualitatively different from the individual, psychological remembrance of the world. Following this observation, some scholars recognize distinct mechanisms influencing the social processes of remembering in and around organizations (Mena, Rintamäki, Fleming, & Spicer, 2016; Ocasio, Mauskapf, & Steele, 2016), and recent research has focused on material practices of remembering (Decker, 2014), the narrative dimension of memory (Adorisio, 2014), and the re-presentation of the past as collective claims (Lamertz, Foster, Coraiola, & Kroezen, 2016).

A second limitation is the emphasis on the strategic motivation and use of organizational memory. Many studies on organizational memory have focused on organizational mnemonics as a direct product of instrumental, organizational efforts

(Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010; Zundel, Holt, & Popp, 2016). Organizations invent traditions (Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993), construct narratives about the past (Maclean, Harvey, Sillince, & Golant, 2014), appropriate social memory (Foster, Suddaby, Minkus, & Wiebe, 2011), and use historical artifacts to reinforce their values for their audiences (Schultz, Maguire, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2012). Organizational mnemonics, however, are more than the purposeful product of an organization's intentions to store information. Organizational memory can be used to create identity both with internal and external stakeholders (Foster et al., 2011; Suddaby & Foster, 2017; Ybema, 2010) as well as to strategically to manage change (e.g., Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Maclean et al., 2014; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). It can also facilitate or hamper processes of negotiation and renegotiation of the past (Booth, Clark, Delahaye, Procter, & Rowlinson, 2007; Janssen, 2012a; Ybema, 2014) and dynamics of (re)appropriation and (re)interpretation (Schwartz, 1997).

Third, previous research remains stubbornly attached to an organization-centric view of organizational mnemonics. This individualist conception of organizational memory lies at the core of some criticisms about conventional OMS. The solution some authors suggest is the same that is proposed to overcome the problem of methodological individualism. Organizational mnemonics should rely on a "collective memory" approach (Olick, 1999) to "take account of the specific social and historical contexts of organizational memory" (Rowlinson et al., 2010, p. 69). The study of organizational mnemonics remains focused on a single organization, and the collective memory of organizations continues to be seen as an exclusive organizational level phenomenon, tied to organizations or, at best, conceived as a result of some inner organizational culture dynamics (Mai, 2015). This approach to OMS has yet to recognize how organizational remembering is nested within broader cultural frameworks (Ocasio et al., 2016; Weber & Dacin, 2011).

Our alternative definition of organizational mnemonics, is predicated upon Halbwachs's (1992) insight that individual remembrance is determined by frameworks of memory drawn from the different social groups to which they belong. In particular, we assert that the frameworks of memory used by organizations to remember are affected by various social institutions (Ocasio et al., 2016) and by the relations actors establish with other field-level actors. In other words, organizational mnemonics take place within organizational fields and, as such, they are subject to many of the forces and influences operating at the level of the field. For instance, we should expect differences between the way central and peripheral actors remember a common event—just as we would expect a general and a soldier to have different memories of the same battle. In addition, boundary-spanning organizations should engage in different kinds of memory work than other peer organizations within the field. And organizations located at the interstices of multiple fields should exhibit behavior regarding their mnemonic practices that is more like that of other organizations in a similar position than that of organizations located within a particular organizational field.

Thus our argument departs from an organization-centered view of social memory. Instead we focus on organizational fields as sites for collective remembering. Akin to individuals within mnemonic communities, organizations do not remember

alone. The dynamics of organizational remembering and forgetting are intermingled and integrated within complex networks of relationships with other actors across time and space. The collective practices of organizational remembering are influenced by existing institutions and organizational fields. These institutions are historically created, mnemonically sedimented, and mythically moralized taken-for-granted practices and meanings that guide social action. Organizational mnemonics are thus institutionally shaped, culturally defined frameworks, practices, and contents of remembrance whose dynamics take place in various fields due to the influence of multiple social actors, such as the state, professions, and social movements.

Mnemonic Fields

Mnemonic communities or communities of remembrance are those in which field membership is attached to a belief in a collectively shared fate. Mnemonic communities emerge around memories that define the field's boundaries and create belonging among members. The creation and reproduction of the community is attached to a central self-definition, which is usually grounded in mythical foundations. Most communities have at the foundation of their collective remembering a shared traumatic experience. In other circumstances, communities of memory are triggered by other kinds of events, all of which exhibit the characteristic of a formative drama, an act that grounds the creation of a collective self-definition and puts into motion processes of identification towards the group (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994).

A mnemonic community requires an act or event that grounds the creation of a collective identity. However, mnemonic communities are usually founded on very ambiguous grounds. This is clearly the case of communities created after traumatic events, in which the grief for the trauma overlaps with the joy of belonging and the realization that the birth of the community was made possible after a tragic loss. The community struggles to remember and wishes to forget that very moment in which it was created. In other words, social processes of remembering establish the foundation and transformation of the community by drawing and redrawing the boundaries of different periods or eras in its historical trajectory. This also holds true for communities founded on other similarly extraordinary events, or whose extraordinariness was built over time in the form of watershed events though communal reflection and remembering. As the research on technology demonstrates (Tushman & Anderson, 1986), technological breakthroughs are intrinsically attached to processes of industry reconfiguration. But new technologies do not act as mere products of a changing environment. Instead, they take an active role in shaping and reshaping those environments as well as the people and the practices that constitute them. A similar process takes place when new cultural tools (Swidler, 1986) become available within a community. The emergence of new meanings and interpretations colonizes the collective experience with anxieties and uncertainties that might promote the divide between different orders of meaning (Zilber, 2007).

The rise of new myths and ideologies also can provide the grounds for the creation of new institutions and fields (Douglas, 1986). In fact, it is usually the case that technological innovation is grounded in new and revolutionary paradigms founded on institutional analogies (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991). And the belief in the foundation of collectivities of organizations on self-sufficing, integrated chains of rationalized myths is a cornerstone of institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). But, as the research on cultural trauma shows (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, & Sztompka, 2004), communities of memory constituted around trauma hardly ever emerge with the trauma itself. Membership always comes together after reflection over the traumatic experience has taken place and those affected have woven together their remembrances into a new myth of origin. Thus, it is through the very act of remembering that the collective identity of the field is generated, together with a new narrative about the group and its collective fate.

Dimensions of Mnemonic Fields

Organizational fields change over time (Fligstein, 1990). Yet, why is it we still talk about fields as though they were static entities? The literature on field-level change has analyzed many different domains of economic activity, including accounting (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), gastronomy (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003), forestry (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), toxic chemicals (Hardy & Maguire, 2010), county cricket (Wright & Zammuto, 2013), radio broadcasting (Leblebici et al., 1991), and music (Anand & Peterson, 2000). However, the temporal nature of the field itself is rarely problematized.

The permanence of organizational fields over time has been usually taken for granted. Consequently, the field as a metaphor needs to incorporate an enriched view of time and temporality. To better understand fields it is necessary to reflect more deeply on issues of sameness and difference in the collective identity of organizational fields across time and space. To define the field as "the same" is to be able to identify some essential features lying at its core (Albert & Whetten, 1985) that have remained immutable, as well as some minor aspects that might have changed.

We propose three main dimensions of mnemonic fields that interact to produce this core or essence. The genealogical dimension can be uncovered through the longitudinal examination of organizational fields. This sort of analysis makes it possible to unpack how some traces and characteristics from past arrangements, decisions, and practices are maintained and reproduced over time and to envision how these dimensions have a direct influence in the present state of field affairs. The narrative dimension is based on an interpretive understanding of the transmission of varied past modes of life (e.g., rationales, practices, meanings) and implies that continuity with the past might be crafted through communication leading to institutional reemergence and reenactment. The third is a moral dimension. Every act of remembering and every representation of the past embodies in itself a moral and

normative component. Past actions imply consequences in the future, as well as deeds, rights, and obligations among actors within the community and from the community in relation to other social actors. Remembrance of the past thus implies a responsibility toward the future and an accountability of actions past.

The Genealogical Dimension

The genealogical dimension of mnemonic fields comprises a legacy of achievements and past experiences. The past provides a foundation for the future and lays the context in which the present takes shape. This influence of the past on the present occurs in two ways (Stinchcombe, 1965). First, the past is imprinted on the structures and organizing frameworks within organizations (i.e., environmental imprinting). Second, the consequences of actions and decisions made in the past are brought to bear on the present state of affairs (i.e., path-dependence effects). Although both approaches might be seen as two sides of the same coin, the distinction is important because it helps to differentiate between models and frameworks of action, which are the focus of research on imprinting, and the consequences of the actions themselves, which are the interest of path-dependence scholars.

The literature on path dependence has been quite successful in arguing for the importance of the past in defining the behavior of organizations in the present. Empirical research in the field has been providing support for some hypotheses. In different levels of analysis scholars have shown the role of self-reinforcing mechanisms in carving the tracks of organizational inertia (Sydow & Schreyögg, 2013). And in the last couple of years they have honed their main assumptions into a clear research framework (Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009). However, one major criticism remains about this approach, querying how change is possible in a world of increasing returns and funneling options. Traditional answers to these questions consider external shocks and internal mistakes as the major forces behind changes in organizational paths (Garud, Kumaraswamy, & Karnøe, 2010; Vergne & Durand, 2010). In this sense, once an organization enters a track, self-reinforcing mechanisms are activated and remain so until disrupted by chance. Two alternative answers developed in the literature empower the actors subject to the self-compelling forces from within.

The first answer was provided by Schneiberg (2007) and relied on non-synchronic modes of mnemonic transmission. In his analysis of the institutional change in the American economy in the first half of the twentieth century, he showed that any institutional development leaves behind records of paths not taken in institutional reservoirs that might be used as legacies for the development of new paths in the future. He argued that even when institutional experiments fail they are not completely in vain, because they might be used as resources to feed new developments in the future. In addition, he identified three main mechanisms of transformation operating across time and space. The mechanism of combination works through the bricolage and assembly of existing organizational forms and traces into new compound structures. There is also the mechanism of theorization, through which actors

draw analogies and establish connections between the practices they engage within their field in the present and what used to be done in the past. The third mechanism is isomorphism with the past, which argues that actors might copy or transpose past accepted modes of action and structures through processes of revival, translation, and conversion.

The second solution is provided by Garud and Karnøe (2001) and Garud et al. (2010) and consists of embracing a narrative turn in path dependence theory. They started laying out a different ontology for the study of path dependence based on a social constructivist view of reality. They recognized that the paths created in the past will be used by people in the future to act in the world; however, instead of trying to explain how these paths form and how they limit action, the authors focused on how action is possible in the first place. They changed the main theoretical focus of the approach to one of path creation rather than path dependence, based on the assumption that every path is, in fact, a reenactment of or a move away from a path existing in the past. They grounded their approach in Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration and assumed that there is no automatic reproduction of path dependence through reinforcing mechanisms. Path maintenance and reproduction is thus a collective realization by social actors engaged in relational processes that entangle action and artifacts intertwined with perceptions of past, present, and future. Actors engage with the world through narratives. Path creation is thus the process through which opportunities for action are created in the present through narratives that connect initial conditions from the past with expectations for the future.

Scholars of path dependence as well as those studying imprinting have realized the importance of social memory in processes of structuration. Social mnemonics mediates the links between agency and structure, action and institutions. The solutions they provided were both grounded in sociocognitive mnemonic processes. Research has demonstrated that in addition to the influence of present time variables there are also imprinted features and reinforcing mechanisms that come into play in the structuration of organizational fields. Organizational remembering is a collective process. By this we mean that organizational memory is both a collective accomplishment by the members of the organization and a process that takes place through the ties and relationships organizations establish with other actors within an organizational field. The field is not limited to the ties and relationships organizations establish in the present. In fact, most of what constitutes the field depends on past institutional arrangements and past actions that have shaped the field. Organizational fields have an intrinsic genealogical component that is not reducible to the collective consciousness of field actors and which must be uncovered by organizational research.

The analysis here is similar to what Hannan and Freeman (1989) theorized about the evolution of organizational forms within a population of organizations. They argued that "the current diversity of organizational forms reflects the cumulative effect of a long history of variation and selection, including the consequences of founding processes, mortality processes, and merger processes" (p. 20). In spite of their exclusively synchronic view of process of inheritance and transmission, they recognized the differences between genetic and cultural transmission, and conceded

that "social and cultural information passes in many different directions among generations" (p. 21). Using their biological metaphor for the sake of clarity, we can look at genealogy as the traces previous generations have passed on to their descendants. At the same time, from a historical point of view, genealogy is the cultural practice of drawing lines of descent between generations of people. The advances in genetic analysis try to bring these two realities together, even if, in fact, they can only provide a narrative competing with the one created by genealogists. What this analysis implies is that there might not be a direct and truthful correspondence between the knowledge the actors use to act in the world and the collective results and consequences of their actions (Giddens, 1984). To look at what of the past is handed over to actors in the future is not the same as to understand how they receive that material and cultural heritage and how they make sense of it. Nevertheless, the limits of the biological analogy need to be noticed, because genes—different from cultural practices and artifacts—do not incorporate the transmission of infused meanings.

Part of what is transmitted from the past to present is embedded in artifacts, routines, and cognitive frames that are not easily available to conscious choice and reflection. In this sense, the genealogical dimension is associated with non-narrative modes of remembering. It makes reference to the memory preserved in bodies and places—for example, images, objects, emotions, sentiments—and acquired by doing through habit and tradition (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010; Shils, 1981). This is not to say this memory is not embedded in networks of meaning and cannot have their existence properly enunciated and justified within the cosmology of a given community. In fact, it is usually because meanings and things are intrinsically connected and laden with value and emotion that they survive the passage of time. As Zilber's (2002) case study of an Israeli rape crisis center shows, the reproduction of organizational practices might be supported by different sets of meanings. Systems of meanings and systems of practice couple and uncouple over time, opening spaces for new practices to emerge within the same cultures or to the maintenance of symbolic systems within different sets of practices.

This understanding is equivalent to the attempts to look at path dependence and imprinting through a social constructivist lens. An interpretive approach transfers the power originally attributed to an objective foundational event to a representation of that event constructed over time as a watershed moment in the history of the community. Two things are important in this sense. First, it does not matter whether an event is "real" or not. What matters is the extent to which the community orients its actions based on its existence (Weber, 1922/1978). If the event has really happened (whatever the meaning somebody wants to attribute to "reality" in this case), its effects would have been incorporated in society and handed over to the future— were they important enough to be inscribed in the social structure of the community. If the event has not happened, there should be little difficulty in analyzing the representations the community has created and how the remembrance of the event intersects with the whole institutional system that guides specific behaviors within the community. Second, accepting a social constructed view of the event shifts the attention from the importance of a single event to the analysis of its place within the collective narratives of a community. The focus of the research thus moves from the

material implications of the event to the way it is symbolically constructed, remembered, and deployed within the mnemonic community.

The Narrative Dimension

In addition to the genealogical dimension, the collective memory of a community also exists in the form of shared narratives about the past. Mnemonic narratives are a fundamental part of collective memory because they provide the context against which the present and the future are assessed and understood. This dimension can be thought of as the symbolic layer that recovers the genealogical traces inherited from the past and infuses past, present, and future reality with meaning. More specifically, although the meaningfulness of social reality is produced through the interaction of mnemonic narratives with other forms of remembering and forgetting, the organization of the past of a community is strongly influenced by the narratives members use to remember their past (Wertsch, 2002; Zerubavel, 2003).

Mnemonic narratives thus embody what is remembered from the past, while also reflecting how a community remembers its collective past. It is by telling stories that the events and the "hard facts" of the past are established, organized, and shared within and between mnemonic communities. In addition to the information about the reality of the historical facts, these narratives convey meaning and significance, as well as emotional and ideological contents associated with each mnemonic episode. In this sense, a community remembers and reconstructs the past through the narratives it (re)tells.

In organization studies, one of the first examples of such mnemonic work is Clark's (1972) analysis of the organizational saga. His study shows how narratives about the past are created and shared over time through successive generations of students. These narratives have the power to infuse the experience of the students with meaning and significance. The benefits of an organizational saga lie in its ability to provide unity and cohesiveness as well as pride and loyalty for the members of the group. Clark's (1972) analysis is a clear instance of the uniqueness paradox (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983). On the one hand, it reflects a similar set of practices and approaches organizational field members engage in to reinforce their distinctive identity from other organizations in the field. On the other, it allows field members to downplay some of their similarities in order to emphasize their legitimacy and categorical fit.

Mnemonic narratives also work as cultural artifacts. They are specific kinds of cultural tools used by members of a community to make sense of and recreate their social realities. They exist in two major forms. First, these narratives are transmitted from the past as preexisting accounts of the past that became inscribed in the memory of the community. Second, they reflect present interests and understandings that actualize and appropriate the past to accomplish things in the present and to construct projected futures. The stock of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) of any mnemonic community is constituted by a narrative infrastructure. An infinite number of stories can be stored in the collective memory of the community, even though

they are not all stored in a common repository or are evenly distributed among members of the community (Wertsch, 2008). Moreover, there is a hierarchical relation established among the stories themselves with some stories occupying a more central and important role in the field than others. Because the complexity of mnemonic narratives tends to be linked to the complexity of a society (Brockmeier, 2002), the organization of the mnemonic narratives of a community has much to say about the organization of the community itself.

The growing interest of management and organizational scholars in the study of rhetorical history is significant in this respect. Suddaby et al. (2010) defined rhetorical history as the intentional attempt of organizations and other social actors in using the past strategically to deal with environmental pressures and achieve particular goals. While much in social mnemonics can be attributed to emerging dynamics, there is an increasing recognition of the purposive attempts of specific social actors in controlling processes of social remembering (Mena et al., 2016) and using history strategically (Foster, Coraiola, Suddaby, Kroezen, & Chandler, 2016). Beyond the frontiers of the organizations, where the past can be mobilized to generate continuity or change (Brunninge, 2009; Maclean et al., 2014; Ybema, 2014), managers and entrepreneurs also engage in the production of historical narratives with the purpose of signaling compliance with existing categories and institutions (Hills, Voronov, & Hinings, 2013), challenging or defending the status quo (McGaughey, 2013), and creating new markets and collective identities (Lamertz et al., 2016).

Another way of approaching the stock of stories of a mnemonic field can be seen in the distinction between specific and schematic narratives about the past (Wertsch, 2002). Specific narratives are accounts of specific events situated in time and space. They evidence how people make sense of and describe historical facts and events in their day-to-day realities. Schematic narratives, on the other hand, encompass the idea of deeper narrative structures in the form of discursive templates that are shared among people from the same cultural tradition. These two notions bring together the narrative and genealogical dimensions of collective memory. Mnemonic practices not only reflect but also constitute communities of memory. Among these, the narrative practices of memory are the most powerful forms of enacting reality (Brockmeier, 2002). Narratives bring together a linguistic, semiotic, and performative order that integrates past, present, and future into a single structure of meaning. It is through the recurrent retelling of mnemonic narratives that people learn how to think about the world. It is through the stories inherited from the past and stories representing the past that people acquire the cognitive schemes they need to make sense of their collective realities (Brockmeier, 2002; Wertsch, 2002). These narratives provide cognitive schemes and points of collective convergence and agreement around which people structure their thoughts about the world (DiMaggio, 1997; Douglas, 1986).

The notion of schemata (DiMaggio, 1997; Douglas, 1986) brings together the collective and individual, the cultural and cognitive dimensions of memory. Schemata are social representations, sets of labels, and categorization schemes interlinked in broader systems of categories that simplify and organize cognition. In this sense, they have the dual function of representing reality and providing the tools for actors to act upon it. As products of inherited narratives, they provide individuals

with cognitive frames of remembering as well as categorical representations of the past. They organize the mnemonic reality of the world as much as they provide the frameworks within which the world should be remembered. As such, together with the informational and factual portrayal of the past they also transmit a system of values and beliefs. Every act of remembering is, in itself, a political act. People remember within groups based on available collective structures of remembering (Halbwachs, 1992). To remember is, in essence, to become once again a member of the group, to reconnect with other members and their way of remembering, to deploy specific categories and schemes of remembering to make sense of one's own reality. To remember is to embrace a particular way of looking at the world from the standpoint of a group's memories. The content of remembering and the schemes of remembering are both infused with, and supportive of, the system of norms and values of the community. As such, the performance of remembering appropriates aspects of a collective past to reflect upon the present and define an agenda for the future while reinforcing existing categories and worldviews. Used as political instruments, these mnemonic narratives are powerful tools that can generate continuity and discontinuity with the collective past, support boundary work and identity work, and legitimate new connections among present, past, and future.

The Moral Dimension

Last, but not least, is the moral component of mnemonic fields. Every representation of the past within the field is a version among many possible others. Even though the past is a singular construct, it cannot be remembered as is (Lowenthal, 1985). Every act of remembering—which also includes historical attempts at remembering—is always biased towards the present (Halbwachs, 1992). At the core of the nexus between remembering and belonging lies the morality of memory. Mnemonic narratives are also normative statements about the past that go beyond questions of what the past is and how people remember. These narratives define the ground rules for past remembrance by specifying who, what, and how things must be remembered. By implication, each narrative determines what from the present should be remembered in the future and how the remembering process should take place in order to preserve the desired memories from the present to future generations. In so doing, these narratives define a moral order that links the present and the future of the community with the actions and decisions that were made in the past.

The idea of a moral dimension within the field can be understood in two different but interrelated senses. The first makes reference to what from the past is remembered, while the second comprises ways of remembering the past. The first deals with the morality of remembered acts. The second evaluates the morality of acts of remembering and forgetting. These two understandings overlap, to the extent that what a community remembers depends on its frameworks of remembrance. The distinction is, nevertheless, important and bears a connection with the other dimensions of the field. We defined the genealogical dimension as a dimension of material practices that have direct consequences for the ways things are done within the field.

This implies the existence of rules, norms, and acceptable, patterned modes of behavior. Whenever a transgression of existing norms happens within the field, this becomes an instance to be remembered and maybe used to prevent violations of that sort from happening again. In contrast are instances when what is ethically sanctioned is remembered. In both cases the normative and narrative aspects of remembering (Assmann, 2011) are present. In the first normative remembering applies to the transgression being narrated. In the second the norms of remembering define how the past should be narrated and how this should be done.

Organization scholars have just recently started paying more attention to the moral dimension of remembering. Organizational historical accountability and the remembering of corporate irresponsibility are examples of the two major issues attached to moral mnemonics. The notion of historical responsibility asks if collective actors should be accountable for actions that were committed in the past (Schrempf-Stirling, Palazzo, & Phillips, 2016). The example of forced labor at Volkswagen during World War II is illustrative (Janssen, 2012b).

Beyond the implications and the responsibility of what was done in the past, mnemonic communities must also be accountable for their mnemonic practices. For instance, Mena et al. (2016) argued that organizations purposefully engage in practices of forgetting in relation to corporate irresponsibility. In addition to their efforts to publicly identify previous misbehaviors and account for immoral or unethical conceptions held in the past, social actors are also responsible for the records and the views they hold about the past. Purposeful forgetting, or even unreflective oblivion, is being commonly questioned and challenged by a growing number of actors. The ability to recover the past, record the present, and provide evidence of the mnemonic efforts engaged in by communities and organizations has become a valuable asset in many different contexts. The ability to revise, update, and resignify the past through narrative accounts provides a context and a rationale for better understanding previously held notions about the past. Moreover, uncovering historical, purposive actions of organizations can help to demonstrate how the strategic intent of some organizations has negatively affected different actors, thus adding to the growing awareness of the historical responsibility of collective actors.

What both Mena and colleagues (2016) and Schrempf-Stirling and colleagues (2016) demonstrate is that the accountability of organizations towards their pasts is a moral responsibility that does not disappear over time (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994). Additionally, organizations also bear a responsibility towards the memory of the field in which they are embedded. To the extent that the field provides the actors with a common identity, it also works as a governance structure that regulates their behavior and organizes collective action. As Douglas (1986) argues, it is the instituted mnemonic system that provides balance and stability within the community, rather than a transcendental entity that controls its members. Together the genealogical, narrative, and moral dimensions provide a spatiotemporal context that integrates the actors within a field. Each dimension provides basic action standards, blocks of meaning, and normative guidelines that organize interaction and orient the practices within the field. These dimensions also create a sense of belonging that connects multiple actors within the community and provides them with a common

identity. Consequently, actors are provided with temporal and spatial references that locate the field and the actions they develop within broader contexts of collective action.

Conclusion

In this paper we introduce the idea that organizational fields should be understood as historically contingent processes. We show how dominant empirical approaches tend to adopt the metaphor of organizational fields as either networks of interaction—in other words, fields-as-place—or shared meaning systems—in other words, fields-as-cognition. Both approaches ignore the temporal elements of field structuration and, as a result, fail to demonstrate how systems of meaning emerge from common interactions over time. Our core contribution is to identify temporality, as constituted through time, history, and memory, as the key mechanism through which fields emerge, are maintained, and erode.

We identify three key dimensions through which temporality connects place with cognition: genealogical, narrative and moral. The genealogical dimension focuses analytic attention on the inexorable flow of time—the passage of events, recurrent activities, or material practices and the accumulation of artifacts—as a critical first step in field structuration. Put simply, the genealogical dimension refers to the past as an uninterrupted flow of events and action—often referred to as the "brute facts" of the past—the accretion of which in repeated patterns contributes to early processes of typification and reification as described by Berger & Luckmann (1967).

The narrative dimension refers to the interpretive practices through which certain brute facts of the past are interpreted as significant and elevated to the status of history. The narrative stage is one of signification, through which events form part of the collective memory of a social unit and which—as a consequence of repeating the story of these events—helps to identify the social unit as ontologically distinct. In this stage, memory is an act of social reproduction that is inseparable from the social unit itself. Collective acts of (re)interpreting the past are invariably focused on a project of structuration of the field and its members as a distinct institutional entity. Each narrative of the past is an act of re-membering or co-memoration, in which actors are positioned in a meaningful and significant role in the uninterrupted flow of the past. It is in this stage of structuration that memory is used to bind actors to place.

The moral dimension of the field refers to a final temporal stage of field structuration in which collective memory is used not only to identify actors, practices, and events as members of a common place, but also acquires a normative status of being legitimate. The moral or normative dimension of field structuration encompasses the institutionalized remembrance or forgetting of the good and the bad. It also refers to the moral appropriateness of certain types of remembering or forgetting.

In sequence, these three dimensions describe the important analytic role offered by viewing fields as mnemonic structures. As we observe, events in time shift ontological status from brute facts of the past, to interpretive significance as history,

and then to moral value as myth. We also theorize how memory is used to create first a sense of place and then a sense of meaning over time. Indeed, the three dimensions also describe a schematic process of three stages through which fields produce collective meaning over time—first, how the past is experienced in real time; second, how these experiences are narrated and shared with the next generation; and finally, how these stories are interpreted and reinterpreted through the lens of the shared present and a prospective common future. By acknowledging fields as historically contingent processes and identifying collective remembering as the key interpretive mechanism through which processes of typification and signification occur, time, history, and memory are seen as a vast and unexplored landscape for achieving a better understanding of organizational fields and processes of institutionalization.

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