

Social Remembering and Organizational Memory

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Abstract

Organizational Memory Studies (OMS) is limited by its managerialist, presentist preoccupation with the utility of memory for knowledge management. The dominant model of memory in OMS is that of a storage bin. But this model has been rejected by psychologists because it overlooks the distinctly human subjective experience of remembering, i.e. episodic memory. OMS also fails to take account of the specific social and historical contexts of organizational memory. The methodological individualism that is prevalent in OMS makes it difficult to engage with the rapidly expanding sociological and historical literature in social memory studies, where a more social constructionist approach to 'collective memory' is generally favoured. However, for its part social memory studies derived from Maurice Halbwachs neglects organizations, focusing primarily on the nation as a mnemonic community. From a critical perspective organizations can be seen as appropriating society's memory through corporate sites of memory such as historical visitor attractions and corporate museums. There is scope for a sociological and historical reorientation within OMS, drawing on social memory studies and focusing on corporate sites of memory, such as The Henry Ford museum complex, as well as the mnemonic role of founders and beginnings in organizations. Taking a social constructionist, collectivist approach to social remembering in organizations allows connections to be made between memory and other research programmes, such as organizational culture studies.

Keywords: collective memory, organizational history, organizational memory, social memory studies

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