

How should history remember me? The role of executives' autobiographies in the
legitimation of managerial capitalism

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ABSTRACT: This project seeks to advance our understanding of managerial capitalism by examining how successful CEOs legitimate their extraordinary status, emolument, and accumulation of personal wealth. Specifically, it analyzes autobiographies written by prominent CEOs at the end of their careers and examines their attempts to shape the interpretations of their work, achievements, and life trajectory. It focuses on CEO's representation of key episodes, such as turnaround, crisis, and successions, both consensual and conflictual. It applies a narrative analysis as well as rhetoric analysis to understand the ways in which CEOs construct the perception of their behavior in the context of these episodes and compares their presentation and interpretation of events to the reflections of these same episodes in the business press and key corporate documents such as annual letters to shareholders. As such, it builds on recent work examining rhetorical history as a legitimizing mechanism (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Ocasio, Masukapf, & Steele, 2015; Strangelman, 2002; Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010). More broadly, the study adds to the literature examining the social construction of the myth of CEO (Grint, 2005; Khurana, 2004).

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Theoretical Framework

- In the context of a trajectory for understanding managerial capitalism we draw on
 - Debates about professional management: Benndix 1956; Chandler, 1977; 1990
 - And more recent critical examinations: Harding, 2004; Grey, 1999; Shenhav, 1999; Wilmot, 1997
- We focus on legitimating the concept of CEO in terms of extraordinary status, emolument, and the accumulation of personal wealth drawing on
 - Social Construction of Legitimacy : Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001, Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006
 - Social construction of CEOs as a mythical concept : Grint, 2005
 - Khurana, 2004

Rhetorical History as a Legitimizing Mechanism

- **Rhetorical History as a strategic resource** (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010, AMR SI, 2015)
 - Corporate museum, commemorative rituals, monument, historiographies
- The Role of Collective Memory in the Emergence and Evolution of Societal Logics (Ocasio, Mauskapf, & Steele, 2015)
- Repeated omission of contradictory elements of organizational history (Anteby & Molnar, 2012)
- Constructing the past in railway Industry (Strangleman, 2002)

**History will
be kind to
me for I
intend to
write it.**

Winston Churchill // Quoteistan.com

Research Design: Analysis of CEO Autobiographies

Cases

Louis Gerstner
Jack Welch
Jeff Immelt
Lee Iacocca
Katherine Graham
Carly Fiorina
Martha Stewart

Supplementary secondary data:
Press / public information

Episodes

- Turnaround
- Crisis
- Consensual successions
- Conflictual succession

Analytical Approach

Narrative analysis

- Character (Protagonist Vs. Antagonist)
- Plot (epic, tragic, comic, ..)

Rhetoric Analysis

- Ethos, Logos, Pathos

Contributions

- Critical management studies: Understanding the construction of extraordinary status, emolument, and the accumulation of personal wealth as a legitimate aspect of managerial capitalism
 - As an individual practice
 - As a collective genre
- Rhetorical history
 - As an individual level device, with collective impact
 - Micro mechanisms of rhetorical history