Managing the Past Responsibly: A Collective Memory Perspective on Responsibility, Sustainability and Ethics

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Abstract

Thus far, responsible management and related areas, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability and business ethics, have largely ignored that past beliefs about what is considered (ir)responsible are reconstructed over time. In this chapter, we address this oversight and develop a collective memory perspective that acknowledges the reconstruction of responsibility, sustainability and ethics over time, as a result of ongoing mnemonic struggles between a variety of actors including business firms and their managers, as well as other stakeholders, like civil society groups and the media. We show how the contemporary understanding of (ir)responsibility is contingent upon mnemonic struggles over what the past should encompass, as well as mnemonic work, different remembering and forgetting practices, the (re-)interpretation of mnemonic traces and the cultural context in which these processes take place. We outline key issues and concepts that should be taken into consideration in the practice of responsible management, where issues related to the past are concerned. We contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of responsible management that attends to a responsible management of the past, as well.

Keywords

Collective memory, forgetting, mnemonic work, past, remembering, responsibility

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Introduction

Responsible management, including associated constructs of managerial responsibility, sustainability and ethics (Laasch & Conaway, 2015), has been described either as a characteristic of managers and their environment (e.g. Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006) or as a process, whereby managers learn to become more responsible (Hesselbarth & Schaltegger, 2014; Laasch & Moosmayer, 2016) and make more responsible the firms they work in doing so (Schneider, Zollo, & Manocha, 2010; Verkerk, De Leede, & Nijhof, 2001). This process is said to depend on a number of managerial characteristics (e.g. mindset, skills, education, engagement; see for instance Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015), as well as different organizational and institutional factors (e.g. management systems, incentives/sanctions, ideology, regulations, etc. See for instance Djelic & Etchanchu, 2017; Gond, Kang, & Moon, 2011; Hilliard, 2013). As such, the literature tends to assume a path dependent view of responsible management: past actions and structures are a given, they determine the current understanding of responsibility and managers, firms and stakeholders can become more (or less) responsible based on this metric (e.g. Barnett, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008). The past is seen as immutable and overwhelmingly determinant of present and future action.

Yet, some recent management and organization studies have challenged this path-dependent view and, in doing so, highlight the socially constructed nature of the past (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Suddaby & Foster, 2017). The so-called 'historic turn' (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004) has led to a wide variety of studies on how the past is actually *re-constructed* by various actors and is not immutable and all determining. For instance, some scholars have shown how managers can manipulate and modify some aspects of the past of their organization to maintain or change their organization's identity (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Gioia, Corley, & Fabbri, 2002). Among these different studies on the socially constructed nature of the past and the implications of this for management, the notion of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]) has emerged to bring to light how the past is re-constructed by social actors to serve their present interests by means of different remembering and forgetting practices (Olick & Robbins, 1998).

In this chapter, we take stock of the rise of this collective memory perspective in management and organization studies (e.g. Do, Lyle, & Walsh, 2018; Rowlinson, Booth, Clark, Delahaye, & Procter, 2010) and develop a collective memory perspective that is connected to responsible management research. In sum, we argue that we should pay more attention to how different actors re-construct collective memories around responsible and irresponsible management practices because it sheds light on how responsible management is understood in a given context and how it is executed at present and in the future. We conclude with highlighting the implications of all of this in relation to our understanding of responsible management and avenues for future research.

Social memory studies

The perspective we describe in this chapter builds on social memory studies (Olick, 1999; Olick & Robbins, 1998). The primary focus of social memory studies is, broadly, the examination of how social groups rely on collectively constructed and shared memories to understand their pasts and how 'social frameworks' shape these memories (Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]). Collective memory is, therefore, often defined as a socially constructed version of the past upheld by a particular social group. Yet, the perspective is not only static (as it refers to what the group collectively remembers about a past event at a particular point in time), it

also encompasses underlying mnemonic processes and practices of negotiation and reconstruction over time (Fine, 2001; Olick & Robbins, 1998).

The basic premise of the collective memory approach is that individuals acquire most of their memories in society, as part of specific social groups (like their family or the organization they work for). They recall and recognize their memories in the context of these social groups (Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]), otherwise known as 'mnemonic communities' (Zerubavel, 1996). These communities "provide the social contexts in which memories are embedded and mark the emotional tone, depth and style of our remembering" (Misztal, 2003: 160). Hence, the overarching values, beliefs, and norms of a mnemonic community will have a strong effect on which memories become salient and which are forgotten. For instance, the social framework of a childhood memory is most likely to be the individual's family, as the memory will be framed in terms of how family members (siblings, parents, grand-parents) acted around and reacted to that specific past childhood event. Salient and important family memories are recounted at family events (like dinners or holidays) and are, thus, reconstructed on these occasions.

New members are socialized into these important collective memories (Misztal, 2003). Socialization occurs informally, but also formally, especially in organizations (Foroughi, 2015; Walsh, Pazzaglia, & Ergene, 2018). In fact, many of our memories are not actually based on personal experience; instead, they are acquired upon gaining membership to a mnemonic community (Misztal, 2003; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996), upon starting a job in a new organization, for example. Of importance here, is how this view is distinct from a *collected* approach to social memory, which adopts a socio-psychological perspective and describes the 'simple' aggregation of individuals' memories. Here, we emphasize a *collective* approach to social memory, one that analyzes the social processes involved in the (re-)construction of memory and the collectively negotiated and shared memories of the past of individuals in a given social group (Olick, 1999).

Acceptance or institutionalization of collective memories in a mnemonic community is a process that involves some degree of struggle (Fine, 2012). As Schudson (1992) has noted, at the onset of each collective memory, something happened; collective memory is about the struggle over what that something is. This struggle, in turn, typically involves a variety of groups vying for the right to define the nature, meaning and substance of past events (Zerubavel, 1996). The way in which actors attempt to influence collective memories of the past is usually referred to as mnemonic work (Fogu & Kansteiner, 2006; Zelizer, 2008). Mnemonic work involves attempts at influencing the process of collective memory: reinforcing/destabilizing, altering or even deinstitutionalizing a collective memory.

There are two types of mnemonic work: remembering and forgetting. The former refers to the reinforcement of an established version of the past and the associated specifics. Established versions of the past are never readily accepted; they are interpreted and interrogated continuously (Kuhn, 2010). The goal of remembering work is to limit questioning of the established version and reinforce its acceptance and continuity. Forgetting work, on the other hand, refers to attempts at reconfiguring, downplaying or erasing (parts of) a collective memory with the eventual goal of deinstitutionalizing the established version of the past (Mena, Rintamäki, Fleming, & Spicer, 2016). The back and forth between remembering and forgetting work by different groups in a given mnemonic community can ultimately result in the institutionalization of an 'accepted' version of a past event and, thus, to the rise of a specific collective memory.

Once a collective memory is institutionalized, even if it is still occasionally contested, it is sustained not only by remembering practices, but also by mnemonic traces. Remembering practices stem from the values, beliefs and norms specific to the mnemonic community. They range from explicit rituals and commemorations, to more implicit, taken-for-granted norms and beliefs about the past (e.g. ways of performing a specific action, habits) (Olick, 2007; Spillman, 1998). Collective memories are also sustained by mnemonic traces that may have a material component, such as artifacts or 'sites of memory' like museums (Nora, 1989).

A collective memory perspective on responsible management

As this brief overview suggests, the collective memory approach sheds light on under-studied aspects of responsible management. For instance, how do managers leverage the past in their (responsible management) work? How do we collectively remember and forget past instances of responsibility or irresponsibility? How do these memories affect how we act (responsibly) today? Ultimately, the approach leads us to the question of how managers can responsibly manage the past.

Increasingly, there is a recognition that issues of managerial and corporate responsibility unfold over time and that how we remember, forget and reconstruct these issues matters. Accordingly, a number of recent studies have drawn on this perspective to better understand responsible management (e.g. Brunninge & Fridriksson, 2017; Mena et al., 2016). Indeed, the key concepts of the collective memory perspective can be applied with relative ease to responsible management. In this chapter, we first take stock of these fledgling efforts and then develop an agenda for future research. We begin with an overview of the rise of 'historical consciousness' in management and organization studies (Suddaby, 2016) and then turn to the ways in which this has influenced responsible management research.

Uses of the past

The 'historic turn' (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Suddaby, 2016) in management and organization studies has brought to light that the past should not be understood as a given that constrains today's actions, but as something that is continuously re-constructed and negotiated by social actors. Accordingly, a variety of studies in different areas, including strategy (e.g. Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013), organizational theory (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2017) and marketing (e.g. Balmer, 2011) have examined 'uses of the past': the way in which companies and their managers may reconstruct their past in their strategies and day-to-day work practices.

In studies of 'uses of the past', the past is seen not as a constraint (e.g. path dependency), but as a valuable resource that managers can draw on to manage both internal and external stakeholders. For instance, several studies have shown that leaders are able to highlight specific aspects of the past of the organization that support a distinct identity for their organization such that employees may more easily identify with it (Lamertz, Foster, Coraiola, & Kroezen, 2016; Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn-Trank, 2016). Using the past may also be helpful in terms of managing external stakeholders in the context of communicating with consumers (Foster, Suddaby, Minkus, & Wiebe, 2011), surpassing competitors by creating a competitive advantage (Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010; Yu & Glynn, 2015) and enhancing corporate reputation and brand image (Balmer, 2011; Etter & Nielsen, 2015).

From this perspective, the past can be seen as a useful resource for responsible management practices, as well. Best practices in terms of responsibility, sustainability and ethics may not only be directly imported from the past, but may be made sense of and re-constructed in a way that is (at least seemingly) more responsible in the present (Brunninge & Fridriksson, 2017). For instance, some research highlights the importance of "salut[ing] the triumphs of the past" as 'aspirational talk' in attempts to improve on past CSR practice and project future improvements (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013: 380).

However, while managers may draw on the past to inform their responsible management practices, they may also do so in a less responsible and ethical fashion. For example, a number of firms, including Bertelsmann and Volkswagen, that were associated with the Nazi regime, both intentionally and unintentionally downplayed some aspects of their involvement with the regime at one point in time or another (Booth, Clark, Delahaye, Procter, & Rowlinson, 2007; Janssen, 2013). Similarly, instances of irresponsibility are often buried by managers, intentionally or not, as in cases of oil spills, waste dumping or involvement in the slave trade (Janssen, 2012; Mena et al., 2016; Rowlinson, 2002).

Much like other perspectives on responsible management, including stakeholder theory, a 'uses of the past' perspective takes a managerialist and firm-centric view of how the past is used with respect to responsibility, sustainability and ethics. Focusing on so-called responsible (or irresponsible) managers puts too much emphasis on these actors and not enough on the variegated contexts in which they reside and the other actors that operate within these contexts (see for example Banerjee, 2018; Verkerk et al., 2001). As such, we develop a broader, collective memory perspective that extends beyond top-down, strategic and managerialist 'use of the past' in responsible management.

Stakeholder mnemonic communities

In line with social memory studies, the perception of responsible, sustainable or ethical behavior on the part of managers is necessarily embedded in a particular version of the past. This version is constructed, re-constructed, negotiated and shared by what has been described as a stakeholder mnemonic community (Mena et al., 2016). The notion of what constitutes a responsible management practice is, in part, influenced by applicable norms and beliefs that stakeholders have co-constructed in the past. Should a manager infringe upon these mnemonic norms and beliefs, disapproval, if not backlash and punishment, may be the result (Barnett, 2014; Clemente & Roulet, 2015).

Stakeholder mnemonic communities draw on mnemonic traces to situate and evaluate contemporary responsible management practices. Interactions between a manager and stakeholders (e.g. the way in which stakeholder engagement is operationalized, how sustainability or responsibility is communicated and reported on, etc.) can become ritualized through repetition and, hence, generate corresponding mnemonic traces of these ritualized interactions. Subsequent behavior is then assessed and framed in reference to these traces (Fine, 2001; Schudson, 1992). Not only strictly symbolic or cognitive traces, but also material ones may subsist as a result of previous manager-stakeholder interactions that sustain a particular version of the past regarding what is responsible and what is not. This brings to mind written accords in response to an incident like a strike or an accident (such as those following the Rana Plaza factory collapse, see Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018), corporate museums or archives (such as the 'Place of Remembrance' for Jewish forced labor by Volkswagen, see Janssen, 2012) and webpages or other publications that recount past

behavior and re-tell the tales of businesspersons, companies or industries and their practices. In this way, these traces influence subsequent interpretations of responsibility on the part of stakeholders.

Mnemonic work

The 'uses of the past' view puts forward the idea that managers will engage in mnemonic work and leverage the past (of their organization, its behavior, its environment, previous managerial practices, etc.) to actively manage stakeholder mnemonic communities. Brunninge & Fridriksson (2017), for example, argue that managers may compensate for a lack of transparency in their supply chains by constructing an image of a responsible company based on examples from its past.

However, even when they are institutionalized, collective memories that shape how we evaluate management practices and assess how responsible they are must be sustained continuously and may even be contested at times – in particular by stakeholders. Indeed, while managers are likely to engage in active mnemonic work, stakeholders too can engage more or less reflexively in mnemonic work at different points in time. Some of this mnemonic work can be habitual, in that it reproduces the dominant, institutionalized version of the past (like stakeholders reinforcing the narrative of a responsible company by confirming or even recounting its responsible history). Other instances of mnemonic work by stakeholders may be more agentic, in the sense that they can willingly and reflexively challenge, extend, downplay, undermine and, in general, modify an institutionalized collective memory of responsible management.

Some work at the intersection of responsible management and collective memory describes the forgetting work that accompanies issues of responsibility, sustainability and ethics. Lamm & Lips-Wiersma (2018), for instance, describe how the Pike River coal mine collapse in 2010 in New Zealand was not prevented despite clear signs of impending disaster in the months preceding it. They analyze how the norms in place, shared by all stakeholders, including the operating firm, managers and workers, led to systemic silencing. In addition to silencing, forgetting work can also target mnemonic traces, leading to evidence of past behavior being downplayed or erased (Mena et al., 2016).

Remembering work is also likely to take place in stakeholder mnemonic communities. In particular, some stakeholders will want to maintain their own version of the past and to supplant the institutionalized, oftentimes managerial, version. Typically, groups of victims of managerial or corporate misconduct will engage in remembering work of different kinds, including commemorations, rallies and protests. Some employees will even overcome substantial pressure to be silent and engage in whistleblowing, even long after the fact (Miethe & Rothschild, 1994). In general, social movements and activists perform remembering work, as they often seek to challenge dominant versions of past events (Janssen, 2012). But managers, too, may perform remembering work in an attempt to appease stakeholders. Firms that have been (historically) associated with slavery and forced labor, for instance, sometimes acknowledge their wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness (Janssen, 2012, 2013).

Mnemonic work is necessarily both constrained and enabled by the broader cultural context in which it takes place. The way in which responsibility, sustainability and ethics are defined and understood within a given context at a given point of time has implications for the

content and effectiveness of mnemonic work (Rintamäki & Mena, 2018). Misztal (2003) notes that past events limit the number of available interpretations of the past, in particular when the trauma created by these events is significant. In the context of sustainability, Hoffman and Ocasio (2001) compare eight critical environmental events, including the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 and the Cuyahoga river fire of 1969, and detail how both structural aspects of the industries involved, as well as cultural norms at these times affected the amount of attention that was devoted by managers and stakeholders to the events and determined whether or not they were remembered and re-enacted over time.

Mnemonic struggles and (de)institutionalization

The tension between remembering and forgetting work in the area of what is and what is not responsible management can be thought of as a mnemonic struggle – at the root of which is the struggle to determine the institutionalized collective memory or version of the past. These struggles are ongoing, by they may be more salient at certain times in terms of public attention (Clemente & Roulet, 2015). Proponents of alternative collective memories are ultimately interested in attracting public attention in order to help their version of the past gain traction. Indeed, "when public opinions are aware of a deviance, pressures will be maintained on the deviant actors until they yield to those pressures" (Daudigeos, Roulet, & Valiorgue, 2018: 17).

When a collective memory is institutionalized and mnemonic struggles are not at the forefront of public and managerial attention, this memory will become a template for future action (Fine, 2012). This version of the past may be either an incremental or drastic departure from previous understandings of responsible management. Mnemonic struggles and their (temporary) resolution matter in terms of responsible management practices, as a version of the past will impose itself into the calculus of what future responsible (or irresponsible) management practice looks like. The institutionalized memory will dictate what is responsible, sustainable or ethical in a given context. For instance, an aggressive growth strategy through acquisitions was widely regarded as acceptable and good business practice by the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) prior to 2007. However, after the 2008 financial downturn, this strategy was demonized and were proscribed. As of 2018, RBS has rolled back much of their previous expansion. Responsible management after the crisis hinged upon a respectful compliance culture, where risks are clearly assessed (Rintamäki & Mena, 2018).

Discussion and avenues for future research

Collective forgetting refers to the loss of meaning of a past event for a social group such that it ceases to influence this group's actions and considerations (Schudson, 1992). Forgetting is often the 'default' process for individuals and communities in light of difficult or uncomfortable pasts, including instances of managerial irresponsibility (Mena et al., 2016). Both cognitive overload and a tendency for intentional and unintentional forgetting may help communities move on (Foroughi, 2015; Ricoeur, 2004). However, forgetting past managerial failures can yield disastrous consequences, as was witnessed in the disintegration of the space shuttle Columbia in 2004. The accident took place, in large part, due to the forgetting of lessons learned as a result of the 1986 explosion of the Challenger shuttle. Prior to both incidents, leaders at NASA began emphasizing cost savings above safety, which led to a gradual relaxing of safety standards and, eventually, to both accidents (Haunschild, Polidoro Jr, & Chandler, 2015).

Our point here is that remembering *both* responsible and irresponsible, beneficial and harmful, ethical and unethical behavior is essential to managers being able to responsibly manage the past. The failure to take this duality into account was seen in the VW emission cheating device scandal in 2015. Prior to this, VW was the poster child of responsible management practices in the automotive industry. It was an industry leader in the use of various environmental and worker-related management systems and in its valuing of responsibility-related certificates (Rhodes, 2016). Yet, the company was found guilty of one of the most sweeping cases of fraud in the history of the industry– for the second time! Indeed, most of us have forgotten that VW had already deceived the EPA with defeat devices in 1973 (Wall Street Journal, 1974). Apparently, leaders and managers at VW did not recognize the importance of remembering past mistakes. This was sustained by a culture of performance, secrecy and disdain for failure that characterized the company environment before both scandals (Rhodes, 2016). This kind of collective and, in particular, organizational and managerial forgetting is clearly irresponsible. As Hibbert & Cunliffe (2015) argue, responsible management is not simply about acting ethically, it is also about actively denouncing irresponsibility.

Accordingly, in this discussion, we refer to two important and related points: on the one hand, managing the past responsibly and, on the other, managing the past by denouncing, preventing and remedying irresponsibility. While the former has been addressed to some extent, the latter has been less attended to (Lange & Washburn, 2012). An issue with both sides of the same coin is that judgment about what is considered responsible or irresponsible vary across time and place. Yet, managing to prevent irresponsibility requires the additional recognition that wrongdoing and harmful practices tend to be ubiquitous (Palmer, 2013; Perrow, 1984). This ubiquity can be partly explained by the collective memory approach: past (irresponsible) behavior has been memorized, institutionalized and re-constructed over time so that it has become 'normal' (see also Greve, Palmer, & Pozner, 2010).

We address how these two important aspects of responsible management of the past should be addressed in future studies and suggest five primary, inter-linked research avenues: mnemonic sensitivity, mnemonic integrity, remembering practices, interrogating the past and the role of archivists in responsible management. These avenues can be thought of in terms of responsible management ethics, practices and roles with regard to the past (see Table 1). Ethics is an integral part of responsible management (Laasch & Conaway, 2015). Mnemonic sensitivity and mnemonic integrity represent the ethics of managing the past responsibly. They underlie the practices of responsible management of the past, which include remembering practices and interrogating the past. Finally, corporate archivists, as organizational members, are able to make use of and take part in these practices and may be informed by these ethics.

Responsible management roles	Corporate archivist	Integrate the role of corporate archivist into responsible management

Responsible management practices	Remembering practices	Practices that support remembrance and learning from both negative and positive past events
	Interrogation of the past	Treat the past as unreliable and look for alternative narratives about the past
Responsible management ethics	Mnemonic sensitivity	Sensitivity to values and norms across time
	Mnemonic integrity	Striving for an honest, interrogative (re-)telling of the past

Table 1. Five avenues for future research on responsible management of the past.

Mnemonic sensitivity

As a baseline for managing the past responsibly, we suggest an ethos of mnemonic sensitivity. While we have emphasized that the cultural context constrains interpretation of the past, responsible managers should strive to rise above the given space and time they find themselves in. To recognize how cultural norms and values vary across space and time requires mnemonic sensitivity. This is likely easier to achieve for managers working in international firms, as has been studied extensively in cross-cultural management and corporate social responsibility (CSR) research (e.g. Matten & Moon, 2008). But this may also lead to the imposition of a West-centric view of the past on other contexts. For instance, Reinecke and Ansari (2015) show how a Western, linear clock-time orientation does not allow fair-trade certification processes to unfold smoothly. Rather, a broader understanding of past, present and future is needed to reconcile competing temporalities in different areas of the world and at different stages in the fair-trade certification process.

However, mnemonic sensitivity refers, in particular, to how norms and values have changed over time rather than over space. A managerial activity undertaken in the past, when it was normal and accepted, may have become transgressive and contestable over time – we have provided examples of this above, cooperation with repressive regimes (Booth et al., 2007), for example. Societal norms and values pertaining to many issues like gender and diversity have changed a great deal over time and great care should be taken to not mistakenly draw upon images of the past that have since become transgressive in light of present day values and norms. Future research should address mnemonic sensitivity, perhaps in an effort to challenge existing notions of 'moral reflexive practice' (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015) or 'social consciousness' (Schneider et al., 2010) in responsible management.

Mnemonic integrity

Another ethical foundation for responsible management of the past can be found in what we term, mnemonic integrity. It refers to maintaining honesty and truthfulness in accounts of the past, even when it might yield uncomfortable managerial outcomes. As mentioned above, forgetting work can sometimes be a type of knee-jerk reaction to being confronted with uncomfortable past issues. Typically, in the aftermath of managerial irresponsibility, blame shifting characterizes the early phase (Gephart, 1993). The BP oil spill offers an example of

this, as the parties involved with Deepwater Horizon – BP, Transocean and Halliburton – initially sought to blame one another (and, at times, the government) for the leaks in the oil well (Kleinnijenhuis, Schultz, Utz, & Oegema, 2013). Blame shifting can also take place *within* an organization, as managers may seek to focus blame on a distinct individual or group, while protecting the rest of the organization. Following its 2015 defeat device scandal, VW first sought to scapegoat its then CEO (The Guardian, 2015) and then shifted its focus to a dozen or so engineers who were supposedly responsible for manipulating engines (O'Kane, 2015).

There is a reason for assigning blame in this way: blame specificity facilitates collective action when there is need to right a wrong (Javeline, 2003). The problem with such a simplistic assignment of blame is that it tends to gloss over the complexity of the entire picture and directs attention away from other factors that might have played a part in causing the event in the first place. Complex problems are rarely solved with simple solutions. Future research on the responsible management of the past should attend to such mnemonic integrity. While existing research tends to focus on the ethics of the present and the future, an examination of integrity with regard to re-interpretation of the past needs to be incorporated, as well.

Remembering practices

Responsible management of the past requires practices that enact the ethical considerations we have proposed in the field. Remembering practices play an important role in both managing responsibly and preventing the forgetting of important lessons from the past (Olick, 2007). First, responsible management is underpinned, we argue, in part by the development of remembering practices. Depending on the industry or context, these practices might include the maintenance of certain safety standards over time as a response to previous incidents (Madsen, 2009). However, rather than merely symbolic adoption, responsible managers must remember the ethos and reason behind these standards. An example, stemming from personal communication with a privileged source at a large global infrastructure firm, is that following a price-fixing scandal, the firm had its new employees undergo training on how to behave in situations that might in any way be related to price-fixing and would not let them sign a contract without first demonstrating that they understood the training. Future research should address how socialization, training, standards and other types of responsible practices and structures can incorporate an explicit and reflexive mnemonic component. This relates, of course, to effective human resource management, which has been examined in the context of responsible management (Hilliard, 2013).

Barring the presence of anything meaningful to connect these practices and structures to, forgetting will likely follow nevertheless (Ricoeur, 2004). Thus, we suggest that a second important component of preventing the forgetting of important lessons is commemoration. We argue that responsible managers should strive to commemorate past mistakes and incidents of irresponsibility in addition to near-misses, events where irresponsible behavior was successfully prevented or where irresponsible behavior was denounced, in cases of whistleblowing, for example. Commemoration refers to designating moral significance to past events in a way that connects them to the present (values), thereby ensuring that past events remain meaningful over time (Schwartz & Schuman, 2005). The form that such responsible management practice in relation to the past should take remains to be researched further. Janssen (2013) shows how Volkswagen put in place a variety of remembering practices after experiencing pressure and having been sued for the use of forced labor under

the Nazi regime. After having ignored the issue for more than 40 years, the company put in place a memorial and ordered a research study scrutinizing its past. This was followed by a variety of other related initiatives, like publications and educational programs for managers and employees at Auschwitz. While Volkswagen seems to have been quite successful in setting effective remembering practices in relation to forced labor, the example we provide above of its use of the defeat device highlights the need for future research to deal with the risk of commemoration becoming only symbolic and not fulfilling its role of preventing irresponsibility in the future.

Interrogating the past

We have noted that mnemonic work can lead to the de-responsibilization of managers and firms – or the forgetting of past irresponsibility. Sometimes, forgetting is not intended to be malicious and simply stems from a desire to leave an uncomfortable past behind and get on with business as usual (Janssen, 2012; Mena et al., 2016). To responsibly manage the past, this kind of forgetting work should obviously be avoided. We argue that responsible managers should, instead, acknowledge the fickle and selective nature of our recollection of the past and conduct the type of interrogative mnemonic work outlined by Kuhn (2010), for which the past's unreliability is the starting point. Informed by mnemonic integrity and sensitivity, this approach inherently puts an emphasis on diligent record-keeping and interpretation of these records. In particular, interrogating the past for responsible management should involve an awareness of past and present power relations and of who might benefit (or not) from the perpetuation different narratives of the past. An interrogative, responsible manager will consider all available past narratives from different actors taking part in the mnemonic struggle. Future research in this area should address how managers might incorporate an ongoing interrogation of the past into their day-to-day activities.

The role of corporate archivists

Finally, we argue that responsible management research should focus on a corporate position that matters for responsible management and, yet, has thus far been ignored: the archivist. Archives and how they are drawn upon in firms have been shown to be important in terms of branding (Foster et al., 2011) and product development (Hatch & Schultz, 2017), among other things. Indeed, many large corporations today employ full-time archivists. As has been noted, corporations are prone to presenting their history in a highly selective manner, often concealing troubling aspects of their pasts (Rowlinson, 2002). As many who have visited a corporate archive can attest, archivists are often lonely figures, who have little to do with the everyday operations of the firm.

We suggest that the archivist could play a key role in the responsible management of the past. Archivists are likely to be aware of past instances of both responsible and irresponsible management. They are well-positioned to perpetuate and disseminate the lessons from these instances in the organization's collective memory. In that respect, archivists might be able to support the continued development of remembering practices, mnemonic integrity and sensitivity and an ongoing interrogation of the past on the part of managers throughout the company. Future research should consider this under-studied position and its role in the responsible management of the past, in particular in a supporting capacity vis-à-vis other managers.

Conclusion

A key concern we have presented in this chapter is that the majority of the literature on responsible management and related areas, such as CSR, sustainability and business ethics, has largely ignored the fact that past beliefs about what is considered responsible and irresponsible are reconstructed over time. Crucially, this socially constructed view of the past means that our representations of (ir)responsible management are contingent on both the mnemonic struggles at play and the cultural norms and values that reign in a given time and space. Furthermore, these representations are the result of interactions of a variety of actors, not least large business corporations, especially where their own activities are concerned, and also managers who have to navigate past, present and future understandings of responsibility, sustainability and ethics.

We have addressed this concern by presenting an overview of the literature using a collective memory perspective to understand corporate (ir)responsibility and have connected that nascent literature to that on responsible management. Specifically, we have outlined key issues and concepts that should be taken into consideration in the practice of responsible management, especially where issues related to the past are concerned. In presenting this outline, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of responsible management that takes into account responsible management of the past, as well.

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