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## STRATEGY RESTORATION

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# Strategy Restoration

## Abstract

Discussions of strategic change generally assume that managers strive to break free from the constraints of their organization's past so that they can forge ahead into the future. However, some organizations instead opt to reinterpret and reenact abandoned strategies drawn from their own history. Such actions are largely unaccounted for in the literature on strategic change. Accordingly, we propose here a conceptualization of a distinct type of strategic change that we call "strategy restoration." We first outline how strategy restoration fills a gap in current understandings of strategic change. We then elaborate conditions that motivate and enable organizations to pursue strategy restoration rather than other types of strategic change. Two components of the framework—organizational traditionality and memory—characterize the organization itself, and two—nostalgia and perceptions of the organization's authenticity—characterize the market in which the organization operates. The proposed conceptualization of strategy restoration and discussion of its underlying mechanisms carry implications for researchers and managers.

## Keywords

authenticity, history, nostalgia, organizational memory, sensemaking, strategic change, strategy restoration, traditionality

## **Introduction**

A temporal orientation toward the future predominates in discussions of strategic planning and change. In a review of temporal orientations in strategic management research, Mosakowski and Earley (2000, p. 803) concluded that “a future-oriented perspective appears in virtually all strategy research.” Bluedorn and Ferris (2004, p. 134) similarly found that “most of the work that has been conducted on temporal depth in organizations has been conducted on future temporal depth; past temporal depth has been generally ignored.” Prior research associates a managerial temporal orientation toward the future with effective strategic change, but is ambivalent about whether focusing on the past supports or hinders it (Kunisch et al., 2017). In contrast with the prevailing emphasis on the future, a small but growing group of researchers raises the possibility of appropriating history to manage strategic change (e.g., Brunninge, 2009; Foster et al., 2017; Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Lockett and Wild, 2014; Schultz and Hernes, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2010).

Researchers often have argued that extending managers’ time horizons farther into the future can enhance organizational performance (e.g., Hamel and Prahalad, 1994, ch. 4; Laverty, 1996; Marginson and McCaulay, 2008). According to this view, the past shapes the present, thereby contributing to present competitive advantage or disadvantage, but the key concern of managers ought to be to move their organization from its present situation toward new and greater advantage in the future. The chief aim is thus to understand how organizations can break from their obsolescing pasts (e.g., Huff et al., 1992; Jones and Macpherson, 2006; Tripsas, 2009; Volberda et al., 2001) or current practices and products (e.g., Chakravarthy and Doz, 1992; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Leonard-Barton, 1992; Mezias and Glynn, 1993; Simons, 1994) to gain competitive advantages in dynamic environments. Suddaby and Foster (2017, p. 21) point out

that such framing suggests that “because time and history reduce agency, change is very difficult to accomplish.” This view also assumes that an organization’s current situation presents the relevant considerations and possibilities for changing its strategy. The past generally enters current managerial consideration only insofar as it shapes present possibilities and constraints. A manager’s role is thus to assess the current situation and act for the sake of the future. Consequently, history is often overlooked as a potential source for innovative strategies.

However, some strategic change efforts do not fit this picture. Rather than the organization’s past merely having a lingering effect on its current situation, managers intentionally draw upon their organization’s history to restore an earlier strategy. Attributes from the organization’s own past that had been altered or abandoned are restored as organizational members reinterpret and reenact their own history in the contemporary context. This is not to suggest that “history repeats itself” in a way that falls outside a realist view of time. It is to propose instead that “history doubles back [such that] the developments involved are not reverses, but advances toward new states of affairs that resemble previous ones” (Schatzki, 2010, p. 215). Such intentional drawing upon an organization’s own history for current change falls outside the scope of existing conceptualizations of and normative prescriptions for strategic change. To address this overlooked category of strategic change, we identify a new concept—which we term *strategy restoration*—and offer a discussion of its underlying mechanisms. Our aim in doing so is to draw attention to the process of bringing an organization’s own discontinued strategy into the present, reinterpreted in a contemporary context, and reenacted for the sake of enhancing future performance.

The contribution of this study lies in identifying, conceptualizing, and explaining strategy restoration as a distinct type of strategic change. Along with contributions from management and

organization theory, constructs and framing drawn from history, hermeneutics, and social theory inform the conceptualization of strategy restoration offered here. In addition to explaining *what* strategy restoration is, we also address *why* it occurs. Our explanation elaborates factors that both motivate and enable strategy restoration. We draw upon disparate literatures to construct an account that includes both internal factors (i.e., organizational traditionality and memory) as well as external factors (i.e., market nostalgia and perceptions of the organization's authenticity). By identifying a new type of strategic change and articulating an explanation for it, this study lays the groundwork for future research to offer a broader theory of the process, content, and outcomes of strategy restoration. It also carries significant practical implications in that it alerts managers to the possibility of constructive change through restoring in an innovative and recontextualized manner previously abandoned or altered strategies.

## **Conceptualization of Strategy Restoration**

### ***Proposed definition and examples***

Organizations sometimes restore strategies that they pursued previously but have since altered or abandoned. However, such restoration does not replicate an organization's past in its previous form; rather, it involves reinterpreting its history to suit the current context. To characterize this phenomenon, we propose the following definition: *Strategy restoration is an organization's intentional reinterpretation and reenactment of discontinued aspects of its historical strategy for present use and for the sake of enhancing future performance.*

Three key elements of this proposed definition are particularly noteworthy. First, strategy restoration is a cross-functional, organization-level phenomenon. Multiple organizational members, acting in their organizational roles and in pursuit of organizational goals, are involved

in the restoration process; reinterpretation and reenactment are thus carried out collectively. Changes in organizational values, beliefs, identity, practices, processes, products, and structure may accompany strategy restoration. However, strategy restoration does not necessarily transform the whole organization; many aspects of the organization may remain unaltered even as other aspects are restored. Furthermore, strategy restoration may result from a large-scale transformative change or a series of small-scale initiatives that cumulatively redirect the organization and its strategy over time (see Løvås and Ghoshal, 2000). Regardless, strategy restoration pertains to the overall direction and strategic positioning of the firm rather than simply changes to its resources and capabilities employed to pursue an existing strategy.

Second, strategy restoration relates to discontinued aspects of an organization's own past strategy. Such change is thus not entirely novel in that it draws upon an organization's own history to restore a strategy that was abandoned or altered sometime in the past. As such, strategy restoration excludes initiatives that are completely unprecedented (i.e., never used before by the organization), recombinations of components currently in use (i.e., never altered or abandoned by the organization), or imported from another organization (i.e., vicarious learning); each of these cases can be adequately captured in existing concepts and theories of strategic change. The strategy restored must have been a part of this same organization (or one of its acquired units) in the past, but over time, it was significantly altered or abandoned altogether. In line with Brunninge's (2009, p. 21) view on the role of history in promoting strategic change, strategy restoration requires reenacting "a strategy back in the past of the organization, which has been abandoned for some time and that is now rediscovered."

Third, strategy restoration is teleological; it is pursued for the sake of enhancing the organization's future performance. Following Schatzki's (2010) view, action is teleological if it

is purposeful, but not necessarily in the strong sense of responding to preconceived goals (cf. Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). As portrayed by Kay (2010), people often achieve goals obliquely, that is, indirectly and without explicit awareness of their intentions or how they relate to outcomes. Our view aligns with those who hold together intentionality and emergence in strategic change (e.g., Mintzberg and Waters, 1985) and allows for diverse goals to arise and co-exist within organizations (e.g., Cyert and March, 1963, ch. 3; Mintzberg, 1994, ch. 4).

Figure 1 depicts the distinctiveness of strategy restoration vis-à-vis two widely-recognized forms of strategic change. Figure 1a portrays *incremental* or evolutionary change in which the strategy remains relatively consistent over time (as depicted by its persistent shape) and exhibits limited innovation (as depicted by its changing shade of color). Continuity may be unintentional and due to a persistent organizational culture, structural inertia, or escalation of commitment (Johnson, 1992; Suddaby and Foster, 2017) or intentional, as when an organization seeks to preserve attributes from its past associated with its unique identity (see Collins and Porras, 1994). Path dependence may constrain present and future organizational innovation (Garud et al., 2010; Schreyogg and Sydow, 2011; Sydow et al., 2009; Vergne and Durand, 2011). Regardless of the reason, organizations often are prone to persistence, despite environmental shifts that should prompt adaptive change. Accordingly, the strategic change literature emphasizes the need for organizations to find ways to break from their current strategy, which is a legacy of the past, to gain a competitive advantage in dynamic environments (e.g., Huff et al., 1992; Jones and Macpherson, 2006; Mezas and Glynn, 1993; Tripsas, 2009; Volberda et al., 2001). Figure 1b depicts such *transformational* or radical change (as depicted by the jagged arrow) that takes the strategy in a fundamentally new direction for the future (as depicted by the new shape at T=3).

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Insert Figure 1 about here.  
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Strategy restoration fills an important conceptual gap beyond these two widely-acknowledged forms of strategic change. Figure 1c depicts an alteration—either intentional or unintentional—of an organization’s strategy from T=1 to T=2. *Strategy restoration*, then, involves returning to the past, not literally but figuratively through searching the organization’s own history. The organization brings forward features of its earlier strategy, reinterprets them, and enacts a new strategy that bears some resemblance to its historical strategy (at T=1), yet is contextualized in such a way that makes it distinctive going into the future (at T=3). Although this latter change (i.e., from T=2 to T=3) might be subsumed under the general category of transformational change, restorative change is unique in that it involves the abandonment of its historical strategy (from T=1 to T=2) as its backdrop, and resources for the subsequent change come from the organization’s own prior history, rather than some other source. Absent this abandonment of its historical strategy at T=2, the transition from T=1 to T=3 could be characterized as incremental. However, neither incremental nor transformational change captures the notion of restorative change as conceptualized here and depicted in Figure 1c. Whereas the literature on strategic change widely acknowledges incremental (i.e., evolutionary) and transformational (i.e., radical) forms of change, restorative change is a distinct, yet generally overlooked, third possibility.

Consider, for example, Scania, a Swedish truck manufacturer. After a long period of growth through internationalization and related diversification (including trucks, buses, and engines), and despite being a relatively small player, Scania remained one of the most profitable companies in its highly competitive global markets (Brunninge, 2009). Its success is partly



explained by a unique product development system begun in the 1980s. The company followed a strategy featuring modularized product designs that achieve manufacturing efficiency through technology and platform sharing across products while supporting product differentiation through flexible recombination of components (Gomes et al., 2010). However, the competitive environment became more threatening over time, including acquisition attempts from major competitors like Volvo. During this time, Scania's designs and production process drifted toward increased standardization for mass production, which limited its product range and differentiation. According to Brunninge (2009, p.19), this change in strategy was primarily due to taking for granted the company's modularization philosophy, rather than intentionally imparting it to new employees: "On the surface, the modular system had never been questioned, but its original meaning had gotten lost along the way." In response, Scania's managers resorted to the company's history to restore the original system. They decided to document and explain the ideas behind the modularization philosophy to new employees: "The basics of the modular system were summarized in a booklet where frequent reference was made to the history of the approach" (Brunninge, 2009, p. 19). The restoration of Scania's original modularization philosophy enabled the company to reduce quality problems due to excessive standardization. This revitalized system was imparted to all new organizational members with the aim of ensuring its successful present and future implementation. Scania illustrates the pattern shown in Figure 1c: an earlier strategy (i.e., modularization at T=1) was abandoned for a new one (i.e., standardization at T=2) until the organization searched its history to reinterpret the earlier strategy and reenact it afresh in the contemporary context (i.e., restored modularization at T=3).

Although customers may become aware of a restored strategy through contact with product features that harken back to an earlier era, strategy restoration originates in changes to

organizational activities. Gucci's transformation during the 1990s illustrates the multifaceted character of strategy restoration (see Yoffie and Kwak, 2000). By 1989, Gucci's line had expanded to some 22,000 products, and fake Gucci bags featuring the GG logo had undermined sales and its brand reputation. To turn around the faltering company, management sought to restore Gucci's strategic positioning as a classic luxury brand. It did so, in part, by discarding two-thirds of its products and then bringing back designs from its archives and updating them for contemporary fashion trends. One such product was the bamboo-handle bag, which it had not produced since the 1960s. However, restoring classic products was only part of the strategy restoration effort. Management stopped distributing through department stores and outside major urban markets. Through the 1990s, the emphasis on restoring a classic brand carried into initiatives to upgrade advertising, store design, and public relations. Gucci scrutinized its suppliers, kept only the best, and sought to upgrade their technical expertise for faster and more predictable delivery of classic products. Pricing also had to be revisited to position Gucci's line relative to other high-end fashion companies. Gucci combined its international operating companies under a single CEO to exert greater control while rolling out its strategy in international markets. Gucci's experience illustrates the ramifications of strategy restoration across a wide range of organizational attributes and activities, including but not limited to product design.

Notably, current conceptualizations of strategic change are unable to fully account for either of these examples. That is, neither example conforms to the pattern depicted in Figure 1a or that in 1b. However, both, are consistent with the pattern portrayed in Figure 1c. We contend that these examples are representative of others making up a neglected third category that are left unaccounted for by current discussions of strategic change.

### *Situating strategy restoration in time*

Strategy restoration—the intentional reinterpretation and reenactment of attributes and activities from an organization’s historical strategy for the sake of future performance—is best understood as “temporal work” (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013) that is situated in time between an actual past, a subjective history, an ongoing present, and an emerging future.

The past consists of actual events and experiences that have occurred. It is the empirical reality that, having already transpired, is no longer directly accessible. However, its ramifications carry forward in time such that the past bears upon the present (Schatzki, 2010). For example, the past shapes perceptions of present situations to which people respond, and capacities gained through experience persist into the present. The past influences the present through the arrangement of material objects and nonmaterial resources that both support and constrain current activities.

Direct causality running from the past to the present is the predominant understanding in strategic management and organization theory. For example, resource-based analysis (e.g., Barney, 1991; Dierickx and Cool, 1989) portrays resources and capabilities from an organization’s past carrying forward into the present in ways that either support or impair competitive advantage, depending on the context. Researchers generally assume persistence of the past as the backdrop for current strategic change (Suddaby and Foster, 2017). In this usage, continuity with the past describes the default condition, and strategic change requires managerial initiative. Occasionally, writers (e.g., Collins and Porras, 1994) point out potential benefits of carrying forward the past through means that require management support. Here an organization’s continuity with the past is a choice requiring ongoing effort and investment; the perspective is normative, rather than descriptive. In both of these usages, the relation between the

past and the present is continuous. In contrast, strategy restoration assumes as the backdrop a discontinuity between the past and the present—that which was present in the organization previously has been lost or discarded (see Figure 1c).

The past shapes history but is not synonymous with it (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2010). History consists of social interpretations of the past that involve both remembering and forgetting. Parts of its history are embedded in an organization's memory in the form of official archives, individual recollections, organizational culture or structure, and so forth (Walsh and Ungson, 1991). Some forgetting of aspects of the past occurs accidentally when organizational members fail to maintain knowledge or awareness of it (Martin de Holan and Philips, 2004). Other forgetting is purposeful such that certain aspects of the past are intentionally omitted (Anteby and Molnár, 2012; Connerton, 2008). Politicization of organizational memory is evident in interested selection of what to remember or what to forget (Foster et al., 2011; Foster et al., 2017). History thus becomes “a persuasive interpretation of the past” (Suddaby et al., 2010, p. 152) in which organizational members selectively remember and collectively shape their accounts in ways that motivate and legitimate action toward particular ends (see also Gioia et al., 2002). Hence, there are both passive responses of receptivity to history as handed down and embodied in present understandings and practices, and proactive efforts to recast history.

Strategy restoration is an intentional or agentic response that involves searching an organization's own history and reinterpreting it through a contemporary lens. Any interpretation of history, which is itself an interpretation of the past, involves a “double hermeneutic,” that is, an interpretation of an interpretation (Polanyi and Prosch, 1975; Taylor, 1995). Organizational members may seek to appreciate history on its own terms yet those terms are never fully

apparent; in other words, history is never self-interpreting. As with the reading of a text, the interpretive process involves both taking in historical details and conjecturing possible ways to make sense of the whole. Reinterpretations of history thus draw upon internalized understandings and sensibilities formed in a particular community and time (Gadamer, 2002).

The past shapes strategic sensemaking and sensegiving by constructing mindsets and frames, and new situations trigger cognitive adjustments and renegotiations of socially constructed meanings (Balogun et al., 2015; Balogun and Johnson, 2004, 2005; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012). In this sense, reinterpretations of history are negotiated via collective sensemaking and sensegiving processes (Foster et al., 2011; Weick, 1995) that do not occur in isolation but, rather, are guided by present concerns (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). Although individuals may arrive at distinct interpretations and applications of history, it is possible for them to work together toward a coherent and shared interpretation (Anteby and Molnár, 2012; Foster et al., 2011).

Whereas historical accounts can be reinterpreted in the present, the future is inherently uncertain and can only be imagined today. Weick (1979, 1995) refers to the notion of “future perfect thinking,” or sensemaking by imagining ourselves in the future and looking back at events as if they had occurred so that we may interpret their meaning. Such thinking is situated in the present and reliant upon experience, yet it displays a human capacity for imagining possible futures. Future perfect thinking is less a matter of outcomes that can be forecasted than a creative imagining or narrating of what might be possible in the future (Garud et al., 2014; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). Imagination, therefore, involves a forward-looking visualization that shapes understanding of the present context and creative action therein (see Chiles et al., 2010).

Although memory and imagination are distinct psychological phenomena (Perky, 1910), restoration involves drawing resources from memory for imagining the future.

Strategy restoration is thus the current creative reenactment of an historical strategy with a view toward an imagined future. Organizational members do not simply revert back to how things used to be done. Rather, they reinterpret and contextualize a remembered history in the current situation, and in doing so, engage in retrospective sensemaking and reconstruction (Foster et al., 2017; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2010; Vaara and Lamberg, 2016; Weick 1979). In other words, organizational members bring history forward into the present as they “resee” (Strauss, 1969, p. 67) or reconceive historical accounts. An imagined future is envisioned today through prospective sensemaking (Gephart et al., 2010; Wiebe, 2010) and, in this process, organizational members also rethink current concerns (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013) and engage in narrating today what might be tomorrow (Garud et al., 2014). In short, organizational members project into the future a reenactment of history as they reinterpret it today.

Search as well as reinterpretation and reenactment are the managerial actions that link an organization’s present to its history and future. Figure 1c depicts these two essential movements—backward into history and forward into the future—during strategy restoration. Motivated by present concerns and opportunities, managers initiate a search that reaches back into their organization’s history. Reinterpretation and reenactment of aspects of this history, in turn, shape and even bring forth an imagined future. Managers’ restoration efforts thus reconfigure the relations between the past, present, and future (Wiebe, 2010). Restoration occurs in the “ongoing present” as the organization and its members are in a “continuous state of

creation, emergence, and becoming while being shaped by a changing past and future ambitions” (Schultz and Hernes, 2013, p. 1).

The standpoint that interpreters bring to a history often does not align with the standpoint encountered in the historical record. Thus, the interpretive process involves actively working with a history to find a standpoint—a horizon—that affords an interpretation suitable to both the encountered history as well as the interpreters’ current situation and expectations for the future. Interpretations of history within strategy restoration involve intentional work toward a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 2002), rather than an incidental reversion to past activities. Individuals and communities are not static, so their interpretive horizons change over time. An encounter with history can raise perplexing questions that challenge interpreters’ current horizons and require work toward a more suitable one for making sense of that which is alien to the contemporary context. Furthermore, restoration work is iterative, making up a “hermeneutical circle.”

Organizational members and leaders exercise agency in the sensemaking involved in strategy restoration. Indeed, “[s]ensemaking goes beyond interpretation and involves the active authoring of events and frameworks for understanding, as people play a role in constructing the very situations they attempt to comprehend” (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014, p. 58). Of course, organizational members may make sense of organizational situations and change in different ways (see Balogun et al., 2015). Accordingly, leaders pursuing strategy restoration must engage in a sensebreaking process (Pratt, 2000) to challenge pervasive orientations toward the present and the future and, at the same time, engage in a sensegiving process (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) to aid organizational members in developing a more appreciative stance toward history. Such processes will be iterative (see Ashforth et al., 2008) as leaders and organizational members work together to make history relevant to strategy in the present context.

### *Distinguishing strategy restoration from related concepts*

We have proposed that strategy restoration is a distinct type of strategic change—one that has not been labeled previously, but can be observed in practice and is worthy of scholarly and managerial consideration. Prior management and organization research identifies some related concepts, yet none of these fully acknowledges and addresses strategy restoration as conceptualized here. Table 1 lists and defines these concepts in the order in which we discuss them.

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Strategy restoration is related to at least two other concepts in the strategy literature. First, *strategic renewal* focuses on the “refreshment or replacement” of organizational attributes (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009). The notion of “renewal” is clearly linked to the past—the word “renew” derives from the Latin word “renovo,” which means “to make new again,” “to refresh,” and “to resume” (Oxford Latin Dictionary)—and the inclusion of “refreshment” in the definition of strategic renewal seems to allow for attending to history. However, with few exceptions (e.g., Gulati and Puranam, 2009; Mezas and Glynn, 1993; Volberda et al., 2001), studies of strategic renewal have focused on the replacement of current organizational attributes with new ones while assuming a managerial temporal orientation toward the present and future that overlooks history. Strategy restoration differs from strategic renewal in that restoration does not entail the use of new attributes but, rather, the reinterpretation and reenactment of historical strategies. Second, *strategic change reversal* involves the cancellation of an ongoing change and reverting back to a familiar pre-change strategy (Mantere et al., 2012). Like restoration, it entails the use of an historical strategy; however, it differs in that it assumes a shorter timeframe than restoration



and, as such, does not involve the effortful process of search, retrieval, and reinterpretation that characterizes the restoration of a strategy after an extended period of disuse.

Strategy restoration is also distinct from a few backward-looking concepts that pertain to particular organizational features. For example, *identity resurrection* focuses on reasserting an organization's historical identity after its decline (e.g., Howard-Grenville et al., 2013). It is like restoration in that both concepts adopt an appreciative stance toward history; however, identity change is not synonymous with strategic change, and identity resurrection is narrower in scope and can at most be a component of a broader effort to restore an organization's strategy.

*Organizational historicizing* refers to the use of historical material to support current managerial actions (Hatch and Schultz, 2017). Like identity resurrection, it is narrower in scope than the overall strategy, referring to the use of historical materials to justify current actions. Finally, *organizational regeneration* activates repeatedly a dormant set of established routines (e.g., Birnholtz et al., 2007) for which an organization must be able to draw upon readily available ostensive understandings of organizational routines (cf., Feldman and Pentland, 2003). In contrast, restoration assumes that the organization works from a markedly reduced capacity to recall and reenact the past due to elapsed time since the past strategy and the non-recurring nature of strategy restoration efforts. Each of these concepts—identity resurrection, organizational historicizing, and organizational regeneration—brings key elements of the organization's history into the present but, unlike restoration, none concerns the reinterpretation and reenactment of historical strategies.

Strategy restoration also resembles but is broader than a few other backward-looking concepts that pertain primarily to products and customers. For example, *innovation through tradition* (De Massis et al., 2016) applies an organization's traditional knowledge to new product

development, but not to other functional activities or overall strategy. *Technology reemergence* denotes a resurgence in market demand for a legacy technology following its displacement as the dominant design (Raffaelli, 2018). *Retrobranding* refers to “the revival or relaunch of a product or service brand from a prior historical period, which is usually but not always updated to contemporary standards of performance, functioning, or taste” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 20). Like strategy restoration, each of these concepts refers to reaching into history to bring back certain lost or underexploited aspects of products. However, strategy requires a broader perspective than product design and marketing alone (Nag et al., 2007). Moreover, strategy restoration, as an organizational phenomenon, brings into consideration all internal and external stakeholders, rather than focusing solely on customers.

### **Motivators and Enablers of Strategy Restoration**

As defined and conceptualized above, strategy restoration is a distinct type of strategic change. Having characterized and distinguished *what* is strategy restoration, we now seek to explain *why* organizations engage in it. An adequate explanation should account for why some organizations pursue strategy restoration while others do not. Because there is no established stream of research on this topic, we draw from other research areas—particularly those taking an appreciative stance toward history—to identify key contributors to strategy restoration. We propose four key factors affecting an organization’s propensity to engage in efforts to restore a strategy from its history. Two of these considerations—traditionality and memory—characterize features of the organization and two—nostalgia and authenticity—relate to the market in which the organization operates. Figure 2 positions each of these constructs as contributors to particular actions within strategy restoration. Traditionality and organizational memory motivate and

enable search within an organization's history. Market nostalgia and perceived authenticity inform managers' reinterpretation and reenactment of an historical strategy, and give managers cause for optimism about the performance of a restored strategy.

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### ***Organizational contributors to strategy restoration***

Some organizations will be more motivated than others to pursue strategy restoration because they place greater value on history; in other words, they are higher in traditionality. Among those, some will be more able than others to restore a strategy because they have sufficient historical resources available; in short, they have stronger organizational memories. We discuss each of these organizational contributors to restoration in turn.

*Traditionality.* Traditionality is the “willing reception of practices, beliefs and values from the past and their use in guiding current action” (Salipante, 1992, p. 135). Traditions and appreciation for them arise through processes that are both socially emergent and deliberately manipulated to form and perpetuate rituals, symbols, norms, values, and beliefs associated with historical and contemporary events (Foster and Hyatt, 2008, Foster et al., 2011). Traditions offer many potential benefits to organizations, such as strengthened organizational commitment, continuation and dissemination of best practices, the promotion of shared understanding for decision making, and maintenance of some level of control.

Organizations express traditionality not simply through continuity with their past but also by appreciating history as a source of guidance for current change efforts (Salipante and Golden-Biddle, 1995). Though traditions can be seen as repetitive symbolic activities related to the past, they are not rigid or locked in the past (Hobsbawm, 1983). Traditions are rooted in historical

accounts, but they only exist through enactments in the present, generally with an eye toward the future (Keulen and Kroeze, 2012). Traditions have, therefore, a communicative and mobilizing function as history is used to justify and legitimate old and new practices necessary for an envisioned future. In other words, traditions are not a passive legacy from the past nor merely a mechanism to perpetuate the past but, instead, are active symbolic expressions enacted in the present and reflective of current concerns and motives (Linnekin, 1991). As Soares (1997, p. 10) succinctly puts it: “A living tradition can provide resources for continuous adjustments to contemporary challenges.”

Whereas any organization might be motivated to search for alternative courses of strategic action for a variety of reasons, traditionality guides search toward history. If an organization places little value on traditions, it will look for a contemporary alternative to update its strategy. Driven by a norm of progress, management may be susceptible to the latest fashion (Abrahamson, 1996; Nijholt et al., 2016). However, in an organization receptive to tradition, search is not limited to contemporary possibilities; search can extend intertemporally by looking to history for solutions and opportunities. Searching technologies of diverse ages enriches the possible combinations available to an innovative organization (De Massis et al., 2016; Katila, 2002; Katila and Ahuja, 2002; Nerkar, 2003). Traditionality implies a willingness to incur the cost necessary to search one’s own or another organization’s history and increases historical strategies’ appeal to organizational members. Organizations high in traditionality hesitate to simply discard the past and embark on change programs with the objective of establishing an unprecedented and unknown future (Soares, 1997). Instead, such organizations are inclined to deliberately look to history to understand the present and act toward the future. As a motivator of

search within an organization's own history, traditionality plays an important part in strategy restoration.

*Organizational memory.* Whereas traditionality motivates an organization to search its history, the availability of accessible organizational memory enables that search. Organizational memory consists of the “stored information from an organization's history that can be brought to bear on present decisions” (Walsh and Ungson, 1991, p. 61). As argued by Schultz and Hernes (2013), the past is not there in itself, but is called forth from memory to guide present and future decisions. An organization's history can be stored in a variety of forms such as individual recollections, cultural remnants, formal processes and roles, physical structures, and external archives (Rowlinson et al., 2010; Schultz and Hernes, 2013; Walsh and Ungson, 1991). Different forms of memory may store different aspects of an organization's history, and memories stored in multiple locations offer a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the past than those found in a single source. For example, physical artifacts likely only reveal *what* happened in the past, whereas individuals may recall *why* events occurred.

Of equal importance to storage is memory retrieval, which can be automatic or controlled (Walsh and Ungson, 1991). Automatic retrieval requires no special effort; it occurs when the past is embedded in the present decision-making process. Controlled retrieval, in contrast, requires intentional effort; it occurs when organizational members are prompted to deliberately recall the past. Restoration depends on controlled retrieval of memories because it requires intentional effort by organizational members to bring back those attributes of past strategies that have been significantly altered or discontinued. Controlled retrieval is most fruitful when history is stored as individuals' recollections (Walsh and Ungson, 1991). However, organizational documents, events, and artefacts also can facilitate the retrieval process (Rowlinson et al., 2010). If an

organization is motivated to search its own history, presumably because it is high in traditionality, the feasibility of doing so depends on having an accessible memory.

The LEGO group illustrated the role of organizational memory in strategic change when, facing crises, management decided to undertake major revisions of the company's overall strategy. A central part of the strategy reviews explored what could be learned from the past to inform and improve the organization's future. For this purpose, the organization undertook on two separate occasions (2000-2001 and 2005-2007), major exercises exploring the company's history with the objective of rediscovering its past organizational identity, reconstructing its present identity, and articulating claims for its future identity (Schultz and Hernes, 2013). The first review was managed by a broad team of middle managers who resorted to a narrow set of textual memory forms (i.e., internal documents and corporate communications) and resulted mainly in refocusing brand strategy after years of brand extensions. The second review was directed by the top management team and used a broader range of textual, material, and oral memory forms (e.g., the founder's home museum, fans' and thought leaders' opinions, and conversations with employees, among other sources). This second exercise had within its purview identity reconstruction and resulted in the redefinition of the organizational mission and vision statements in light of its original identity claims and the founder's motto: "only the best is good enough" (Schultz and Hernes, 2013). While the first occasion required resorting to more readily available and recent memory forms, the second occasion tapped more distant memory going back to the company's origins. These reviews served to reinforce the importance of understanding LEGO's heritage and of building upon its past and, more importantly, of "going back to the core in new ways" (Schultz and Hernes, 2013, p. 14). Although strategy restoration is broader than identity reconstruction, the availability of memory is essential to both.

### *Contextual contributors to strategy restoration*

An organization should be more or less likely to engage in strategy restoration based on the character of its target market and its identity in that market. Managers engage in thought experiments that assess the suitability of historical strategies to compete in the contemporary market. In doing so, they exhibit intertemporal—as contrasted with interindustry—analogue reasoning (cf., Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010; Gavetti et al., 2005; Gavetti and Rivkin, 2005). An organization might choose to pursue strategy restoration in one market, where managers see the potential for competitive advantage, but not in another. Success with strategy restoration depends on the market's preference for historical products and services (i.e., nostalgia) as well as the extent to which managers believe that they can satisfy those demands while staying true to the organization's core values (i.e., authenticity).

*Market nostalgia.* Nostalgia refers to “a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities with days of yore” (Holbrook, 1993); it is a belief that “things were better *then* than *now*” (Davis, 1979, p. 18, emphasis in original). Nostalgia is a form of detachment of history from lived experience that exaggerates the past's positive aspects relative to its deficiencies. Under nostalgia, one experiences the present context with a sense of loss relative to an idealized history (Turner, 1987). Nostalgia occurs at two levels (Davis, 1979). *Personal nostalgia* refers to individual preferences for things of the past and is generally linked to age; individuals often prefer things that remind them of their youth. *Communal nostalgia* refers to a shared preference for things of the past, which often occurs in times of societal or cultural unrest when social groups prefer things that remind them of stability and simplicity. Personal and communal nostalgia are intertwined (Brown et al., 2003) and their presence within a market heightens receptivity to products and services associated with a restored strategy.

The media have commented on the “nostalgia boom” (Naughton and Vlasic, 1998) and management scholars have pointed to nostalgia as “a source of market value” (Penaloza, 2000). Products and services restored from the past trade on these nostalgic inclinations (see Brown et al., 2003). For example, Volkswagen’s introduction of the New Beetle served to highlight the nostalgic tendencies of the automobile market, sparking a trend of retro-futurist designs from other automakers, including the Chrysler PT Cruiser, Ford Thunderbird, and Mini Cooper, among others. Consumers of other goods have exhibited similar nostalgic tendencies; for example, Ray-Ban, Sperry Top-Sider, and Levi’s have all benefitted from nostalgic appeal in the fashion and clothing industry. Restoration—as a form of strategic change—encompasses more than just product features; nevertheless, nostalgic appeal in the market can be part of managers’ rationale for restoring an organization’s historical strategy.

Markets vary in their openness to nostalgic goods and services, even within the same industry. For example, management scholars and sociologists alike have highlighted the nostalgic appeal apparent in the microbrewery movement in the United States (e.g., Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). Consumers prefer microbrews because they harken back to a simpler time of small-scale production, even if such beers are often of lower technical quality. However, microbreweries in China failed to generate the same appeal, with most local consumers exhibiting a preference for mass-produced, consistent-quality beers that are created with modern technology rather than traditional, small-scale production methods. Organizations operating in markets with nostalgic leanings are more likely to pursue strategy restoration than those operating in markets resistant to such offerings. In such cases, the imagined future will look more attractive and managers thus will assign a higher expected payoff to strategy restoration efforts.



*Authenticity.* The widening appeal of authenticity “has become one of the most powerful movements in contemporary life” (Potter, 2010, p. 4). A growing body of research demonstrates that customers favor organizations deemed authentic (e.g., Carroll, 2015), rewarding them with higher ratings (Kovács et al., 2014; Verhaal et al., 2015), increased sales (Frake, 2017), and stronger brand appeal (Beverland, 2005). Authenticity even enables organizations to challenge prevailing norms in the marketplace (Lehman et al., 2014) and create new product categories (Weber et al., 2008).

Whereas nostalgia indicates a preference in the market for things of the past, authenticity refers to an attribution accorded to a specific organization and its products, services, or practices. In some cases, authenticity is a matter of originality, provenance, or authorship (see Becker, 1982; Dutton, 2003). In such cases, authenticity can be determined on the basis of factual evidence, even if relevant evidence is hard to ascertain. However, authenticity is most often a more subjective matter; it is a socially-constructed perception. In such cases, authenticity attributions emerge from social interaction and discourse (Peterson, 1997). Authenticity can be interpreted in different ways. For some, an organization or product might be deemed “an authentic X if it is an instance or member of the class of Xs” (Davies, 2001, p. 203), or, for others, if it “makes explicit values-based choices...rather than accepting pre-programmed or socially imposed values and actions” (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009, p. 261). Although meanings and interpretations of authenticity abound (for reviews see Lehman et al., in press; Newman and Smith, 2016), most scholars agree that entities are authentic if they “are what they appear to be or claim to be” (Trilling, 1972, p. 93).

To the extent that an organization relies on an image of authenticity for a competitive advantage, it accepts a constraint on how it engages in strategy restoration efforts. Specifically,

the organization's history must be reinterpreted and reenacted in a manner that is accepted in the marketplace as consistent with its perceived identity. Baron (2004, p. 24) points to the temporal nature of authenticity: "Authentic identities must be established early in the evolution of an enterprise." He adds that organizations that engage in strategic change simply "to capitalize on the presumed popularity of a different approach...risk being viewed...as mercenary or duplicitous, rather than authentic." In other words, the success of strategy restoration efforts hinges not just on an organization's capacity to satisfy market preferences for nostalgia, but also on its ability to reinterpret and reenact its past in a manner that is consistent with its present identity and core values as perceived by customers. As such, the way in which the market interprets the authenticity of an organization enables and constrains how it can reinterpret and reenact its own history.

Not all restoration efforts will be perceived as equally authentic, even if the strategy draws on the organization's own history. Credible consistency with the past is critical to establishing authenticity. Ravasi and Schultz's (2006) study demonstrates how Bang & Olufsen, a Danish firm specializing in high-end luxury television and audio products, used its history to reexamine beliefs about its core attributes and validate organizational values and identity. On three different occasions when they faced severe crises, managers resorted to their own history to reaffirm particular values and redefine their identity within the company and with external stakeholders (Ravasi and Philipps, 2011). Invoking historical practices helped the company successfully define its long-term strategic intent. The Carlsberg Group, a leading Danish brewer, similarly resorted to its own history as a way of responding to criticism from consumers and the media about the quality of mass-produced lager beer. At the time, Carlsberg and other established large brewers faced increased competition from many microbreweries that had

entered the industry using artisanal and traditional craft brewing processes. By invoking values of the past embedded in their “Semper Ardens” (“always burning”) motto established by the founder, Carlsberg developed a new product based on traditional craft-based brewing processes (Hatch and Schultz, 2017). The company not only made use of the rediscovered original “Semper Ardens” motto, it also rolled out a new label with the image of the founder, Carl Jacobsen, and put back into use old recipes, ingredients, and brewing methods. The combination of all these elements drawn from the company’s history contributed to the general perception by internal and external stakeholders of the new product as “an authentic extension of the old brewer’s intentions for Carlsberg” (Hatch and Schultz, 2017, p. 18).

In contrast, restoration efforts that do not pass the test of authenticity risk failure. For example, Ford was eager to follow in Volkswagen’s footsteps and cash in on the nostalgic leanings of the automobile market when it introduced a new edition of the Thunderbird in 2002, just five years after its discontinuation. The latest generation was reminiscent of the original Thunderbird from 1955, but it featured observable differences, both in design as well as under the hood; most notably, perhaps, it was powered by a Jaguar engine (Swan, 2003). Even though Ford owned Jaguar at the time, the brand was commonly associated with its British heritage. This disparity appeared to have played a role in customers’ doubts about whether the eleventh generation of the Thunderbird was consistent with the American ideals of its predecessor of decades past. Sales for the new edition of the Thunderbird were disappointing and, as a result, Ford discontinued production just three years after its launch.

A strategy that appeals to nostalgia and is deemed authentic can be quite distinct if competitors have abandoned the historical position. As an example, Miller (2002) observed that sectarian religious organizations that restore historical teachings and practices can outperform

churches that more fully conform to contemporary culture and lack differentiation from one another and from secular substitutes. Expected performance, taking into consideration market nostalgia and stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity that provide differentiation in a market, should motivate strategy restoration efforts. Moreover, these considerations should account for subsequent organizational performance if they anticipate correctly the market's response.

### ***Integration***

The four factors identified here are relevant motivators and enablers of strategy restoration. Each has been discussed separately for expositional ease; however, we expect that all four factors contribute jointly to the occurrence of strategy restoration. Most importantly, we propose that all four factors function as necessary conditions. Traditionality is a requisite for organizations to have the motivation to draw upon their history and, at the same time, sufficient memory is required for organizations to be able to do so. Similarly, market nostalgia should factor positively into managers' assessments of the potential performance from a restored strategy. The extent and durability of the potential competitive advantage depends also on whether customers perceive the company's restored strategy as authentic.

While arguably necessary, the four contributors may not be sufficient for the occurrence of strategy restoration. None on its own determines whether strategy restoration occurs. Jointly they provide a set of conditions conducive to strategy restoration, rather than a sufficient cause. Proposing such a nondeterministic relation between the four contributing conditions and the occurrence of strategy restoration allows for managerial agency and the social process of sensemaking to play out in different ways

## **Discussion of Implications**

### ***Theory and management***

The conceptualization and explanation of strategy restoration offered here adds to our understanding of strategic change in several ways. Most discussions of strategic change assume that organizations are prone to persistence for a variety of reasons and that managers must therefore strive to break free from their past so that they can forge ahead into the future. Such a construal overlooks the possibility that some strategic change efforts draw upon discontinued aspects of an organization's own history. Strategy restoration, therefore, fills an important conceptual gap beyond the familiar categories of incremental (evolutionary) and radical (transformational) change. Not only do we point to a phenomenon neglected by current theories, we also highlight a form of strategic change that reflects an appreciative stance toward history. A defining feature of modernist thinking is to view the past as a problematic obstacle to ongoing progress (Rhodes and Pullen, 2010; Shils, 1981). Prejudice against the past causes scholars and managers to frame strategic change in ways that neglect the potential constructive role of history. In contrast, strategy restoration allows for learning from history that expands the possible courses for current action. Both the present and the past afford opportunities for organizational learning, yet theorists and practitioners alike tend to neglect history. The conceptualization of strategy restoration presented here raises the prospect that history can, in some cases, contribute to innovation, strategic change, and future performance enhancement beyond what is achievable solely on the basis of possibilities available in the present.

However, strategy restoration is not a panacea. It is not without risk and not all strategy restoration efforts will contribute positively to future performance. The likelihood and extent of future performance enhancements will be shaped by market characteristics as well as industry

competition. Success with restoration often may turn on the extent to which a firm's internal innovation process anticipates the market's response to restored products, services, and practices. If an organization's culture is strong on traditionality, it may move forward with restoration efforts despite a lack of corresponding nostalgia in the marketplace. Conversely, if an organization's culture downplays traditionality despite the market's inclination toward nostalgia, its innovation process may overlook opportunities in its history that could enhance performance.

Temporal myopia is a key constraint on managerial decision making. Researchers tend to consider only organizations with inadequate *foresight* to be temporally myopic (Levinthal and March, 1993); however, we suggest that the term could apply equally to organizations with limited *hindsight* resulting in missed opportunities for strategy restoration. The prevailing emphasis in management research as well as the popular press is on the need for organizations to change and develop innovative practices and products. This emphasis fosters a managerial orientation toward innovating in the present with a focus toward gaining future competitive advantage. This orientation often neglects managers' capacity for retrospection and the potential benefit to organizations from restoring values, beliefs, practices, processes, products, and relationships that have eroded or been lost over time. A long-term temporal horizon can raise awareness of the possibilities for enhancing organizational performance discovered by going back to attributes that characterized earlier times in an organization's past. The line of argumentation offered here should encourage scholars to better appreciate the role of history in strategic management and prompt managers to search their organization's own history for possible restorative innovation and organizational change that might bring about a better future.

Strategy restoration thus emphasizes the critical role of time and temporal work in organizational life. Despite multiple calls to incorporate temporal issues more fully in

management and organization research (e.g., Ancona et al., 2001; Ancona, Okhuysen, and Perlow, 2001; Brunninge, 2009; Mitchell and James, 2001), theories of strategic change have yet to explore in depth the potential merits of drawing from history as well as organizations' propensity to do so. Strategic management theories instead tend to assume and even prescribe an orientation toward the future (Mosakowski and Earley, 2000). Some literature characterizes managers as following the latest fashion (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; David and Strang, 2006; Gibson, 2001; Kieser, 1997; Nijholt et al., 2016). However, other research has highlighted that managers indeed work across temporal boundaries, and has suggested that "an analysis of strategic change is...incomplete without considering how actors negotiate and link their divergent interpretations of the past, present, and future" (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013, p. 29). By connecting current action to history for the sake of future performance, our conceptualization of strategy restoration extends work on temporality in organizational change.

### ***Future research***

*Theory development.* The conceptualization and explanation of strategy restoration offered here lay the groundwork for further theory building and testing beyond the scope of this initial study. There is ample work to be done that acknowledges other levels of analysis that complement our organizational and strategic orientation toward restoration. Microfoundations studies could investigate the characteristics of individual managers and management teams that determine propensity or aversion toward strategy restoration. Researchers also can investigate how affective processes and cognitive orientations incline managers to look into history and search for previously-used strategies. For example, risk aversion may factor into favoring restoration over unprecedented innovations. This line of inquiry can make use of prior research

characterizing individuals' temporal focus (e.g., Shipp et al., 2009; Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999). Mohammed and Harrison (2013) argue that diversity of temporal foci among top management team members supports constructive strategic change, and this may be true for restorative change as well because it encompasses considerations of the past, present, and future. Bluedorn's (2002) temporal index, could prove to be a useful tool in future studies as it would facilitate investigation of how managers with a strong temporal focus on the past may be more inclined to resort to strategy restoration than those with a temporal focus on the future.

We also see the potential to enrich our understanding by elaborating the social and political aspects of restoration efforts within organizations. By adopting the organization as our primary unit of analysis and addressing *what* strategy restoration is and *why* it occurs, we have not explored in detail *how* it occurs. We suppressed (for now) facets of the sociopolitical process required for strategy restoration efforts to take place. Research on stakeholder legitimacy (Nielsen and Rao, 1987), power and change agents (e.g., Simons, 1994), and resistance to change (Ford et al., 2008) has much to offer here. As noted earlier, the conceptualization of strategy restoration offered here is one of intentional rather than incidental change even as it allows for restored strategies to be planned or emergent (Mintzberg and McHugh, 1985). Notions of sensebreaking (Pratt, 2000), sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), and sensemaking (e.g., Weick, 1995) thus stand to provide useful insights into the role of leaders as well as followers in strategy restoration and, in particular, how divergent interpretations of historical accounts might converge in support of restoring a particular strategy (see Balogun et al., 2015; Gioia et al., 1994; Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012). Our conceptualization of strategy restoration as a process of reinterpreting and reenacting history provides a starting point for research on strategy restoration as a social and political process.



The question of *when* strategy restoration occurs is also worthy of consideration, and various theoretical perspectives on the timing of strategic change may offer guidance in this regard. For example, behavioral theorists treat organizations as goal-pursuant entities that set performance targets and respond to feedback about performance relative to aspirations (Cyert and March, 1963). As such, future research could investigate whether organizational members tend to search for alternative ways of doing things and are more likely to pursue restorative strategic change when performance falls short of aspirations. For its part, institutional theory suggests that strategy restoration might be more likely when managers view it as a way to maintain organizational legitimacy in the eyes of key stakeholders. Such legitimacy is granted through a social process of diffusion and acceptance of consensual beliefs and practices (Johnson et al., 2006). Behavioral and institutional theories are just two perspectives among others in strategic management and organization theory that provide possible lenses for understanding the timing of restoration efforts.

Our conceptualization of strategy restoration also responds to calls for management research to more fully consider the role of rhetorical history in organizations (e.g., Anteby and Molnár, 2012; Foster et al., 2011; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Suddaby et al. (2010, p. 157) defined rhetorical history as “the strategic use of the past as a persuasive strategy to manage key stakeholders of the firm.” Our portrayal of strategy restoration distinguishes history from the experienced past, and affirms that the social construction of organizational history is ongoing interpretive work carried out by managers and other stakeholders. Organizations construct history through retrospective collective sensemaking in light of current circumstances and future possibilities (Foster et al., 2011; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Suddaby and Foster, 2017; Suddaby et al., 2010; Walsh and Ungson, 1991). Managers are critical players in the sensegiving

process (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013). They do not simply draw upon established history; they focus attention on selected aspects of history, as well as reinterpret and embellish historical accounts, to manage organizational image, identity, culture, and strategic change. This is evident, for example, in organizations hiring corporate historians to make use of history as a rhetorical tool to legitimate and justify action, and persuade both internal and external stakeholders (Anteby and Molnár, 2012). Our study expands understanding of how managers use history strategically. Future studies could explore how different interests and the malleability of historical accounts influence the feasibility and direction of restoration processes (see Foster et al., 2017).

We argued that traditionality and available memory influence the temporal horizon of organizational search. These factors may influence not just *whether* the organization searches its history but also *how deeply* into the past it goes. For example, Newsweek brought its print magazine “back from the dead” only fifteen months after moving to an online-only format (Kaufman, 2014, p. 1). As such, Newsweek’s experience is better classified as strategy reversal (Mantere et al., 2012) than restoration. Nerkar (2003) suggests that searching recent history (“temporal exploitation”) is generally efficient and effective for firms due to the technical superiority of the most recent knowledge, the greater ease of implementing it, and its perceived legitimacy. However, searching more distant history (“temporal exploration”) tends to result in greater organizational performance effects. Awareness of restoration could prompt researchers to explore the influence that an organization’s history can have on explorative innovation.

In focusing on why organizations pursue strategy restoration, we also suggested starting points for developing an explanation for its performance implications, yet more needs to be done. Market nostalgia and perceptions of authenticity may not only shape the likelihood of strategy

restoration, they also may carry implications for the time horizon for enhancing future performance. Both play a part in whether performance is enhanced in the near versus more distant future. Some restoration efforts may require greater investments and time than others to cultivate nostalgia among potential customers (see Harrison and Corley 2011) in a way that is authentic to the organization's image (see Hatch and Schultz, 2017); of course, some efforts fail altogether. To the extent that nostalgia and authenticity differentiate an organization's products and services in ways that create value, restoration should enhance strategic performance. By contrast, if products and services lack differentiation within the market, the organization will struggle to win customers and improve margins. Imitators of other organizations' successful restoration efforts may not fare well if they pursue strategies that lack differentiation relative to those of their predecessors.

*Research designs and methods.* Our arguments identified motivators and enablers of strategy restoration. To explain strategy restoration, we need a fuller understanding of whether particular motivations to change are more likely than others to invoke search directed toward an organization's own history. In cultural settings generally characterized by temporal orientations toward the present and future, traditionality is likely to be a distinguishing feature that orients particular organizations' change efforts toward engagement with history. This article invites researchers to investigate empirically how the extent of traditionality and the form of organizational memory affect the propensity and feasibility of strategy restoration. Such research calls for in-depth intra-organizational analysis based on longitudinal or retrospective data. To avoid selecting on the dependent variable (i.e., studying only occurrences of strategy restoration, not its absence), comparative case studies would contrast instances in which strategy restoration efforts did and did not occur within and across organizations. Researchers should consider what

might be learned from designing studies around matched pairs of organizations—contrasting similar firms taking different actions—to narrow the set of possible causes accounting for whether organizations pursue strategy restoration.

Social processes that involve discontinuities in time and rich causality often do not lend themselves to large-scale quantitative research or formal modeling. Abbott (1990) argues that such phenomena instead call for narrative explanations. Narrative inquiry emphasizes people, action, context, and temporality (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), all of which must figure prominently in a theoretical account of strategy restoration. Researchers can set out to develop a process theory that considers states and events as they occur over time, and identifies necessary conditions for the outcomes of interest (Mohr, 1982; Sminia, 2009). Results of social processes can arise from contingent conjunctions of causal mechanisms (Miller and Tsang, 2011). In-depth case studies can help to identify and describe idiosyncratic contingencies (Nash, 1999), even while pursuing the goal of generalizability across cases (Poole et al., 2000). Given the current dearth of research on strategy restoration in organizations, comparative historical and longitudinal case studies initially may be the best way to enrich our theoretical understanding of the causal mechanisms and process dynamics, although quantitative research eventually would be a fruitful endeavor as well.

Action research may offer firsthand, real-time experience with managerial efforts to draw upon an organization's history for strategic change. Experiential learning employing the “search conference” method thus could be used in future studies. This method, “designed to stimulate active adaptation to turbulent environments” (Williams, 1979, p. 470), involves participants in the collective planning and implementation of innovative projects based on a shared history (Schafft and Greenwood, 2003). A key feature of the search conference method, unlike action

research in general, is understanding the organization's history. To this end, participants devote a great deal of attention to searching and discussing the organization's history, along with the present situation, to initiate change toward a more desirable future.

Research on the performance effects of strategy restoration can be done only by looking beyond intra-organizational considerations to market responses. Although researchers must assess organizational capabilities and the effectiveness of strategy formulation and implementation, our theoretical arguments emphasize the roles of market nostalgia and perceptions of authenticity as determinants of competitive advantage. An ideal research design would include cases of attempted restoration in which organizations face market conditions that differ along these two dimensions, as well as varying degrees of failure and success. Studying a given organization's performances from restoration efforts in different markets would allow for variation in our explanatory variables while controlling for internal organizational features.

In sum, a variety of different research designs and methods will allow us to understand and build a theory of strategy restoration. The intertemporal nature of the concept challenges researchers to broaden their temporal frame and presents opportunities for innovative empirical research designs. Although the task may be challenging, it merits further attention given the potential role of restoration in strategic change theory and practice.

## **Conclusion**

“Like Janus, the Roman god of the threshold, truly adaptive organizations and their management teams simultaneously look forward, and create their future; and back, and appreciate their past” (Hurst et al., 1989, p. 97). Current conceptualizations of strategic change often come up short of this ideal due to a persistent neglect of the resources within history. It is telling that the literature

lacks an identifying label for the organizational phenomenon of drawing upon and reenacting an historical strategy. We proposed the term “strategy restoration,” defined here as an organization’s intentional reinterpretation and reenactment of discontinued aspects of its historical strategy for present use and for the sake of enhancing future performance. In drawing attention to strategy restoration, we aim to prompt a richer and more appreciative view of the role of history in strategic change. We proposed that history augments the basis for current innovation beyond contemporary possibilities alone and, as such, potentially can underpin future competitive advantage. Of course, we readily acknowledge that hanging onto the past can sometimes be just as detrimental as too readily leaving it behind. Just as some companies ought to be “urged to remember their past,” others should be “chastised for not forgetting their past” (Walsh and Ungson, 1991, p. 70). We therefore recommend that scholars and managers alike adopt an inclusive temporal horizon that attends to history along with the present and future.

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**Table 1. Distinguishing strategy restoration from related concepts.**

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<i>Strategy restoration</i>	An organization’s intentional reinterpretation and reenactment of discontinued aspects of its historical strategy for present use and for the sake of enhancing future performance.
<i>Strategic renewal</i>	“The process, content, and outcome of refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization that have the potential to substantially affect its long-term prospects” (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009, p. 282).
<i>Strategic change reversal</i>	“An attempt to reinstitute a prior strategy as a basis for an organization’s interpretive scheme” (Mantere et al., 2012, p. 175).
<i>Identity resurrection</i>	A “restarting [of] the identity reproduction process” (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013, p. 131).
<i>Organizational historicizing</i>	“A temporal pattern of micro-level activities that accounts for how actors used...historical material and, in doing so, lent the authenticity of history to their actions” (Hatch & Schultz, 2017, p. 657).
<i>Organizational regeneration</i>	“The process of reproducing an organization after a period of dormancy, often by training and guiding persons who are largely new to their roles, or to the organization as a whole” (Birnholtz et al., p. 315).
<i>Innovation through tradition</i>	“A product innovation strategy that firms can apply to leverage temporally distant knowledge for product development” (De Massis et al., 2016, p. 94).
<i>Technology reemergence</i>	“The resurgence of substantive and sustained demand for a legacy technology following the introduction of a new dominant design” (Raffaelli, 2018, p. 1).
<i>Retrobranding</i>	“The revival or relaunch of a product or service brand from a prior historical period, which is usually but not always updated to contemporary standards of performance, functioning, or taste” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 20).



**Figure 1. Strategy restoration as a distinct type of strategic change.**

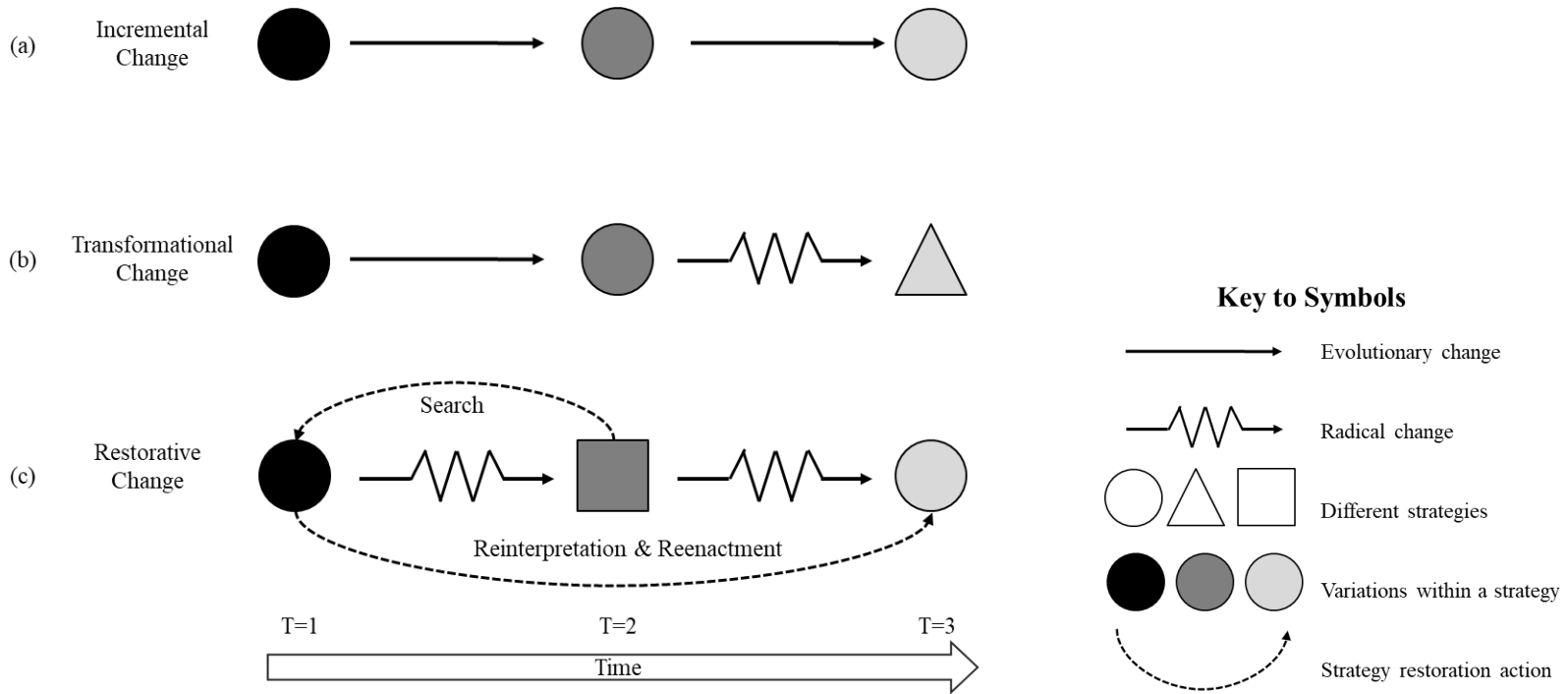


Figure 2. Strategy restoration motivators and enablers.

