

## The Stuff of Legends: Corporate Museums and the Construction of Organizational Heritage

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A growing body of research in sociology has focused on the relationship between the practices through which individuals and collectives engage with history and the constitution of collective memory and identity. Organizational research, in contrast, has tended to emphasize either the “burden of history” as a source of constraint, or its rhetorical use for strategic purposes. In this study we build on work in sociology that emphasizes engagement with history as a set of mnemonic practices and investigate the effects of the creation of corporate museums on organizational memory and identity. We conduct an inductive theory-building study of the uses of corporate museums in four Italian organizations. In contrast to prior organizational research that has emphasized either the symbolic rhetorical aspects of strategic engagement with history, or the substantive constraining effects of the past, we observe that organizational members used the museums to recover historical knowledge and celebrate the organization’s historical identity. These processes affected how they thought about the future and how they innovated. Based on these observations, we develop a theoretical model that relates the creation of corporate museums as memory sites to the constitution of collective memory and the veneration of historical identity, resulting in distinctive practices of innovating within tradition.