

A Temporal Perspective on Organizational Identity

Majken Schultz

Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School, 2000 Copenhagen F, Denmark, ms.ioa@cbs.dk

Tor Hernes

Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School, 2000 Copenhagen F, Denmark; and
 Vestfold University College, N-3103 Tønsberg, Norway, th.ioa@cbs.dk

We offer as our main theoretical contribution a conceptual framework for how the past is evoked in present identity reconstruction and the ways in which the past influences the articulation of claims for future identity. We introduce the notion of textual, material, and oral memory forms as the means by which organizational actors evoke the past. The conceptual framework is applied in a study of two occasions of identity reconstruction in the LEGO Group, which revealed differences in ways that the past was evoked and influenced claims for future identity. Our study suggests that (1) a longer time perspective in the use of memory enabled a longer time perspective in formulating claims for future identity, (2) a broader scope of articulated identity claims for the future was related to the combination of a broader range of memory forms, and (3) the depth of claims for future identity was related to the way in which memory forms were combined. At a more general level, our paper illustrates how viewing identity construction from the perspective of an ongoing present adds a new dimension to understanding the temporal dynamics of organizational identity.

Key words: ongoing temporality; organizational identity; organizational memory; history

History: Published online in *Articles in Advance* May 23, 2012.

Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.
 —Søren Kierkegaard

Perceptions of the past are an intrinsic part of individual and organizational self-understanding, influencing how we see ourselves in the future (Lawrence 1984). Indeed, process theorists argue that we are our pasts (Hernes 2007, p. xv). “The past,” however, is open to interpretation, as it is conditioned by the situation from which it is viewed (Mead 1934; Weick 1993, p. 635). It is important to note that the past is not there “in it-self” (Mead 1932, p. 9) but is called forth in memory through its relationship to the emergent future. Thus, temporality—defined as the ongoing relationships between past, present, and future—becomes particularly relevant when actors in organizations make claims about who they are or who they are becoming as an organization. In this paper, we focus on how actors formulate claims for future organizational identity and how these claims relate to the ways in which actors evoke experience from organizational memory.

This paper is based on a temporal perspective that views actors as operating in an *ongoing present* (Bergson 2007, Mead 1932), which means that the organization’s future is continually enacted from past experience using materials available in the present (Mead 1932). The term “ongoing” is chosen to signify that which is currently happening (i.e., that which the actors are in the process of doing). This perspective parallels the notion of organizing as an ongoing accomplishment (Feldman 2000, Weick 1995) emerging from efforts to create order and

make retrospective sense of what occurs (Weick 1995). Viewing the organization as an ongoing accomplishment draws more specifically on process thinking, whereby organizations are seen as in a continuous state of creation, emergence, and becoming while being shaped by a changing past and future ambitions (Hernes 2007). Such a view directs focus toward the demands posed by the flow of time and the challenge of constructing the future from past experience. Usually, this process goes on unnoticed, as when actors subconsciously reproduce past experience as a means of moving forward. At other times, however, such as in situations of crisis or ambiguity, actors may make active use of memory to articulate a different future. Our argument is that viewing identity construction as an ongoing process enables a deeper understanding of embedded agency in identity reconstruction processes, as it enables an understanding of how “the contingencies of the moment” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 963) actually frame social processes informed by the past while being oriented toward the future. A basic assumption of such a perspective is that not only is the future open but also that the past is open to (re)interpretation (March 1999, Levitt and March 1988) as to which experiences to retain. A main focus of the perspective is the processes by which past organizational experiences are retained and transformed into claims for the future.

The past–future relationship has not been ignored by organizational identity scholars. For example, the

past is seen as particularly salient during times of crisis and transition, in which organizational members question their identities and search for new desired future identities (e.g., Albert and Whetten 1985, Corley and Gioia 2004, Corley et al. 2006, Gioia and Thomas 1996, Hatch and Schultz 2002, Nag et al. 2007, Whetten 2006, Whetten and Mackey 2002). Additionally, Corley and Gioia (2004) argued that the acknowledged role of social comparison in identity construction is complemented by the comparison of identity over time, and Whetten (2006) suggested that organizations make use of both comparative and historical frames of reference when determining appropriate organizational action. More recently, the need to further develop a temporal perspective on identity in and around organizations has been stressed jointly by identity and process scholars (Schultz et al. 2012).

Until now, however, the debate on temporality among identity scholars has mostly focused on the question of identity's enduring nature versus its change over time (e.g., Gioia et al. 2000, Ravasi and Schultz 2006). An ongoing perspective on identity construction, such as the one we advocate in this paper, shifts the focus from change versus enduring identity over time to the question of how organizational actors construct identity in an ongoing present suspended between the past and the future. Although it has been indicated that organizational members typically evoke the past by asking questions such as "Who have we been?" (e.g., Gioia et al. 2000), "Where do we come from?" (Ashforth and Mael 1996, p. 26), and "What were the 'defining moments' in our past?" (Whetten 2006, p. 224), the means by which they actually evoke the past and forge connections to the future remain to be elaborated.

In view of these concerns, we based our work on the following research questions: How do organizational actors use memory forms when evoking the past in organizational identity reconstruction, and how does the use of memory influence identity claims for the future? We work from the assumption that there are three different forms of memory available to actors when evoking the past, which we call textual, material, and oral memory forms. The organization in our study is the LEGO Group, a leading Danish producer of construction toys (<http://www.lego.com>). Founded in 1932 by carpenter Ole Kirk Christiansen, the LEGO Group is known throughout most of the world for its multicolored plastic bricks. The first bricks were invented by Christiansen in 1949, followed by the stud-in-tube system in 1957 (Pickering et al. 1999). Since its origin, several generations of owners and organizational leaders have expressed concerns about the identity of the company. In the process, a strong tradition of explicit vision, mission, beliefs, and values has made the LEGO Group a highly relevant organization for the study of identity reconstruction over time (see Hatch and Schultz 2008, Schultz

and Hatch 2003, Schultz et al. 2005). We grounded our research question in an empirical study comprising two occasions of identity reconstruction, demonstrating how, during these two occasions, organizational members evoked their past differently while using memory forms to articulate claims for future organizational identity.

We begin by reviewing the literature on organizational identity, focusing on the use of temporality. We apply a definition of organizational identity as articulated claims emerging from interaction among leaders, employees, and other stakeholders (Albert and Whetten 1985) regarding who they are, or who they are becoming, as an organization (Corley and Gioia 2004). Given the distinction between identity labels and their associated meanings (Corley and Gioia 2004, Gioia et al. 2000, Ravasi and Schultz 2006), we include both identity labels and explicit discussions about their associated meanings. These labels and associated meanings are often manifested through other organizational phenomena such as strategy, branding, and organizational design, as identity serves as the underpinning claims guiding organizational change. The review identifies a gap in terms of the ongoing view of temporality in the organizational identity literature. We then present a brief review of organizational memory from which we advocate the relevance of exploring three different memory forms, i.e., textual, material, and oral forms. We subsequently introduce our empirical study, explaining the different data sources and the interrelated nature of the two identity reconstruction occasions studied at LEGO. We then develop a conceptual framework for studying the relationship between past, present, and future in identity reconstruction to guide this empirical analysis. Our findings demonstrate how LEGO managers, in two strategic contexts, evoked the past through different variations and combinations of memory forms, which influenced the scope and depth of identity claims for the future, as well as how differences in time span were echoed in the past and future. Finally, we discuss the implications of our study for further theoretical development of an ongoing temporal perspective on organizational identity and the role of combined memory forms in articulating identity claims for the future. We conclude by pointing to the relevance of temporality and offering suggestions for further research.

Connecting Organizational Identity to Organizational Memory

Temporality in Organizational Identity

Following Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition of organizational identity as the central, distinctive, and enduring nature of an organization, debates have revolved around the durability and continuity of such

identity. According to Albert and Whetten (1985), organizational identity claims change if organizational actors experience disruption from the enduring development of the originally held identity, such as in periods of crisis or other situations of identity threat (Albert and Whetten 1985, Ravasi and Schultz 2006, Whetten 2006). In a follow-up paper in which temporality is brought into greater focus, Whetten (2006) suggests that identity claims made in the present are likely to be viewed as enduring characteristics in the future, thus highlighting the interconnectedness of past, present, and future.

Scholars have questioned the enduring aspect of identity, arguing that it should be seen as changing and dynamic. First, the dynamic nature of identity has been articulated in different ways. Gioia et al. (2000), for example, highlight the generally dynamic and adaptive nature of identity, as opposed to seeing it as stable and enduring. Rather than focusing on identity claims, they are concerned with the shifting meanings of enduring claims, which allow organizational identity to adapt to unstable external conditions for identity construction expressed through shifting external images, or what they term “adaptive instability” (Gioia et al. 2000). Dutton and Dukerich (1991) study changes in identity based on the relationships between image and identity, showing how discrepancies between self-perceptions and the construed image of others provoked a sequence of identity reconstructions over several years. They observe that identity changed as a response to changing perceptions of the organization among outsiders. Drawing on Mead (1934), Hatch and Schultz (2002) and Pratt (2012) explore the self-defining processes of organizational identity dynamics, which may include the dynamics between organizational culture and organizational image (Hatch and Schultz 2002). Rather than linking identity change to various relationships between the organizational self and others, some scholars offer a social constructivist view of temporality and identity, arguing that “continuity is clearly in the eye of the beholder” (Ashforth and Mael 1996, p. 27) or that organizations themselves construct narratives that draw coherence from the past (Czarniawska 1997).

Second, identity studies have examined reinterpretation processes that serve to create coherence between past, present, and future identities. For example, in their study of strategic change, Gioia and Thomas (1996) show how aspirations for future identity/image influence present identity sensemaking in a university setting. They elaborate the connections between the future and present, stating that organizational identity may change rapidly in response to environmental changes enacted as a new strategic aspiration. In a similar vein, Gioia et al. (2002) argue that organizational members are inclined to reinterpret the past in light of a desired or expected future: “[A]s organizations try to define their role in the present and in the future, there often is a need to revise

the past to be consistent with the future” (p. 623). Taking an embedded view, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) demonstrate how past cultures are reinterpreted during three different periods of identity reconstructions at audiovisual product manufacturer Bang & Olufsen, as part of both their sensemaking in a situation, where their identity was threatened, and the related sensegiving for the future. In this instance, identity reconstruction was a response to different external situations posing threats to their identity over the course of 25 years. Finally, in a recent study of the formation of identity among Dutch microbrewers, Kroezen and Heugens (2012) argue that intertwined processes of imprinting and enactment bring a reservoir of past identity attributes into the present, stressing how the origin of identity influences the claims that follow (see also Gioia et al. 2010).

Finally, some scholars have taken the temporal perspective further in a process-based perception of identity. For example, based on their study of identity work among business coaches, Clegg et al. (2007) argue that ongoing processes of identity construction emerge from relationships between the temporal (continuity over time) and spatial dimension of identity (identity defined as social comparison with others). Building on Chia’s (1996) focus on the dialectic of being and becoming organizations, the authors suggest a perception of identity as emerging from the ongoing process of “how we are becoming an organization” rather than defining “who we are,” as also indicated in the work on ongoing identity dynamics by Ashforth and Mael (1996), Gioia et al. (2000), Hatch and Schultz (2002, 2008), and Pratt (2012).

The brief review above demonstrates that scholars have started to pay attention to the roles of the past, present, and future in identity reconstruction. Combined, these and other contributions enable important observations about the malleability and dynamics in the construction of organizational identity over time. However, there are some notable limitations in the application of a temporal perspective.

First, time is most often used to compare perceptions and the orchestration of organizational identity between different periods of time, which could appropriately be called a “periodic” view of temporality. In this view, organizational identity is typically assumed to express certain stable characteristics—such as central claims, labels, associated meanings, or shared understandings—until it is upset or challenged by external perceptions, concrete events, or organizational changes resulting in the emergence of a different set of characteristics. This periodic view has similarities to theories of punctuated equilibrium, where stable periods are seen to be disrupted by transformations or reorientations (e.g., Gersick 1991, Romanelli and Tushman 1994). A periodic view provides understanding of how internal and external factors either trigger change of organizational identity or

stabilize it. This perspective is less suited, however, for providing an understanding of how time plays a role in the internal workings of identity construction processes. As a result, we suggest that there is a need to complement the periodic view of temporality with studies of the ongoing process by which organizational members draw upon their own past when formulating claims for the future, because this provides an opportunity to study the temporal dynamics at work in organizational identity construction. In other words, we advocate a closer study of how “temporal resources” (i.e., the past, present, and future) are deployed in identity construction (Ybema 2010, p. 483). This distinction between periodic and ongoing temporality is not meant to reflect the different temporalities of different organizations but, rather, the different temporal views from which organizational change and continuity may be analyzed.

Second, to the extent that the past has been included in previous studies, it has largely been conceived as coherent past identities available for assessment in the present. An assumption of coherence enables comparisons between periods over time, as suggested by Corley and Gioia (2004), Whetten (2006), and Clegg et al. (2007). We argue, however, that the past rarely stands out as previous coherent identities. Instead, we suggest that the past is constituted by a selection of “memory cues,” which do not always form coherent patterns that may be defined as organizational identity (Ravasi and Schultz 2006, Weick 1995). As argued by Levitt and March (1988), the past may be inconsistent as well as ambiguous. It is therefore likely that some past identity claims are partly blackboxed for organizational members, who can only confer meaning upon them in the present by evoking cues via different memory forms. The extent to which the cues correspond to identity claims cannot be determined a priori, as some cues may consist of identity claims, whereas others may not be identity related. For example, Nissley and Casey (2002) demonstrate how corporate museums, acting as repositories of knowledge, also constitute “organizational forgetting” (Martin de Holan and Phillips 2004), as certain artifacts are excluded or withdrawn from exhibition. Although past identity claims may be accessed directly through memory forms in some cases, cues are pieced together to form an impression of what would have been plausible identity claims in the past. In other words, cues in organizational memory may relate directly or indirectly to past identity constructions. In other words, the past that is evoked is contingent upon factors of the evocation process, which may be investigated by an ongoing view of temporality.

Organizational Memory Forms

A temporal perspective on organizational identity invites the consideration of how the past is constructed from what we, inspired by Mead (1932, p. 29), refer to as

the “materials of the present.” Previous research on organizational memory draws mainly on textual forms of memory, focusing on how processes of information acquisition and retrieval influence decision processes (e.g., Anand et al. 1998, Covington 1985, Fiol 1995, March et al. 2000, Walsh and Ungson 1991, Weber 1968). Our study was inspired by Walsh and Ungson’s (1991) definition of organizational memory as “bins” from which “stored information from an organization’s history . . . can be brought to bear on the present” (p. 61). We, nevertheless, suggest three extensions to this conception of organizational memory.

First, the idea of bins in Walsh and Ungson’s (1991) paper conveys a view of memory as something that can be considered separate from its context. We support the use of memory *forms*, rather than memory bins, to emphasize that the form in which it is evoked shapes the meaning of an experience. For example, the meaning of an event may differ depending on whether the event is being narrated, presented in writing, or evoked through an artifact.

Second, the emphasis on textual information as the prime source of memory limits the understanding of the richness and importance of memory in organizations. Inspired by Mead’s (1932, p. 352) distinction among “material documents, oral testimony, and historical remains” as the fundamental forms of memory from which people access the past, we suggest that organizational memory may be classified into textual, material, and oral forms (see usage by historians as described in the Library of Congress 2009, Olick 2007). By focusing on the means by which memory is evoked, we expect to gain empirical evidence on how memory is actually accessed by organizational members, a point that has not been systematically addressed in organizational memory research (Olivera 2001).

Third, the concept of bins conveys a memory independent of the meaning conferred upon it by individual actors. We build instead on a sensemaking perspective (Boje 1991, Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991, Weick 1995, Weick et al. 2005) and focus on how organizational memory is evoked in the present. We purposely use the word “evoked” to emphasize the bringing forth of memory as part of the process of making sense rather than the word “invoke,” which commonly refers to the activation of a given law, routine, or program of action. The latter appears more appropriate to the conception of memory as stored in bins, which conveys the image of memory as an unambiguous entity.

Pursuing an understanding of the content of memory as shaped by its *form*, which may take any of three distinct memory forms, we elaborate a brief review of the properties of the three memory forms and the ways in which each memory form exhibits different properties, thus having different functions in identity reconstruction, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Memory Forms

| Form | Examples | Characteristics | Functions in identity reconstruction |
|----------|--|---|--|
| Textual | Corporate communication Written rules Records Corporate autobiographies | Abstract Factual Standardized representation | Allows for correlations over time Allows for comparing past and future identities |
| Material | Artifacts Physical spaces Prototypes Corporate museums Emblems | Experiential Sensorial Open to multiple interpretations | Allows for imagining experiences of past actors Allows for materialization of future projects |
| Oral | Stories and narratives Presentations Conversations | Intersubjective Interpretive Contextual | Allows for richness and detail of meaning of past experience Allows for aligning future claims with socially conveyed meaning of the past |

Textual Memory. The memory form referred to most extensively in the literature on organizational memory is textual memory. Weber (1968) points out how decisions are based on recorded case histories kept in files ready for retrieval by the official, allowing for the standardized treatment of cases over time. Textual memory may also take the form of written rules (March et al. 2000), archives (Covington 1985, Walsh and Ungson 1991), annual reports (Fiol 1995), corporate communication and corporate autobiographies (Fiol 1989), as well as records, databases, and financial accounts (Argyris and Schön 1996, Levitt and March 1988). Text in written form exhibits a relative constancy of meaning over time, owing to the regularity of signs and the relations between them (Saussure 1986). The constancy of text enables information about organizational phenomena to be reinterpreted in much the same light over long periods of time. This makes textual memory a particularly relevant form when comparing memories over long periods of time (e.g., March et al. 2000).

Data derived from works on textual memory reflect comparisons of similar organizational phenomena over time. Smith (2001, p. 160), for example, makes the point that “[t]exts and documents make possible the appearance of the same set of words, numbers or images in multiple local sites, however differently they may be read and taken up.” Thus, written information about design solutions, for example, as shown by Sutton and Hargadon (1996), may be stored and used by other organizations as a basis for developing new products. This implies that facts may be seen as similar, even over long time spans, as long as the signs and their interrelationships have similar meanings. The relatively high degree of structure and standardization of textual memory conveys factuality about the past, which may also help to avoid ambiguity in claims of future identity. Statistics from different periods, for example, may be compared in view of the respective identity characteristics of those periods. Rules, records, and results may be related to

selected practices of the past, providing indications of how they might relate to claims for future identity. In this way, textual memory enables a preliminary comparative basis for the implications of changes in organizational identity.

Material Memory. Whereas text is a structured and abstracted description of past practices, material objects and arrangements—such as prototypes (Sutton and Hargadon 1996), physical spaces (Moorman and Miner 1998), emblems, or corporate museums (Nissley and Casey 2002)—exemplify past practices and provide cues about the contexts in which they were carried out. Moorman and Miner (1997) suggest, for example, that the features of products and product lines (such as product design, materials, packaging, and logos) are important physical objects associated with organizational memory. From their study of brainstorming among designers, Sutton and Hargadon (1996) report how product designers, in addition to retrieving ideas from archives or videotapes, also bring actual design artifacts, referred to as “solidified intellect” by one of their informants (p. 699), into brainstorming sessions. Material artifacts offer a physical and sensory experience in the process of conferring knowing upon objects (Sveiby 1996). Knowledge is conceived as inextricably intertwined with materiality in studies of technology, science, and organization (Orr 1990, Orlikowski 2006, Suchman 1987). Orlikowski (2006), for example, argues that knowing is always material, emphasizing the importance of the social nature of materiality, as people establish shared knowing through such artifacts.

In addition to being manifestations of past practice, material artifacts provide cues about the intentions and experiences of actors when they engaged in practices in the past (Schutz 1967, p. 209), thus also providing cues about what might have been decisive experiences of the actors during those past occasions. Such cues enhance a historically informed understanding of the challenges of

the present. Unlike text, artifacts provide direct manifestations of what something looked like or felt like, or how it may be adapted to identity claims. They offer intimate knowledge of past identities, partly because they create an immediacy of experience while remaining open to differing interpretations (Carlile 2004, Star and Griesemer 1989). A combination of closeness and openness enables actors to imagine how past actors made use of the artifact to position organizational identity within a broader context. Artifacts may also be particularly effective in mobilizing affect around choices related to claims for future identity, as they may be conceived as carriers of future identity, thus enabling a common visionary project to be developed (Schultz et al. 2006).

Oral Memory. Transmitted by gestures, words, or actions in social interaction (Blumer 1969), oral memory provides a rich, instantaneous form of human communication (Suchman 1987). Key to oral memory is the transmission of the meaning of past experience. Blumer (1969, p. 12) makes the point that meaning is formed, learned, and transmitted over time through a social process of indication. Mead (1934, p. 76) also emphasizes the temporal significance of meaning creation, suggesting that meaning is created primarily through intersubjective processes in which speech and gestures serve to connect different temporal phases of the social act. Hence, as pointed out by Mead (1934), meaning is not attached to one thing or one fact, but it is acquired through the intersubjective relating of experiences over time. The main elements of oral memory are stories (Martin et al. 1983), narratives (Czarniawska 1997, Humphreys and Brown 2002), rituals (Trice and Beyer 1984), and ceremonies (Trice and Beyer 1984). Stories and narratives in particular enable potentially complex relationships between past and present experiences to be conveyed in a compact, vivid form (Boje 1991).

The importance of stories as organizational memory is well illustrated by Boje (1991), who provides several examples of how storytelling serves to evoke the meaning of past experiences. Also, Putnam and Boys (2006) argue that stories and narratives serve as vehicles of contestation or vessels for conveying corporate meaning, whereas Martin et al. (1983) suggest that stories generate changes in organizations, partly because of the rich detail and multiple interpretations they enable. Weick (1995) points out that a good story holds “disparate elements together long enough to energize and guide action, plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens” (p. 61). Thus, we suggest that oral memory be seen as a *form* evoked and validated in social interaction. It is important to note that it enables claims for future identity to be aligned with current social interpretations of the meaning of past experience. And because stories and narratives in particular exhibit possibilities for multiple interpretation

(Boje 1991), they also provide arenas for the social validation of claims of future identity. We may hypothesize that their richness (Suchman 1987) makes for claims that capture the depth of past experience, whereas the social validation enables support in the implementation of claims for future identity.

The above review shows how the three identified memory forms differ from one another in the ways that they enable identity construction from past experience. This review does not cover all aspects of the debate about organizational memory; our aim is merely to demonstrate that the three forms are sufficiently distinct from one another so that we are able to study how organizational actors use these forms when evoking the past in organizational identity reconstruction and how they influence identity claims for the future.

Data and Methodology

The period from 2000 to 2008 may be seen as an ongoing process of self-critical analysis in the LEGO Group, which was searching for reasons why the company was having problems and was trying to find ways to overcome them. By 2010, the self-questioning turned into a successful transformation (see <http://www.lego.com>). Two occasions—one between 2000 and 2001 and the other between 2005 and 2007—were characterized by a deliberate managerial orchestration of identity reconstruction. Developments over the nine-year period were also characterized by an escalating level of ambiguity and uncertainty, moving from an emergent crisis resulting from changing market conditions (first occasion) to a turnaround situation as a result of a potential economic meltdown (second occasion). The evocation of organizational memory was part of the data gathered, because it was a concern in the ongoing discussions of identity-related issues among LEGO managers.

Our research question emerged in 2008, when we listened to a talk by the CEO of the LEGO Group in which he was explicit about the importance of organizational memory when “revitalizing” organizational identity. This resulted in the formulation of the research question for this paper, as well as the beginning of the coding and analysis of existing data collected as part of a previous study of the LEGO Group’s organizational identity and corporate brand conducted by the first author. In addition, new data were collected for the project by both authors, previous data were reexamined with new interpretations in mind, and the activities that took place, particularly from 2005 to 2007, were further described. The data from 2008 and 2009 are retrospective in that informants were asked to recall how they engaged in identity reconstruction, including their use of memory forms.

Data Collection

The data were collected over a long period of time, during which several key actors were replaced. The

researcher relationship to the organization also changed over time. The first author worked for the company parttime for three years as an affiliated researcher (2000–2003) and had extensive access to data during this time. She served as a discussion partner for middle managers, a source of knowledge, and a co-organizer of numerous workshops, but she did not play the role of an interventionist as described in action research (Adler et al. 2004, Van de Ven 2007). Building on Van de Ven's notion of "engaged scholarship," the relationship was closer in nature to collaborative research (Van de Ven 2007, p. 272; see also Mohrman et al. 2001), in that it was clear to informants that the data obtained would be used for research purposes. The presence of the first author likely contributed to a higher degree of documentation of the activities conducted during identity reconstruction in the first occasion and a more explicit argumentation for the articulation of the identity claims for the future. Still, the first author did not direct the process, which was executed by experienced middle managers, just as all final decisions concerning the articulation of identity claims were made by top management building on LEGO's tradition for managerial involvement in identity construction. Thus, it is not likely that the presence of the first author influenced the findings of this study in any significant way.

During the second occasion, the first author continued association with the company and its new top management team, but in the role of external researcher. The second author analyzed data from the first occasion and participated in additional data collection and data analysis during the second occasion. The research question for this paper was formulated retrospectively, but issues concerning how the past is evoked in identity reconstruction emerged from interactions with the LEGO Group. The relevance and retrieval of organizational memory was a primary theme among LEGO managers during both occasions, providing first-order insights for the research (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Locke 1996), although the application of the three memory forms to the data was carried out in 2008.

Our data are from a comparative study of varying length and depth, using the same conceptual framework to analyze data from both occasions. The first occasion lasted for one year, providing extensive qualitative and quantitative data and a large number of informants. The second occasion comprised a limited number of informants but extended over a longer period of time. We compare the two occasions, as they address similar issues of identity reconstruction. Data collection methods differed between the two occasions because of variations in access and the characteristics of the occasions, as specified in Table 2.

During the first occasion, data were collected from extensive participant observation and active engagement in task force activities by the first author, who was in

continuous dialogue with the task force leader and other task force members on at least a weekly basis, from which field notes were taken. Together, these data provided the opportunity to study how members of the task force used a wide range of documents and archives. A total of 18 interviews were conducted with LEGO managers involved in previous identity reconstruction, along with several interviews and regular conversations with top management. In all of these interviews, themes addressed included how the informants interpreted the current identity, how they conceived past identity reconstruction, what the informant found that the company could learn from these identity reconstructions, and how he or she conceived identity claims for the future in relation to the challenges facing the LEGO Group.

Data from the second occasion were primarily desk research and interviews with the new CEO and other members of the top management team, as well as the manager of the LEGO Museum (formerly Idea House). Although there are fewer interviews for this occasion, interviews with the CEO were long (e.g., a full-day interview to review the Shared Vision strategy took place in 2007). Central interview questions revolved around learning from past mistakes and rethinking the core of the LEGO identity, as well as how identity claims for the future related to the past. The interviews from 2008 and 2009 were retrospective because they focused on recalling the activities and reflections of the informants during the identity reconstruction that took place from 2005 to 2007. Informants generally understood the concept of differing memory forms, which aided them in reconstructing what had happened, as well as recalling how they had influenced the articulation of claims. As our research question developed, we contacted the CEO again and requested that he elaborate the identity reconstruction process, using the three memory forms to guide interviews. In the last interview with the CEO, we explicitly shared our research idea and received valuable feedback on our initial version of this paper. Such feedback has been defined as "informed basic research" (Van de Ven 2007, p. 272). Although there is always the risk of postrationalization in retrospective sense-making, we believe that the numerous interviews conducted over several years enabled us to test and confirm the integrity of the CEO as informant in particular and to become aware of potential shifts or revision of past experiences. No major shifts in his accounts over time were observed, but an increasing interest in the role of organizational memory was noted, presumably because new identity claims began having a positive impact on the business. We also interviewed the owner of the LEGO Group about the role of the past and how he saw the past projected onto the future as part of organizational identity claims. Drawing on corporate communication material, such as annual reports and press releases, media, and public presentations at our

Table 2 Data Collection from the Two Occasions

| Data collected | Restating the LEGO values (2000–2001) | Rethinking the LEGO raison d'être (2005–2007) |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Desk research | <p>Company archives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous company identity statements: Vision, mission, beliefs, values • Overview of development of LEGO play system • Lists of past economic performance since 1980 according to key performance indicators • Two past organizational structures and guidelines • Print and television ads from previous three LEGO brand campaigns and slogans: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) LEGO as Mind Karate (2) A New Toy Every Day (3) Just Imagine... (prints and movies) <p>External reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies and reports; material on implementation from brand consulting agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty • McKinsey report behind reorganization in 1999 analyzing past development and what built the brand over three generations. • Archetype study interpreting what kind of children play with LEGO bricks by a consultant in 2000 <p>Current company reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task force report: The LEGO brand foundation and future brand strategy (December 2001) and competitor analysis comparing identity statements and brand architecture • <i>Remembering Why We Are Here</i>: Booklet signed by the current CEO (owner) and COO in 2001 with drawings and brief statements | <p>Current company reports and records:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120-page CEO strategy plan called Shared Vision, 2007 (partly confidential) • Company strategy as presented in press releases filed in a Web-based press archive (CEO cited directly: four times) • Annual reports from 2004 to 2008, including past economic performance from 1998 to 2008 (CEO cited directly: five times) <p>Media material:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press clippings containing interviews with new CEO and/or owner from 2004 to 2007: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews in Danish daily newspapers: 18 <i>Berlingske Tidende</i>: 7 <i>Politiken</i>: 6 <i>Børsen</i>: 2 <i>Jyllands-Posten</i>: 3 Interviews in international magazines: 5 <i>PR Newswire</i>: 1 <i>News Media Age</i>: 1 <i>PR Week</i>: 1 <i>Computer Graphics World</i>: 1 <i>Wired</i>: 1 |
| Observations and related field notes | <p>Observations from workshops and meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant observation of four two-day workshops involving eight task force members and one workshop assisted by two Red Spider consultants. • Workshops held in Billund, Denmark (2) or Slough, United Kingdom (2) using selected material above. Supplemented by field notes and own analysis. • Participant observation of six full-day task force meetings conducted in Billund with eight task force members. Agenda, presentations, and summaries from task force meetings. • Forty-five weekly one-hour meetings with the task force coordinator. <p>Observation from LEGO Idea House:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit to the LEGO Idea House (internal corporate museum), housed in the modern LEGO headquarters. Every LEGO product through time displayed; interactive LEGO experiences. | <p>Observation from CEO office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of CEO office exhibit (hand-carved sign "Only the Best Is Good Enough"). <p>Observation from LEGO Idea House:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two visits to the LEGO Idea House (later LEGO Corporate Museum), now located at the home of the founder. Included a guided tour by the manager of LEGO Idea House. |

business school, we have included official data to explain and express identity claims in addition to these interview data (Fiol 1995, Whetten 2006). Finally, a key internal strategy plan entitled Shared Vision (LEGO 2007) was closely examined. The online appendix (at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0731>) contains additional LEGO material and links to corporate communication material.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a two-step process. Initially, the reconstruction of identity claims between the two occasions was compared to extract identified identity claims from all of our data. In relation to Whetten's (2006) elaboration of identity claims, the data include the reconstruction of functional (differentiation) and structural (centrality) identity claims. The

Table 2 (cont'd)

| Data collected | Restating the LEGO values (2000–2001) | Rethinking the LEGO raison d'être (2005–2007) |
|----------------|--|--|
| Interviews | <p>Two two-hour interviews with third-generation owner: Interviews with third-generation owner of the LEGO Group (current CEO). Conducted in person; notes taken.</p> <p>Bimonthly conversations with the COO: Part of the first authors' terms of employment, regular follow-up conversations conducted.</p> <p>Seven one-hour interviews with top managers: Interviews with four product division managers and three brand board members using individualized interview guides. Conducted in person; notes taken.</p> <p>Eleven one-hour interviews with middle managers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews using individualized review guides with LEGO middle managers involved in past brand work based in Denmark (5), the United Kingdom, (3) and the United States (3). • Danish interviews were conducted in person. UK and U.S. interviews conducted via phone. Notes taken. | <p>One interview with third-generation owner: One one-hour interview 2007 (notes taken).</p> <p>Five interviews with the CEO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two informal interviews 2005 and 2006 (notes taken). • One full-day interview 2007 (notes taken). • One two-hour interview 2008 (taped). • One two-hour interview 2009 (taped), included feedback on first draft of this paper. <p>Speeches by the CEO: Two CEO speeches in May and September 2008 (taped).</p> <p>Five interviews with other LEGO managers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three one-hour interviews in 2008 (taped) with three members of the LEGO Group's top management team. • Two interviews in 2008 and 2009 with the manager of LEGO Idea House (notes taken). <p>Lectures: One two-hour lecture by the Brand Community Coordinator at the Copenhagen Business School in 2006.</p> |

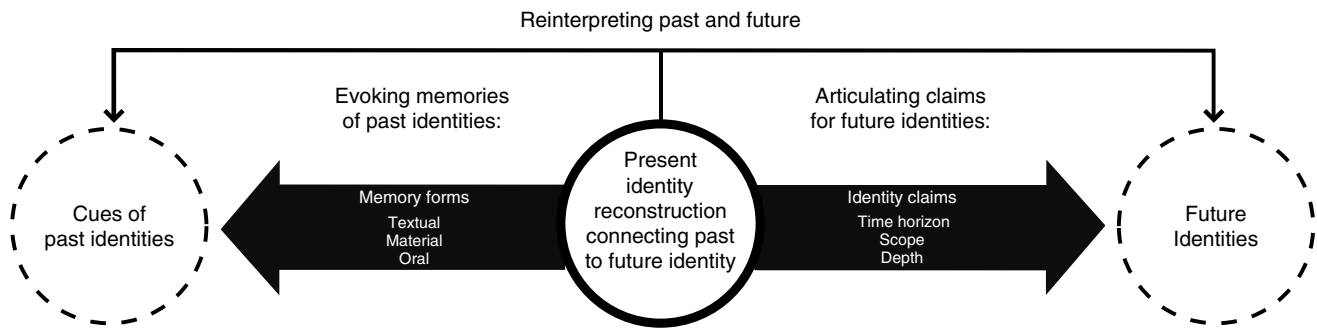
articulation of claims (labels) and the associated meanings were also included, as claims were often articulated in relation to other organizational phenomena, such as in strategy or corporate communication documents (i.e., textual memory), or through talks, interviews, and conversations (i.e., oral memory). Our data reflected an ongoing search for “core” statements on what LEGO is all about, although identity claims were articulated in relation to slightly differing discursive referents. During the first occasion, claims were defined by managers in terms of “central ideas,” “core values,” and “brand strategy,” whereas during the second occasion, terms such as the “raison d'être as a company,” “core idea,” and “brand position” were used. All of the claims were intended to express what Whetten (2006) refers to as the organizations' “self-determined (and ‘self-defining’) social space reflected in a unique pattern of binding commitments” (p. 230). Studying the empirical articulation of identity claims for the future often entailed the inclusion of strategic choices, corporate communication to stakeholders, organizational culture activities, and changes in organizational design. Here, identity served as the underpinning aspirations and self-referential commitments guiding organizational transformation. Organizational identity claims can rarely be studied per se, but they are expressed through other related organizational phenomena. This is reflected in the multiplicity of data sources discussed above and also shown in Table 3.

As the second step, we used our research to organize and analyze the data. We found the data from the first occasion to be rich with examples from written documents, interviews, and field notes. We recorded both the

narratives of informants and the first author's observations of how memory cues from the past were retrieved. We then categorized and labeled these narratives and observations in specific memory forms. Informants did not use the notion of memory forms explicitly, but their ways of recalling the past were readily categorized into different memory forms. Data from the second occasion were explicitly collected with the research question in mind, with key informants confirming the relevance of memory forms as an analytical category. In our selected examples of how memory forms are used, we drew from a broad range of data, but we do not claim to provide a full sample of all the situations where memory was evoked. Instead, we have carefully chosen what we consider to be the most relevant examples of identity reconstruction, as memory was also evoked for purposes other than identity construction.

Identity Reconstruction in the LEGO Group

In this section we present our analysis of the two occasions and elaborate on the ways in which identity was reconstructed. We present the framework for a temporal perspective on identity reconstruction applied to our analysis. This framework is guided by our research question concerning how organizational actors use memory forms when evoking the past in organizational identity reconstruction and how this influences claims for future identity. Figure 1 provides an illustration of our analytical framework.

Figure 1 The Relationship Between Past, Present, and Future in Identity Reconstruction

The conceptual framing of temporality follows from our theoretical perspective, just as the memory forms were inspired by our review and further developed during empirical analysis. The left-facing arrow in Figure 1 illustrates the three different memory forms: textual, material, and oral. From the empirical study, articulated identity claims for the future, illustrated by the right-facing arrow in Figure 1, are analyzed in relation to three dimensions: *time horizon* (i.e., what the articulated time span was), *scope* (i.e., the range of claims reconstructed), and *depth* (i.e., how fundamental identity was reconstructed). The following section introduces the strategic contexts in which identity claims were reconstructed. Next, we present an analysis of how organizational members evoked memory forms and how the combination of forms influenced these identity claims along the dimensions of time horizon, scope, and depth. In both cases, we compare the first and second occasion. Our analysis specifically relates the use of memory forms to the extent of the identity reconstruction and analyzes how relations differ between the two occasions. Our data show that other factors differed between the two occasions, notably the severity of the crisis and the involvement of top management in the identity reconstruction process. We will return to the influence of these factors in our discussion.

The Strategic Context of Identity Reconstruction

Table 3 summarizes the main differences between the two occasions.

First Occasion (2000–2001). Whereas the first occasion was initiated by top management (the third-generation owner CEO and a nonfamily member COO), the identity construction was delegated to a team of middle managers. In the context of increasing financial volatility and loss of direction in the organization, the strategic intent was to reconstruct the brand strategy of the LEGO Group, focusing on a clarification and redefinition of LEGO core values and the implications for its brand portfolio. The emerging crisis was primarily caused by a dramatic shift in the toy market in the 1990s with the introduction of digital toys and games,

such as PlayStation and Game Boy, to LEGO's core consumers, primarily defined as boys aged 4–12. The company responded by extending the brand to include new kinds of toys and established, for instance, a new business division, LEGO Media, in London to develop computer games and television series. The company also increased its dependency on licenses, such as Harry Potter and Star Wars, and expanded its global amusement parks. However, the many extensions eroded the distinctiveness of the LEGO identity in the minds of its core stakeholders, confusing employees and consumers with respect to the identity of LEGO both as an organization and as a provider of play experiences (Hatch and Schultz 2008, Schultz and Hatch 2003). A failed identity reconstruction that took place from 1997 to 1999, spearheaded by a leading brand consulting company (Bartle Bogle Hegarty), combined with the continuous brand extension constituted part of the context for the first occasion.

The goal of the first occasion was to create more clarity and coherence in identity claims within the limits of the established vision and mission. After deciding to rely on its own people, the company formed an eight-member interdisciplinary task force that included middle managers and the support of one researcher (the first author). Although managed by the Danish headquarters, members came from several European markets and the United States. The task force worked for a seven-month period beginning in January 2000. Its members worked closely with top management and the most relevant business units, including those who participated in past reconstruction processes. The task force generated some disagreement, notably between its European and American members, reflecting different perceptions of LEGO's brand position. In Europe, the LEGO brand was associated with quality developmental toys for children, whereas in the United States, LEGO was associated with colorful plastic bricks. These dissimilar perceptions created different ideas as to what the LEGO brand could become in the future. The task force formulated a new brand strategy, including a rearticulation of its core values, brand architecture, and positioning statement, as shown in Table 3. Five core values were selected from among more than 50 existing LEGO values and were

Table 3 Comparing Occasions of Identity Reconstruction at the LEGO Group

| | Occasion 1: Redefining LEGO values | Occasion 2: Rethinking the LEGO raison d'être |
|---|---|---|
| Strategic situation | Refocusing brand after long period of brand extension and increasing financial volatility | Turnaround as a return to core business as a foundation for the future |
| Strategic intent | Redefine brand strategy within existing vision | Rethink foundation of the brand, including brand position |
| Hierarchical position | Middle management team, eight members | Top management team, headed by new CEO |
| Time horizon of identity reconstruction | <p>Past identity claims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1978: From “construction toy” to “creative and developmental quality toy,” stressing how the toy improves child development • 1997–1998: Attempt to create one coherent identity for the LEGO Company based on the idea that it “stimulates creativity” <p>Future reach of claims: Near future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine-month rollout plan launched in 2002 that includes claims leading to changes in visual identity; communication toolbox available for all markets • New brand architecture with four brand portals • Redefined organizational roles and responsibilities in innovation, communication, and marketing organization • Reduction in the number of advertising agencies from 40 to 2. LEGO Brand School established, inviting employees to elaborate how refined LEGO values translate to their work | <p>Past identity claims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>First articulations of identity claims in the 1930s:</i> Reinstated motto of the founder “Only the best is good enough” • <i>LEGO system in the 1950s:</i> Creativity and sustaining originality: System in play; playful learning; principle of repeatability, i.e., LEGO bricks can be used again and again to build new things (repeat usage) <p>Future reach of claims: Distant future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three stages in strategy renewal; increased focus on differentiation: • Turnaround: Survival (2004–2005), e.g., closing of product lines and subbrands, outsourcing, downsizing • Business transformation: Making the most of the core (2006–2008), e.g., renew LEGO core products, new simplified brand framework, insourcing • Brand: Revitalization and growth (2009 and beyond), e.g., development of new digital forms of play, global expansion of core products, increased user involvement |
| Scope of identity reconstruction | <p>Narrow scope: Selection and redefinition of claims</p> <p><i>Selecting among existing claims:</i> LEGO core values reduced and restated, but not dramatically altered. The brand was redefined from a “product and platform driven brand” to a “corporate brand of substance” and positioned from one that “stimulates creativity” to having the “power to create”^a</p> <p><i>Redefining selected claims:</i> Five core values: “From quality to trusted” “From creativity to self-expression” “From fun to active fun” “From learning to playful learning” “From imagination to endless ideas”</p> | <p>Extended scope: Rethinking full range of identity claims</p> <p><i>New claims:</i> Redefining vision and raison d'être to “systematic creativity”</p> <p><i>Redefinition of existing claims:</i> Mission, beliefs, the importance and meaning of sustainability in relation to all stakeholders</p> <p><i>Elimination claims:</i> Slogan (“Play on”); brand personality and the brand architecture model, including discontinuing girl's brands, multiple subbrands, games, and television shows and movies licensed to other companies</p> |
| Depth of identity reconstruction | <p>Limited depth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content focused on choosing and redefining core values, clarifying corporate brand idea, and relating to brand architecture • Changes designed to build a focused, LEGO-specific understanding of play, learning, and creativity different from competitors | <p>Extensive depth:</p> <p>Content focused on existential fundamental issues such as “Why do we exist” and “What is our raison d'être?”; defining LEGO's vision, reconfirming unique 75-year-old identity emerging from LEGO as “systematic creativity”^b</p> <p>Evoking of original “Only the Best Is Good Enough” motto inspires Shared Vision; aiming for a premium niche position as an “idea-based company” and moving away from unrestrained brand extensions</p> |

^aSee the final task force report “The Lego Brand and Future Strategy” (LEGO 2001).

^bSee the CEO strategy report “Shared Vision” (LEGO 2007).

redefined to make them more unique to LEGO's identity (e.g., a shift from “fun” to “active fun”). As a consequence of the ambition to create a more coherent global LEGO brand expression, innovation and marketing func-

tions were reorganized, and the number of advertising agencies was significantly reduced. Finally, the LEGO Brand School was established to enable employees to relate the five core values to their daily work.

Second Occasion 2005–2007. The LEGO Group's economic situation worsened, creating increasing financial pressure, both because of soaring costs in new extended business areas and the inherent volatility of a seasonal licensing business. The second occasion began as a comprehensive turnaround after a significant drop in revenue and net profit in 2003 and 2004, where the company faced its largest deficit in history. The turnaround was set off by a replacement of top management in October 2004, where Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, who had initially joined the LEGO Group as a business strategist, was appointed the first nonfamily CEO. The second occasion was initiated by the new CEO together with a small team of LEGO managers (senior vice presidents), several of whom had also been members of the Global Management Team during the first occasion. The strategic intent was to conduct a comprehensive rethinking of the *raison d'être* of the company in 2006, following a year of crisis management involving significant downsizing measures (reductions from approximately 8,000 to 5,000 employees), outsourcing production overseas, and the closing down of multiple product lines and subbrands. The time of the second occasion covers the development of this turnaround and related strategic changes over a three-year period, focusing on the material and activities relevant to organizational identity reconstruction developed by the top management team between 2005 and 2007. Thus, the boundaries of the second occasion for identity reconstruction were less clear than those of the first occasion.

During the second occasion, the new CEO also involved external stakeholders to learn from their perceptions of LEGO's identity. In his own words, he started talking to fans and members of LEGO brand communities, drawing inspiration from key opinion leaders whose creativity was stimulated by playing with LEGO bricks: "So all those fans, I started talking to them, because they were known to LEGO, but they were known as the shadow market or the weird guys" (CEO interview 2008). During the second occasion, the influence of adult LEGO fans changed, as they were reinterpreted from a rather annoying "shadow market" to a valuable source of insight in rethinking core identity. Based on a critical examination of existing identity claims, as well as the elimination of several types of claims, such as slogans, brand extensions, and architecture, much of the previous identity was discarded and replaced with a new and simplified niche identity. The outcome was a redefinition of the identity claim of the LEGO Group from a mass market producer of play material to a premium idea-based company dedicated to "systematic creativity." As indicated in Table 3, each claim articulated during the second occasion was intended to go beyond a decade, combining a focus on the LEGO core with the pursuit of new digital opportunities.

Time Horizon in the Past and the Future

Of particular relevance to this study is that the past was deliberately evoked during both occasions, but each occasion drew upon its own memory of evoked historical periods. It is important to note that differences in the time horizon of the past were echoed in the time horizons of the identity claims for the future.

First Occasion: Shorter Time Horizon. During the first occasion, task force members recalled memories from the two most recent deliberate reconstructions of identity claims in 1978 and in 1997–1998. The identity reconstruction of 1978 was intended to transform the identity of LEGO from a pure construction idea to a creative, quality developmental toy. As a consequence, different subbrands that contributed to the fragmentation of its identity were developed. The 1977–1978 identity reconstruction was a reaction to this increasing fragmentation and sought to produce a more coherent brand based on "stimulating creativity" designed to generate a single company identity. The task force members used these "lessons from the past" (LEGO 2001, p. 11) to expand and position proposed claims for the future. They specified how they deemed both of these preceding identity reconstructions as "failures," leading to a drift toward a "stand-alone product focus and a fragmented identity" (LEGO 2001, p. 12). Their interpretation of the 1997–1998 reconstruction was that the company was strongly determined to create a coherent identity but failed to implement it: "The company was not able to muster enough discipline and shared responsibility to take this step forward" (LEGO 2001, p. 11).

In developing their identity claims for the future, the LEGO Group task force focused on the near future, suggesting a nine-month rollout plan that included a range of new activities supporting the adaptation and execution of redefined identity claims (LEGO 2001, pp. 25–30). The revised expression and communication of identity claims comprised a refinement of the visual identity based on the LEGO logo and primary colors, along with the development of a communication toolbox, a metaphor for comprehensive internal online sources containing media and advertising material available for all markets. Furthermore, a number of roles and responsibilities were redefined as the company changed future communication and marketing practices. Finally, the LEGO Group established a "Brand School," where all employees were invited to discuss how the redefined LEGO values would influence their work. In defining these activities, tensions between the European and American task force members emerged in relation to how far the company should centralize the adaptation of identity claims, such as the elaboration of the brand position and association with external agencies.

Second Occasion: Longer Time Horizon. The second occasion involved a greater leap backwards in time, as memories were evoked from the long (75-year) existence of the company and the development of its central idea of a “system in play.” The management team returned to the era of the founding of the LEGO Group before the brick was invented in 1949, making the point that the LEGO idea did not originate from a specific artifact (i.e., the brick) alone. Instead, identity claims were articulated in response to the goal of delivering the best to its stakeholders, as stated in the first company motto in the 1930s, “*Det bedste er ikke for godt*” (translated to “Only the best is good enough”), and the key idea that children should always be able to play with the best materials. During the second occasion, LEGO managers also evoked memories about the development of the “system in play” in the 1950s, which was identified as the “timeless core” that had existed throughout the history of the company. Thus, managers evoked a more distant past than in the first occasion, drawing on early articulations of the “idea of good play” (origin) and “system in play” (1950s). Looking back on the process during a 2009 interview, the CEO explains,

To me, the motto was what should and could be kept as a bridge to the past. Remember it was a financial turnaround, and the business was almost turned upside down, but we all talked about it as a return to the core. So what is the logic of that? When you return to the core, shouldn't you just go back to the old ways of doing things? Ideally, you should try and take the best things from the past, but it is never like that in practice, and bring them into the future.

The second occasion occurred at the beginning of the second stage of an intended seven-year strategic renewal of the company, as shown in Table 3. The fundamental reconstruction of identity set the direction and priorities for the future and was intended to rebuild trust in the new management team's ability to articulate the core of the past as a long-term future ambition. The CEO further explains in a 2009 interview,

So, in our case, there was a journey of discussing what was actually inside the core of LEGO, and I can tell you that it is a very hard discussion because it is a very emotional discussion. . . . And if there is a misalignment between your identity and your destiny, you will not become successful, you will be inconsistent, or you can say that you are a company without integrity.

Comparing Identity Reconstructions. The near past evoked in the first occasion pointed toward its short-term implementation process, whereas the more distant past of the second occasion was used to set the direction for a long-term strategic transformation to recreate the integrity of the company. These differences in time horizon, with respect to both the past and the future (a short versus long time horizon), framed the overall temporality in the further analysis of how evoking of memory influenced the articulations of identity.

Scope of Identity Reconstruction and Range of Memory Forms

The reconstruction of identity claims differed between the two occasions in relation to the range of identity claims that were reconstructed, in the sense that the first reconstruction had a more narrow scope than the second reconstruction. The task force responsible focused on selecting and redefining five core values and recreating brand architecture, as shown in Table 3, which involved a limited range of identity claims articulated at the time. In contrast, the second occasion comprised a wider range of identity claims, as almost no claim was left untouched. Some claims, such as “systematic creativity,” were created anew, whereas some, such as the redefinition of core values, were redefined, and still others such as beliefs, personality statements, slogans, and several subbrands and brand extensions, were eliminated. In short, the scope of the claims was significantly wider for the second occasion.

First Occasion: Limited Range of Memory Forms and Narrow Scope in Claims. Task force members primarily evoked the past using textual memory, which comprised various kinds of documents from internal files related to past identity reconstructions to previous corporate communications material (e.g., advertising campaigns). They assessed LEGO brand performance over time, taking advantage of the ability to compare and contrast sources of information. The numbers told them that the company had kept a strong focus on the top line, which had supported the wide extensions of the brand. In addition, the task force referred to a 2000 booklet entitled *Remembering Why We Are Here*, in which current top management offered their interpretation of the origin of LEGO's identity. The booklet states the following:

First, we should take a moment to remember who we are. And why we are here. What is the LEGO Company all about? We believe in certain things. Like stimulating children's imagination, creativity and learning. This is why consumers have remained loyal to the LEGO brand and have made us successful for so many decades. These ideas are timeless. And we believe they will continue to make us successful for many decades to come. . . .
(LEGO 2000, p. 5)

The booklet provided management's explanations for the cause of poor financial results in 1999, stating, “One problem was our own exuberance. After a great year in 1998, we became overconfident. It could be said that we put too much on our plate. . .” (LEGO 2000, p. 7). A secondary source was oral memory, whereby task force members listened to stories from managers involved in the two previous identity reconstructions (1978 and 1997–1998), including detailed perspectives on what went wrong. Some mentioned the lack of managerial persistence, whereas others talked about the autonomy of local markets. These explanations shaped their

awareness of the difficulties of identity reconstruction. The third-generation owner of the LEGO Group also shared his perceptions of the LEGO heritage, stating that his aspirations for identity reconstruction were a return to “the core of the LEGO idea in new ways,” as indicated in an interview in 2000: “Vision is part of our heritage. Look into it, but do not feel restricted by it You should build on the strengths of the past. The brick should always be the core, but you should aim at going back to the core in new ways.” Thus, oral memory was central in evoking what the owner perceived as the heritage of the LEGO identity and the elements of the past he hoped to take into the future. During the first occasion, there was no special effort to evoke material memory, apart from one visit to the LEGO Idea House, a corporate display of the most recent LEGO product lines. This visit gave task force members an impression of the fragmentation of the LEGO identity and confirmed how product inventions that followed the identity reconstruction of the 1990s had moved the identity away from the construction idea.

Second Occasion: Broader Range of Memory Forms and Extended Scope in Claims. In contrast to the first occasion, the top managers responsible for identity construction during the second occasion evoked material memory in a variety of ways, referring to the origin of the company long before the LEGO brick was invented. Despite his humble beginnings, the founder, Ole Kirk Christiansen, articulated the kind of company he aimed to create through his motto: “Only the best is good enough.” Being a carpenter, he made the first hand-carved sign expressing the motto himself. When the CEO reinterpreted what he called the “deeper purpose” or “spirit” of the company (expressed through oral memory) in 2005, he placed a copy of the sign in his new office as a physical reminder for employees and visitors. He also found a new use for the founder’s home, turning it into a corporate museum to replace the former Idea House. The founder’s home had been empty and was on the market when long-serving employees and the owner of LEGO reminded the new CEO of its importance. The new museum included a wooden toy collection and presentations of the historical development of LEGO product lines from their origins. It also created a playful sensory experience of the LEGO past using color, sound, and light to make the displayed artifacts come to life. As the CEO explained,

That heritage is naturally important, because it is the proof of the pudding of the ideology And we made an internal museum, like a shrine to what LEGO is all about, where we explain all these stories about our management philosophy, brand philosophy, product philosophy, and company philosophy, if you like That is LEGO pride. (CEO interview 2008)

Through this physical legacy, the management team emphasized the need for employees and fans to experience the timeless qualities of the material product itself

to understand why the company existed. Finally, the management team evoked memories of distinctive consumers, such as fans and thought leaders, by listening to their memories of playing with LEGO products. Similar to the first occasion, the CEO evoked oral memory in conversations with the owner, the management team, and other external key stakeholders seeking to understand the LEGO heritage and to select cues that could be applied in future strategy. The central claim of the reconstructed identity became “systematic creativity” as the interpretation of the original creativity “the LEGO way” (CEO interview 2007, LEGO 2007). In later reflections concerning his attraction to the original identity claim, “Only the best,” during a 2009 interview, the CEO stated four key interpretations of what the motto had come to mean to him and, ultimately, to the LEGO Group:

One is doing good for something else in the company. The second is continuous improvement—you can always do better. The third one is competitive positioning, because we are going to compete by being better rather than being bigger. Finally, it says a lot about business sustainability and that it has to be good enough not just for children, but for all of our stakeholders.

According to the CEO, the LEGO Group had a rich tradition for remembering past experiences and central values through stories told by employees with long tenure: “One of the secrets of the LEGO Group is that we have a lot of people who have been here for a long time” (CEO interview 2009). One of the legendary stories evoking the spirit of the founder is the “duck story,” which was recorded and replayed to the management team and later used in the museum (according to a 2009 interview with the manager of Idea House). In short, this story from the 1930s recalls the founder’s young son, who proudly tells his father that he has only painted the wooden ducks that were going to Sweden twice instead of the normal three layers, in order to save money for the company. His father orders him to take his bike to the train station, pick up the big box of ducks, and add the third layer of paint before going to bed. The son ends up working all night and never forgets his father’s insistence on “the best,” whatever the situation.

Material and oral memory evoked the origins of the company, whereas textual memory primarily provided information from the past decade, focusing on a variety of key performance indicators that demonstrated what the management team called “10 years of deteriorating performance” (LEGO 2007). However, textual memory also reconfirmed interpretations of the spirit of the company, as discovered by the CEO when he came across an old interview with the founder:

I found out by accident later that he said in a newspaper interview in 1951 that he had never been a salesperson. He wanted to make a product that was so good that other people would talk about it and recommend it to their

friends, and that [it] was the intention of being the best—make it so good that other people will talk about how good it is. (CEO interview 2009)

Comparing Identity Reconstructions. During both occasions, LEGO managers evoked the past through a variety of memory forms. Our findings suggest that the broader range of memory forms (the addition of material memory) used during the second occasion facilitated a broader scope in the articulation of identity claims by introducing a broader inclusion of claims to be defined, redefined, or eliminated. Bringing forward past experiences through a wider range of memory forms, such as reports on failures, stories from critical moments, artifacts from the origin of the company, and prototypes from fundamental innovations, enabled the top managers to include more identity claims in the conception of the future organization and to note a broader range of identity claims to be redefined or eliminated during the second reconstruction. In contrast, the more limited inclusion of memory forms during the first occasion narrowed the scope of identity claims, resulting in a process focused on selecting and redefining core values.

Depth of Identity Reconstruction and Combinations of Memory Forms

The identity reconstruction processes also differed with respect to the depth of the reconstruction, or how fundamentally identity claims were reconstructed. The reconstruction during the second occasion entailed a deeper, more fundamental rearticulation of the *raison d'être* of the LEGO Group, whereas the first occasion had a more limited depth comprising corporate values and brand architecture. Although the differences in the scope of identity reconstruction discussed above seem to have influenced the depth of identity claims, our analysis also suggests that the combination of memory forms influenced the depth of identity reconstruction. Drawing on the classic distinction between coordination of interdependencies in organizations, as suggested by Thompson (1967) and Mintzberg (1979), memory forms were combined in different ways during the two occasions, namely, sequentially and reciprocally.

First Occasion: Sequential Combination of Memory Forms and Limited Depth in Claims. Dominated by textual and oral memory forms, the first occasion was characterized by a sequential flow during a year-long process. The process was briefly initiated, using material memory, through a collective visit to the corporate display of artifacts. As a second step, task force members used oral memory to test their interpretations of what had gone wrong in previous attempts to reconstruct the LEGO identity. Next, task force members relied on different forms of textual memory to define a frame of reference for the reconstruction process, inviting a variety of comparisons with past claims. These different memory forms were combined sequentially in such a way

that the content of the memory evoked from one step fed into the next. The sequential flow should be seen in relation to an orchestrated reconstruction process in which task force members met regularly and engaged in a systematic collection and discussion of data. However, this process appears to have prevented a more spontaneous inclusion of memory forms that might have otherwise emerged. Also, to seek a compromise between the differing interpretations of brand position held by European and American participants, the leader of the task force formalized the process in a stage-gate fashion, clarifying premises and topics for discussion during each workshop, to ensure that the task force moved forward despite disagreements.

Second Occasion: Reciprocal Combination of Memory Forms and Extended Depth in Claims. The memory forms used during the second occasion were combined more reciprocally, such that several memory forms were evoked simultaneously and allowed to spontaneously support and influence each other. This identity construction was orchestrated by a top management team engaged in severe self-scrutiny that actively pursued the cues emerging in the process. The length and intensity of the identity reconstruction appeared to enhance the inclination to pursue a broader range of memories, allowing the reciprocity of the memory forms to unfold. In particular, material and oral memory were combined when rethinking the *raison d'être* of the company, such as when a combination of artifacts and stories brought the origin of the company into the present. In addition, the managers combined their material knowledge of the product with different narratives of what playing with LEGO meant to different stakeholders.

This is illustrated by the CEO's realization that opinion leaders were influenced by the memory of playing with LEGO toys as children, enabling them to tell stories of how they applied "systematic creativity" later in life. The CEO explained, "Because when they have built with LEGO all their life and they are passionate about LEGO, they may just have founded *Wired* magazine, Google, Amazon, or Microsoft. It doesn't mean that we are something for everybody, but we have some relevance in the world" (CEO interview 2008). Another example of the reciprocal reinforcement of memory forms is the display of the founder's wooden hand-carved motto in the CEO's office, combined with the CEO evoking the story of the LEGO idea of going "beyond the brick." The account of how the new CEO was about to sell the founder's old house illustrates the gradual discovery of the importance of bringing memory into the identity reconstruction. As mentioned above, when the CEO was confronted with stories told by employees and the owner about the past importance of the founder's house, he realized that creating a complete display of LEGO products there would provide a means for employees and visitors to experience the continuous development of the LEGO idea.

Comparing Identity Reconstructions. The combination of memory forms differed in the two occasions, suggesting that—all other things being equal—a reciprocal combination of multiple memory forms likely enhanced the depth of identity reconstruction. The first occasion was orchestrated as a sequential use of memory forms feeding into each other. This created a process of narrowing down relevant claims, but it did not motivate an examination of the assumptions behind those claims. The sequential process enabled the members both to make choices between the identity claims available and to anticipate their implementation in the future, but most relied on one memory form at a time. The second occasion was a more longitudinal process, drawing upon a reciprocal combination of memory forms. Reciprocal combinations appear to have mutually reinforced and deepened the memories and imagination of the company's enduring and future identity. The reciprocal combination of memory forms, such as the joint use of oral and material memory forms, enhanced the depth of identity reconstruction, enabling both a deliberate “forgetting” of past identity claims and a fundamental renewal of claims intended to be brought forward into the future. Bringing forward the founding period stimulated a deeper reconstruction of identity claims, as it was a more reflexive and explicit consideration of the fundamental ideas and principles behind the company, calling for an articulation of the future of the company at the same level.

Discussion of Findings

Our study indicates how evoking different organizational memory forms influenced the articulation of claims for the future identity of the LEGO Group.

Connecting Memory to Identity. First, the time horizon used to evoke the past was echoed in the time horizon of the identity claims for the future. In addition to reflecting March's (1999) argument that long time perspectives in the past encourage similar perspectives for the future, the time horizon shows how evoking organizational memory by reaching far back in time enabled organizational members to gain a wider future time horizon for the identity reconstruction process. A longer time perspective promotes greater abstraction from the present and may consequently motivate bolder claims for the future. In contrast, when organizational members in the study looked back at most recent identity reconstructions, they were more likely to propose incremental changes for the future.

Second, the study shows how using different memory forms expands the scope of identity claims for the future. Compared with existing memory research (e.g., Moorman and Miner 1997, Sutton and Hargadon 1996, Walsh and Ungson 1991, Ybema 2010), oral and material memory in particular were given considerably more attention in identity reconstruction, as they were widely used

during the second occasion. We suspect that the direct sensing of artifacts through texture, form, and color was remarkably influential in evoking memory and stimulating imaginations concerning how future claims could be expressed.

Finally, the LEGO case demonstrates how combinations of memory forms enhanced the depth of identity reconstruction. It was apparent that the reciprocal use of several memory forms opened a path to deeper understanding of past identities, inspiring greater depth in the articulation of the intended future identity of the company. For example, central artifacts such as products, museums, and emblems encouraged managers to evoke other memory forms in interpreting material cues, such as listening more carefully to employee stories about the past. Oral memory, in the form of storytelling and conversations, also proved to be a significant memory form (for example, when LEGO managers recalled the passion and thoughts of the founder and other central actors from the past). The stories motivated the top management team to search for more textual memory documenting LEGO's behavior over time.

Crisis, Power, and the Extent of Identity Reconstruction. On both occasions the LEGO Group was facing a crisis, but the second occasion represented a crisis of a higher magnitude than the first. In addition, LEGO's top management was substantially more involved in the identity construction process during the second occasion, notably through the personal involvement of the CEO. Whereas our analysis has focused on the relationships between the use of memory forms and the extent (time horizon, scope, and depth) of identity reconstruction, neither the differences in severity of the crisis nor the involvement by top management can be neglected as influential factors. It is obviously difficult to disentangle factors of influence and assess their relative impact in a case study analysis. Nevertheless, a distinction may be drawn between the impetus to the process on the one hand and the content of the process on the other. The looming financial crisis and the presence of a CEO may have combined to ensure momentum in the search for past cues and a greater intensity in the process of articulating identity claims for the future. It is not obvious, however, that a more severe crisis triggers a search for past cues and claims for the future that are more distant in time, nor that the scope of claims for change necessarily becomes greater with a more severe crisis (Nystrom and Starbuck 1984). However, the presence of top management may have kept pressure on actors to actively engage in the process, as illustrated by the 120-page CEO strategy plan produced during the second occasion. Apart from ensuring impetus to the process, it is also likely that the presence of top management encourages a focus on strategically more consequential claims; hence, the scope of claims for future identity may have been influenced by top management engagement during the second occasion.

Beyond the LEGO Case. Our findings derive from one case study, but they raise several issues related to organizational identity change in general. During both occasions of identity reconstruction, LEGO Group managers were confronted with problem-ridden strategic situations that likely obliged them to engage in a more conscious, comprehensive identity reconstruction than would have occurred in less troubled times. This echoes the argument that identity is seen as more salient in times of transition (Albert and Whetten 1985, Gioia et al. 2000). This observation is supported by other empirical studies of identity reconstructions, showing how perceived identity threat at Bang & Olufsen (Ravasi and Schultz 2006), spin-offs (Corley and Gioia 2004), and the discrepancies between identity and externally construed images in the New York Port Authority (Dutton and Dukerich 1991) triggered intense self-scrutiny. Furthermore, scholars of organizational change have argued that crises and high levels of ambiguity motivate organizational members to bring about change of a more profound nature (Bartunek 1984, Hedberg et al. 1976, Hedberg 1981). In that sense, the findings from the identity reconstruction at the LEGO Group may be relevant to other organizations in situations of crisis or transformation. Consequently, the two occasions of LEGO's identity reconstruction were well suited for studying the specific processes of identity change. However, it cannot be concluded that identity reconstruction takes place only in situations of crisis or transformation. Our case also includes several past identity reconstructions evoked during the first occasion, when times were less troubled in the 1970s and 1990s. Identity construction may well occur on a regular basis, as also shown by Ravasi and Schultz (2006), but the intensity of the search for cues in the past, and the extent of reconstruction of claims, may vary with the sense of urgency that the actors experience.

We would claim that the importance of the past is more germane to organizational identity change than to other kinds of organizational change. Questions about organizational identity encourage a search for cues from the past more naturally than other change efforts, such as organizational restructuring, change of routines, or strategy change, which tend to be directed toward the future. However, evoking the organizational past requires organizations to have maintained accessible cues from the past in some way. If the LEGO Group had not preserved, documented, and maintained a focus on its past, the opportunities for bringing the past into the present would not have been the same. Perhaps, also because of being family owned, the LEGO Group has been particularly concerned with narrating its past, just as the materiality of the product—the brick—has enabled the company to collect and display artifacts covering a long period of time. Still, there are many examples of nonfamily-owned companies recalling their origins through the use of artifacts, such as Hewlett-Packard's

garage museum on Addison Avenue in Palo Alto, CA. Although family owned, LEGO is a professionally managed manufacturing company operating and competing on a global scale. The family's influence on top management changed between the two occasions from a family to a nonfamily CEO, indicating that evoking the past was important irrespective of family or nonfamily leadership. Hence, the LEGO Group was well suited for a study of how organizational actors retrieve their past for the future. The processes the LEGO Group went through illustrate how the inclination to evoke the past might play a particularly important role in organizational identity change.

Temporality and Organizational Identity: Contributions and Suggestions for Future Research

An Ongoing Temporal Perspective on Organizational Identity

As argued in the review of temporality and organizational identity, studies of organizational identity that pay attention to time tend to apply what we call a periodic perspective on temporality (e.g., Corley and Gioia 2004, Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Although each period may be studied in terms of its own identity dynamics, such as interrelations between identity and future image (e.g., Dutton and Dukerich 1991, Gioia and Thomas 1996), the temporal dimension of organizational identity is understood as adaptive change of identity from one time period to another. Whereas studies adhering to a periodic perspective of temporality show how identities change or remain stable over time, an ongoing perspective as used here focuses more explicitly on *how* change or stabilization of identity arises from the work of organizational members as they use the materials of the present to transform past organizational experience into ambitions for the future.

Rather than operate from the idea that identity changes or stays the same, an ongoing temporal perspective sheds light on how connections between the past and future are highlighted, modified, suppressed, or ignored, and other connections are made in their place with a focus on the present (Hernes 2007). In this way, identity may be viewed as simultaneously enduring and changing. This simultaneous presence of continuity and change is illustrated in the ongoing search for the core of LEGO's identity, which, despite being evoked differently in the two occasions, was an enduring theme in LEGO's identity reconstruction. Thus, an ongoing temporal perspective on identity reconstruction avoids the question of identity as stable/enduring versus changing/dynamic (e.g., Corley et al. 2006, Gioia et al. 2000). Consequently, periodic and ongoing perspectives on temporality pose different, yet complementary, questions concerning the study of

organizations. In relation to Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition of organizational identity as the central, distinctive, and enduring nature of an organization, a temporal perspective focuses on organizational identity as temporally, rather than spatially, structured. Instead of conceiving the role of time as enduring continuity, it considers how the past and future are continuously reconstructed by organizational actors when seeking to define what the organization is becoming. As a consequence, what are considered central and distinctive characteristics of the organization in the past may change, just as the ways in which central cues from the past influence claims for the future.

Our conceptual framework invites further analysis of how organizational actors mobilize their "temporal resources" (i.e., the past, present, and future) in identity reconstruction (Ybema 2010, p. 483), implying that, on certain occasions, some identity cues are chosen as significant whereas others are not. This highlights the contingent nature of the present as an ongoing perspective. An identity cue, such as the story about the painted ducks, may have produced different claims if it had been evoked under other circumstances or may have been ignored altogether. As stated previously, the past is treated as open to (re)interpretation (March 1999, Weick 1995), which from an ongoing temporal perspective means that evoking different memories from the past might well set the stage for different claims for future identity. This invites more precise questions about the context of evocation, including the composition of actors and their respective power bases.

Instead of studying how organizational identity changes in response to various external and internal changes, we focused on the ways in which cues from the organization's own past identity construction processes were actually evoked and transformed into claims for the future. To arrive at fuller explanations of identity reconstruction processes, further research could combine studies of contextual factors with ethnographic, real-time studies of identity reconstruction to better understand the combined effects of external factors and internal processes. Such studies could then compare actors' perceptions of the contextual factors surrounding the present situation with choices made regarding what to retain from the organization's past in making informed choices for the future. Also, a further elaboration of an ongoing perspective of temporality would benefit from longitudinal studies comprising several different occasions of identity reconstruction to further examine how these shifting connections between the past and the future are intertwined and to better understand what motivates organizational actors to evoke different moments of the past in the present.

Multiple, Related Memory Forms and Their Implications for Identity

The processes by which organizational actors evoke the past have not been extensively addressed in organization studies (Olivera 2001). An important starting point is the distinction between textual, oral, and material memory forms constituting what we have labeled the "materials of the present." Several scholars, including Mead (1932), Moorman and Miner (1997), Walsh and Ungson (1991), Sutton and Hargadon (1996), and, more recently, Ybema (2010), have identified multiple forms (materials, types, bins, resources). But studies that draw explicit distinctions among textual, oral, and material memory forms, or that explore the implications of combining these memory forms, are lacking. Our analysis of memory provides a number of useful ideas for future research, which we believe are particularly relevant for identity studies (Schultz et al. 2012).

First, although we have developed a framework for the use and influence of different memory forms in the process of organizational identity reconstruction, the distinctions between the three forms remain coarse. Each memory form covers a wide variety of manifestations, which may exert a significantly different impact on the articulation of identity claims for the future, pointing to the need for further exploration of the contingencies of identity reconstruction. For example, when the brewery Carlsberg Group recently engaged in the articulation of claims for the future following the discovery of a personal letter from the founder written in the late 19th century, the letter served as guidance in defining how the company will engage with society in the future. The founding of Carlsberg is well described through various other textual memory forms as well, such as corporate narratives and research-based books, but the evocation of this specific and original textual memory form had considerable influence on the articulation of future claims, motivating the actors to think carefully about long-term societal concerns.

Second, our study indicates that the combination of memory forms over time matters, such as whether they are combined sequentially or reciprocally or in any other way. Much empirical work is still needed to further develop the temporal interplay between the evocation of memory forms and how different uses weave into one another over time to generate coherent, yet shifting, accounts of past and future organizational identities.

Third, the influence of external strategic context on the use of memory forms could be explored further. Our study shows how a serious crisis triggered the search for identity cues, evoked by material artifacts and stories from the founding of the company, whereas the near past was evoked using textual memory in a less critical situation. A tentative hypothesis is that the more critical an occasion is, the more it encourages actors not only to search far back in time to reconstruct their identity

for the future but also to include a broader range of memory forms. Other studies might test whether this hypothesis holds and then correlate the effects of other external factors with the use of memory forms.

The Relevance of Temporality

Although the focus of this paper has been to better understand the importance of temporality in identity reconstruction, we also want to highlight the relevance of research of this nature to management. Some companies bring forward the past to define the future—for example, Fiat, which relaunched a modern version of their classic model 500 from the 1960s, or Volkswagen, which relaunched a modern version of the Beetle. These efforts represent more than nostalgic appeal. The artifacts, while evoking the past, also suggest a possible future. Similar examples are found in the fashion industry, where Burberry's turnaround involved using old trench coat drawings from World War I in their campaign. Such relaunches represent more than a mere repackaging of products: they also represent processes of organizational identity reconstruction. Whereas the Fiat 500 and the Volkswagen Beetle are material manifestations of memory used to claim future identity, we suspect that the processes of arriving at the new 500 or the new Beetle are inherently organizational and relied on evoking the organizational past. Studying how such processes take place could provide an important opportunity for organizational identity research. Here, it is necessary not only to consider the future as uncertain but also to consider the untapped potential of the past to frame the future within the constraints of the present. We believe, in particular, that troubled times increase the need for self-insight in organizations, calling for enhanced temporal awareness in the study of organizational identity, not as a new discipline of business history but as a deeper understanding of the potentiality of exploring the past to influence the future.

Electronic Companion

An electronic companion to this paper is available as part of the online version at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0731>.

Acknowledgments

In the writing of this paper, the authors are grateful for the feedback from their editor, Blake Ashforth, and the three anonymous reviewers. They have also benefitted from comments and inspiration from Daved Barry, Dennis Gioia, Mary Jo Hatch, Kristian Kreiner, James G. March, Stefan Meisniek, Mads Mordhorst, Thomas Smith, Kjell Tryggestad, Eero Vaara, and Uffe Oestergaard. They thank the CEO of the LEGO Group, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, for his contributions to this paper and all of the people from the LEGO Group who have made this study possible. An earlier version of this paper was included in Best Paper Proceedings at the Academy of Management Conference in Montreal 2010.

References

- Adler, N., A. B. Shani, A. Styhre, eds. 2004. *Collaborative Research in Organizations: Foundations for Learning, Change and Theoretical Development*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Albert, S., D. A. Whetten. 1985. Organizational identity. L. L. Cummings, B. M. Staw, eds. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 7. JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, 263–295.
- Anand, V., C. C. Manz, W. H. Glick. 1998. An organizational memory approach to information management. *Acad. Management Rev.* **23**(4) 796–809.
- Argyris, C. S., D. A. Schön. 1996. *Organizational Learning II: Theory, Method, and Practice*. Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Ashforth, B., F. Mael. 1996. Organizational identity and strategy as a context for the individual. J. A. C. Baum, J. E. Dutton, eds. *Advances in Strategic Management*, Vol. 13. JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, 19–64.
- Bartunek, J. M. 1984. Changing interpretive schemes and organizational restructuring: The example of a religious order. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **29**(3) 355–372.
- Bergson, H. 2007. *The Creative Mind*. Dover, New York.
- Blumer, H. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism*. University of California Press, Los Angeles.
- Boje, D. M. 1991. The storytelling organization: A study of story performance in an office-supply firm. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **36**(1) 106–126.
- Carlile, P. R. 2004. Transferring, translating, and transforming: An integrative framework for managing knowledge across boundaries. *Organ. Sci.* **15**(5) 555–568.
- Chia, R. 1996. *Organizational Analysis as Deconstructive Practice*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Clegg, S. R., C. Rhodes, M. Kornberger. 2007. Desperately seeking legitimacy: Organizational identity and emerging industries. *Organ. Stud.* **28**(4) 495–513.
- Corley, K. G., D. A. Gioia. 2004. Identity ambiguity and change in the wake of a corporate spin-off. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **49**(2) 173–208.
- Corley, K. G., C. V. Harquail, M. G. Pratt, M. A. Glynn, C. M. Fiol, M. J. Hatch. 2006. Guiding organizational identity through aged adolescence. *J. Management Inquiry* **15**(2) 85–99.
- Covington, C. R. 1985. Development of organizational memory in presidential agencies. *Admin. Soc.* **17**(2) 171–196.
- Czarniawska, B. 1997. *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Dutton, J. E., J. M. Dukerich. 1991. Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation. *Acad. Management J.* **34**(3) 517–554.
- Emirbayer, M., A. Mische. 1998. What is agency? *Amer. J. Sociol.* **103**(4) 962–1023.
- Feldman, M. 2000. Organizational routines as a source of continuous change. *Organ. Sci.* **11**(6) 611–629.
- Fiol, C. M. 1989. A semiotic analysis of corporate language: Organizational boundaries and joint venturing. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **34**(2) 277–303.
- Fiol, C. M. 1995. Corporate communications: Comparing executives' private and public statements. *Acad. Management J.* **38**(2) 522–536.
- Gersick, C. 1991. Revolutionary change theories: A multilevel exploration of the punctuated equilibrium paradigm. *Acad. Management Rev.* **16**(1) 10–36.

- Gioia, D. A., K. Chittipeddi. 1991. Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management J.* **12**(6) 433–448.
- Gioia, D. A., J. B. Thomas. 1996. Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **41**(3) 370–403.
- Gioia, D. A., K. G. Corley, T. Fabbri. 2002. Revising the past (while thinking in the future perfect tense). *J. Organ. Change Management* **15**(6) 622–635.
- Gioia, D. A., M. Schultz, K. G. Corley. 2000. Organizational identity, image, and adaptive instability. *Acad. Management Rev.* **25**(1) 63–81.
- Gioia, D. A., K. N. Price, A. L. Hamilton, J. B. Thomas. 2010. Forging an identity: An insider-outsider study of processes involved in the formation of organizational identity. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **55**(1) 1–46.
- Glaser, B. G., A. L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Aldine, New York.
- Hatch, M. J., M. Schultz. 2002. The dynamics of organizational identity. *Human Relations* **55**(8) 989–1018.
- Hatch, M. J., M. Schultz. 2008. *Taking Brand Initiative: How Companies Can Align Strategy, Culture, and Identity Through Corporate Branding*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Hedberg, B. 1981. How organizations learn and unlearn. P. C. Nystrom, W. H. Starbuck, eds. *Handbook of Organizational Design*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 3–27.
- Hedberg, B. L. T., P. C. Nystrom, W. H. Starbuck. 1976. Camping on seesaws: Prescriptions for a self-designing organization. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **21**(1) 41–65.
- Hernes, T. 2007. *Understanding Organization as Process: Theory for a Tangled World*. Routledge, London.
- Humphreys, M., A. D. Brown. 2002. Narratives of organizational identity and identification: A case study of hegemony and resistance. *Organ. Stud.* **23**(3) 421–447.
- Kroezen, J., P. Heugens. 2012. Organizational identity formation: Processes of identity imprinting and enactment in the Dutch microbrewing landscape. M. Schultz, S. Maguire, A. Langley, H. Tsoukas, eds. *Constructing Identity in and Around Organizations*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 89–128.
- Lawrence, B. S. 1984. Historical perspective: Using the past to study the present. *Acad. Management Rev.* **9**(2) 307–312.
- Levitt, B., J. G. March. 1988. Organizational learning. *Annual Rev. Sociol.* **14** 319–340.
- LEGO. 2000. *Remembering Why We Are Here*. Booklet. LEGO, Billund, Denmark.
- LEGO. 2001. The LEGO brand and future strategy. LEGO brand task force report, LEGO, Billund, Denmark.
- LEGO. 2007. Shared Vision. LEGO Group strategy report, LEGO, Billund, Denmark.
- Library of Congress. Types of primary sources for historians. Accessed October 2009, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>.
- Locke, K. 1996. Rewriting the discovery of grounded theory after 25 years? *J. Management Inquiry* **5**(3) 239–245.
- March, J. G. 1999. Research on organizations: Hopes for the past and lessons from the future. *Nordiske Organisationsstudier* **1**(1) 69–83.
- March, J. G., M. Schulz, X. Zhou. 2000. *The Dynamics of Rules*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.
- Martin de Holan, P., N. Phillips. 2004. Remembrance of things past? The dynamics of organizational forgetting. *Management Sci.* **50**(11) 1603–1613.
- Martin, J., M. S. Feldman, M. J. Hatch, S. B. Sitkin. 1983. The uniqueness paradox in organizational stories. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **28**(3) 438–453.
- Mead, G. H. 1932. *The Philosophy of the Present*. Open Court Publishing Company, Chicago.
- Mead, G. H. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Mintzberg, H. 1979. *The Structuring of Organizations*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Mohrman, S., C. Gibson, A. Mohrman. 2001. Doing research that is useful to practice: A model and empirical exploration. *Acad. Management J.* **44**(2) 357–375.
- Moorman, C., A. S. Miner. 1997. The impact of organizational memory on new product performance and creativity. *J. Marketing Res.* **34**(1) 91–106.
- Moorman, C., A. S. Miner. 1998. Organizational improvisation and organizational memory. *Acad. Management Rev.* **23**(4) 698–723.
- Nag, R., K. G. Corley, D. A. Gioia. 2007. The intersection of organizational identity, knowledge, and practice: Attempting strategic change via knowledge grafting. *Acad. Management J.* **50**(4) 821–847.
- Nissley, N., A. Casey. 2002. The politics of the exhibition: Viewing corporate memory through the paradigmatic lens of organizational memory. *British J. Management* **13**(S2) S35–S45.
- Nystrom, P. C., W. H. Starbuck. 1984. To avoid organizational crises, unlearn. *Organ. Dynam.* **12**(4) 53–65.
- Olick, J. 2007. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. Routledge, New York.
- Olivera, F. 2001. Memory systems in organizations: An empirical investigation of mechanisms for knowledge collection, storage and access. *J. Management Stud.* **37**(6) 811–832.
- Orlikowski, W. J. 2006. Material knowing: The scaffolding of human knowledgeability. *Eur. Inform. Systems* **15**(5) 460–466.
- Orr, J. 1990. Sharing knowledge, celebrating identity. D. Middleton, D. Edwards, eds. *Collective Remembering*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA, 169–189.
- Pickering, D., N. Turpin, C. Jenner. 1999. *The Ultimate LEGO Book*. Dorling Kindersly, London.
- Pratt, M. G. 2012. Rethinking identity construction processes in organizations: Three questions to consider. M. Schultz, S. Maguire, A. Langley, H. Tsoukas, eds. *Constructing Identity in and Around Organizations*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 21–50.
- Putnam, L. L., S. Boys. 2006. Revisiting metaphors of organizational communication. S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, eds. *Handbook of Organization Studies*. Sage, London, 561–576.
- Ravasi, D., M. Schultz. 2006. Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture. *Acad. Management J.* **49**(3) 433–458.
- Romanelli, E., M. Tushman. 1994. Organizational transformation as punctuated equilibrium: An empirical test. *Acad. Management J.* **37**(5) 1141–1666.
- Saussure, F. D. 1986. *Course in General Linguistics*. Open Court Publishing Company, Chicago.
- Schultz, M., M. J. Hatch. 2003. The cycles of corporate branding: The case of the LEGO Company. *Calif. Management Rev.* **46**(1) 6–26.

- Schultz, M., Y. M. Antorini, F. F. Csaba, eds. 2005. *Corporate Branding: Purpose, People, Process*. Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen.
- Schultz, M., M. J. Hatch, F. Ciccolella. 2006. Brand life in symbols and artifacts: The LEGO Company. A. Rafaeli, M. Pratt, eds. *Artifacts and Organizations: Beyond Mere Symbolism*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 141–161.
- Schultz, M., S. Maguire, A. Langley, H. Tsoukas, eds. 2012. *Constructing Identity in and Around Organizations*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Schutz, A. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Heinemann Educational Books, London.
- Smith, D. E. 2001. Texts and the ontology of organizations and institutions. *Stud. Cultures, Organ. Soc.* 7(2) 159–198.
- Star, S. L., J. R. Griesemer. 1989. Institutional ecology, “translations” and boundary objects: Amateurs and professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–1939. *Soc. Stud. Sci.* 19(3) 387–420.
- Suchman, L. A. 1987. *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human-Machine Communication*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Sutton, R. I., A. Hargadon. 1996. Brainstorming groups in context: Effectiveness in a product design firm. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 41(4) 685–718.
- Sveiby, K. 1996. Transfer of knowledge and the information processing professions. *Eur. Management J.* 14(4) 379–388.
- Thompson, J. D. 1967. *Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory*. Transaction Publishers, New York.
- Trice, H. M., J. M. Beyer. 1984. Studying organizational cultures through rites and ceremonials. *Acad. Management Rev.* 9(4) 653–669.
- Van de Ven, A. H. 2007. *Engaged Scholarship*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Walsh, J. P., G. R. Ungson. 1991. Organizational memory. *Acad. Management Rev.* 16(1) 57–91.
- Weber, M. 1968. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Weick, K. E. 1993. The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 38(4) 628–652.
- Weick, K. E. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Weick, K. E., K. M. Sutcliffe, D. Obstfeld. 2005. Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organ. Sci.* 16(4) 409–421.
- Whetten, D. A. 2006. Albert and Whetten revisited. *J. Management Inquiry* 15(3) 219–234.
- Whetten, D. A., A. Mackey. 2002. A social actor conception of organizational identity and its implications for the study of organizational reputation. *Bus. Soc.* 41(4) 393–414.
- Ybema, S. 2010. Talk of change: Temporal contrasts and collective identities. *Organ. Stud.* 31(4) 481–503.

Majken Schultz is a professor of management at the Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School since 1996. Her research focuses on processes of organizational identity construction, including the relations between identity, organizational culture, and branding, and the implications of identity construction for management practices. She serves on several company boards and the Board of Governors for the Academy of Management, and she is a regular columnist in Danish newspapers.

Tor Hernes is a professor of organization theory at the Copenhagen Business School and adjunct professor at Vestfold University College, Norway. He has previously held positions at Tromsø University and the Norwegian Business School (formerly the Norwegian School of Management). His work is centered on the development and application of process-based theory from philosophy and sociology in the study of organization.