
CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

ANTI-History

*Theorization, Application,
Critique, and Dispersion*

**NICHOLOUS M. DEAL
CHRISTOPHER M. HARTT
ALBERT J. MILLS**

ANTI-History

CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

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Critical Management Studies

ANTI-History: Theorization, Application, Critique and Dispersion

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| ANT | Actor–Network Theory |
| ASB | Atlantic Schools of Business Conference |
| MOS | Management and Organizational Studies |
| NCA | Non-corporeal Actant |
| Pan Am | Pan American World Airways |

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About the Authors

Nicholous M. Deal is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Business Administration and Tourism and Hospitality Management at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Canada. He obtained his PhD in Management at Saint Mary's University where he was first introduced to ANTi-History. In the time, since he has developed a research agenda in management and organization studies that problematizes political processes of marginalization through critical historiography vis-à-vis ANTi-Microhistory. His research has been published in *Management Decision*, the *Journal of Management History*, and *Management & Organizational History*. He is an Associate Editor of the journal *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, the social media editor for the *Journal of Management History*, and serves as the Elected Representative for doctoral students and junior faculty in the Management History Division of the Academy of Management.

Christopher M. Hartt is Professor of Management in Dalhousie University's Faculty of Agriculture. Growing up in an economically depressed area of Nova Scotia, he shared sports fields and classrooms with a diverse population. He noted that education seemed more related to family history than capability. 'Smart' kids went to university or prison. Fortunately, his family prized education and he received a BA and MBA by age 25. He worked 22 years managing for others and being an entrepreneur during which he often wondered if his co-workers, colleagues, and employees learned anything in university. In 2008 (age 47) he enrolled in the Sobey PhD and was introduced to critical management studies by Dr Jean Helms Mills and Dr Albert J. Mills. During that time, he developed non-corporeal actant (NCA) theory by applying critical sensemaking theory to micro aspects of actor-network theory. NCA theory looks to discover what is behind what seems to be irrational choices and possibly predict them. Key to further enlightenment was work with Indigenous scholars to connect the symmetry of actors (actor-network theory) with symbiosis of place (an idea consistent with many Indigenous traditions). This work owes much to ANTi-History and the many discussions with others from The Halifax School. He is married and has two adult sons: one farms 'clean' and sells vegetables and flowers at a local market and the other holds a PhD in Statistics and is an expert in sports analytics.

Albert J. Mills is Professor Emeritus of Management at Saint Mary's University (Canada) and Professor of Innovative Management at the University of Eastern

Finland. His main research interests focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion; gender and management; critical management studies; ANTi-History, and critical sensemaking. These interests are reflected in his 50 books, 200 journal articles, and book chapters. His books include *History and Business Storytelling* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2023 – with Nick Deal); *Management and Organizational History: A Research Overview* (London: Routledge, 2020 – with Milorad Novicevic); *Insights and Research on the Study of Gender and Intersectionality in International Airline Cultures*, 2017 (Leeds: Emerald); *The Routledge Companion to Management & Organizational History* (London: Routledge, 2015 – with Trish McLaren and Terry Weatherbee); *The Oxford Handbook of Diversity in Organizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 – with Regina Bendl, Inge Bleijenbergh, and Elina Henttonen); *ANTI-History: Theorizing the Past, History, and Historiography in Management and Organizational Studies* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012 – with Gabrielle Durepos); and *Gendering Organizational Analysis* (London: Sage, 1992 – with Peta Tancred).

Foreword

In a time when organizations and society have been changing immensely, the understanding of history and its role in shaping contemporary organizational studies has become more critical than ever. As scholars, we are called upon to question the ways in which history is constructed, narrated, and employed to produce knowledge. Recognizing that organizational practices are shaped by their past, historical research enables scholars to challenge hegemonic practices and normative organizational theory. According to Durepos et al. (2020), the growing variety of approaches in writing organizational histories, management thought, and researching management in historically conscious ways has led to the rise of critical organizational histories characterized by reflexivity, questioning of performativity, and a commitment to de-naturalizing hegemonic organizations and historiography. Such scholarship challenges the dominant history of management thought by exposing exclusion and marginalization in various domains. The incorporation of postcolonial, feminist, and queer scholarship into historical approaches highlights the ethnocentricity, gender-neutrality, and fixed identity categories in management education, emphasizing the importance of reflexivity and inclusion of marginalized voices (see Durepos et al., 2020). ANTi-History emerged as an important approach to understanding history in our field (Durepos & Mills, 2012a).

If we want to discuss ANTi-History, it is important first to present what I understand as actor–network theory (ANT). Based on the work of Bruno Latour and John Law, ANT is rooted in the Studies of Science and Technology field, presenting an alternative to approaches that focus solely on either humans or artefacts in analysing technological development and change. ANT emphasizes the importance of heterogeneous networks, arguing that both the social and the technical aspects of technology should not be divided into separate entities. This approach posits that entities are formed and acquire their attributes due to their relationships with others, existing only as continuous relational outcomes of ordering processes.

Central to ANT is the understanding that entities exist within networks of relationships, making it impossible to separate actors from networks. The primary focus of ANT is to investigate how networks are formed and maintained, with an emphasis on understanding the strategies that generate and sustain large actors. As a process-oriented perspective, ANT aims to analyse how order is achieved through the complex interactions of multiple materials, focussing on empirical settings and actions without imposing a priori definitions on the actors involved.

The application of ANT to organizational studies offers valuable insights by addressing how organizations are composed of and maintained through the networking of heterogeneous elements. This perspective views organizations as temporary stable products resulting from minute, contingent processes of ordering. ANT contributes to organizational studies by emphasizing reflexivity and focussing on how specific organizational aspects are sustained and maintained by networks.

ANT is ontologically relativist, acknowledging that the world can be organized in different ways, and empirically realist, offering no difficulty in producing descriptions of organizational processes. This combination renders ANT a relevant and useful approach to organizational studies. By refusing to accept dualisms and taking anomalies as its starting point, ANT provides a way of understanding how institutions work without relying solely on human agency or structural imperatives as explanatory tools. ANT offers a unique approach to understanding complex systems, developing its own notions and vocabulary in the process. By analysing the networking of heterogeneous elements, ANT contributes to the broader field of organizational studies by providing a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the processes, relationships, and interactions that shape and sustain organizations.

ANT is focussed on politics. ANT is presented as an approach that transcends ontology, enacting versions of reality that encompass the good, the epistemological, and the ontological, as well as their counterparts. Consequently, accounts emerging from ANT are inherently political. Ontological politics, as a concept, highlights the mutable nature of realities, which are shaped and contested through everyday practices. In this context, realities are intertwined with the political, challenging the presupposition of singularity and revealing the potential for alternative realities.

The implications of ontological politics in social science suggest that researchers contribute to the enactment of various realities, raising questions about which realities are being prioritized and which are being marginalized. Representations are understood as performative acts that generate divisions, distributions, and narratives, ultimately rendering some possibilities imaginable while leaving others unattainable. Furthermore, Mol (2002) posits that various aspects of life, such as sex differences, age, and cultural identity, are enacted alongside disease processes, resulting in complex, intertwined realities. Ontological politics, in this sense, challenges the notion of rational choice, emphasizing the importance of problem framing and the localized nature of solutions. ANT encourages a deeper understanding of the complex interconnections between realities and the role of researchers in enacting and contesting realities. ANT challenges the conventional understanding of organizations, provides critical performativity, and concurrently presents a reflexive approach to management and organizational knowledge, particularly by promoting a 'political ontology' of organizing (Alcadipani & Hassard, 2010, p. 419).

ANTi-History represents an adaptation of ANT to examine history within the disciplines of management and organizational studies. This innovative

approach seeks to incorporate the principles and methodologies of ANT in the analysis of past events, fostering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the development and dynamics of organizations and their management throughout history.

Within this context, this book emerges as a timely and significant contribution to this intellectual endeavour. ANTi-History, an innovative approach conceptualized by Durepos and Mills (2012), challenges the conventional understanding of history as a singular and objective account of the past. Instead, it acknowledges the complex interplay between storytelling, social values, and the limitations of factual truth-telling. This book serves as a comprehensive guide to ANTi-History, presenting not only its theoretical foundations but also its potential applications and future directions within the realm of management and organizational studies.

ANTi-History emphasizes the imperative of examining prevailing perspectives and elevating the voices of disenfranchised groups. As a result, this methodology advocates for integrating diverse viewpoints into historical narratives, thus enabling a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of past epochs. By scrutinizing the biases and assumptions embedded in traditional historiography, ANTi-History generates a more refined interpretation of historical events and their elucidation. By challenging established historical accounts and methodologies, this approach nurtures critical thinking skills and motivates individuals to reevaluate commonly accepted concepts and beliefs. Moreover, ANTi-History highlights the significance of sociocultural and political contexts in shaping historical events and their subsequent analyses, ultimately producing a more intricate and profound comprehension of history. By offering a platform for marginalized communities to convey their experiences, ANTi-History can facilitate empowerment within these groups and foster a more equitable society.

The authors undertake an exploration of ANTi-History, delineating its development from its genesis to its present standing as an expanding area of investigation. The book is organized into five coherent chapters, each addressing a distinct facet of ANTi-History. Commencing with an introduction and the evolution of the approach, the authors supply a lexicon of essential terms, evaluate influential publications, and engage with ongoing discussions pertaining to ANTi-History. The following chapters probe the theoretical foundations, empirical implementations, and global contexts in which ANTi-History has been employed. The book culminates with a contemplative examination of the future potential of ANTi-History and its prospective contributions to the wider domain of organization studies.

This book serves as an attestation to the abundant and diverse scholarly engagement with ANTi-History, rendering it a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and students interested in examining the past from unconventional standpoints, contesting dominant historical accounts, and promoting critical thinking in management and organizational studies. Furthermore, it incites readers to participate in reflective and transformative dialogues regarding the nature of history, knowledge production, and its implications for organizational practices.

As you immerse yourself in the contents of this book, you will be engrossed in a captivating and intellectually stimulating endeavour that aspires to redefine your perception of history and its function in contemporary organizational studies. I encourage you to join the authors in investigating the potential of ANTi-History and embark on a quest towards a more discerning and multifaceted comprehension of the past.

– Rafael Alcadipani, Professor of Organizational
Studies, FGV EAESP.

Acknowledgements

No book comes together without the efforts of many people working behind the scenes. We find it fitting that a book about ANTi-History – an approach that commits to revealing the processes that take place in producing knowledge – begins with acknowledging those who might not feature prominently in our research but have nonetheless contributed to our success in moving this project forward. First, we would like to thank the team at Emerald for agreeing to work with us. We especially thank Fiona Allison, Lydia Cutmore, and Sathiya Bama S. S. for your patience and guidance at each step of this project. Your support of us to write as much as we needed and in whatever way we felt comfortable provided us the creative licence to just be ourselves. We are grateful.

This work was similarly impacted by the selflessness of two scholars in particular: Gabrielle (Gabie) Durepos and Milorad M. Novicevic. Gabie played an integral role in first having the book commissioned as a research overview of ANTi-History. Then, she committed herself to providing feedback on what we wrote as we wrote it. This resulted in countless hours of discussion – a true testament of her ethic as a supportive scholar and friend. As will soon become clear, Gabie’s work developing ANTi-History with Albert J. Mills over the last 15 years plays a leading role not only in shaping the content of this book but also encouraging dialogue about the usefulness of historical analyses in management and organization studies. Her commitment to advancing ANTi-History as an ‘open system’ approach to ‘doing history’ in business, management, and organizational research is a gift that we do not take for granted.

We are similarly indebted to Milorad M. Novicevic who is deserving of an enormous deal of respect for challenging us to think beyond the literature and towards ANTi-History’s potential. At an early stage of this project, Milorad had admonished us to consider how the debates about method in management history, especially those focussed on critiquing ANTi-History, are as much about scholarly elitism as they are about research philosophies. What we took from his comments was an opportunity to present ANTi-History using more straightforward, inclusive language than in the past. Our tone and writing style throughout reflect this sentiment; one that oscillates between an analytical and conversational tone. Milorad likewise provided editorial comments that have immensely improved our writing.

The foreword written by Rafael Alcadipani is incredibly generous of our work. We have long admired Rafael’s scholarship in actor–network theory, the politics of organizing, and surfacing marginalized voices from the Global South. For us,

our shared research interests but especially Rafael's role in mobilizing ANTi-History in Brazil presented a rare opportunity to collaborate in this way. A special thanks is owed to him for agreeing to take on this task in short order. We could not be more pleased to have his endorsement as well as an assessment of ANTi-History in the context of the field's current intellectual terrain.

A special recognition is also worth noting to our vignette contributors. Each chapter begins with a short reflection from an international and diverse group of leading scholars in the field that are familiar with, contributed to, and have authority in ANTi-History: Milorad M. Novicevic (University of Mississippi), Wim Van Lent (IÉSEG School of Management), Renata Guimarães Quelha de Sá and Alessandra de Sá Mello da Costa (Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro), Christian Stutz (University of Jyväskylä), and William M. Foster (University of Alberta). They provide thoughtful insights that no doubt instigate future ANTi-History research.

Our families have given their unwavering support over the past two years. The choice to take on this project was not theirs yet our spouses, children, and extended family each played an invaluable role in inspiring our motivation to finish writing. As is practice when working with Christopher M. Hartt, we had the benefit of his wife, Gretchen Pohlkamp's editorial prowess in reading, suggesting improvements, and making our content much more comprehensible. We also benefitted from two of his research assistants, Linqi Cai and Ashley MacDonald, in the Faculty of Agriculture at Dalhousie University who performed a systematic literature review of ANTi-History work. Truly this book is better because of their support.

Finally, we are indebted to all those who have laboured to advance ANTi-History both locally vis-à-vis the Halifax School and abroad in a dozen or so countries. Your contributions spread across numerous international conference presentations and proceedings, journal articles, book chapters, and commentaries are what inspired us to write. Put simply, this book would not exist if it were not for your interests in 'doing critical historiography'. We hope that the book adds yet another mark on the future of our field, practice as scholars, and shared community abroad.

Author's Note

This book provides a research overview of ANTi-History in historical research of business, management, and organization. It is structured around a systematic, close reading of ANTi-History through its introduction to the field nearly two decades ago; the literatures that theorize it as an approach for 'doing history' and how others have contributed to its usefulness to scholars, practitioners, and students; an exploration of the empirical research areas, settings, and contexts – especially its position within an archival zeitgeist in critical management and organizational studies – that scholars have engaged in; revisiting the debates that concern ANTi-History and its theorization of the past; the international character that it has taken across numerous countries in six continents; and potential future research that present unique opportunities to further advance and refine ANTi-History and critical historiography scholarship.