Business History

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fbsh20

# The origins of organisation: A trans-methodological approach to the historical analysis of preindustrial organisations

Ioanna Iordanou

**To cite this article:** Ioanna Iordanou (2023): The origins of organisation: A trans-methodological approach to the historical analysis of preindustrial organisations, Business History, DOI: 10.1080/00076791.2023.2181957

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2023.2181957

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 14 Apr 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1798

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=fbsh20

BUSINESS HISTORY
https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2023.2181957

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

Check for updates

# The origins of organisation: A trans-methodological approach to the historical analysis of preindustrial organisations

Ioanna Iordanou

Oxford Brookes Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK

**ABSTRACT**

Conventional wisdom dictates that the advent of large organisations engaging innovative managerial practices is a natural by-product of the rationality and technological advancements ensuing from the Industrial Revolution. Accordingly, except for a few studies on medieval and early modern institutions such as armies, feudal estates and governments, preindustrial organisations remain largely unexplored by historians. Arguing for a trans-methodological approach that combines the narrative construction of theoretical constructs with a comprehensive description of events within the historical context in which they evolved, I present a microhistorical case study of the ducal chancery of Renaissance Venice as an exemplar of organisation. Placing particular emphasis on the instrumentality of historical context for the study of preindustrial organisations, I foster a fresh debate on what constitutes 'organisation' as a unit of historical analysis, arguing that the phenomenon of organisation was conceived and given meaning in the early modern era.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Received 30 March 2022
Accepted 13 February 2023

**KEYWORDS**
Archive; Early modern Venice; ducal chancery; preindustrial organisation; trans-methodological approach

## The state of play in preindustrial organisational and business history

The historical study of preindustrial organisations has been gradually attracting the attention of organisational theorists, signalling a 'historic turn' in organisation and management studies (Bucheli & Wadhani, 2014; Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Weatherbee et al., 2015). Historians, conversely, have been slower in their espousal of this relatively new field of enquiry, except for those that operate under the aegis of a Business School. Undoubtedly, several historical studies have been conducted on the organisation of medieval and early modern economic enterprises, such as guilds and industries (Franceschi, 2020; Ogilvie, 2019; Trivellato, 2020). The emphasis of these studies, however, has been primarily on business organisation and economic growth, with a particular focus on the origins and rise of capitalism (Gelderblom & Trivellato, 2019). The preindustrial organisation, on the other hand, has lagged behind in business history narratives. This paucity reaffirms what Professor Luca Zan boldly called a 'fear of history', coupled with a predilection for '*present centeredness*', that is, the strong belief

**CONTACT** Ioanna Iordanou ioanna.iordanou@brookes.ac.uk

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

in the uniqueness of the present as different to the distant past (Zan, 2016, pp. 573–574, emphasis in the original).

One of the reasons for this scholarly propensity is that, espousing the business history tradition mapped by Alfred D. Chandler Jr. and his followers, historians (and organisation studies scholars) focussed their attention on those organisational entities that resembled the modern (US) corporation as the normative model of managerial enterprise responding to the corporate and technological imperatives of the post-industrial era (Chandler, 1962, 1977; Galambos, 1970, 1983, 2005). With its focus on mass production and distribution, the modern corporation emerged as the rational response to the mechanisation of production that increased industrial output and, by extension, national wealth (Chandler et al., 1997; Lazonick, 1991). What ensued was the 'Americanisation' of business (and organisational) history, with limited critical questioning on the value and consequences of this type of 'Anglo-centrism' for historical research in business, management, and organisation studies (Zan, 2016, pp. 576–77; See also Zan, 2019). Following this line of thought, scholars espoused the contention that the lack of industrialisation, the primitive forms of technology, and the relatively less complex market conditions in which preindustrial organisational entities operated make for a rather 'thin' conceptual contribution (Langley, 1999, p. 697).

This chasm in the scholarly treatment of what effectively is the post-industrial and the preindustrial era implies that, even though past events and human actions are seen as ontologically significant for path dependence, this path only starts in the relatively recent past, while only a handful of scholars – primarily from the disciplines of organisation and management studies – have deemed pre-nineteenth century organisations as ontologically relevant (Kieser, 1987; Newton, 2004; Ruef & Harness, 2009; Sydow et al., 2009; Zan, 2006; 2016). The reasons for this lacuna are linguistic, methodological, and epistemological. *Linguistic*, primarily because the historical analysis of organisational practices necessitates the use of terminology deriving from theoretical constructs commonly used in organisational analysis that had neither been conceived nor used by actors in the distant past, engendering, thus, the risk of anachronism. Such terminology is either unknown or immaterial to historians (Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014, p. 251). *Methodological*, in the sense that the farther back we go into the past, the more we rely on archival records that, more often than not, are incomplete, as they tend to focus on those organisational actors who occupy the highest echelons of organisational hierarchies, rather than the rank and file (Decker, 2013; Rojas, 2010, p 1268). As a result, the historian has to rely heavily on reconstruction and what philosophers of history have termed 'impositionalist' objection, the distorted sense of structure that fact reconstruction and narration imposes (Callinikos, 1995; Carr, 1986, esp. pp. 117–131; Norman, 1991). And *epistemological*, in terms of the treatment of evidence and what constitutes a genuine contribution to knowledge. This stems from an abiding disagreement between historians and other social scientists in relation to the value of archival records. While for the former archival documents provide evidence that is regarded as primary data, organisation theorists perceive the archive as a repository for 'anecdote and chronology' that can only provide 'background information' on the history of organisations (Kuhn, 1970, p. 1; Strati, 2000, p. 158).

It becomes apparent, therefore, that there is lack of agreement on a methodology that will enable historians to survey the entire spectrum of the history of organisations, balancing the historical study of contemporary organisations with apt examinations of primordial organisational structures that preceded, and even paved the way for, the modern

corporation. This lacuna poses an opportunity for historians to enrich not only the domain of history, but also a constellation of adjacent disciplines such as sociology, economics, and organisation studies, with balanced analyses of organisational life in the distant past. Accordingly, two questions need to be asked. Firstly, what constitutes an organisation in the early modern era? Secondly, what methodology can help minimise, even eliminate, some of the linguistic, methodological, and epistemological impediments inherent in the historical study of preindustrial organisations?

These are the questions this article seeks to answer in an effort to explore the concept of preindustrial organisation. As probing the various meanings of 'organisation' in the preindustrial era is a gargantuan task, an alternative microhistorical approach offered here is that of a contextual case study, presented as an illustrative example to leaven what might otherwise be an overly abstract analysis. The article uses the case study of the early modern archive – in particular, the chancery of early modern Venice – as an exemplar of preindustrial organisation in the two senses of the word 'organisation', organisation as an entity and organisation as a process (Bakken & Hernes, 2006; Weick, 1979). Revisiting the historiography on the Venetian chancery using a revisionist lens, the article argues that the phenomenon of organisation, both as an entity and as a process, was conceived and given meaning in the early modern era, which hosted the gradual systemisation of diplomatic practices that went hand in hand with the development of state bureaucracies. Specifically, the article asks the following sub-questions: Why was the archive conceived, developed and systematised at that particular point in time? What purpose did it serve? Was it merely an institutional repository of records, an administrative tool of power, or did it serve other ideological purposes? Ultimately, what insights can the study of the development of the early modern archive confer on the historical study of organisation, as conducted by scholars of diverse thematic, spatial, and temporal interests? In asking these sub-questions, the article is not only based on archival sources but analyses the creation and development of the archive as a form of organisation, in order to challenge the conventional wisdom that sees organisation as a modern phenomenon. As such, it offers a critical examination of the contention that preindustrial organisational entities cannot offer notable contributions to the historical study of organisations and institutions.

Building on the methodological rigour of the developing discipline of organisational history, an approach which combines historiography with organisation theory in order to explore and analyse the historical development of organisations (Godfrey et al., 2016), the article employs a trans-methodological approach. Specifically, it combines the narrative construction of established, theoretically informed analytical constructs such as *organisational secrecy*, *organisational identity*, and *organisational image* – an approached termed 'analytically structured history' by organisation studies scholars (Rowlinson et al., 2014) – with the detailed description of historical events against the socio-economic and political context in which they developed. These historical events emerge as they emerge from the critical examination of an exhaustive body of relevant literature, supplemented by pertinent archival material. The former approach, that is, the narrative construction of analytical concepts, has been deemed amenable to the explanation of the causal relationship between historical events and theoretical concepts, retaining 'narrative as the main form of explanation' but 'driven by concepts, events, and causation' (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p. 264). The latter, the nuanced narrative of historical events within a specific context, stemming from the critical examination of relevant literature and archival sources, constitutes a form of analysis in its own right (Geertz, 1973). As such, the narrative in

this essay is underpinned by the conviction that 'theory is a vital part of the historical research process, but that if theory is inadequately contextualised the outcome is likely to be as shallow as is atheoretical "fact-grubbing"' (Nyland et al., 2014, p. 1150).

The article starts by offering a brief introduction of the political and socio-economic context in which the ducal chancery was developed in Renaissance Venice. It then proceeds to explore the chancery as a primordial form of organisation, both as an entity and as a process, using a trans-methodological approach, whereby theoretically informed analytical concepts are constructed through an in-depth description of historical events within the socio-economic context in which they evolved. The ensuing discussion is divided into two parts: firstly, a section explicating the value of the proposed tans-methodological approach and its usefulness in eliminating some of the linguistic, methodological, and epistemological impediments entrenched in the historical study of preindustrial organisations. And secondly, a section focussing on the value and instrumentality of historical analyses of this kind, particularly for the study of preindustrial organisational entities and practices. The article concludes with an evaluation of studying the creation and organisation of the archive, reiterating the value of a trans-methodological approach to the historical analysis of preindustrial organisations.

## Early modern Venice, its ducal chancery, and the *Secreta*

In a thought provoking essay on historical sources and data used in business and organisational history, Professor Kenneth Lipartito reminds us that 'historians are obligated to the past as it really happened [… by seeking] to learn things that cannot be found by turning over the thin topsoil of present day human experience as reflected in current theory' (Lipartito, 2014, p. 285). In an effort to 'respect the integrity of the past', it is important to examine this article's proposed case study in the historical context in which it emerged (ibid). This historical context is situated within the wider canvas of the gradual bureaucratisation of the Italian Renaissance states (Gamberini & Lazzarini, 2012). For this reason, it is necessary to introduce briefly the Republic of Venice and the development of its ducal chancery.

Between the fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, Venice gained territorial domination over wide regions of northern Italy, the Balkan Peninsula, and several of the major Greek islands. As a result, Venice became the master of the most strategic Mediterranean and European trade routes, controlling the commerce of luxury products such as silk and spices from India and Egypt and providing the main trade link between Germany and the Mediterranean (Lanaro, 2006; Lane, 1973; Luzzatto, 1961). In consequence, in early modern Venice, commercial and political supremacy were indistinctly intertwined. This commercial and political supremacy, combined with its effervescent economy and strategic geographical position midway between the Ottoman and the Spanish empires, placed Venice at the forefront of diplomacy's development (Fusaro, 2015; Lazzarini, 2015). As a result, Venice became one of the first early modern states to establish multifarious diplomatic representations abroad, sustained by a variety of formal and informal envoys (Lazzarini, 2015; Queller, 1966). This territorial and administrative expansion necessitated the written dissemination of information and, importantly, the development of efficient and reliable systems of collecting, ordering, archiving, and distributing large quantities of filed knowledge for the purpose of information management. This led to the creation, already in the thirteenth century, of one

of the earliest archives of state records, the Venetian ducal chancery (Baschet, 1870; Cecchetti, 1872–1873; Trebbi, 1980).

Despite the recent 'archival turn' in cultural history that transposed the scholarly focus from the archive as a research site to a legitimate object of study, the archive as a process of organisation within a larger system or institution has received limited attention by historians (Cook & Schwartz, 2002; Corens et al., 2016; De Vivo et al., 2016; Head, 2010). This is due to a growing scholarly tradition that analyses early modern archives, firstly, as the storehouses of social and cultural memory, with a particular focus on conceptions about stored knowledge, its order, management, and control by the state (Blair & Milligan, 2007; Blouin & Rosenberg, 2006; Burke, 2000). Secondly, archives as documentary repositories of governmental institutions shaped by, at times, conflicting power relations that emerged in constantly evolving social and cultural contexts. An apt example here, is the official archives of Old Regime France, which comprised separate depositories formed around sites of power, such as the Parlement of Paris, the Crown, and even the Church (Soll, 2009). Thirdly, archives as workspaces contingent upon social interactions and processes of record-keeping. From this perspective, archives are explored as institutions premised on a variety of administrative policies, practices, and social interactions that enable multiple historical voices to shape the development of historical knowledge (De Vivo, 2013; Peters et al., 2018). And, finally, archives in a Foucauldian sense, as tools of political domination, whereby the production of knowledge is contingent upon the conscious or unconscious manipulation of information by colonial rulers. Historians of colonial societies have been particularly partial to this perspective (Cf. Decker, 2013; Dirks, 2002; Foucault, 1972; O'Toole, 2002; Stoler, 2009).

Notwithstanding this rich scholarly tradition, organisation and business historians have paid scant attention to the historical development and preservation of the archive as an organisational entity, as well as a systematic process of organisation that enables the registration, storage, and provision of information about people and institutions. Instead, their focus has been cast on the methodological restrictions inherent in the use of archival records for the study of institutions, such as the scarcity or over-abundance of potentially relevant material held by an archive (Coleman, 1987; Mills & Mills, 2011). As such, these scholars perceive the archive, primarily, in its pragmatic sense, as a time capsule, the repository of historical records housed in a specific location and intended to preserve (part) of an institution's history.

This brings us back to late medieval and early modern Italy that hosted the inception and systematic organisation of the archive (Lazzarini, 2015, pp. 51–52). Historically, the creation and organisation of the archive was symbiotic with, if not symptomatic of, the emergence and systemisation of the state bureaucracies of the late medieval and early modern period (Lazzarini, 2008; Senatore, 1998; Soll, 2009). The creation of larger territorial states in that period opened up the political arena to a larger number of actors, who required innovative documentary solutions to issues of political control and legal jurisdiction (De Vivo, 2010; Lazzarini, 2015, p. 52). In other words, the growing complexity of state administration necessitated the creation and organisation of a complex system of public bureaucracies (Kettl, 2008). In the period of the long *Quattrocento*, in particular, the archive gradually became 'the heart of public authority, power, and legitimacy, increasingly monopolising the decision-making process' of territorial polities (Lazzarini, 2015, p. 51). In this respect, the central chancery, as the archive was termed in early modern Italy, emerged as the pedestal of state bureaucracy and administration, and its size was analogous to the extent of a state's political jurisdiction and economic potency (Leverotti, 1994). It is not accidental, therefore, that

alongside the archives of the Vatican, that sheltered the documentary heritage of the all-pervading Catholic Church, and those of Simancas, that housed the state bureaucracy of the Spanish Empire, the state archive of the Republic of Venice is 'amongst the largest repositories of records produced by a chancery before modern times' (De Vivo, 2010, p. 233). In this context, the archive was viewed as a fully organised corpus, indicating the existence of a progressive and systematic process of organisation.

Historiography has explored Venice's ducal chancery in three distinct ways: as the fountainhead of the state's administration (Baschet, 1870; Von Ranke, 1879); as a branch of a burgeoning civil service that employed a distinct workforce of white-collar secretaries whose appointment depended on skills and ancestral entitlement (Galtarossa, 2009, 2021; Trebbi, 1980, 1986; Zannini, 1993); and, less systematically, as an information management system developed by one of the most efficiently informed governments in the early modern world (Antonini, 2016; De Vivo, 2010; Salmini, 1998). As a microhistorical case study then, the Venetian chancery is amenable to critical examination, since its abundant historiography allows for ample contextual analysis. There is, however, a more important reason for the suitability of the Venetian chancery as a unit of analysis for the historical exploration of preindustrial organisations; it is emblematic of organisation in both senses of the word 'organisation', as an entity and as a process.

The Venetian chancery was what today would be seen as an organisation of public administration with managerial hierarchies that determined interwoven ways of working between its members, aiming at efficiency in the use of its resources. It also entailed 'conditionally related processes' – such as registering, indexing, and archiving – that were determined through a series of regulations deliberated and enforced by the Venetian authorities (Grey, 2012, p. 15; Iordanou, 2019). It was, therefore, an organisation both as a solid entity and as a systematic and progressive process of becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick, 1979). Examining both these organisational facets of the Venetian chancery opens up new optics for exploring the history of organisation not only as a fully formed and bounded entity, but as the progressive process through which organisations came into existence (Czarniawska, 2008; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick, 1979, 2001). In other words, the study of the archive is amenable to the exploration of the origins of organisation in the historical context in which it was conceived, developed, and systematised.

Before we explore the Venetian chancery as an emblematic preindustrial organisation, it is important to elaborate on the historical context in which it evolved. Early modern Venice was one of the first states to have created a centrally administered state intelligence organisation (Iordanou, 2019). This was headed by the Council of Ten, the exclusive committee responsible for the security of Venice and its territorial possessions. The Council was made up of seventeen men, including ten ordinary members, six ducal councillors, and the Doge of Venice (Cozzi, 1973, p. 308). Within its jurisdiction were secret affairs, public order, domestic and foreign policy. Over the course of the centuries, the Ten's political and judicial prerogatives multiplied, primarily on account of their control over the Republic's 'information machinery' (De Vivo, 2009, p. 53. See also, Cozzi, 1981a, 1982).

As part of their responsibilities, the Ten oversaw the central administration of intelligence gathering and espionage in Renaissance Venice. For this reason, they created and managed a complex network of informants and spies, which included professional information gatherers and amateur intelligencers, who were located in or shipped to any area where intelligence operations were underway, especially the Ottoman Empire, Venice's long-lasting

enemy (Iordanou, 2016). The Ten also organised and oversaw the professional training and development of employees stationed in the Ducal Palace, such as state secretaries, archivists, personal assistants to diplomats, as well as the famed Venetian cryptographers and cryptanalysts (Iordanou, 2018). The organisation of centrally administered intelligence operations and the management of in-house and expatriate staff was contingent upon two interdependent processes: correspondence and archiving.

Correspondence was the most prevalent method of long distance communication and became the mainstay of political and diplomatic exchanges in that period (Bethencourt & Egmond, 2007; Boutier et al., 2009). In the organisation of work amongst individuals who were situated remotely from each other, correspondence did not only serve the purpose of facilitating long distance communication; it functioned as a tool of management, enabling those occupying higher positions in the organisational hierarchy to communicate their instructions and orders to their subordinates through letters (Bento da Silva & Iordanou, 2018; Iordanou, 2019, pp. 95–99). Accordingly, correspondence became a means of managing human action and performance at a distance, undergirding the organisation of work that was, more often than not, wide reaching and geographically dispersed. This is a significant managerial innovation of the sixteenth century that has been misleadingly attributed to the post-industrial era, most probably due to business (broadly speaking) scholars' reluctance to engage comprehensively with archival sources (and the historical context in which they were produced and stored), coupled with the Anglo-centrism favoured by several of them (Hoskin & Macve, 1986, 1988). Nevertheless, such scholarly views have not been left uncriticised (Boyns & Edwards, 2000; Zan, 2004, 2016).

Ruling over a large part of Northern Italy and a substantial portion of the Adriatic and the islands of the Levant and entertaining diplomatic and commercial representations across Europe, Anatolia, and even Northern Africa entailed a vast paper trail that the Venetian authorities made use of in order to communicate their directives. Its immensity was attributed to its variety, which included the registers of governmental deliberations, the voluminous draft notes of such deliberations, and the countless diplomatic dispatches pertaining to those deliberations. It was for this reason that the Council of Ten pioneered a complex system of information management through the methodical production, collection, and archiving of letters, reports, and any sensitive record relating to domestic and foreign policy and security. For clarification, sensitive records were those documents containing information that was strictly confidential and intended for the exclusive consumption of specific individuals. One such example is an enciphered letter sent by the Council of Ten to the Venetian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in the late 1560s. In the letter, the Ten communicated the confidential information provided to them by the Venetian ambassador to the Holy Roman Empire, corroborating the alarming rumours of an imminent Ottoman invasion of Cyprus, one of Venice's most valued possessions in the Mediterranean.[1] Minutes of meetings held by the Council of Ten were also considered sensitive records that had to be concealed. In October 1605, for example, the Ten dictated that minutes of a formal meeting they held regarding the fortress of the Venetian town of Bergamo would be communicated to the *Collegio* – the Venetian Senate's steering committee – and from there to the Senate – the Venetian government's debating and primary legislative committee – under strict secrecy. However, any information pertaining to a certain Count Francesco Martinengo Colleoni, a notorious bandit who was known to the Ten as a man threatening state affairs in the Venetian mainland, had to be removed from the minutes. If the *Collegio* decided not to communicate

the minutes to the Senate, the Ten could request their restitution, banning the *Collegio* from producing a copy of them.[2] From the late thirteenth century onwards, all these sensitive documents were stored in the Doge's Palace, in what was initially called *Curia Maior* and eventually *Cancelleria Ducale*, Venice's ducal chancery (Antonini, 2016).

In 1402, the Great Council – the assembly of all Venetian male patricians – decreed to physically isolate documents relating to extremely sensitive issues of Venice's republican politics (Baschet, 1870, pp. 155–156). These were to be stored in the *Cancelleria Secreta* (secret chancery) or simply *Secreta*, Venice's secret archive. The secret chancery was a distinct wing of Venice's ducal chancery, operating as the repository of the secret documents pertaining to the Venetian Republic's domestic and foreign security (Antonini, 2016; De Vivo, 2010; Iordanou, 2019). It primarily contained sensitive records of proposals and counter-proposals, the voting results of the government's numerous elective bodies, and notes on collective decisions (De Vivo, 2010, 2013). By the 1460s, the *Secreta* was entirely administered by the Council of Ten and became the cornerstone of their political control and intelligence organisation (Trebbi, 1980, pp. 79–81).

## The Venetian ducal chancery as a form of organisation

Under the jurisdiction of the Ten, the ducal chancery, including the *Secreta*, became emblematic of organisation in both senses of the word 'organisation', as a solid entity and as a systematic process of becoming (Bakken & Hernes, 2006; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick, 1979). In the former sense, the chancery functioned like a civil service organisation made up of eighty to one hundred professional state servants, who were responsible for transcribing, indexing and archiving all documents housed in it (Zannini, 1993, p. 131). As already mentioned, these were primarily conciliar records on state affairs and diplomats' letters that were often written in cipher for secrecy purposes. Having gone through formal training and rigorous examinations, the secretaries were expected to index and transcribe the archival records into leather-bound parchment registers, in order to bolster their preservation to posterity (De Vivo, 2010). In 1605, for instance, two state secretaries were ordered to create two books – one for the Venetian strongholds in the Mediterranean and one for the Venetian colonies in the Italian mainland – in which they would clearly register and index all state ciphers and their keys, taking a note of the date and the person to whom they had been consigned, as well as the expected return date. They were also ordered to create two copies of these volumes, 'one of which must be kept in a chest or cabinet in the *secreto* [the working room of the Venetian cipher secretaries] locked by a key to be stored in the letter cabinet of the [chamber of the] Collegio […] and the other to be held in the office of the Heads of this Council [of Ten]'.[3] Accordingly, in the latter sense of organisation as a process, Venice's ducal chancery entailed repetitive and progressive processes of organising, such as registering, indexing, and archiving. It is for this reason that Venice's ducal chancery was emblematic of organisation, both as an entity and as a process.

As a primordial form of organisation, the ducal chancery was characterised by hierarchical administration. From 1261, it was headed by the Great Chancellor (*Cancellier Grande*), a non-patrician whose role assumed the second highest importance in state service, after that of Venice's Doge (Casini, 1991; Trebbi, 1980, 1986; Zannini, 1993, pp. 119–181). The *Cancellier Grande*, who was appointed for life, oversaw the work of all chancery employees. These differed from other public officers in an important way: recruitment was subject to a public

examination and to continuous professional development (Iordanou, 2018). The entry-level post was that of *notaio straordinario* or *extraordinario*, a probationary five-year position, followed by that of *notaio ordinario* (Trebbi, 1980, p. 99; Zannini, 1993, p. 132). After an additional five years in service, the employee could apply for promotion to the position of secretary of the Senate. A selected minority of the most distinguished state secretaries could eventually be elevated to the post of Secretary of the Council of Ten, the highest ranking state secretary position in the chancery (Trebbi, 1980, p. 87). Aside from the watchful eye of the Great Chancellor, the chancery was supervised by the ubiquitous Council of Ten (Trebbi, 1980, pp. 79–81). In consequence, the organisation of work in Venice's ducal chancery was dependent upon organisational elites who allocated human resources by means of basic administrative practices.

All functions of the Venetian chancery were determined by formal regulations – that is, legally binding directives or decrees deriving from the Ten's formal deliberations, made and enforced by the Venetian deliberative bodies, primarily the Council of Ten (Iordanou, 2019, 2022). Due to the nature of work within the chancery, several of these regulations were created to secure state secrecy. Specifically, according to the Ten's regulations, access to the archive was restricted only to authorised individuals, and a notary was responsible for producing a list of approved readers and the documents they accessed (De Vivo, 2009, p. 50). Upon entering the *Secreta*, in particular, approved readers were expected to swear an oath of secrecy.[4] Moreover, any civil servant who attempted to delegate work to unauthorised staff was liable to legal sanctions (De Vivo, 2013, p. 722). In 1600, any copying or note-taking in the *Secreta* chamber was prohibited, while in 1611 a new decree imposed the continuous supervision of visitors by secretaries. In 1624, the *Collegio* declared that requests for copies of documents should be formally recorded (Antonini, 2016, p. 112).

It becomes apparent that, as a result of all these bureaucratic developments, the systematic organisation of the ducal chancery became emblematic of good government and good governance. This was achieved in two ways: organisational secrecy and institutionally controlled historicisation. *Organisational secrecy* has been defined as 'the ongoing formal and informal social processes of intentional concealment of information from actors by actors in organisations' (Costas & Grey, 2014, p. 1423). The Ten, as the organisational elites of the chancery, were obsessed with secrecy in the workplace, not only on account of the sensitive nature of work conducted therein, but also because to them secrecy epitomised harmony and concord (De Vivo, 2009, p. 43). As a result, the chancery secretaries were ordered to keep no record of conciliar debates and censor any cases of disagreement in the final transcript of committee deliberations.[5] The purpose of the censorship was to conceal from posterity any trace of internal conflict, in order to preserve the temperate image of communal serenity triumphing over private interests and discrepancies that conferred on Venice the title *La Serenissima*, the most serene of states (De Vivo, 2013, p. 716). Accordingly, on several occasions secretaries were instructed not to communicate sensitive information discussed in the Council of Ten to other deliberative bodies, such as the *Collegio* and the Senate.[6]

The secretaries of the ducal chancery were drawn from the social class of the *cittadini originarii* (citizens), the 'secondary elite' in the Venetian social hierarchy (Chambers & Pullan, 1992, p. 261). They were 'a socio-professional group both prestigious and privileged', placed immediately under the patriciate in Venice's social hierarchy (Viggiano, 2013, p. 65). While they did not have political rights, to secure their loyalty, the government reserved exclusive privileges for them, namely high-level official posts within the Venetian governmental

administration (Grubb, 2000; Romano, 1987). The secretaries of the *Secreta*, in particular, received preferential treatment in the form of reserved civil service posts specifically for them, their families and their descendants.[7] This social and professional segregation had two purposes. Firstly, it compensated for insufficient salaries that had been reduced due to the mounting costs of continuous wars (De Vivo, 2013, pp. 720–722). Secondly, it was designed to create a distinct group identity – adding 'a cachet to the necessity of being different' (Herman, 1996, p. 330) – which, premised upon the collective understanding of distinct professional features and values, could have spawned a professional, even *organisational identity*.

Borrowing from social theorisations of secrecy and from concepts emanating from organisational theory might help elaborate on this latter contention further. According to the German sociologist Georg Simmel, secrecy enables the creation of the social boundary between two separate entities, those in the know and those who do not know. The exclusivity of being in the know can enhance the sense of distinctive inclusiveness in a group and, by extension, bolster one's identification with it (Simmel, 1906, p. 497). Additionally, the social aspect of secrecy, that requires and promotes the conscious awareness of the group, due to the intention of concealment and boundary construction, can augment the process of group identity creation (Ybema et al., 2009). The sense of belonging that ensues can potentially increase the need to protect and perpetuate secrecy, so as to maintain the group. Secrecy, therefore, creates a dynamic relationship between its agents and becomes both the unequivocal condition and the consequence of the formation of group identity (Costas & Grey, 2014, 2016).

This type of group identity, premised on organisational members' collective understanding of the distinct features of their work within the organisation, is termed *organisational identity* (Albert & Whetten, 1985). By singling out these government professionals – the 'ordo scribarum', as the contemporaneous Venetian diplomat Gasparo Contarini (1543, p. 110) styled them – as the guardians of state secrets and reinforcing the distinctive significance of their work with exclusive benefits, in a way, the government – here, the Council of Ten – can be seen as attempting to engineer the social construction of an organisational identity that was premised on secrecy (Simmel, 1906). This epitomises the German sociologist Max Weber's notion of state bureaucracies as sites of secrecy (Weber, 1978b, pp. 225, 994), and has led historians to present Renaissance Venice's chancery as 'the forerunner *par excellence* of modern bureaucracy' (De Vivo, 2013, p. 709). The reason for this representation is the state secretaries' perceived 'ethos of state service' and dutiful subservience to the Venetian patricians, despite the bureaucratic challenges faced by the latter in their effort to exert power and control over the territories of the Venetian dominion (De Vivo, 2013; See also, Cozzi, 1981b; Viggiano, 1993). Under this light, the Venetian chancery was not merely a repository of state documents but a conglomeration of 'interlocked behaviours', that is, 'repetitive, reciprocal, contingent behaviours that develop and are maintained between two or more actors' (Weick, 1979, p. 166).

The secrecy that permeated the organisational culture of the ducal chancery did not only pertain to the preservation of the state's most sensitive records; it also served the purpose of maintaining the historical memory of the government and, by extension, the Venetian Republic as 'a model of good governance and political norms for centuries to come' (Antonini, *Historical Uses*, p. 77). For this reason, from 1516 onwards several patricians were granted access to the *Secreta*, in order to consult its holdings for the production of official histories of the Republic for wider publication (Cozzi, 1963). The timing of this admittance was not fortuitous. It followed Venice's shattering defeat at Agnadello (1509) against the League of

Cambrai, an alliance between Pope Julius II, Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, King Louis VII of France, and Ferdinand II of Aragon (Gilbert, 1973). During that conflict, Venice lost a significant portion of her mainland territories. A historical defence of the city of Saint Mark that would restore the Republic's image domestically and, more pressingly, internationally, was deemed paramount by the Council of Ten. It was for this reason that from 1516 onwards, a series of patrician historiographers were granted access to the 'books, files and secret letters' of the various governmental councils stored in the *Secreta*.[8] Accordingly, state record-keeping became directly interlinked with state-historiography. Hence, while the *Secreta*'s primary function was to house Venice's archive of 'classified' records, it also served the purpose of providing the repository of documents that historians could tap into in order to produce the historical image of the Venetian Republic and, by extension, the image of the very institution that contributed to this image creation, the Venetian government with the Council of Ten at the helm (Bouwsma, 1968).

Indeed, when the Ten first opened the *Secreta*'s doors to official state historiographers, they explained that it was the prerogative and responsibility of every king, prince or republican government to have a state's reputation preserved 'not by means of various vague and crude chronicles and annals, but with authentic, elegant, and elaborate histories' without any alteration of the truth.[9] Thus, the Ten's relevant decree indicates that they were not only concerned with the creation and preservation of the Republic's historical image but also with the image they projected as a governmental unit in charge of the Venetian chancery, that is, the institution's construed external image. The latter was intended to create, strategically, a desired future image of the past – what organisation theorists have termed *projected organisational image* – emanating from those records (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 66). In essence, an institution's projected organisational image is the envisioned historical image intended to portray its legacy. Accordingly, the archival records stored in the secret chancery were intended for institutionally controlled historicisation.

The purpose of institutionally controlled historicisation was not the production of misleading or biased information through direct political propaganda but the social construction of a preferred image of the Venetian state and, by extension, of the government, for, inter alia, strategic purposes (Foster et al., 2017). For this reason, the official historians were required to submit their works to the Council of Ten for review and final approval prior to publication. Responsible for the revision and censorship of Venice's official state histories were the *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, three Senators appointed to the administration of the Republic's neighbouring university (Grendler, 1977). The creation of the office of the official historian, therefore, provided the nexus between the processes of archiving, historiography, and strategic image creation and promotion within and beyond the state's borders. In this respect, the archive was not simply the repository of an institution's records but a mnemonic implement in the process of production and control of the government's *projected organisational image* and, by extension, the Republic's desired future historical image.

This control of the institution's desired future image of the past was officially sanctioned in 1601 when the post of the supervisor (*sopraintendente*) of the *Secreta* was assigned to the official historian of the Venetian Republic. With an annual compensation of 100 ducats, the superintendent was responsible for delegating, supervising, and reporting on the work of state employees within the *Secreta*.[10] This was the first instance in the Venetian state's history that a historian was placed in charge of a governmental organisation, a practice that would become institutionalised in ensuing years (Antonini, 2016; De Vivo, 2010, p. 243). In

consequence, the superintendent of the state's most classified records became the guardian of the information that could provide the narrative for the construction of the government's organisational image as an institution, and, by extension, the historical image of the Republic as a territorial state. By entrusting, therefore, historians with the organisation's (and consequently, the state's) most guarded secrets, the Ten, as the organisational elites, were clearly concerned not only with the systematic archivisation of the past and present but importantly, with how the past and present would reverberate into the future and, thus, be committed to collective memory. In this respect, Venice's secret chancery was conceived not only as a repository of sensitive records pertaining to the institution but also as an organisational process of institutionally controlled historicisation intended to create and project a desired future image of the past (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

Overall, the Venetian ducal chancery was dependent on the organisation of commonly accepted patterns of work that were determined by explicit regulations stemming from the Ten's formal deliberations. It was also premised on hierarchical relationships between different state officials. Consequently, the chancery resembled the definition of organisation offered by Max Weber, one of the foundational thinkers of the bureaucratic management theory and, by extension, organisation theory. According to Weber, organisation (*Verband*) is 'a social relationship which is either closed or limits the admission of outsiders', and that is determined by regulations that 'are enforced by specific individuals: a chief and, possibly, an administrative staff, which normally has administrative powers' (Weber, 1978a, p. 48). Viewed from this lens, Venice's chancery does not only matter ontologically, as a repository of historical remnants for path dependence; it matters epistemologically as well, enabling us to understand how the past has been and can be known through the systematic archiving and utilisation of its traces. Consequently, exploring the inception, development and, importantly, organisation of the archive, both as an organisational entity but also as a process of organising, confers epistemological insights as to how we can interpret individuals and collective entities – their temporal values, intentions, and actions – within specific historical contexts, prior to using such contexts as interpretative tools.

## Discussion

This essay has attempted to show that the development of an organisation, including, indeed, a preindustrial organisation, is a dynamic and contingent phenomenon which necessitates historically embedded contextual examination and trans-methodological analysis. Following on from the detailed historical analysis of the early modern Venetian chancery as a primordial form of organisation, the first part of the following Discussion will reiterate the value of a trans-methodological approach, which combines theoretically informed analytical constructs with detailed accounts of events within the historical context in which they developed. Such an approach, it is argued, can enable and encourage further historical analysis of preindustrial organisational entities and practices. The great value of this type of historical analyses is emphasised in the second part of the Discussion.

### *The value of a trans-methodological approach*

The great value historians can bestow upon the historical study of organisations lies in their ability to enrich the disciplines of history and organisation studies with incisive and plausible

accounts of organisational life in the past, especially in the distant past, within the historical context in which organisational life evolved. To do so, the starting point should not be the organisation as a solid, fully formed and bounded entity; instead, the focus could be cast on organisation as the progressive and systematic process through which organisations came into existence, 'the organisation of the organisation, so to speak' (Grey, 2012, p. 15). This entails locating organisation in the historical context in which it originated and developed, in order to move beyond the 'self-accounts and self-understandings of individuals and collectivities' (Grey, 2012, p. 6). Situating those very self-accounts and self-understandings in the historical contexts in which they developed is paramount because, as Carlo Cipolla aptly argued, 'the interpretation of a source cannot really be separated from evaluation of its authenticity and reliability', which can be conferred by a well-rounded understanding of historical context (Cipolla, 1992, p. 51). As such, historical context has the potential to produce more balanced interpretations of these accounts and understandings. This is because situating such accounts and understandings in the historical contexts in which they developed minimises the hermeneutic risks inherent in the process of interpreting past events solely through 'the distorting filter of our own values and concerns' (Martin, 2004, p. 13). Accordingly, historians can provide the conceptual framework against which the historical development of organisation (in both senses of the word) can be mapped, not as an idiosyncratic but as a historically grounded explanation of a teleological event.

Viewed from this perspective, organisation studies scholars' disregard for historical context and its significance to historiography and collective memory is epistemologically unsubstantiated, even precarious (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p. 258). This is because historical context can enrich the – at times – abstract ways in which lived experience and common sense have been articulated by social scientists engaging in the historical study of organisations (Grey, 2009; 2012). This can be achieved through narrative construction and this is where the contribution of the historian is invaluable. Specifically, aside from offering the prospect of narrative richness, the detailed description of historical events, an indispensable tool in the historian's toolbox, constitutes a form of analysis in its own right. It can, thus, restore the 'qualities of evidential and interpretative fidelity' in the historical study of organisations (Grey, 2012, p. 6). Complementing such detailed descriptions with the narrative construction of established theoretical concepts from adjacent disciplines, an approach that organisation studies scholars have termed 'analytically structured history' (Rowlinson et al., 2014), can enrich the historian's discourse and render it more comprehensible to such disciplines. Moreover, it can enable historians to enhance the theoretical underpinning of their archival-based interpretations, rather than rely on 'placing their trust to "common sense"', an assumed tendency which leaves them exposed to criticism by scholars of other disciplines (Cipolla, 1992, p. 30. See also, Decker et al., 2015). Importantly, trans-methodological historical analyses might open up possibilities to explore and interpret the past from fresh perspectives.

Before labouring the point of a trans-methodological approach further, it is important to clarify why the approach of analytically structured history in isolation might be inadequate to provide plausible accounts of preindustrial organisations. By enabling the construction of historical narratives grounded on theories of organisation, analytically structured history allows for 'a degree of epistemological reflexivity' that is paramount for exploring the distant past, while minimising 'social scientific objections to narrative construction' (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p. 268). However, this approach does not necessarily emphasise the salience of – let alone the use of – historical context. This is because for most organisation studies scholars

who engage in historical research a date (or periodization) can substitute for a detailed description of historical context, which is taken as a given, depending on the assumed background knowledge of readers (Dray, 1986; Rowlinson et al., 2014). But if our aim is to explore the forms that preindustrial organisations assumed and the economic and socio-political processes that generated organisation and management in the preindustrial era, historical context is pertinent and must be an integral part of the methodological approach a scholar employs. Moreover, the detailed description of historical events within the socio-economic and political context in which they evolved can enhance the epistemological reliability of the narrative construction of theoretical concepts. It follows then, that a trans-methodological approach that combines theoretically informed analytical constructs – which are so valued by organisation studies scholars – with detailed accounts of events within the context in which they developed – as typically pursued by historians – can be a plausible proposition. In our case, the historian's narrative description can help generate theoretically informed analytical constructs, such as *organisational secrecy*, *organisational identity*, and *organisational image* that organisational theorists consider paramount for the historical exploration of organisations and that broaden and deepen our understanding of preindustrial organisations. In this respect, analytical constructs can explain the causal relationship between historical events and theoretical concepts and lay the groundwork for historically informed theorising.

The possibility for historically informed theorising, in particular, is conferred by historical distance, which enables grounded decisions on 'which singular events are historiographically significant beyond the subjective perceptions of actors' (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p. 259). This is because historical distance allows scholars to retrieve and rely upon information that actors at the time might not have been privy to (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Consequently, historical distance can serve as a valuable tool which historians (and scholars of other disciplines) can use in their efforts not only to provide well-grounded accounts of the phenomena they research within the context in which they developed, but also to theorise based on these accounts. Inviting historians to employ a trans-methodological approach to the historical analysis of preindustrial organisations, then, is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it produces novel questions and enables fresh interpretations of decisions and actions of organisational actors at specific points in time. Secondly, it provides the conceptual framework against which the historical development of organisation can be mapped, not as an idiosyncratic but as a historically grounded explanation of a teleological event. Thirdly, it can illuminate and explain causal relationships between historical events and theoretical concepts, providing the groundwork for historically informed theorising. Most importantly, as a consequence of the above, a trans-methodological approach like the one employed in this essay can help minimise, even eliminate, some of the linguistic, methodological, and epistemological impediments inherent in the historical study of preindustrial organisations, opening up the disciplines of Business and Organisational History to more empirical studies on preindustrial organisational entities and practices.

## *The value of the historical analysis of preindustrial organisations*

The critical examination of the Renaissance archive as a form of preindustrial organisation, enabled by the use of the above-mentioned trans-methodological approach, challenges

the existence of gaping chasms relating to the legitimacy of organisations that existed in the eras that preceded the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, it engenders three insights that carry significant implications for the instrumentality of our contribution, as historians, to the historical study of organisational and managerial practices, especially those prevalent in the preindustrial era.

Firstly, the historical exploration and analysis of primordial organisational entities and practices enables us to contest the view that contemporary organisations are ontologically irrelevant to those operating in the preindustrial past, due to lack of technological advancements or rationality. This view is premised upon unsubstantiated assumptions that contemporary organisations have an autonomous existence, independent from their past. If, however, we accept the conventional wisdom that organisations are an exclusively contemporary phenomenon autonomous from the past, then we inadvertently deprive them of their claim to practical durability in the future (Martin, 2004, p. 6). This is because, in the continuum of past, present, and future, no entity can claim independence of one end of the spectrum while maintaining its link to the other; a historical location in time requires both. In consequence, overlooking one end of the spectrum, especially the past, means that we not only discount our historical location in time but also its temporal relation to our future, threatening our entitlement to practical durability and survival in collective memory. Exploring, therefore, the preindustrial organisation, both as an entity and as a process, in the historical context in which it developed, and not merely as the outcome of a universal and inexorable process of rationalisation, enables us to re-examine our values and challenge our assumed sense of superiority on account of contemporary advancements.

Secondly, historians – especially those specialising in ancient, medieval, and early modern eras – are in a fitting position to defend the assertion that there is no history that is irrelevant and inconsequential because it relates to the very distant past. This is because, if we accept that history has educational qualities, its value lies not in the likelihood of repetition and replication but in the prospect of analogy and affinity (Koselleck, 2004). This is particularly pertinent in the practical application of disciplines such as politics and business, where strategic decision taking and policy making have been deemed exercises 'linking past inheritance with future possibility through the fleeting hinge of the present', more often than not premised upon lessons from history (Martin, 2004, p. 6). We may, therefore, ask ourselves whether our knowledge of the post-industrial organisation, as it has been committed to ink and memory by business historians and organisation theorists, offers a substantial enough dataset for making strategic decisions. One wonders, for instance, whether the proponents of Taylorism would have been better equipped to anticipate some of the negative consequences of relegating human labourers to automatons, had they had a grasp of the socio-economic and political causes of historical events such as the Peasants' Revolt in London (1381) or the German Peasants' War (1524–1525). While there is no ostensible historical link between these historical episodes, the ensuing lesson is about the – devastating at times – consequences of subordinating human beings to the master or the machine and the consequent socio-economic and political repercussions. By contrast, the remarkable prediction of the renowned historian Michelle Perrot, as long ago as the late 1970s, that the 'watchful eye of the master' – so pervasive in Taylorism – was soon to be replaced by 'the quiet violence' of the computer, was based on her historically situated understanding of the progressive development of industrial discipline (Perrot, 1979, pp. 164–165). Accordingly, in the era of the 'gig economy' and the rapid advancements of Artificial Intelligence, lessons from history, even

preindustrial history, can prove beneficial to historians and everyone who engages with our discipline.

It follows then, that the value in casting our scholarly gaze back to preindustrial periods does not lie in the principle of direct knowledge transfer, which can offer few value propositions to the discipline of history or any adjacent scholarly fields. Indeed, it would be naïve to assume that there might be indeterminate transferable knowledge that can be conveyed from the distant past to contemporary experience. The value of historical exploration and analysis rests on using the past to ask novel questions that might produce fresh interpretations of how organisations progressively came to assume their form in unlikely places, such as convents, agricultural estates, churches and governments (Ruef & Harness, 2009). Such interpretations reinforce the ontological and epistemological significance of historical context. In consequence, the past can be used to provide relationships between ideas and understandings which require and enable us to focus not on the finished product – the organisation as such – but on the causal links between the parts and the social patterns that came together to assemble it (Lipartito, 2016, esp. p. 137). Viewed from this perspective, it is not the use of history that can lead to idiosyncratic views about organisations, as several of its critics have argued (Down, 2001; Langley, 1999; Norman,1991). It is its deficit that can spawn such views.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to revisit the historiography on the Venetian chancery through a revisionist lens, in order to explore its inception and development as an organisation, in both senses of the word organisation – as an entity and as a process. By focussing on this microhistorical case study, the intention has been to challenge the conventional wisdom that sees organisation as a modern phenomenon and to critically examine the contention that preindustrial organisational entities and practices cannot offer notable contributions to the historical study of organisations and institutions. In this effort, the article posed some pertinent questions: Why was the archive conceived, developed and systematised at that particular point in time? What purpose did it serve? And what insights can the study of the development of the early modern archive confer on the historical study of organisation, as conducted by scholars of diverse thematic, spatial, and temporal interests?

Based on a trans-methodological approach that combines the narrative construction of theoretical constructs with a comprehensive description of historical events within the socio-economic context in which they evolved, the Venetian chancery is presented here as an organisational response to the increasingly complex administrative needs imposed by early modern Venice's territorial expansion and constantly evolving diplomatic practices. These went hand in hand with the emergence and systemisation of the state bureaucracies of the late medieval and early modern period. Aside from its practical purpose of serving as the storehouse of the Venetian Republic's official state records and its ideological purpose of contributing to the creation of the Republic's desired historical image, the Venetian chancery served a dual organisational purpose: that of a public sector organisation made up of professional state servants responsible for transcribing, indexing, and archiving official state records; and that of the progressive and systematic process of organising, which entailed 'the arrangement, preservation, and consultation of public and private documents' (Cipolla, 1992, p. 22). Appreciating this dual purpose of the Venetian chancery as a form of

organisation both as an entity and as a process can make us more reflexive of the need for a trans-methodological approach in the way we deal with the content of archival holdings, in order to understand that 'lack of a particular kind of evidence may be just as significant as its existence' (Cipolla, 1992, p. 22). This is especially important for the early modern period since, whether deliberately or owing to 'capricious fortuity' – a term coined by Emilio Gabba to indicate unforeseen (or not) circumstances such as earthquakes, fires, floods, deteriorations, acts of vandalism etc. that can impact the preservation and survival of archival records – the further back we go into history, the patchier the documentary evidence can be (Cipolla, 1992, p. 22). Accordingly, the main insight of studying the creation of the Venetian chancery as a form of organisation is to forefront the significance of historical context not only as an interpretative mechanism but as a methodological tool that can enhance historical analysis.

The above reflections reinforce the argument that a trans-methodological approach to the historical study of preindustrial organisations might be of great value to historians and other scholars working on preindustrial organisational history. This approach entails the comprehensive description of events against the historical context in which they evolved which, in turn, enables the historian to create and use theoretical concepts stemming from this comprehensive narrative construction. As a result, this approach can eliminate some of the linguistic, methodological, and epistemological impediments that scholars have encountered in their efforts to study and analyse preindustrial organisations. More specifically, a trans-methodological approach can attenuate the social scientific scepticism over the theoretical deficiency of archival data, since it can produce rigorous, theoretically grounded causation (Sutton & Staw, 1995; Weick, 1995). Accordingly, it allows scholars to ascribe a fresh historical meaning to those organisational entities, or, more broadly, organisational practices, that operated in eras when technological advancement had still not been established as the leading driver of economy and society. Importantly, employing a trans-methodological approach can minimise the possibility of the historian's 'impositionalist' objection – the misleading sense of structure that narration imposes, so vilified by sociologists and organisation studies scholars who are keen to explore the historical development of organisations (Maclean et al., 2017; Norman, 1991, pp. 120–122. See also, Carr, 1986).

These reflections are not made with the intention of subordinating idiographic history to the nomothetic norms of the social sciences. On the contrary, they reinforce the great value historical analysis can confer on the conceptual historicism of preindustrial organisations. So great is this value that it might now be the time for the discipline of organisational history, which overwhelmingly sits within the field of organisation and management studies, to move beyond the gates of the Business School, and to enter the realm of academic History departments, especially those specialising in economic and social history. Employing a trans-methodological approach to organisational history will enable historians to meet the challenge, set by colleagues specialising in organisation and management studies, of a large-scale genealogical examination and reconceptualisation of organisation that includes the exploration of meanings ascribed to this concept throughout the preindustrial era (Ruef & Harness, 2009). Such explorations would enable us to interpret our current conceptualisation of pre-modern organisation under a new light. They would also permit us to question the nature of disciplinary polarities and demonstrate how the present is as contested as the past. In such worthwhile pursuits, the historian's craft is not only indispensable, it is imperative. The interesting question for both historians and organisation studies scholars, therefore, should not be whether they should blow the

dust off antiquarian manuals or timeworn parchments held in archives, in order to expose and explore primordial forms of organisation; it should focus on how they analyse and recount the context in which such archival artefacts were created, in order to achieve greater insights into the historical nature of individuals and collective entities. Ultimately, a trans-methodological approach to the historical analysis of preindustrial organisations can produce novel and multidimensional understandings that address the linguistic, methodological, and epistemological challenges of historical analysis in the study of preindustrial organisations. This is surely an end worthy of its means.

## Notes

1. Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), Consiglio di Dieci (hereafter CX), *Deliberazioni Secrete*, Registro (hereafter Reg.) 9, carta (hereafter c.) 33 recto/verso (hereafter r./v.) (21 Oct. 1569).
2. ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Secrete*, Reg. 14, cc. 110v.–111r. (22, 25 Oct. 1605).
3. '… facendone subito due copie, l'una delle quale debba star sempre in una cassetta overo armaro nel secretto sotto una chiave da esser tenuta nell'armaro delle lettere in Collegio […] et l'altra sia tenuta nell'officio deli capi di questo consiglio'. ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Secrete*, Reg. 14, cc. 126r.-127.v (31 Aug, 1605).
4. See, for instance, ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Secrete*, Reg, 14, c. 28 verso (hereafter v.) (24 April 1598).
5. ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Comuni*, filza 351 (30 May 1624).
6. See, for example, ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Secrete*, Reg. 7, c. 48v. (19 June 1561); Ibid., c. 84 r./v. (8 July 1562).
7. See, for example, *Tabele nominative e chronologiche dei Segretari della Cancelleria Ducale*, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Manoscritti Italiani, Classe VII 1667 (8459), for family trees of generations of secretaries in the Venetian Chancery.
8. ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Secrete*, Reg. 12, c. 37 r./v. (21 March 1580).
9. ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Miste*, Reg. 39, Part II, c. 39 r./v. (30 Jan. 1516).
10. ASV, CX, *Deliberazioni Secrete*, Reg. 14, cc. 74r.-75r. (17 Sept 1601).

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all colleagues who offered their valuable feedback and comments on the various versions of this manuscript, especially Dr Sylwia Ciuk, Dr Guy Huber, Dr Joanna Karmowska, Professor Juliette Koning, Professor Christopher Moran, and Dr Jane Stevens Crawshaw. Special thanks are due to the two anonymous reviewers for their incredibly constructive and professional feedback and recommendations, which is greatly appreciated.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This study was supported by the British Academy and Oxford Brookes Business School.

## Notes on contributor

***Ioanna Iordanou*** is a Reader in Human Resource Management at Oxford Brookes University, UK, and an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of the renaissance, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK. With a particular focus on the early modern era, her research centres in the development of pre-industrial organisational entities and managerial practices.

## ORCID

Ioanna Iordanou http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1849-1824

## References

Albert, S., & Whetten, D. A. (1985). Organizational identity. In L. L. Cummings & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behaviour* (Vol. 7, pp. 263–295). JAI Press.

Antonini, F. (2016). *Historical Uses of the Secret Chancery in Early Modern Venice: Archiving, Researching and Presenting the Records of State [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]* Birkbeck College, University of London.

Baschet, A. (1870). *Les archives de Venise*. Henri Plon.

Bakken, T., & Hernes, T. (2006). Organizing is both a Verb and a Noun: Weick meets Whitehead. *Organization Studies*, *27*(11), 1599–1616.

Bento da Silva, J., & Iordanou, I. (2018). The origins of organising in the sixteenth century. In T. Peltonen, H. Gaggiotti, & P. Case (Eds.), *Origins of organizing* (pp. 127–147). Edward Elgar.

Bethencourt, F., & Egmond, F. (2007). (Eds.) *Correspondence and cultural exchange in Europe, 1400-1700, Vol. 3 of Cultural exchange* in *early modern* Europe, R. Muchembled & W. Monter. Cambridge University Press.

Blair, A., & Milligan, J. (Eds.). (2007). Toward a cultural history of archives [special issue]. *Archival Science*, *7*(4), 269–397.

Blouin, F. X., & Rosenberg, W. G.Jr. (Eds.) (2006). *Archives, documentation, and institutions of social memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*. The University of Michigan Press.

Boutier, J., Landi, S., & Rouchon, O. (2009). *La politique par correspondence: Les usages politiques de la lettre en Italie (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle)*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Bouwsma, W. J. (1968). *Venice and the defence of the republican liberty: Renaissance values in the age of the counter reformation*. University of California Press.

Boyns, T., & Edwards, J. R. (2000). Pluralistic approaches to knowing more: A comment to Hoskin and Macve. *The Academy of Accounting Historians*, *27*(1), 151–158. https://doi.org/10.2308/0148-4184.27.1.151

Bucheli, M, & Wadhwani, R. D. (Eds.) (2014). *Organizations in time: History, theory, methods*. Oxford University Press.

Burke, P. (2000). *A social history of knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot*. Polity Press.

Callinikos, A. (1995). *Theories and narratives: Reflections on the philosophy of history*. Polity.

Carr, D. (1986). Narrative and the real world: An argument for continuity. *History and Theory*, *25*(2), 117–131. https://doi.org/10.2307/2505301

Casini, M. (1991). Realtà e simboli del Cancellier Grande *V*eneziano in età moderna (sec. XVI-XVII). *Studi Veneziani*, n.s., *22*, 195–251.

Cecchetti, B. (1872-1873). Costituzione istorica degli archivi Veneti antichi 1200-1872. *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di Scienze. Lettere ed Arti, Series*, *4*(2).

Chambers, D., & and Pullan, B. (Eds.) (1992). *Venice: A documentary history*. Blackwell.

Chandler, A. D.Jr (1962). *Strategy and structure: Chapters in the history of the American industrial enterprise*. MIT Press.

Chandler, A. D. Jr (1977). *The visible hand: The managerial revolution in American business*. Harvard University Press.

Chandler, A. D., Amatori, F., & Hikino, T.Jr. (Eds.) (1997). *Big business and the wealth of nations*. Cambridge University Press.

Cipolla, C. M. (1992). *Between two cultures: An introduction to economic history*. Norton.

Clark, P., & Rowlinson, M. (2004). The treatment of history in organization studies: Towards an 'historic turn'? *Business History*, *46*(3), 331–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/0007679042000219175

Coleman, D. (1987). The uses and abuses of business history. *Business History*, *29*(2), 141–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076798700000030

Cook, T. & Schwartz, J. (Eds.) (2002). Archives, records, and power [special issue]. *Archival Science*, *2*(1-2), 1–169.

Contarini, G. (1543). *De Magistratibus et Republica venetorum libri cinque*. Ex officina Michaelis Vascosani.
Corens, L., Peters, K., & Walsham, A. (Eds.) (2016). The Social history of the archive: Record keeping in early modern Europe. *Past and Present*, *230*(Supplement 11), 1–358.
Costas, J., & Grey, C. (2014). Bringing secrecy into the open: Towards a theorization of the social processes of organizational secrecy. *Organization Studies*, *35*(10), 1423–1447. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613515470
Costas, J., & Grey, C. (2016). *Secrecy at work: The hidden architecture of organizational life*. Stanford University Press.
Cozzi, G. (1963). Cultura politica e religione nella «pubblica storiografia» veneziana del '500. *Bollettino Dell' Istituto di Storia Della Società e Dello Stato Veneziano*, *5-6*, 215–294.
Cozzi, G. (1973). Authority and the Law. In J. R. Hale (Ed.), *Renaissance Venice.* (pp. 293–345). Faber & Faber.
Cozzi, G. (1981a). La politica del diritto nella repubblica di Venezia. In G. Cozzi (Ed.), *Stato, società e giustizia nella Repubblica Veneta (sec. XV-XVIII)* (pp. 15–151). Jouvence.
Cozzi, G. (Ed.) (1981b). *Stato, società e giustizia nella Repubblica Veneta (sec. XV-XVIII)*. Jouvence.
Cozzi, G. (1982). *Repubblica di Venezia e stati italiani. Politica e giustizia dal secolo XVI al secolo XVIII*. Einaudi.
Czarniawska, B. (2008). *A theory of organizing*. Edward Elgar.
Decker, S. (2013). The silence of the archives: Business history, postcolonialism and archival ethnography. *Management & Organization History*, *8*(2), 155–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449359.2012.761491
Decker, S., Kipping, M., & Wadhwani, R. D. (2015). New business histories! Plurality in business history research methods. *Business History*, *57*(3), 30–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2014.977870
De Vivo, F. (2009). *Information and communication in Venice: Rethinking early modern politics*. Oxford University Press.
De Vivo, F. (2010). Ordering the Archive in Early Modern Venice (1400-1650). *Archival Science*, *10*(3), 231–248. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-010-9122-1
De Vivo, F. (2013). Cœur de l'Etat, Lieu de Tensión: le Tournant Archivistique vu de Venise (XVe-XVIIe Siècle). *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, *68*(3), 699–728.
De Vivo, F., Guidi, A., & Silvestri, A. (2016). Archival transformations in early modern Europe [special issue]. *European History Quarterly*, *46*(3), 421–589.
Dirks, N. B. (2002). Annals of the archive: Ethnographic notes on the sources of history. In B. K. Axel (Ed.), *From the margins: Historical anthropology and its futures* (pp. 47–65). Duke University Press.
Down, S. (2001). Knowledge sharing review the use of history in business and management, and some implications for management learning. *Management Learning*, *32*(3), 393–410. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507601323006
Dray, W. H. (1986). Narrative versus analysis in history. In J. Margolis, M. Krausz, & R. M. Burian (Eds.), *Rationality, relativism, and the human sciences* (pp. 23–42). Springer.
Foster, W. M., Coraiola, D. M., Suddaby, R., Kroezen, J., & Chandler, D. (2017). The strategic use of historical narratives: A theoretical framework. *Business History*, *59*(8), 1176–1200. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2016.1224234
Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
Franceschi, F. (2020). Big business for firms and states: Silk manufacturing in renaissance Italy. *Business History Review*, *94*(1), 95–123. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680520000100
Fusaro, M. (2015). *Political economies of empire in the early modern Mediterranean: The decline of Venice and the rise of England, 1450-1700*. Cambridge University Press.
Galambos, L. (1970). The emerging organizational synthesis in modern American history. *Business History Review*, *44*(3), 279–290. https://doi.org/10.2307/3112614
Galambos, L. (1983). Technology, political economy and professionalization: Central themes of the organizational synthesis. *Business History Review*, *57*(4), 0471–0493. https://doi.org/10.2307/3114810
Galambos, L. (2005). Recasting the organizational synthesis: Structure and process in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. *Business History Review*, *79*(1), 1–38. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680500080181

Galtarossa, M. (2009). *Mandarini veneziani: La cancelleria ducale del Settecento*. Aracne.
Galtarossa, M. (2021). La Cancelleria ducale a Venezia: resistenze al declassamento e fine del privilegio. In M. Barbot, J. F. Chauvard, & S. Levati (Eds.), *L'expérience du déclassement social: France-Italie, XVIe - premier XIXe siècle* (pp. 113–131). École française de Rome.
Gamberini, A. & Lazzarini, I. (Eds.) (2012). *The Italian renaissance state*. Cambridge University Press.
Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.
Gelderblom, O., & Trivellato, F. (2019). The business history of the preindustrial world: Towards a comparative historical analysis. *Business History*, *61*(2), 225–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2018.1426750
Gilbert, F. (1973). Venice in the crisis of the league of Cambrai. In J. R. Hale (Ed.), *Renaissance Venice* (pp. 274–292). Faber & Faber.
Gioia, D. A., & Thomas, J. B. (1996). Image, identity and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *41*(3), 370–403. https://doi.org/10.2307/2393936
Gioia, D. A., Schultz, M., & Corley, K. G. (2000). Organizational identity, image, and adaptive instability. *Academy of Management Review*, *25*(1), 63–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/259263
Godfrey, P. C., Hassard, J., O' Connor, E., Rowlinson, M., & Ruef, M. (2016). What is organizational history? Toward a creative synthesis of history and organization studies. *Academy of Management Review*, *4*(4), 590–608. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2016.0040
Grendler, P. F. (1977). *The Roman inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605*. Princeton University Press.
Grey, C. (2009). Historicizing knowledge-intensive organizations: The case of Bletchley Park. *Management and Organizational History*, *4*(2), 131–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744935909102905
Grey, C. (2012). *Decoding organization: Bletchley Park, codebreaking and organization studies*. Cambridge University Press.
Grubb, J. (2000). Elite citizens. In J. Martin and D. Romano (Eds.), *Venice reconsidered: The history and civilization of an Italian City State, 1297-1797* (pp. 339–364). Johns Hopkins University Press.
Head, R. (Ed.) (2010). Archival knowledge cultures in Europe, 1400-1900 [special issue]. *Archival Science*, *10*(3), 191–343.
Herman, M. (1996). *Intelligence power in peace and war*. Cambridge University Press.
Hoskin, K. W., & Macve, R. H. (1986). Accounting and the examination: A genealogy of disciplinary power. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *11*(2), 105–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-3682(86)90027-9
Hoskin, K. W., & Macve, R. H. (1988). The genesis of accountability: The west point connections, *accounting*. *Organizations and Society*, *13*(1), 37–73. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-3682(88)90025-6
Iordanou, I. (2016). What news on the Rialto? The trade of information and early modern Venice's Centralized Intelligence Organisation. *Intelligence and National Security*, *31*(3), 305–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2015.1041712
Iordanou, I. (2018). The professionalization of cryptology in sixteenth century Venice. *Enterprise & Society*, *19*(4), 979–1013. https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2018.10
Iordanou, I. (2019). *Venice's Secret Service: Organizing intelligence in the renaissance*. Oxford University Press.
Iordanou, I. (2022). Regulating the transfer of secret knowledge in renaissance Venice: A form of early modern management. In F. J. Dijksterhuis (Ed.), *Regulating knowledge in an entangled world* (pp. 149–166). Routledge.
Kettl, D. F. (2008). Public bureaucracies. In S. A. Binder, R. A. W. Rhodes, and B. A. Rockman (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political institutions* (pp. 366–384). Oxford University Press.
Kieser, A. (1987). From asceticism to administration of wealth. Medieval monasteries and the pitfalls ofrationalization.*OrganizationStudies*,*8*(2),103–123.https://doi.org/10.1177/017084068700800201
Koselleck, R. (2004). *Futures past: On the semantics of historical time*. Columbia University Press.
Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. (2nd ed.). The University of Chicago Press.
Lanaro, P. (Ed.) (2006). *At the centre of the old world: Trade and manufacturing in Venice and on the Venetian Mainland (1400-1800)*. Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies.
Lane, F. C. (1973). *Venice: A maritime republic*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management Review*, *24*(4), 691–710. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1999.2553248
Leverotti, F. (Ed.) (1994). Cancelleria e amministrazione negli stati italiani del Rinascimento. *Ricerche Storice*, *24*, 277–423.
Lazonick, W. (1991). *Business organization and the myth of the market economy*. Cambridge University Press.
Lazzarini, I. (2015). *Communication and conflict: Italian diplomacy in the early renaissance, 1350-1520*. Oxford University Press.
Lazzarini, I. (Ed. (2008). Scritture e potere. Pratiche documentarie e forme di governo nell'Italia tardomedievale (secoli XIV-XV) [Special Issue]. *Reti Medievali*, *9*.
Lipartito, K. (2014). Historical sources and data. In M. Bucheli & R. D. Wadhwani, (Eds.), *Organizations in time: Theory, history, methods* (pp. 284–304). Oxford University Press.
Lipartito, K. (2016). Reassembling the economic: New departures in historical materialism. *American Historical Review*, *121*(1), 101–139. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/121.1.101
Luzzatto, G. (1961). *Storia Economica di Venezia dall'XI al XVI Secolo*. Centro Internazionale delle Arti e del Costume.
Maclean, M., Harvey, C., & Clegg, S. R. (2017). Organization theory in business and management history: Present status and future prospects. *Business History Review*, *91*(3), 257–281. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680517001027
Martin, G. (2004). *Past futures: The impossible necessity of history*. University of Toronto Press.
Mills, A. J., & Mills, J. H. (2011). Digging archaeology: Postpositivist theory and archival research in case study development. In R. Piekkari & C. Welch, (Eds.), *Rethinking the case study in international business and management research* (pp. 342–360). Edward Elgar.
Newton, T. (2004). From freemasons to the employee: Organization, history, and subjectivity. *Organization Studies*, *25*(8), 1363–1387. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840604046347
Norman, A. P. (1991). Telling it like it was: Historical narratives on their own terms. *History and Theory*, *30*(20), 119–135. https://doi.org/10.2307/2505536
Nyland, C., Bruce, K., & Burns, P. (2014). Taylorism, the International Labour Organization, and the genesis and diffusion of codetermination. *Organization Studies*, *35*(8), 1149–1169. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840614525388
Ogilvie, S. (2019). *The European guilds: An economic analysis*. Princeton University Press.
O'Toole, J. M. (2002). Cortes's notary: The symbolic power of records. *Archival Science*, *2*(1), 45–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435630
Perrot, M. (1979). The three ages of industrial discipline in nineteenth-century france. In J. M. Merriman (Ed.), *Consciousness and class experience in nineteenth-century Europe*. Holmes & Meier Publishers.
Peters, K., Walsham, A., & Corens, L. (Eds.) (2018). *Archives and information in the early modern world*. Oxford University Press.
Queller, D. E. (1966). *Early Venetian legislation on ambassadors*. Droz.
Rojas, F. (2010). Power through institutional work: Acquiring academic authority in the 1968 third world strike. *Academy of Management Journal*, *53*(6), 1263–1280. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.57317832
Romano, D. (1987). *Patricians and Popolani: The social foundations of the Venetian renaissance state*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
Rowlinson, M., Hassard, J., & Decker, S. (2014). Research strategies for organizational history: A dialogue between historical theory and organization theory. *Academy of Management Review*, *39*(3), 250–274. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2012.0203
Ruef, M., & Harness, A. (2009). Agrarian origins of management ideology: The Roman and Antebellum cases. *Organization Studies*, *30*(6), 589–607. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840609104801
Salmini, C. (1998). Buildings, furnishing, access and use: Examples from the archive of the venetian chancery, from medieval to modern times. In M. V. Roberts (Ed.), *Archives and the metropolis* (pp. 93–108). Guildhall Library Publications, in association with the Centre for Metropolitan History.
Senatore, F. (1998). *Uno Mundo de Carta": Forme e strutture della diplomazia Sforzesca*. Liguori.
Simmel, G. (1906). The sociology of secrecy and secret societies. *American Journal of Sociology*, *11*(4), 441–498. (A. Small, Trans.)

Soll, J. (2009). *The information master: Jean Baptiste Colbert's secret state intelligence system*. The University of Michigan Press.
Stoler, A. L. (2009). *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton University Press.
Strati, A. (2000). *Theory and method in organization studies*. Sage.
Sutton, R. I., & Staw, B. M. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *40*(3), 371–384. https://doi.org/10.2307/2393788
Sydow, J., Schreyögg, G., & Koch, J. (2009). Organizational path dependence: Opening the black box. *Academy of Management Review*, *34*(4), 689–709. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.34.4.zok689
Trebbi, G. (1980). La cancelleria veneta nei secoli XVI and XVII. *Annali Della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi*, *14*, 65–125.
Trebbi, G. (1986). Il segretario veneziano. *Archivio Storico Italiano*, *144*(1), 35–73.
Trivellato, F. (2020). Renaissance florence and the origins of capitalism. *Business History Review*, *94*(1), 229–251. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680520000033
Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science*, *13*(5), 567–582. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.13.5.567.7810
Viggiano, A. (1993). *Governanti e governati. Legittimità del potere ed esercizio dell'autorità sovrana nello stato veneto della prima età moderna*. Fondazione Benetton.
Viggiano, A. (2013). Politics and constitution. In E. R. Dursteler (Ed.), *A companion to Venetian history, 1400-1797* (pp. 47–84). Brill.
Von Ranke, L. (1879). *Zur Venezianischen Geschichte. Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 42 (Leipzig, 1879). Verlag von Duncker & Humblot.
Weatherbee, T. G., McLaren, P. G., & Mills, A. J. (2015). Introduction: The historic turn in management and organizational studies: A companion reading. In P. G. McLaren, A. J. Mills, & T. G. Weatherbee (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to management and organizational history* (pp. 3–10). Routledge.
Weber, M. (1978a). *Economy and society: Outline of interpretive sociology*, Vol. 1, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. University of California Press.
Weber, M. (1978b). *Economy and society: Outline of interpretive sociology*, Vol. 2, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. University of California Press.
Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
Weick, K. E. (1995). What theory is not, theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *40*(3), 385–390. https://doi.org/10.2307/2393789
Weick, K. E. (2001). *Making sense of the organization*. Blackwell.
Ybema, S., Keenoy, T., Oswick, C., Beverungen, A., Ellis, N., & Sabelis, I. (2009). Articulating identities. *Human Relations*, *62*(3), 299–322. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708101904
Zan, L. (2004). Accounting and management discourse in proto-industrial settings: The Venice arsenal in the turn of the 16th century. *Accounting and Business Research*, *32*(2)2004), 145–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/00014788.2004.9729958
Zan, L. (2006). *Il "discorso del maneggio". Pratiche gestionali e contabili all'Arsenale di Venezia, 1580-1643*. Il Muliono.
Zan, L. (2016). Complexity, anachronism and time parochialism: Historicising strategy while strategising history. *Business History*, *58*(4), 571–596. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2014.956730
Zan, L. (2019). History of management and stratigraphy of organizing. The Venice arsenal between tangible and intangible heritage. *Heritage*, *2*(2), 1176–1190. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage2020077
Zannini, A. (1993). *Burocrazia e burocrati a Venezia in età moderna: I cittadini originari* (sec. XVI-XVIII). Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti.