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Document Version

Final published version

Published in:

Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies

DOI:

[10.18291/njwls.123602](https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.123602)

Publication date:

2021

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Citation for published version (APA):

Koll, H. (2021). Bridging the Dialectical Histories in Organizational Change: Hysteresis in Scandinavian Telecommunications Privatization. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 11(3), 23-42.
<https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.123602>

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Bridging the Dialectical Histories in Organizational Change: Hysteresis in Scandinavian Telecommunications Privatization¹

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ABSTRACT

Conventionally, organizational change research has viewed history as objective facts associated with path dependencies, making change difficult. However, started with the work of Suddaby et al. (2010), a different stance has emerged, viewing history as a subjective, narrative construction that can be utilized to facilitate change. This paper responds to calls for ways of bridging these two perceptions and increasing historical consciousness in organizational change studies. To these ends, the paper explores the capacity of Bourdieu's construct of hysteresis as a bridging construct. Based on an ethnographic study, the paper operationalizes hysteresis to analyze the response strategies of technicians and shop stewards to organizational change following privatization in a Scandinavian telecommunications company. The paper argues that hysteresis constitutes a valuable alternative to bridging constructs available in extant literature and holds the potential to open new avenues for exploring the implications of history for organizational change.

KEYWORDS

Bourdieu / chameleon habitus / history / hysteresis / organizational change / privatization

I Introduction

'It's gone a long way from the dawn of time when we just had to take care of the customers. Today, we have to make money' (Interview, Jonathan, Shop steward)

This paper investigates organizational change in the wake of privatization in the Scandinavian telecommunications company, Telco (pseudonym), from a historical perspective. Telco was privatized in the early 1990s, along with all telecommunications companies in the Nordics, following the liberalization of the European telecommunications market (Jordfald & Murhem 2003). The study reflects a current trend in the Nordics where public sector reform policies impose new logics of work, new ways of organizing, and new styles of management which threatens to erode the principles of the Nordic model (Børve & Kvande 2012; Byrkjeflot 2001; Ervasti et al. 2008). The study is based on 6 months of ethnographic field work in 2016, in the company's operations department, a quarter century after privatization.

¹ You can find this text and its DOI at <https://tidsskrift.dk/njwls/index>.

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The extract above illustrates how planned organizational change creates a new time horizon – in shape of a ‘before’ and a ‘now’—and how history emerges as a frame of reference to identify change has occurred and to make sense of the lived experience of change (Dawson & Sykes 2016; Shipp & Cole 2015; Van de Ven & Poole 2005). This makes change an inherently temporal phenomenon (Huy 2001; Noss 2002; Weick & Quinn 1999) and creates a synthesis between change and history as they both imply retrospective engagement with the past. Hence, one cannot be studied without implicit or explicit reference to the other (Suddaby & Foster 2017). But what are the actual implications of history for organizational change? Is history an objective structure which constrains the possibilities for change? Or is history a subjective construction which can be mobilized by actors to achieve future goals?

These questions provide the starting point for this paper as it situates its contribution within the expanding stream of ‘management and organizational history’ also known as ‘the historic turn’ (Clark & Rowlinson 2004; Maclean et al. 2016; Weatherbee et al. 2015). ‘The historic turn’ has directed attention to the potential of historical analyses to advance understandings of organizational change (Brunninge 2009; Ericson 2006; Suddaby & Foster 2017). However, the research field is characterized by a significant diversity in ontological representations of the past and a lack of studies which explicitly engage in discussions about the fundamental nature of history and how history might be used to increase our understanding of organizational change (Brunninge 2009; Pettigrew et al. 2001; Suddaby 2016).

Specifically, the research field is characterized by a dualism between two different perceptions of history and its implications for organizational change. One perspective represents a positivist view from which history is presented as objective truth. In this tradition, history has predominantly featured as a constraining influence on organizational change (Booth 2003; Ericson 2006; Suddaby & Foster 2017). Another perspective represents a constructivist view from which history is presented as a subjective narrative construction. In relation to change, this perspective takes a radically different stance as history is perceived as an important symbolic resource which can be mobilized to serve strategic purposes (Carroll 2002; Gioia et al. 2002; Suddaby et al. 2010). On account of this dualism, calls have been made for organizational change scholars to embrace a ‘historical consciousness’ (Brunninge 2009; Suddaby 2016), that is, to engage explicitly in discussions about what constitutes history and about the role history plays in shaping actors’ experience of the present, their expectations for the future, and the choices they make (Wadhvani et al. 2018). In other words, there is an assumption that history has implications for agency and our capacity for change. According to Suddaby and Foster (2017), those who perceive the past to be objective will be most inclined to see the future as highly determined by the past, and, thus, view history as a constraining influence on agency and change. Conversely, those who perceive the past to be subjective might by the same token be expected to see the future as more malleable, and, thus, perceive actors to be highly agentic and capable of creatively shaping futures based on interpretations of the past. Derived from this dualism between objective and subjective understandings of history, calls have been put forth for studies that can bridge the dualism by theorizing history in ways that draw together its objective and subjective elements (Suddaby 2016).

This paper joins this discussion by proposing Bourdieu’s construct of hysteresis (1990, 2000) as a bridging construct that inherently interlinks two modes of existence

of history, the subjective and the objective, and, thus, draws attention to the largely underexplored interaction between the two (Suddaby 2016). The paper operationalizes the construct in an analysis of the response strategies of technicians, and shop stewards to radical organizational change in Telco. Even though organization and management studies have taken increased interest in Bourdieu's conceptual framework, hysteresis has been overlooked as a valuable analytical construct (Sieweke 2014), aside from a few notable exceptions (e.g., Kerr & Robinson 2009; Koll 2019; Koll & Ernst forthcoming; McDonough & Polzer 2012). This paper, therefore, draws on studies from the research fields of sociology (Abrahams & Ingram 2013, 2015) for inspiration on how to operationalize hysteresis. In this sense, the paper provides a novel theorization that responds to calls for bridging constructs that can increase historical consciousness in organizational change studies (Brunninge 2009; Suddaby 2016; Suddaby & Foster 2017).

The paper is structured as follows: First, the paper offers a brief review of the objective and subjective representations of history and the assumptions about its implications for organizational change which have characterized the research field. Then, the paper elaborates on Bourdieu's construct of hysteresis, explaining how it draws together subjective and objective elements of history, and how the construct is operationalized in the paper. This is followed by a method section. Before the paper turns to the analysis of the response strategies of technicians and shop stewards to sweeping organizational change. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of its contribution to extant literature and the potential of hysteresis as a bridging construct.

2 Literature review

2.1 History-as-fact

The dominant perception of history in organizational change research is that history is a constraining influence on change or in other words that an organization's history makes change difficult (Brunninge 2009; Ericson 2006; Suddaby & Foster 2017). Predominantly, history has featured as an explanation for inertia or path dependencies (e.g., Garud & Karnoe 2013; Schreyögg et al. 2011; Sydow et al. 2009). The latter refers to the assumption that decisions in the past restrict human agency and strategic choice. Thus, the passing of time is associated with a kind of deterministic fatalism as opportunities for change narrow with the accumulation of time (Suddaby & Foster 2017). An implication of this view is that the past becomes an independent variable which can only be objectively known (Brunninge 2009). Theories of change based on these assumptions often associate organizational change with structural or material changes and define change in segmented temporal states of being (Suddaby & Foster 2017). A well-known example of this thinking is Lewin's (1947) model of planned change consisting of the three stages 'unfreezing' the organization, 'changing or moving' it, and then 'refreezing' it (Dawson & Sykes 2016, p. 84). The model has laid the grounds for numerous frameworks for best practices of planned change interventions (e.g., Bullock & Batten 1985; Cummings & Huse 1989; Kotter 1995). Of these stage-models, especially Kotter's eight steps (1995) has been influential in promoting the perception that failure to sufficiently comply with the early steps of the model constrains later efforts and thus the possibilities



of successful change. The past then becomes something an organization must overcome or deal with (Suddaby & Foster 2017).

2.2 History-as-rhetoric

In organization and management research, the ‘historic turn’ has triggered the rise of a so-called ‘uses of the past’ approach which is a constructivist perspective (Wadhvani et al. 2018, p. 1664). Within this stream, history has primarily been viewed as a rhetorical device; a malleable narrative construction which can be mobilized by organizational members for strategic purposes (Foster et al. 2017). History in this view is thus not perceived as synonymous with an objective past but rather as a symbolic resource (Foster & Suddaby 2015). A growing number of studies have embraced this approach to study how history, as interpretations, representations, and inventions of the past, has been used for business purposes such as: Creating competitive advantage (Foster et al. 2017; Suddaby et al. 2010), constructing reputation, identity and legitimacy (Hatch & Schultz 2017; Oertel & Thommes 2018; Schultz & Hernes 2013), and managing strategic change (Brunninge 2009; Gioia et al. 2002; Maclean et al. 2018). By representing history as malleable and making the past open to interpretation, organizational actors are seen to have a significant amount of agency to operationalize history for change purposes (Suddaby et al. 2010). Studies subscribing to this historical perspective often focus on change in organizational stories or cultural practices based on these stories such as rituals, traditions, or identity (Suddaby & Foster 2017). The perspective draws on the narrative tradition in which storytelling is used to facilitate change (e.g., Barry & Elmes 1997; Boje 2001).

2.3 Emergence of historical consciousness

The history-as-fact paradigm has been heavily critiqued for being ahistorical and atemporal, and for neglecting the processual dynamics of time and change altogether, by reducing time to neutral chronology and change to episodic movement between static states of being (Pettigrew et al. 2001; Tsoukas & Chia 2002). In response to these critiques, the historic turn in organization and management studies brought increased attention to history as a social construction – essentially a narrative produced by actors for purposes in the present (Suddaby & Foster 2017). By understanding actors as producers and consumers of interpretations of the past, organizational change literature has embraced a more subjective perception of history, breaking away from previous notions of history as synonymous with a fixed past (Wadhvani et al. 2018). However, what the literature still calls for are ways of theorizing history to explain how consumption and production of history are also products of history, that is, how perceptions of time are shaped by time itself (Suddaby 2016). In other words, to understand the implications of history for organizational change, bridging the objective elements of historical facts and the subjective elements of historical narrative is crucial (See also Koll & Jensen Schleiter forthcoming; Lubinski 2018; Mordhorst 2008; Oberg et al. 2017). In the following, the paper explains the construct of hysteresis with emphasis on its capacity to perform this bridging function.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Habitus and field: Subjective and objectified history

In order to fully understand the potential of hysteresis as a bridging construct, it is necessary first to understand how Bourdieu's theory of practice (1990) works, and how Bourdieu understands history. To Bourdieu, social life is seen to transpire as ongoing adjustments between mutually generating subjective and objective structures known respectively as habitus and field, or as history in bodies and history in things (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). The relation between habitus and field is dialectical and can be understood as two modes of existence of history brought together in every action (Bourdieu 1981). As they are mutually generating, history becomes both a structured and structuring structure in the sense that action is structured through engagement in a certain field of practice but also structuring of the very same engagement (Bourdieu 1990). Historical structures, in other words, are simultaneously incorporated, in bodies and in things, and put to work through action (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).

A field is a distinct social space constituted by its own history and the history of its relation to other fields. The boundaries of a field are defined by what is at stake for its participants whom are perceived to be at continuous struggle for the positions and resources of value in that particular field, also known as different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1990).

Habitus has been defined as a 'system of dispositions – a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 54). In other words, as a product of history, habitus produces social practices in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. Thus, all new experiences are mediated by habitus in shape of historically transmitted dispositions (Bourdieu 1990). Habitus is important for understanding how to act and navigate successfully in social space seeing as a habitus perfectly adapted to the field endows actors with a 'practical sense' which allows them to maneuver meaningfully without conscious thought, like the instantaneous and intuitive moves of a ball player in the heat of the game (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 20). As habitus and field attune to each other through socialization, taken-for-granted assumptions develop about what is true and important about the world and which moves that are possible and impossible. When these ingrained assumptions, or common sense, are enacted in practice, they confirm that which is being practiced like an adherence to the self-evidence of the world (Bourdieu 1990).

3.2 Hysteresis

Hysteresis is a technical term originally used in the scientific field of physics as early as the 1880s in studies of the effects of magnetism. Specifically, the term was applied to explain the lag that occurs in a magnetic material when it is magnetized by an external magnetizing force. In other words, hysteresis captures those instances when 'changes in a property lags behind changes in an agent on which they depend' (Hardy 2008, p. 128). Thus, at the very core of its meaning, hysteresis implies for



two structures to be interdependent in such a way that a change in one necessitates a change in the other. This is one of the reasons this paper argues that hysteresis constitutes a viable bridging construct. What also makes it valuable to the study of organizational change is the implied hiatus or time-lag that occurs before the relationship between the two structures is realigned if it does realign (see Koll & Ernst forthcoming). In this sense, hysteresis implies a mismatch between two structures which were previously aligned with each other (Hardy 2008). Thus, what is often theorized as resistance to change (e.g., Procter & Randall 2012; Thomas & Hardy 2011) could also be viewed as a delay in the adaptation of subjective, incorporated mental structures to changes in the objective structure on which they depend (Koll & Ernst forthcoming). An additional property of the construct of importance here is the possibility for permanent and irreversible change. This property is illustrated by 1960s studies of elasticity where hysteresis was described as the phenomenon of ‘returning to its original size and shape only slowly or not at all’ (Hardy 2008, p. 128).

Bourdieu adopted hysteresis to describe the relationship between the subjective structures of habitus and the objective structures of fields. The construct is applied by Bourdieu as a condition of a field that affects its actors whenever changes to the field are so radical that the routine adjustment between habitus and field is disrupted (1990). Bourdieu makes an important distinction here between routine change that transpires in the continuous process of everyday adaptation between habitus and field, without need for reflection or conscious thought, and radical change which initiates hysteresis (Hardy 2008). In case of the latter, actors become conscious of their practice and reflexively retrains their habitus, and, thus, adapt to new field conditions. In rare cases, however, the habitus never adapts to the changed conditions – creating what Bourdieu describes as a ‘Don Quixote effect’ understood as a permanent breakdown of the established self-regulation between an individual and society (Bourdieu 2000, p. 160). Hence, hysteresis constitutes an opportunity for adaptation and reshaping of habitus. However, in cases when actors encounter an environment ‘too different from the one to which they are objectively adjusted’ they fail to seize the opportunity (Bourdieu 1990, p. 62; Koll & Ernst forthcoming).

In most of Bourdieu’s writing he emphasized those instances when actors failed to adjust, leading to a cleft, destabilized habitus, that is, a state of ambivalence, contradiction, and suffering because the positions occupied by actors require dispositions that are different from those socialized (e.g., Bourdieu 2000). Therefore, in order to theorize those instances when actors successfully reshape their habitus during organizational change, the paper adopts Abrahams’ and Ingram’s (2013, 2015) strategies to overcome hysteresis. Originally developed to account for the ability of local university students living at home to navigate between the demands of their field of origin and the new demands of attending university, the framework is easily adopted to a context of sweeping organizational change such as privatization where a new logic of work and new forms of capital are imposed on the organizational field.

Abrahams and Ingram (2013) compare hysteresis to a sense of being out of place or stuck between two worlds as the new field demands and the demands to which the habitus is adjusted will pull the habitus two ways. Based on empirical studies, they outline three response strategies for overcoming hysteresis.

Table 1 Strategies for overcoming the hysteresis effect

Strategy 1	Distancing from the new field. – The new field is rejected, and its structures are not internalized.
Strategy 2	Distancing from the field of origin. – Habitus is renegotiated in response to the structuring forces of the new field.
Strategy 3	Adapting to both fields. – Habitus reconciles and accommodates the structuring forces of both fields despite their opposition and incommensurability. Can induce a degree of reflexivity.

Where Strategy 2 constitutes an adaptation to new field structures facilitated by a temporary state of reflexivity, Strategy 3 constitutes a unique privileged position of increased reflexivity and adaptability, from which a reconfiguration or revision of habitus to accommodate seemingly incommensurable demands is attainable. Abrahams and Ingram (2013) describe this as a chameleon habitus that allows actors a degree of more permanent reflexivity as they navigate through contradictory demands.

The following figure illustrates how hysteresis and Bourdieu’s theory of practice provide a viable way to bridge the dualism between objective and subjective representations of history in organizational change research.

Table 2 Different representations of history and implications for organizational change

	History-as-fact	History-as-rhetoric	Bourdieu
Assumptions about history	History is a structuring structure. It is an objective immutable account of the past.	History is a structured structure. It is a subjective narrative construction.	History is a structuring and structured structure. History works as a dialectical relationship between objectified history embedded in social context and subjective history embodied as habitus.
Implications for change	History is a constraining influence on organizational change.	History is a symbolic resource; an important asset for organizational change.	Incremental change occurs continuously through pre-reflexive dialectical adjustments between objectified and subjective history. Hysteresis presents an opportunity for reflexively changing one’s habitus to adjust to new demands; navigate old and new demands; or fail to do either. History can thus be both constraining and enabling for change.

4 Method

4.1 Data collection

Most of the data were collected in the fall of 2016 during a 6-month ethnographic study. The data collection included 25 interviews and approximately 185 hours of observation studies. The data also comprise a significant number of documents including e-mails,



KPI-reports, meeting minutes, and union newsletters. To understand the structuring forces that set the framework for privatization, secondary data such as written reports and literature on industrial developments in the Scandinavian telecommunications sector were also part of the investigation. The dataset is summarized in Table 3. below.

Inspired by Hasse (2015), the author was granted access to assume the role of participant observer in the department and follow closely the work practices of technicians, shop stewards, and managers. The author was provided with an employee access card

Table 3 Ethnographic data summary

Data generation method	Data specification and volume	Data recording method
Participant observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 185 hours of multi-sited participant observation of work in the operations department 	Fieldnotes that were written up in more coherent research accounts immediately after the day's fieldwork
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 management meetings, approx. duration: 6–8 hours each • 4 team meetings, approx. duration: 2 hours each • 3 e-meetings, approx. duration: 30–60 minutes each • 1 project related meeting, approx. duration: 1 hour • 1 working environment representative meeting, approx. duration: 1 hour • 1 meeting with central coordination department, approx. duration: 2 hours 	Fieldnotes that were written up in more coherent research accounts immediately after the day's fieldwork
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One town hall management meeting, introduction of employee satisfaction survey, approx. duration: 1 hour • One customer experience seminar, approx. duration: 2 hours • One management team seminar, approx. duration: 2 hours 	Fieldnotes that were written up in more coherent research accounts immediately after the day's fieldwork
Informal conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal conversations took place before, during, and after observations 	Fieldnotes that were written up in more coherent research accounts immediately after the day's fieldwork
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 interviews, approx. duration: Between 45 and 90 minutes each <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 16 with managers – Three with the Regional director – Six with technicians/shop stewards 	23 audio recorded and fully transcribed Two notes were taken during the interviews and written up in more coherent research accounts immediately after the interviews
Archival material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A selection of documents including e-mails, meeting minutes, performance scorecards, union newsletters, etc. 	Filed and categorized according to source, type of material, and content

that allowed observation studies to take place on multiple sites, on different weekdays, and different times of the day. Inspired by Hasse (2015, p. 10) participant observations were aimed at developing ‘relational expertise’, that is, through engagement to develop an understanding of field actors’ activities without going native. Hence, observations were conducted with the idea of learning the practices of actors by participating as much as possible while retaining epistemic reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). In other words, the author took on the role as a learner in the field in order to connect with the life-worlds of participants (Cunliffe 2015); understand how organizational change had impacted their practice; how their field-positions might have changed; what was at stake for them; and, finally, to develop a sense of their dispositions and determine their response strategies. Concretely, three full days were spent on ride-alongs with technicians during which the author would participate in solving the tasks at hand, try to learn about their craft, while asking questions about the technicians’ experiences of the organizational change during their tenure. In similar fashion, the time spent observing managers also involved spending full days with the same manager in order to develop a sense of the activities and stakes that constituted their practice. Other times, the author would just show up in the office and blend in with the managers and, like a newcomer, learn how to ‘move with the culture’ (Hasse 2015, p. 31).

The 25 interviews were split between three with the regional director, 16 with managers, three with technicians and three with shop stewards. The duration of interviews typically ranged between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews were aimed at two purposes; first, to establish an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and experience of the participants; second, to achieve a sense of their responses to the organizational change. To these ends, all participants were asked to initiate the interview by providing their professional life stories (Rouleau 2010) including information about their historical trajectories within the company that had led them to their current roles and positions. Additionally, inspired by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the interviews were set up according to a thematically arranged interview guide revolved around a variety of questions concerning the participants’ experience of the organizational changes and about the way their work practices had changed.

4.2 Data analysis

The analytical understanding of the paper rests on the entire dataset in the sense that the understanding of company privatization, the subsequent field-level changes, and the experiences and responses of actors to these changes were developed as part of a learning process that started during data collection and continued through multiple rounds of analysis. However, the data examples brought forth in the paper mainly comprise the responses of actors conveyed in their narratives, as narratives have been viewed as a key part of the way actors understand and organize lived experiences (Boje 2001; Koll & Jensen Schleiter forthcoming).

The overall question guiding the analysis was how the participants responded to the organizational changes. Following recommendations of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (1994) and Saldaña (2015), the transcripts and field notes were analyzed in an iterative manner which involved numerous close readings to generate themes and descriptive codes. In a combination of inductive and deductive readings, and subsequent coding,



it became clear that the past, and the way the informants mobilized the past as history, played a significant role for their understanding of themselves, and their lived experience of the change process. Field positions were not defined a priori but emerged during the analysis based on mapping and coding of thematic patterns that depicted distinctions between the dispositions of groups of actors. As previously mentioned, a prerequisite for defining the boundaries of a field is to empirically detect a struggle over something which is at stake for its participants. The groups included in the analysis are therefore to be understood as analytical constructs which serve to illustrate the tension and dynamic of the field.

The coding of data was conducted simultaneously with examination of theoretical material in an iterative back and forth process serving to develop a theoretically informed interpretation of data. Thus, the study was not initially conducted with Bourdieu's theoretical concepts in mind but as data analysis progressed, it became clear that the framework offered a lens particularly helpful in investigating the implications of history for organizational change in the wake of company privatization.

Next, the paper moves on to the analysis section which is divided into four parts; the first part defines the boundaries of the field and the forces that lie behind its current dynamic by returning to its conditions of emergence and its genesis (cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). This part of the analysis illustrates how privatization and the organizational changes that followed exposed the field to hysteresis. The second part analyzes the habitus of technicians and shop stewards which will be characterized as a civil servant habitus. The third and fourth part analyzes the response strategies of technicians and shop stewards, respectively.

5 Results

5.1 The genesis of the field and hysteresis as a field condition

Privatization is one of many types of public sector reform policies which have been deployed in the Nordics for the purpose of making some of the largest public sectors in the world run more efficiently (Lane 1997). Telecommunications is a key area in which privatization has occurred throughout the EU and the Nordics in particular where all former state-owned telecommunications monopolies have been partly or fully privatized since the early 1990s (Greve & Andersen 2001). The privatizations followed market liberalization which was deployed by the EU as part of a new financial strategy to increase 'Growth, Competitiveness and Employment' (Jordfald & Murheim p. 13). The reforms led to radical restructuring across the telecommunications sector as the companies were exposed to a hypercompetitive international market combined with the rapid escalation of technological innovations (Müller et al. 1993). Consequently, in response to the new demands, rationalization, streamlining, and cost cutting measures became an integral part of operations for the companies as the financial sanctuary of public monopoly was replaced by fierce competition and a logic of shareholder value. The transition from public institutions to private corporations added pressure on the employees and the previously powerful trade unions that now had to adjust to the political terms of the private sector while the demands on the individual workers increased. As state-owned monopolies, the companies had been governed by the Nordic model in which workers

and employers are viewed as stakeholders of equal rights and obligations to the firm which essentially can be seen as a community or a political system (Kettunen 2012). The Nordic model has been known to rely on democratic and participative models of leadership (Byrkjeflot 2001; Børve & Kvande 2012), which are reflected in solidary wage policies ensured through systems of collective bargaining between employers' associations and trade unions. Derived from the collective bargaining systems are low levels of income inequality and high security of employment provided by responsible employers (Ervasti et al. 2008). Hence, in the Nordic companies, employees had grown accustomed to favorable working conditions and terms of employment that included civil servant tenure, pension, and benefits. However, in the wake of privatization, the Nordic model came under pressure as new employment schemes, with less security of employment, and performance-based pay, replaced the old civil servant schemes (Jordfald & Murhem 2003). Thus, after privatization, the Nordic telecommunications companies experienced a decline in trade union power and influence as capitalist market logics came to permeate strategic and operational levels of organizing. The imposition of this logic carries with it a management imperative of maximizing shareholder value (Parker 1995). In Telco, performance management was implemented along with new success criteria for work (known as Key Performance Indicators, KPIs) such as efficiency, productivity, and billable hours. In this sense, the purpose and the logic of work were considerably altered as productivity and economics became the primary means of assessing work performance.

In light of these events, the paper views the Nordic telecommunications companies as a field since the companies share similar conditions of existence and are involved in a similar kind of battle of definitions (Bourdieu 2005) between a traditional principle of legitimacy based on the Nordic model and an economic rational principle of legitimacy based on performance management. Consequently, two opposed positions took shape in Telco with management on one side laboring to enforce performance management and technicians and shop stewards on the opposite side laboring to keep things the way they were to sustain their power and capital. It follows that field positions, forms of capital, and the logic of practice were all radically changed. Hence, the paper argues that hysteresis became a field condition, prompting the habitus of actors to respond to radical field-level changes. The field-level changes are summed up in Table 4.

Table 4 Objectified history or the objective structures of the field before and after privatization (Adopted and modified from Koll & Jensen Schleiter forthcoming)

	Before privatization	After privatization
Company objectives	Serve the public good	Maximize shareholder value
Governing values	Community Solidarity Loyalty	Productivity Efficiency Profitability
Employment schemes	Seniority-based pay Tenure High security of employment	Minimum-wage system Performance-based pay Low security of employment
Dominant organizing principle	The Nordic model	Performance management



5.2 Civil servant habitus

The operations department of Telco comprised twenty teams of approximately twenty technicians. Each of these teams was led by a frontline manager who referred directly to a regional director. In each team, one technician also assumed the role of shop steward. The latter performed the same work as the former and was a part of the regular day-to-day production of servicing and installing digital solutions for corporate and private customers. The shop stewards essentially functioned as buffers between their fellow technicians and management, speaking on behalf of the group, or assisting their co-workers in administrative matters that demanded dialogue with management. Hence, although they were part of production, their time was not as closely monitored as the rest of their colleagues'. The vast majority of technicians and shop stewards were civil servants who had been with the company for multiple decades. At the time of the study, the average age of this group of employees was 53. Hence, the habitus of the civil servants was socialized in the time before privatization. Due to the terms of civil servant employment schemes, the underlying assumption about working life was to have one job from apprenticeship to retirement. In an interview, one of the shop stewards, who had been with the company for thirty-two years referred to the job as 'the eternal rest' (interview). A great deal of pride was associated with being a servant of the 'public good' and performing an important task for the government. Due to the company's monopolistic status, the union had a lot of power, and favorable working conditions, including pension and benefit packages, and high security of employment, for civil servants were negotiated. Strike was the ultimate trump card because there were no competing firms or work force that could perform the job as the company civil servants. Consequently, the workers were extremely loyal to one another, and if the volume of tasks was a bit low, the technicians would lower the pace of work to make it look like everyone was needed. The regional director explains how the technicians would whisper amongst each other to 'break out the small hammer and put away the big one' (interview). In this sense, securing jobs was most important to the civil servants whose loyalty lied with the union, more so than with the company. Survival of the company depended on the government, not on work performance. The technicians had enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in their work as they would be assigned their tasks for the day on a sheet of paper in the morning and then drive off in a utility vehicle to complete the tasks largely without any further supervision or monitoring. However, as indicated above, privatization had increased demands on the individual worker to perform productively, efficiently, and profitably. The implementation of performance management included an array of technological tools that enabled management to measure, survey, and control the work of technicians to a much greater extent than before. For example, technicians now carried a laptop on which they had to register very detailed their daily work – these registrations then constituted the basis for performance measurement in shape of KPI numbers. Digitally, management could oversee and measure the work being performed and assign new tasks throughout the course of the day. Fleet management software even allowed management to monitor the exact location of each utility vehicle. The next parts of the analysis focus on the response strategies deployed by the civil servants to radical field-level change and hysteresis. The analysis of response strategies is divided into two parts because the civil servants despite their shared habitus displayed distinct strategic preferences between technicians and shop stewards respectively.

5.3 Response strategies of technicians

‘We got a lot more work done back then. You just couldn’t tell by a bunch of [KPI] numbers. The customers were also more satisfied back then’ (Field notes).

The excerpt comes from a heated argument at a team meeting where a technician airs his frustration with the new work demands through nostalgic reminiscence of the past. By creating a narrative dichotomy between KPI-numbers and the actual performance of work, the technician denounces the legitimacy of performance management. The reference to customer satisfaction also suggests that he is remembering former ways of being a good public servant and, thus, shows discontent with the fact that customer satisfaction under the new conditions no longer generated the same amount of symbolic capital.

Each week, the technicians received an automatically generated e-mail called ‘My Overview’ summing up their performance through KPI-numbers, figures, and statistics. The format at the time was an eight-page pdf-file consisting of performance charts, and numbers in different colors, to illustrate the development in performance week to week.

‘He tells me I need to look at “My Overview”, and when I ask him what I need to do that for, I get this long speech like hearing a politician on TV [...]. Then, when I tell him I am working as fast as I can – so how will this help me work faster? – My manager says: That is on me to figure out’ (Interview, Tobias, Technician).

The excerpt illustrates a discrepancy between management’s and technicians’ taken-for-granted evaluations of what was true and important about work as management ascribes capital to KPI and the technician expresses how he does not see the point of KPI at all. This could be seen as an example of how the embodied dispositions for work, socialized under monopolistic conditions, becomes dysfunctional under the new work conditions. Performance management became a source of continuous frustration for the technicians who displayed an aversion to new work structures as something which had ruined work for them.

‘I don’t give a s... [about KPI] I mean, I like my job but all this [Performance management]. The job is super but gradually there are so many things getting in the way of it being super’ (Interview, Tobias, Technician).

The frustration and discontent show the clash between the traditional and the economic rational principle of legitimacy as the technicians disapproved of KPI-numbers as standards of work assessment and performance management as organizing principle. Despite their efforts to sustain work as before, positions of power had shifted, and capital been redistributed. The diminishing power of the union to impact the pace of day-to-day operations as well as terms and conditions of work is illustrated in a story told by a younger technician about the regional director.

‘He [The regional director] simply doesn’t care about the individual technician. If you don’t perform, you get the boot. It doesn’t matter whether you’ve been here for 30 or 40 years [...]. We are just a number and if that number doesn’t add up, you wipe the board clean and write another’ (Interview, Christian, Technician).



The battle of definitions appears in the extract as the technician denounces the economic rational principle of legitimacy and ascribes legitimacy and symbolic capital to seniority and loyalty.

Based on the narratives of technicians displayed above, the analysis views the response strategies of technicians as Abrahams' and Ingram's (2013) Strategy 1, understood as a distancing of themselves from the new objective structures of the field. Through this strategy, we see the inertia or enduring nature of the habitus. In other words, we see how the technicians were unable to generate practices conforming to the demands required by the objective structures of the field post privatization because they were remembering former ways of being good at their job. However, the dispositions acquired in times of monopoly were deemed obsolete due to the radical field-level changes. Therefore, the technicians experienced a state of ambivalence and contradiction which led to frustration and suffering. The aversion to KPI-numbers and the nostalgic accounts of past times can, thus, be seen as strategies to maintain the structures, of which their habitus was a product, by rejecting the legitimacy of the new ones. In light of the quarter century that had passed between the time when Telco initiated privatization and the time of the study, the paper theorizes the response of technicians as the 'Don Quixote effect' (Koll & Ernst, forthcoming), understood as a permanent adherence to Strategy 1.

5.4 Response strategies of shop stewards

'It depends on: How is my collaboration with my immediate manager? [...] Is he a little on my side? Am I a little on his side to understand the business side of things, to understand that of course he has a production to run?' (Interview, Oliver, Shop steward).

The notion of being on someone's side highlights the two opposed positions as well as the seemingly incommensurable logics of the field. The narrative conveys how Oliver, as a shop steward appears to side naturally with the technicians in the battle of definitions versus the managers. However, by underscoring the importance of collaboration between himself and his immediate manager, and by bringing 'understanding of the business side of things' into the equation, he shows a degree of acceptance of the economic rational principle of legitimacy. According to Abrahams and Ingram (2015), whenever, in the dialectical confrontation between habitus and field, the habitus accepts new field structures it is simultaneously structured by these structures, thus, enabling a modification in the habitus. A similar example of acceptance is illustrated by the following excerpt.

'I have a lot of direct contact with our regional director [...]. I speak with him a lot and have an extremely trusting relationship with him [...]. If we were like cat and dog all the time, nothing good would come of it. We have to try to be more accommodating on both sides to make this collaboration succeed because it comes back in a good way to my colleagues' (Interview, Oliver, Shop steward)

By acknowledging that the two competing positions must be accommodating towards each other, Oliver again displays a degree of acceptance of two principles of legitimacy. By approaching the regional director in confidence, he accommodates the economic

rational principle, and by justifying and motivating his practice by the sentiment that it will benefit his fellow technicians, he accommodates the traditional principle. A similar strategy is shown in a story told by shop steward Jonathan who acknowledges that competition demands increased focus on making money, though without neglecting the good customer service.

'It's gone a long way from the dawn of time where we just had to take care of the customers. Today, we have to make money. [...] So, there's still time for you to take care of the customers, but not in the same way [...] and that's probably understandable' (Interview).

According to Bourdieu (2000), acceptance of the legitimacy of new field structures can lead to internalization of conflicting dispositions causing a cleft, destabilized habitus torn by contradiction. In some cases, such conflicting dispositions might pull the habitus in different directions leaving an individual incapable of navigating meaningfully in social space. Implied by the construct of hysteresis, however, there is also a chance that internalization of conflicting structures can lead to a reshaped habitus and an opportunity to attain a position of heightened reflexivity. This opportunity is captured by Abrahams' and Ingram's (2013) construct of chameleon habitus. The next excerpt illustrates how the shop stewards have utilized the opportunity provided by the field's hysteresis to renegotiate or reshape their habitus to accommodate incommensurable structures and position themselves advantageously in the field.

'As a shop steward today, one can't just focus on employment contracts and see to it that management stick to the rules. It is just as much collaboration with my manager [...] I see myself as an extension of the manager out in the field [...] you might call me a deputy' (Interview, Jan, Shop steward).

The excerpt shows how Jan has used a heightened reflexivity and his ability to speak the language of two logics to create a powerful position for himself as a crucial link between his immediate manager and his team of fellow technicians.

'I must be conscious of the type of information I pass on because I can turn the whole group against [The manager] in a heartbeat, and then we start to bicker about even the smallest things. Therefore, it's important that we build a good collaboration and a trust to make the group work optimally' (Interview, Jan, Shop steward)

Jan displays an increased reflexivity by acknowledging the uniqueness of his position and consciously considering how to manage it to sustain and accumulate symbolic and social capital in shape of the trust of his teammates as well as that of his manager. In this sense, the analysis shows how hysteresis has made possible a reconciliation of objective structures of two incommensurable logics, thus, transforming the civil servant habitus of shop stewards into a chameleon-habitus. In other words, the shop stewards had seized the change opportunity provided by hysteresis to develop an ability to reflexively shift between the two contradictory positions that constituted the field.



6 Discussion and conclusion

The paper has investigated organizational change in the wake of privatization in Scandinavian telecommunications company, Telco. Particularly, the paper has focused on the responses of technicians and shop stewards to radical change derived from the imposition of capitalist market logics into a monopolistic civil servant work culture. Empirically, the paper captures a broader societal tendency in the Nordic countries in which the continual adaptation to new international demands threatens to erode or reshape Nordic model principles. Formerly perceived as a benchmark for other countries known for its ability to combine economic efficiency and growth with a peaceful labor market, a fair distribution of income, and social cohesion, the sustainability of the Nordic model is now deemed questionable, in light of continuous public-sector reforms such as privatization, New Public Management, and outsourcing (Andersen et al. 2007; Ervasti et al. 2008). In a similar vein, the findings of this paper indicate a clash or tension between the Nordic model and capitalist market logics or, in other words, between constitutional management (Byrkjeflot 2001) and performance management. The response strategies of technicians are particularly illustrative of the challenges facing Nordic model governed companies under the constant change demands of public sector reforms. Arguably, if one considers these findings exclusively, it makes sense why other studies have deemed the Nordic model obsolete and incapable of functioning in the context of a globalized business environment (e.g., Byrkjeflot 2001). However, the response strategies of the shop stewards tell a different story, indicating that, in spite of the apparent incommensurability between the traditional principles of legitimacy and the economic rational principles of legitimacy, it is possible for workers with a civil servant habitus to accept and accommodate new field demands. Seen from a managerial perspective, the notion of shop stewards as a kind of deputies or extensions of front-line managers, along with their chameleon-like ability to successfully navigate in a field of contradictory demands, also suggest a collaborative managerial approach to be fruitful (See also Koll & Jensen Schleiter forthcoming).

Theoretically, the paper has explored the potential of Bourdieu's construct of hysteresis (1990) for bridging subjective and objective elements of history to increase historical consciousness in organizational change research. As the 'uses of the past' approach has grown in popularity over the last decade (Wadhvani et al. 2018), calls are now emerging for theoretical constructs that captures how the objective elements of history as fact shape the way history is narratively constructed. Mordhorst (2008), for example, suggests the construct of counter-narrative history as opposed to counter-factual history to study why some historical narratives achieve hegemonic status. In a study of organizational identity in universities, Oberg et al. (2017) explore the interrelation between history as time and history as process, showing how historical narratives take shape through multiple engagements with temporality, that is, with perceptions of time as well as perceptions *fixed by* time. Suddaby (2016) argues that the construct of rhetorical history and uses of the past is based on two components of history in the sense that the objective elements of history as truth place limits on actors' perceptions of what is possible or impossible, and, thus, on the way actors interpret history. While these studies have made significant strides in terms of understanding the construction and function of history in organizations, according to Lubinski (2018), there is still room to explore further the intersection between historical narratives, the organizational field, and society at large.

It is in response to the theoretical dilemma of history's double function; this paper has explored the potential of hysteresis as a bridging construct. The paper argues that hysteresis adds a valuable alternative to the constructs currently available in the literature because interdependence between subjective and objective structures is inherent in the essence of its meaning. In other words, for hysteresis to occur at all, a mismatch between a habitus and a field is a prerequisite. Thus, because of the mutually generating relationship between habitus and field, Bourdieu's framework (1990) does not allow us to study history's subjective or objective elements in isolation – and by virtue of the intrinsic properties of hysteresis, we are reminded to study history as both a structuring and structured structure. Bridging is, thus, implied by the framework itself, making hysteresis a viable way of bridging the dialectical histories of organizational change and increasing historical consciousness in the research field. In this sense, hysteresis allows us to nuance our perception of history's implications for organizational change as neither an objective determinant nor a completely subjective narrative constructed by agentic actors. As is reflected in the response strategies of technicians and shop stewards, agency, that is, the ability of actors to resist or embrace change, is a product of history understood as a dialectical relation between habitus and field.

The paper adds an additional contribution by showing how the responses of technicians and shop stewards to hysteresis vary according to the structural positions of these actors – according to McDonough & Polzer (2012)—an area yet to be explored in organizational change studies. Considering the numerous attempts at reforming Nordic public sectors since the early 1990s (Lane 1997), it seems fair to assume change demands to be both continual and inevitable for public sector organizations. It follows that the way organizational actors respond to hysteresis effects can be crucial for the future of public sector organizations. Hence, change managers as well as future organizational change studies might therefore beneficially focus on the possibilities of managing change in a way that facilitates response strategies resembling a chameleon-habitus as this will allow organizational actors to navigate smoothly in the face of the contradictory demands of the organizations' 'before' and 'now'. In conclusion, by drawing on studies of hysteresis and response strategies of actors from the research field of sociology, the paper demonstrates how the construct opens new avenues for exploring the implications of history for organizational change.

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