



Historicism in narrative reviews of strategic management research

Milorad M. Novicevic

*Management Department, School of Business Administration,
University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi, USA*

Michael G. Harvey

*University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi, USA and
Bond University, Robina, Australia*

M. Ronald Buckley

University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, USA, and

Garry L. Adams

Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of methodological issues that accompany the articles reviewing past research in strategic management.

Design/methodology/approach – The topic of the philosophical underpinnings and implications of historicism in strategy reviews is examined by contrasting and explaining deterministic, indeterministic, and underdeterministic views of strategy's intellectual history.

Findings – Three diverse philosophical approaches to historicist interpretation are found to be embedded in key review articles in the field of strategic management.

Practical implications – This paper indicates the need to develop and teach an accepted methodology of systematically reviewing and interpreting available knowledge in strategic management.

Originality/value – The unique contribution of this paper is that it indicates new paths that are important not only for the development of an alternative way to construct a shared history of the subject but also for the development of common norms for review articles that could help to advance strategic management scholarship.

Keywords Narratives, Management research, Strategic management

Paper type Research paper



What Carr (1986, pp. 98-9) has said about historians applies equally to strategy researchers: we do not render a photographic copy of the real world, but instead select, out of the infinite ocean of facts, the minute fraction that best supports our purpose (Powell, 2001, p. 686).

Over the past four decades, a number of researchers have reflected on the evidence derived from past theoretical developments and empirical findings to assess the current state and often to propose future directions for strategic management research (Bracker, 1980; McKiernan, 1996). This retrospective approach commonly takes the form of a review article written as a systematic (quantitative) or narrative (qualitative) prologue to past research contributions. A prototypical example of a systematic review article is a bibliographic study of research published in the *Strategic Management*

Journal, 1980-2000 (Rodriguez and Navarro, 2004). A prototypical example of a narrative review article is Ghemawat's (2002) "Competition and business strategy in historical perspective," which interprets in retrospect the evolution of strategy frameworks, assesses the state-of-the-art in strategy research, and proposes future research directions for the new millennium.

The focus of this paper is on examination of methodology and assumptions made in narrative reviews of strategic management research. Although narrative reviews have long been legitimized by many leading academic journals as often-cited intellectual contributions that complement systematic reviews (meta- and citation analyses), little attention has been paid to the assumptions and the methodology used in this form of inquiry in strategy scholarship. A closer examination of narrative reviews seems to be appropriate given these articles envelop virtually all past research studies in strategic management thus mapping our shared understanding of the field's past and future advancement (Kieser, 1994; Hambrick, 2004; Hitt, 2005).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of specific, yet latent philosophical and methodological issues that as historicism underpin and accompany the articles reviewing past research in strategic management. We focus our examination on these philosophical underpinnings and implications of historicism in strategy research reviews by contrasting and explaining deterministic, indeterministic, and underdeterministic views of strategy's intellectual history. This distinction is important not only for the development of an alternative way to construct a shared history of the subject but also for the development of common norms for review articles that could help to advance strategic management scholarship.

Narrative reviews are a distinct form of literature review, as their scope extends beyond specific phenomena (e.g. diversification, governance, or restructuring) to capture a meaningful coherence within a kaleidoscope of phenomena examined in strategic management as a field of inquiry. Building on the foundations developed in philosophy of history, we hypothesize in this paper that the meaning of coherence seems to be found more in the reviewer's philosophy of history than in the very history of strategy research. To examine this hypothesis, we analyze how three diverse philosophical approaches to historicist interpretation are embedded in key review articles.

Historicism in reviews of strategic management research

The authors of review articles use retrospective narration to assess those evolutionary paths that are likely to be explanatory for the state-of-the-art in strategic management research. The extensions of these paths are assumed to facilitate the identification of directions for future research streams (i.e. the streams that the authors of review articles believe will contribute to the consolidation of research in strategic management). The key concept describing the authors' modes of retrospection in reviews is historicism (Gordon, 1981; Kirkham, 1992; Kuhn, 1977; Popper, 1963).

Historicism is herein understood as a narrative form of reasoning (Ankersmit, 1995), which assumes that an "adequate understanding of the nature of a phenomenon and the adequate assessment of its value is to be gained through considering it in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within a process of development" (Mandelbaum, 1971, p. 42). This view of "historicism as a logical category of thought" (Iggers, 1995, p. 135) is different from the traditional view of "historicism as a worldview" (Ankersmit, 1989). Because it incorporates historical thinking beyond

history as the subject matter (Page, 1995), this logic of meaningful retrospection on strategy research is helpful to the authors of review articles to develop pro/con arguments about different paths of progress in the field. Arguably, the studies traced along the paths of the past provide the necessary social material of research experience and competence (i.e. theoretical maturity and empirical content) to construct blueprints for the current state and for future research directions.

Diverse philosophies underpinning historicism in the review process

The authors of narrative reviews try to connect selected individual studies through a narrative involving coherent reasoning that links these studies meaningfully in order to relate them to the current state and future directions in strategic management field. Moreover, the authors of these narratives attempt to insure coherence of study linkages by employing historicist methodology. Herein, the historicist methodology used in narrative reviews is not to be viewed only as “the study of methods” (Marieta and Perlman, 2000, p. 185) but also “a branch of philosophy that identifies the methods of solid persuasion chosen by those arguing a case” (Perlman, 1995, p. 134). Specifically, the authors implicitly argue a case why a specific study conducted in the past should be included into a narrative review. By appealing to the relevance of history when using the historicist method, the authors assume that they can argue persuasively why a study deserves the merit of inclusion by drawing generalized lessons from its past contribution to the field of strategy in terms of its unique significance for the advancement of the field. The authors thus adopt the following two fundamental assumptions of historicist methodology: “1) that regularities based on chronologies and observation do exist; and 2) that historical evidence, though by nature interpretative, is meaningful” (Marieta and Perlman, 2000, p. 168).

In effect, the authors employing a historicist method in strategic management reviews assume the role of judges who make verdicts from the class of past theoretical contribution and empirical findings. The verdicts of these “judges” are suggested relevant paths leading to the current state and indicating future research directions in strategic management. In order to reach their verdicts, reviewers engage in a historic interpretation of past contributions to convince other actors in the field of inquiry of the veracity of their conclusions. In other words, the authors of narrative reviews try to increase the plausibility of their claims in the minds of the audience by arguing the coherence between their conclusion (i.e. current state and future directions) and the premises (i.e. perceived historic pattern of selected empirical findings). This coherence between the input of historic evidence and output of projective significance of past research is grounded in the author’s philosophy of historicism, which becomes manifest when the authors make judgments about the relevance of past contributions in strategic management research (Table I).

Table I.
Diverse historicist perspectives in narrative reviews of strategy research

Philosophy	Determinism	Indeterminism	Underdeterminism
View of history	Prescriptive	Normative	Instrumental
Means of reviewing	Derivations	Reflections	Argumentations
Mode of reviewing	Monological	Dialectical	Dialogical
Claim in reviews	Predictions	Refutations	Revelations
Form of claim	Thesis	Antithesis	Synthesis

Historicism is a contested concept, and is a subject of an on-going, often bitter debate as to which definition of historicism (old/new) deserves merit in the contemporary philosophy of history (Ankersmit, 1995; Iggers, 1995). Because the focus of this paper is narrowed to the conceptualization of historicism as logic of thought applicable beyond the subject field of history, we follow Tucker's (2001) advice that the definition of historicism provided in *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2000) is instrumental to such a conceptualization. *The American Heritage Dictionary* provides three different definitions/meanings for the term "historicism":

- (1) the belief that processes are at work in history that man can do little to alter (i.e. this definition implies the author's prescriptive view of past research contributions);
- (2) the theory that the historian must avoid all value judgments in his study of past periods or former cultures (i.e. this definition implies the author's normative view of past research contributions); and
- (3) veneration of the past or of tradition (i.e. this definition implies the author's instrumental view of past research contributions).

In the philosophy of history (Tucker, 2001), these three different views/perspectives of historicist interpretation are labeled as determinism, indeterminism, and under-determinism (Burrowes *et al.*, 2004).

As shown in Table I, researchers adopting deterministic historicist philosophy deduce derivations from the class of theoretical reasons and empirical findings to form a single prescriptive view of past contributions in strategic management research. In other words, they recognize logically different empirical inputs, different types of theories, methods, and findings, but claim that their historicist interpretation is not only consistent but also possesses predictability that determines relevant future research directions. Structuring their narration as a monological thesis that is claiming coherent reasoning about past contributions, determinists promote their view of history as a repository of facts that have implications for the programs of future research.

In contrast, indeterminists take a skeptical stance claiming that most past inputs are socially constructed, and therefore do not determine current historicist interpretation relevant for the future research directions. In this view, any consistency and/or regularity that is observed in historicist interpretations results from normative political, ideological, or sociological-historical factors that influence groups of researchers with a shared mindset. In general, indeterminists view history as a repository of values that influence researchers' bias in historicist interpretation; therefore, only dialectical discourse based on the antithesis claiming incoherent reasoning about past contributions may reveal future research directions.

Between the prescriptive determinism and the normative indeterminism lies the instrumental underdeterminism in historicist interpretation of authors. In this view, some authors' accounts of historicist argumentations are factually determined by the past, while others are undetermined and require some values-based explanations. This assumption imposes upon authors a constraint to make a critical choice among a finite range of possible historicist interpretations of past research contributions. Underdeterminists tend to focus on searching for the discovery of inconsistencies in specific deterministic interpretations to engage in their criticism using negative-proof reasoning and/or dialogical appeals to a wider social purpose. Proponents of this view

argue that critical realism of unmasking/revealing orthodoxy is an appropriate perspective for reviews because it allows for synthesis that incorporates both the uniqueness of some historic events affecting strategic management research and the complexity of historic processes related to strategic management inquiry. In the remaining parts of this section, we will illustrate how the three diverse reviewer philosophies of history are mapped onto specific examples of articles reviewing past research in strategic management.

Deterministic reviews of strategic management research

The philosophy of determinism in historic interpretation of past contributions in strategic management research can be described metaphorically as “the past frames the present.” The underlying logic of this perspective espouses that the formal study and objective interpretation of past research models and findings are the keys to setting a consistent set of future directions for strategic management research. This view, however, discounts the possibility that deterministic reliance on history may bias the reviewers’ arguments toward the status quo of the current research paradigm. The reviewers subscribing to deterministic perspective tend to employ their expertise to identify and promote existing solutions to new problems in strategic management in order to predict the appropriate future approaches to addressing these problems.

Deterministic reviews have dominated the field of strategic management since the 1970s when Hofer and Schendel (1978, pp. 12-20) used deterministic historicist perspective to trace very briefly “The evolution of the concept of strategy” as a foundation for their proposed strategy paradigm. Their historical interpretation was concise, of necessity, as the field was nascent. In the 1980s, Porter (1981, 1982), moved strategic management “from informed conversation to academic discipline” (Barney, 2002, p. 53). He used a “quasi-historical” (Porter, 1981, p. 609) approach to justify and explain why industrial organization (IO) should assume “a central place among the conceptual frameworks” of strategy formulation (Porter, 1981, p. 614). In the 1990s, in “Strategy changes: possible worlds and actual minds,” Bowman (1990) reviewed three decades of strategy research and later offered a set of prescriptions for strategy inquiry in the future (Bowman, 1995a, b; commented by Grant, 1995). Rumelt *et al.* (1994) sponsored a conference on strategy and published an edited book *Fundamental Issues In Strategy: A Research Agenda*, as an outgrowth of the conference. In the first chapter, “History of strategic management,” the authors established a foundation for a historical account of the development of strategic management, focused on an examination of the fundamental questions confronting the field, and subsequently framed a proposed agenda for future research. At the end of the twentieth Century, Hoskisson *et al.* (1999) provided yet another deterministic historicist retrospective of strategic management research: “Theory and research in strategic management: swings of a pendulum” in the *Journal of Management*. This time, the authors interpreted the theoretical and methodological swings that have occurred throughout the field’s research history, arguing that they were bringing that history current by including relevant discussions of the knowledge-based and resource-based views of the firm. Then, as it has become the norm in deterministic type of historicist interpretation, the authors concluded their work with their own assessment of “future directions” for strategic management research (Hoskisson *et al.*, 1999, p. 418). Recently, Volberda and Elfring (2000) edited the book *Rethinking Strategy* proposing a synthesis across the ten

historically identified “schools of thought” in strategic management research. Their synthesis yielded three “promising” lines of future research.

These proponents of historic prescriptions view strategic management research as the application of the lessons of the past to the challenges of the present (i.e. theoretical developments and empirical findings created in the past arguably govern the future research pathways). However, these reviewers tend to discount the fact that the past paradigmatic settlements among researchers do not dictate the outcome of contemporary paths and undertakings in strategic management research – even if they frame and limit those outcomes.

This discounting attitude is understandable as it is intuitively appealing, although sometimes logically deceptive, to create a historic pattern of research studies as constructed paths in service of the contemporary state of the inquiry in the field. The logical problems in constructing these paths are associated with the challenges of interpreting the change of inquiry and the inquiry of change in strategic management research. As these changes are different in nature, they entail latent problems/costs that complicate both the research process (i.e. the coordination costs of integrating the new knowledge) and the research content (i.e. information costs of institutionalizing the new knowledge). Specifically, the more heavily researchers rely on the institutionalization of past knowledge, the more likely are current and future research paths determined by the path dependence of past research studies, rather than by current and future needs of policy and practice. Specifically, most leading researchers are often constrained by the intellectual inertia built into the research/publishing content/process, especially that articulated at the levels of governing institutions (e.g., the Academy of Management and the Strategic Management Society) as well as in the leading journals (e.g. *Strategic Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Organization Studies*, and *Journal of Management Studies*).

These governing institutions themselves exert sometimes-prescriptive path dependence in strategic management research by framing critical themes of special journal issues and dialogs of major conferences. The path dependence may be further mapped onto the review articles because it seems that their narrative structure, in contrast to the formal structure of the reviewed studies, might provide the “maneuvering” room for the authors to fit their suggested research directions to the institutions’ salient current interests and future needs. In this way, institutional framing in strategic management research could enhance reviewers’ autonomy by legitimizing the deterministic “history-as-prescription” as the dominant philosophy of the field. In contrast, the more the reviewers of management research view themselves and are regarded as autonomous stewards within the community of researchers the less strategic management research will be dependent on the inertial institutional forces of the past.

Indeterministic reviews of strategic management research

The philosophy of treating history as the factual repository of prescriptive knowledge and competence to frame present and future directions in strategic management research is different from the indeterministic philosophy of treating the past normatively as a repository of values. The normative historicist interpretation of past contributions in strategic management research views the past as a socially constructed repository of values that need to be deconstructed for revelations relevant

to the present paradigm and future directions of research. In other words, the indeterministic historicist interpretation of past strategic management research posits that history of inquiry is not only a source of facts for reviewers but also a source of their implicit values.

The indeterministic reviews have evolved with the advancement of post-structuralism (in different forms and to different degrees) in strategic management research (i.e. introducing a shift in the review grounding from normal science to humanities, with an accent on philosophizing and deconstruction approaches to review of strategy research). For example, Knights and Morgan (1991) developed their historicist interpretation by conducting a genealogical analysis of strategic management in a manner proposed by Foucault (1980). They argued that power and knowledge were the primary sources shaping strategy concepts. Hendry (2000) presented a discursive account of past contributions in the domain of strategic decision making, while Barry and Elmes (1997, p. 429) treated "strategic management as a form of fiction." Specific to all these indeterministic reviews is the emphasis on epistemological orientation over conceptual orientation (Farjoun, 2002).

Arguing for the demystification of integrative strategic management research, indeterminists claim that the past benchmarks for current research questions are often arbitrary, as they are partially determined by researcher preferences. However, such an opinion is less likely to bring progress in the field of inquiry, but rather may engender a situation where researchers focus primarily on revealing the rhetorical fads and fashions in strategic management research and practice. This seemingly patronizing attitude toward past research "streams" discounts the possibility that history as repository of values does not simply "reproduce" itself. An alternative approach of extracting a normative principle from past research paths to guide future research directions would appear to accrue more benefits to the community of researchers and practitioners. For example, Calori (1998, p. 281) suggests that philosophizing may "help practitioners and scholars to renew their management models, recipes and theories."

Underdeterministic reviews of strategic management research

While researchers that ground their theoretical perspective in economics and philosophy tend to subscribe to prescriptive and normative approaches to historicist interpretation of theory development and empirical evidence, it seems that the "strategy process" researchers tend to view histories of research contributions as instrumental. The indeterministic view of historicist interpretation of past contributions in strategic management research is instrumental because it selectively uses historic evidence of past contributions only to the extent such evidence is consequential for present and future critical research dialogs. These pragmatic researchers view historic evidence mainly as a means to explain deficiencies, often in terms of the relevance of strategy for the pursuit of wider societal goals. In particular, some authors are increasingly interested in the societal impact of strategic management research/practice in terms of complex interactions with the issues of democracy, public policy and justice. In this perspective, historicist interpretation provides a useful "instrument" in their efforts to legitimize an alternative worldview in strategic management.

The underdeterministic reviews have become salient mostly owing to Mintzberg (1978, 1990a, b, 1994) who criticized prescriptive determinism of strategic planning/thinking by emphasizing the instrumental role of social learning process

(i.e. the view that promotes an alternative view of strategy as a pattern of actions). Recently, as a commentary to the use of historic interpretation in Volberda and Elfring (2000) edited book *Rethinking Strategy*, Mintzberg (2001, p. 42) explained current ramifications of his past argumentations about “schools of thought”:

The point is that the schools were presented as a history of sorts, a kind of snapshot of where the strategy field was when I wrote it and where it had been. If that can help to take us further if, in other words, the framework can be treated as flexible and dynamic, then so much the better. Our world of strategy is also flat and round, bumpy and bulging.

Such a consistently resolute and blatant criticism of deterministic philosophy has opened over time the proverbial “barn door” for reviews of socially responsible management based on stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984).

The proponents of this pragmatic view of historicist interpretation in strategic management research, who focus in their reviews on socially responsible paths and states in the evolution of strategic management research, tend to build a historicist justification for their preferred positions mostly in order to accentuate an ethical perspective in their reviews. These instrumentalists often disclose the idealistic underpinnings of their positions. They try to stimulate a critical dialog and trigger activism within the community of researchers in order to challenge the pervasive monologs of narrative historicisms in reviews of strategic management research. They do so assuming that they are dealing with something that matters for progress in strategic management research (i.e. by passionately rejecting the notion that the past prescriptions should rule the present worldviews in strategic management).

The risk of underdeterministic reviews is the Type II errors that the authors might make due to their propensity to “over-select” those works that fit their critical dialogs, while neglecting some important works that do not match that fit. Therefore, the instrumental approach to historicist interpretation does not grant an unrestricted license to these reviewing authors to use input historic evidence of past theoretical development and empirical evidence only to serve some radical agenda calling for activism. Rather, a tempered focus on the realistic social consequences of the instrumental historicist interpretation could be a useful self-imposed restraint for the “under-deterministic” reviewers.

Discussion on diverse review philosophies

Historization of ideas is not specific to strategic management scholarship. Rather, diverse historicist interpretations are increasingly common in virtually all social science domains. Referring to Nietzsche’s criticism that historical interpretations end commonly either to belittle the past or to glorify the present, Posner (2000a) argues that the quest for historical understanding can have a debilitating effect of radicalizing history as liability of “belittling the present.” Critical narrative historicism is a form of skeptical and relativistic radicalism whose “lively consciousness of the past induces a sense of belatedness; it makes us feel ‘latecomers’ living in the old age of the mankind” (Posner, 2000a, p. 576).

Even a less radical end-of-history perspective (Fukuyama, 1992), in which “the dead bury the living,” distorts a proper sense of our stage in the history of civilization. Specifically, the overemphasis on the end of history is likely to “fan emotions that impede achievement” (Posner, 2000a, p. 578). As an alternative, Posner proposes

an overarching history-as-resource perspective, arguing that historicist interpretations should help us to build a vision of social needs for productive policies and practices, rather than limiting us to focus on the patterned reproduction of the past or on the metaphysical critiques of obsolete traditions.

History-as-resource perspective can be emphasized in strategy reviews by legitimizing an ecological view of past strategy research, which embraces complexity (rather than reducing it), while raising the accountability standards for the present. For example, calling for an increased accountability and transparency in the strategy field, Whittington *et al.* (2003) assert that history-as-resource perspective can be beneficial to reveal when the past uncritically glorifies the present (which is an assertion complementary to that of Posner).

Higher accountability in identifying historical contributions to the strategy field and increased transparency in revealing potential authors' conflict of interest are critical in strategy as an organizational field of social relevance "in which actors' manipulative behavior can prompt regular cycles of excess, collapse, and correction" (Whittington *et al.*, 2003, p. 397). For example, the duality of research and consulting in the strategy field has contributed to an uncritical focus on integrative solutions where consulting assignments are often "reverse engineered," published as research articles, and included in subsequent reviews (Ghemawat, 2002). This improper use of history as a resource to promote specific management practice/fad is not only detrimental but also likely to occur today when consulting giants act as "solution providers" and need academic validation of their solutions (i.e. which is often acquired symbolically through conference sponsoring, strategic alliances with selected universities, and shared governance of societies and associations) (for a comprehensive review of social/public risks in the strategy field of research and practice, see Whittington *et al.*, 2003).

The history-as-resource perspective should be applied responsibly in strategy reviews given the demand for higher accountability and "more criticism, transparency, and pluralism in our journals and our conferences" (Whittington *et al.*, 2003). Such an overarching perspective could insure that strategic management researchers circumvent the trap of promoting certain "blockbuster solutions" in their reviews and rather focus their reflexivity on seminal contributions to the public benefit of advancing strategy scholarship (for a comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Ghemawat, 2002). Reviewers should also be aware that potentially significant differences in the relationship between social needs and the strategy field exist across different national contexts. Therefore, a disciplined reflexivity in prescriptions for future research directions should be practiced because the main lesson to be learned from history is that "awareness of reality is more important than indoctrination in generality" (Chandler, 1963).

Implications for strategy research

As a part of the review process, the authors using diverse philosophies of historicism might slip into relativism when trying to both describe and explain the past. This "slippage" might occur due to their historicist claim that the essence of interpreting strategy phenomenon lies primarily in its past. To capture this essence, the authors of reviews often use coherence as a surrogate for substance in their arguments. However, coherence is often more a function of language than of reality (Pollman, 2000). Therefore, rather than focusing on the comparison of coherence within and across different review philosophies, a focus on the "history-as-resource" perspective is

recommended for use in strategy reviews. For this perspective to mitigate effectively certain risks of authors' opportunistic behavior, specific norms of reviewing could be developed to clarify the blurring boundary between "disciplined imagination" and "disciplined reflexivity" in reviews of strategy research (Weick, 1999).

Appropriate reviewing norms might enable a shift toward a less fragmented orientation to evolve in the field of strategy. In the absence of such adopted norms, those who are invited to write review articles will continue to "domesticate" the history of strategic management research by idiosyncratic citations of past contributions. The historicism-driven citations bias in strategy reviews raises the question of the purpose of the reviews, which may go well beyond their authors' intentions.

The norms of reviewing might also mitigate the risks of authors' biases in the selection/citation of past studies in their reviews. Posner (2000b) identifies six most common citation risks that are applicable to both narrative and bibliographic reviews:

- (1) self-citation of author's past studies in the review;
- (2) reciprocal citation between reviewers;
- (3) negative citation to exclude opponents' studies from the review;
- (4) careless citation involving inclusion of inadequate studies in the review;
- (5) authority citation involving the preference to cite authority figures from authority institutions while neglecting seminal contributors to the field; and
- (6) vintage citation involving a tendency to phase out "older" works.

Future applied studies should develop recommendations for editors on how to involve the Editorial Board members in the collective judgment process that could prevent the occurrence of such risks in the "invited" review articles.

Conclusion

In the maturing field of strategy, the number of review articles is likely to increase as scholars attempt to consolidate large and fragmented bodies of work. The consolidation attempts in the form of review articles face many challenges, as strategic management is an eclectic field in scholar background, material and subject content, methodology, unit of analysis, and philosophical conjecture. Therefore, it is important for readers to understand how narrative reviews contribute or bias our understanding of past and future paths of research in this field. By exploring the contribution of reviews, this paper identifies and differentiates three strands of historicism illustrated with prototypical examples that ground the discussion.

Historicism seems to be inevitably begotten in review articles when the evolution of strategic management thought becomes an object rather than a subject of the field's history (Prasad and Eylon, 2001). The historicist objectification of past contributions to the strategy field entails philosophy-mediated risks, which are to be mitigated by collective efforts that insure history-as-resource perspective is mapped onto the authors' reviewing process. As this mapping process is still in its initial stage, the recommendation to scholars is therefore to approach review articles with caution – not only to learn from them but also to discern their vested interests, agendas and epistemological foundations. It is hoped that such awareness will eventually trigger a "reflexive turn" (Weick, 1999) in strategy reviews, as "in order to understand ourselves

as management researchers we must engage ourselves through thinking about our thinking” (Johnson and Duberley, 2003, p. 1279).

If we start thinking more about our thinking we will see that a review of strategy research is essentially an observational study where the population is not firms but individual research studies. We will see that review studies have no standard format and seldom contain any quantitative synthesis because journals do not provide instructions for authors specifying the components of review articles that the editors intend to publish. Evidently, a closer thinking about our thinking indicates that there is a nascent need for systematic reviews in strategy scholarship.

It is not however enough to complement the traditional narrative reviews with meta-analyses and citation analyses because these methods are replete with their own biases. Rather, we need first to develop international registers for observational studies, which should include registers of research philosophy employed and variables examined in the studies. Moreover, we need to develop and teach an accepted methodology of systematically reviewing and interpreting available knowledge in strategic management, so that journal editors could insure standardization and improvement of reporting quality and require specific quality and profile of systematic reviews within and across the sub-fields of strategy discipline. Upon a disciplined reflection, we will eventually see that only our concerted effort can contribute meaningfully to the growth of knowledge base in strategic management.

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Corresponding author

Milorad M. Novicevic can be contacted at: mnovicevic@bus.olemiss.edu

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