

24 Page Preview

**PUBLICATION
NUMBER** AAT 3218598

TITLE An exploration of the relationship between how an organization expresses its identity and how visitors make sense of it in its corporate museum

AUTHOR Byington, Linda L.

DEGREE EdD

SCHOOL THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

DATE 2006

**An Exploration of the Relationship Between How an Organization
Expresses Its Identity and How Visitors Make Sense of It in Its Corporate Museum**

By

Linda L. Byington

B.A. 1963, Western Michigan University

M.A. 1968, University of Michigan

M.A. 1988, Western Michigan University

A Dissertation Submitted to

The Faculty of

The Graduate School of Education and Human Development
of The George Washington University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

May 21, 2006

Dissertation directed by

Dr. Andrea Casey, Assistant Professor, The George Washington University

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, Assistant Professor, The George Washington University

Dr. Nick Nissley, Chief Learning Officer and Senior Director, Milton Hershey School

UMI Number: 3218598

Copyright 2006 by
Byington, Linda L.

All rights reserved.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3218598

Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Abstract of the Dissertation

An Exploration of the Relationship Between How an Organization Expresses Its Identity and How Visitors Make Sense of It in Its Corporate Museum

The communicative and symbolic expression of an organization's identity has become a crucial element of doing business in a highly competitive, postindustrial world. Organizational identity has been understood as what is most central, enduring, and distinctive about an organization, though there are ambiguous and complex issues around this construct. Some organizations expend significant resources to express their identities through the exhibited narratives and stories of their corporate museums. This expression of identity has been studied primarily from a management perspective.

Using a qualitative case study design, this study explores the relational nature of an organization's identity, looking at both how it is expressed through the exhibited narratives and stories of its corporate museum and how visitors make sense of it. The researcher used the foreground construct of organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2003) and the background construct of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), viewed through a narrative paradigmatic lens (Fisher, 1984, 1987). The findings indicate that a coherent and stable organizational identity was expressed and made sense of in similar ways. The findings further reveal that the connecting links between the expression and the sensemaking of the organization's identity are found in the stories themselves—those exhibited in the visitor center but also those expressed by administrators and visitors from their prior knowledge and experience. The study further identifies two symbolic and communicative gaps that have implications for theory and practice. One of these is between how the founding stories are told by administrators, often with a strong

sense of personal connectedness, and the degree to which they are systematically exhibited. The second reveals an incomplete circle of narrative communication, for while the company exhibits its stories in its visitor center, it does not benefit in any real or formal way by hearing visitors' stories of their connections to the company's brands or to its founding story.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge two special kinds of people in my life: my family and my friends and colleagues, who have provided the important support and caring that anyone needs who undertakes such a daunting task. They made it possible for me to see the light at the end of the tunnel. First is my husband, John, who patiently gave me all kinds of support and intelligent feedback. There are also my parents, now deceased, who instilled persistence and the pride in accomplishment that are absolute requirements for successful completion of a doctoral program. My children provided encouragement, an occasional touch of humor, and a reality check as well, cheering me on mostly by phone and e-mail.

Among my friends and colleagues, I mention first my committee chair, Andrea Casey, who exemplifies the highest level of teacher-mentor qualities. I am most fortunate that she has been my advisor, chair, and friend, and I look forward to our continuing research adventures. My committee members, Nick Nissley and Jae Hoon Lim, also went way above the norm in providing scholarly and supportive feedback. I was lucky to have them both as committee members. Others were encouraging and helpful in a variety of ways.

I was also fortunate, with Nick's help, to conduct my research at a site that was rich in both history and data. The willingness of this large company to provide me with the access I needed was most impressive. Having the opportunity to share some part of the rich stories of both those who work in this company and those who experience it through its visitor center was a pleasure beyond my expectations of doctoral research.

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
List of Figures	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose	7
Research Questions.....	8
Guiding Conceptual Framework	9
A Symbolic-Interpretive Conceptual Lens	10
Linking Identity and Sensemaking	11
Linking Identity, Sensemaking, and Narrative	12
Significance of the Study.....	13
Overview of the Research Design and Methods	18
Delimitations of the Study	19
Limitations.....	20
Subjective Biases and Assumptions	21
Definitions of Major Terms.....	22
Study Overview	22
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	24
Organizational Identity	24
The Expressive View.....	29
Identity as Core Purpose and Core Philosophy	30

Organizational Identity as Social Actor.....	31
Identity Literature: Key Ideas Summarized.....	34
Sensemaking.....	35
Sensemaking's Seven Characteristics	36
Other Sensemaking Theories.....	39
Narrative Theory.....	41
Fisher's Narrative Paradigm.....	42
The Founding Myth.....	43
Other Narrative Theories	44
Museum Studies	46
Museums as Meeting Grounds	47
Museums as Places of Informal Learning	48
Summary.....	51
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	52
Research Design.....	53
The Context: The Bailey Company and Its Visitor Center	56
Site Selection Criteria.....	58
Gaining Access.....	59
Participant Sample and Selection	60
Administrators	61
Visitors.....	62
Study Duration.....	64
Data Collection.....	64

Visits.....	65
Visit 1 (April 13-15, 2005).....	66
Visit 2 (May 11-13, 2005).....	66
Visit 3 (June 8-11, 2005).....	66
Visit 4 (July 7-9, 2005).....	67
Interviews	67
Administrator Interviews.....	69
Visitor Interviews	70
Observations	72
Observation Guidelines	72
Participant-Observers.....	73
Visitor Observation Criteria	74
Learning from Observation	75
Documents	76
Photos	76
Text and Audio.....	77
Websites.....	77
Oral Histories.....	77
Data Analysis.....	78
The Spiral Nature of Data Analysis: Three Loops	79
Coding	82
Atlas.ti5.....	84
Peer Coding	86

Connecting Matrices and Within Case–Across Case Methods	87
Validation	89
Biases.....	91
Ethical Considerations.....	92
Methodology Conclusions.....	94
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	96
Demographics.....	97
Administrators	97
Visitors.....	98
Findings	100
Part 1: Bailey’s Essential Identity	101
Context: Destination Bailey.....	102
Bailey’s Core Purpose	104
Bailey’s Core Philosophy	109
Part 2: Bailey’s Exhibited Identity	116
Telling the Company’s Historic Story.....	117
Creating an Experiential and Caring Environment.....	122
Part 3: Visitors’ Sensemaking	128
What Visitors Made Sense of.....	130
How Visitors Made Sense	138
Part 4: The Relationship Between How the Bailey Company’s Identity Is Exhibited and How It Is Made Sense of.....	150
Conclusions	157

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND	
RECOMMENDATIONS	159
Summaries of the Research Questions	161
Subquestion 1: What Is the Identity of the Organization?.....	161
Subquestion 2: How Is the Organization’s Identity Expressed?	163
Subquestion 3: How Do Visitors Make Sense of the Organization’s Identity?	163
Overarching Question: What Is the Relationship Between the Organization’s	
Exhibited Identity and Visitors’ Sensemaking of It?.....	165
Conclusions and Discussion	166
Joining the Conversation: Organizational Identity	166
The Stability and Coherence of Organizational Identity	167
Founders as the Source of Organizational Identity	169
Joining the Conversation: Narrative	171
Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm	171
The Founding Myth	172
Perpetuating the Founding Myth	173
Joining the Conversation: Sensemaking	175
Joining the Conversation: Museum Studies	178
Organizational Identity, Narrative, and Sensemaking	179
Implications for Theory	181
Organizational Identity	181
Two Views of a Stable Identity	181
The Identity Characteristic of Distinctiveness.....	182

The Founder and Founding Events.....	183
Narrative Theory and Sensemaking	184
Sensemaking and Museum Studies	185
Future Research	190
Organizational Identity	190
Narrative Theory and Sensemaking	191
Sensemaking and Museum Studies	192
Implications for Practice.....	194
Founding Stories: The Gap.....	194
Telling But Not Hearing: An Incomplete Narrative Communication Circle	196
Closing Remarks.....	197
References.....	200
Appendices	214
Appendix A: Description of Bailey’s Candy Land Visitor Center and Its Attractions	215
Appendix B: Log of Research Visits to Bailey Company and Candy Land.....	222
Appendix C: Protocol for Corporate Administrator Interviews	230
Appendix D: Protocol for Visitor Center Administrator Interviews.....	232
Appendix E: Protocol for Visitor Interviews	235
Appendix F: Corporate and Visitor Center Administrators’ Demographics.....	237
Appendix G: Visitors’ Demographic Information	238

LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page</u>
1. Guiding conceptual framework	9
2. Summary of levels of pattern coding	85
3. Codes used with the most frequency at the descriptive level.....	86
4. The organization's identity from administrators' perspectives	115
5. The organization's identity expressed through exhibited narratives and stories from administrators' perspective	127
6. The sense visitors make of Bailey's identity	137
7. Ways visitors made sense of their Candy Land experiences.....	149
8. The relationship between how the Bailey Company expresses its identity and how visitors make sense of it in the exhibited narratives of its visitor center.....	151
9. Telling but not hearing: an incomplete narrative circle	188

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Increasingly organizations compete based on their ability to express who they are and what they stand for” (Schultz, Hatch, & Larsen, 2000, p. 1). The communicative and symbolic expression of identity has become a crucial aspect of doing business in a highly competitive, postindustrial world (Hatch, 2002; Margolis & Hansen, 2002; Olins, 1998; van Riel, 2000).

Since the concept of organizational identity was first defined as the “essence of an organization” (Albert and Whetten, 1985, p. 267), or that which is central, enduring, and distinctive (Gioia, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 2000), it has been important to how organizations conceptualize and express themselves to multiple audiences. Yet, the organizational studies literature reflects complex and ambiguous issues around this construct (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia, 1998; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Margolis & Hansen, 2002; Whetten, 2003). Chronicling multiple efforts to clarify its meaning, Whetten has contrasted organizational identity with related concepts like culture and image. Hatch and Schultz (2000), on the other hand, have incorporated it with image and culture, creating a broad framework that “encompasses the interests of all stakeholders” (p. 180). Their relational understanding may provide a useful perspective for exploring the expression of organizational identity and its boundaries.

While organizations communicate their identities in multiple ways to a variety of internal and external audiences, some have chosen to express them through the exhibited narratives or stories in their corporate museums (Nissley & Casey, 2002; Yanow, 1998). Found in almost every industry in the world (Danilov, 1991, 1992), *corporate museum* is a

broad descriptor for an exhibit-based facility owned and operated by a public or private company. Although many corporate museums are small, little-known displays of company history, others are large, well-publicized visitor centers like Hershey's Chocolate World Visitor Center or the World of Coca Cola, which by June 2004 had hosted 12 million visitors since its opening in 1990 (personal communication, World of Coke guide, September 10, 2004).

Visitors to corporate museums, the most significant and numerous of their audiences, inevitably make sense of what they experience there (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hein, 1998; Kavanagh, 1999; Roberts, 1997), constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing meaning from the exhibited narratives and stories into some kind of framework from their own experiences and prior knowledge. This dynamic and emergent process has been identified in the organizational studies literature as sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Schwandt, 2005; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking, often linked with organizational identity as well as with organizational storytelling (Gabriel, 2000; Kleason, 2001), has been studied in various contexts, such as university governance (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), departmental restructuring in an organizational setting (Greenburg, 1995), and the New York/New Jersey Port Authority (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), though visitors' sensemaking about an organization's identity in the context of the exhibited narratives and stories of its corporate museum has not been studied.

Czarniawska (1998) has called narratives "texts that present events, developing in time" (p. vii), stressing their inherent value for communicating and making sense of organizational identity. She uses 'narrative' and 'story' interchangeably, as do Fisher (1984, 1987) and others (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Pentland, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Weick, 1995), though some do not (e.g., Boje, 2001; Gabriel, 2000;

Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Fisher's (1984) definition of narrative is broad: "symbolic actions—words and deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p. 2), coming from his "narrative paradigm," built on an epistemological assumption that humans fundamentally create and make sense of their world by storytelling. His symbolic and interpretive view that all communication is narrative provides a theoretical perspective from which to look at how organizations express their identities through exhibited narratives and stories and how visitors make sense of them.

Narratives and stories connect people and organizations. They are an integral part of organizational sensemaking (Gabriel, 2000). Indeed, they may be necessary (Weick, 1995) or even critical for organizations to coherently communicate their identities in the competitive marketplace (Shaw, 2000; van Riel, 2000). Czarniawska (1998) has described organizational narratives as "the main mode of knowing and communication in organizations" (p. 17). In the broader social world, Polkinghorne (1988) has called narrative "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (p. 1). Fisher (1984, 1987) has said that symbols created and communicated as stories are meant to give order and meaning to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them. Given his view and the purpose of this study, it seems useful to ask questions like these: How is the 'inducement' of symbols as stories expressed or communicated in the corporate museum? And, how do corporate museum visitors make sense of that inducement?

Statement of the Problem

Whetten (2003) has said that multiple assumptions about the nature of organizational identity and its relatedness to other constructs have created considerable confusion about its collective nature. There has also been limited empirical study (Margolis & Hansen, 2002;

Tobin, 2002), though recent theoretical work has framed a broader conception of organizational identity that incorporates both organizational and corporate concepts of identity and encompasses internal and external perspectives (Hatch & Schultz, 2000, 2002). Others have emphasized the increasingly permeable and fuzzy boundaries between organizations and their external environments (Coupland & Brown, 2004; Jenkins, 1996; Rindova & Schultz, 1998) while inside the organization, issues have been identified around multiple actors who construct multiple identities (Pratt & Foreman, 2000) and multiple dialogues (Hazen, 1993). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) took an interpretive approach to the complex processes of meaning making, suggesting that two major dimensions, sensemaking and sensegiving, operate, where sensemaking “has to do with meaning construction and reconstruction by the related parties” and sensegiving “is concerned with the processes of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition” (p. 442). In a recent longitudinal study of the social processes of organizational sensemaking, Maitlis (2005) also studied the degree of interrelationship between the dynamics of sensemaking and sensegiving.

Weick (1995) has argued that most organizational realities are based on narration, citing Boje (1991) and Orr (1990), for example. Yet, except for the work of Czarniawska (1997, 1998), there has been little research to conceptualize and better understand the expression of organizational identity through narrative and stories (Van Maanen, Manning, & Miller, 1998) in any organizational setting, including the corporate museum.

There has also been limited research about corporate museums (Danilov, 1986, 1991; Nissley & Casey, 2002), despite their resurgent use to represent an organization and to express elements of its identity. Some museum studies scholars have described their history, content, and development (Coleman, 1943; Danilov, 1991, 1992; Rowlinson, 2002).

Danilov (1991) identifies the book by Coleman (1943) as the only previous one on the history of the corporate museum. Nissley and Casey have looked at the corporate museum as a little-understood site of organizational memory. Though they have described more traditional, repository uses where memory is gathered, stored, and retrieved, based primarily on Walsh and Ungson's (1991) definition of organizational memory, they have also explored a more dynamic strategic management process, "a borderland between the corporate museum and organizational identity/image that has not been previously studied" (p. 20). More specific to the scope of this study, Nissley and Casey tied collective memory to stories when they conceived of the corporate museum as "a representation of collective memory in the stories that are formed through the telling and retelling of the history of the organization and captured in the verbal and written narration of exhibits" (p. 11).

In spite of limited research, complex issues around the construction and interpretation of meaning in museums have been raised that are likely to influence the interpretation of this study's findings. For example, beyond their exploration of corporate museums as a form of collective memory that influences identity and image development, Nissley and Casey (2002) have posited from a critical perspective that the politics of remembering (what gets exhibited) and forgetting (what does not) exist within the corporate museum and influence the selection and meaning-making process. Yanow (1998) has described similar issues in her study of the built spaces of museums. Looking through a hermeneutic, text-based lens, she speaks of multiple meanings for writer and reader about the relationship between expression and sensemaking. She asks the question: "What meaning is made and by whom—and with what congruence and conflicts," suggesting that as texts, "built spaces are read by multiple audiences who sometimes make meanings that

are not intended by their architectural or organizational designers” (p. 5). Kavanagh (1999) has raised similar issues around the complexities of meaning making:

People encounter and use museums on many different levels and access the meanings that best fit their agendas. It is now recognized that the museum visitor is capable of being gloriously subversive in the messages taken from exhibitions or thoroughly disempowered by omissions, oversights, and generalities (p. xi).

Yanow (1998) and Kavanagh (1999), as well as others (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hein, 1998; Roberts, 1997), have studied museums, while Nissley and Casey (2002) have specifically studied corporate museums. All have conceptualized them as complex meaning-making and storytelling entities where multiple voices are expressed and/or forgotten and where the meanings intended may not be the meanings interpreted. While these theorists have not focused specifically on the relationship between organizational identity and visitors’ sensemaking about it, the complex issues and problems they raise are important to this study and the interpretation of its findings.

The value of this study becomes clear when considering several factors. First, corporations spend considerable effort and money exhibiting their identities (Danilov, 1992; Friedman, 1992; Grunig, 1993; Kinni, 1999; Nissley & Casey, 2002; Olins, 1989; Quintanella, 1998). Second, with the advent of the knowledge society and the highly competitive global economy, academics and practitioners alike place increasing emphasis on understanding the effective expression of the most central, enduring, and distinctive attributes of companies. The coherent communication of organizational identity is seen as not only essential to organizations’ success but necessary to their survival (Barney & Stewart, 2000; Olins, 1989; Schultz et al., 2000).

In spite of identified ambiguities and gaps within the literature and complex issues around organizational identity and meaning or sensemaking, there appears to be

considerable agreement around ideas important to this study, such as the following: (1) organizational identity is central to the way organizations define themselves to multiple audiences (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Margolis & Hansen, 2002; Whetten, 2003); (2) organizations communicate aspects of their identity through multiple signs, symbols, and artifacts (Cheney, 1983; Gioia, 1998; Grunig, 1993; Olins, 1989; Schultz et al., 2000; Tobin, 2002); (3) corporate buildings including corporate museums are important organizational artifacts (Danilov, 1991, 1992; Hatch, 1997; Olins, 1989) that contain oral and written symbols used to communicate organizational identities to multiple stakeholders, both internal and external (Hatch, 1997; Olins, 1989); (4) coherent organizational stories that express an organization's identity are important strategic tools in the marketplace (Shaw, 2000; van Riel, 2000); and (5) visitors learn from museums, though it is not clear what they learn or what kind of sense they make of their experiences there (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hein, 1998).

Purpose

This case study focuses on the organizational identity of a leading American candy and confectioner corporation. Specifically, it seeks to explore and better understand the relationship between organizational identity as expressed through exhibited narratives and stories in a corporate visitor center and visitors' sensemaking about that identity. Organizations express their identities in multiple ways, including their corporate museums (Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Nissley & Casey, 2002; Olins, 1989), while at the same time, visitors who have been invited inside this part of an organization make sense of that identity, bringing their own identities and experiences with them (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hein,

1998; Kavanagh, 1999; Roberts, 1997). Both are rich data sources for exploring the expression and sensemaking of an organization's identity.

This study draws on Albert and Whetten's (1985) organizational identity theory and Whetten's (2003) social actor theory, as well as Margolis and Hansen's (2002) framework of organizational identity's core purpose and core philosophy. It also draws on Weick's (1995) seven characteristics of sensemaking, while stressing Schwandt's (2005) emphasis on sensemaking's prior knowledge and experience. This study is intended to inform theory and practice in organizational identity and sensemaking, the key constructs. The context in a corporate museum/visitor center and the relational nature of the overarching research question also give the opportunity to inform the narrative and museum studies literatures.

Research Questions

This study centers on an overarching research question: *What is the relationship between how an organization expresses its identity and how visitors make sense of it through the exhibited narratives of its corporate museum?* Three subquestions provide a framework for the research design:

- What is the identity of the organization?
 - From corporate administrators' perspectives
 - From visitor center administrators' perspectives
- How is the organization's identity expressed through the exhibited narratives of the corporate museum?
 - From corporate administrators' perspectives
 - From visitor center administrators' perspectives
 - From researcher's perspective

- How do visitors make sense of the organization's expressed identity through the exhibited narratives and stories of the corporate museum?

Guiding Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) is designed to guide, not direct, this case study. It identifies two constructs—organizational identity and (visitors') sensemaking—within the context of the corporate museum and its exhibited narratives and stories. Each of these complex constructs is understood as socially constructed and symbolically expressed and interpreted (Blumer, 1969; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hatch, 2002; Soffe, 2002; Stimpert, Gustafson, & Sarason, 1998; Weick, 1995).

Organizational identity is the foreground construct. Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition, however, provides the identified elements—*the central, enduring, and distinctive elements of an organization*—for surfacing the content of organizational identity within the exhibited narratives and stories. The elements for exploring the process and content of (visitors') sensemaking, the background construct, are Weick's (1995) seven characteristics of sensemaking: (1) *grounded in identity construction*, (2) *retrospective*, (3) *enactive of sensible environments*, (4) *social*, (5) *ongoing*, (6) *focused on and by extracted cues*, and (7) *driven by plausibility rather than accuracy*.

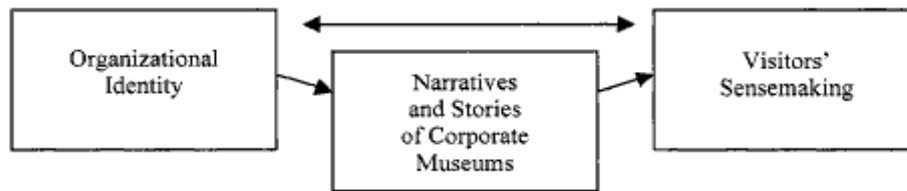


Figure 1. Guiding conceptual framework.

A Symbolic-Interpretive Conceptual Lens

This qualitative study draws from a symbolic-interpretive paradigmatic lens where reality and meaning are socially constructed, contextual, and made sense of within the subjective consciousness of the individual (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hatch, 1997; Schutz, 1967; Weick, 1995). Strongly identified with Mead (1934) and interpreted by Blumer (1969), symbolic interpretive and interactionist theory centers on the belief that people act based on what things mean to them, that humans are active, interpretive agents who rely on symbols as the primary means to know and represent the world (Wood, 1997). Mind and self arise and develop within the social and cultural processes where people actively shape each other's meanings and sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995). For Mead, Blumer, and later for Bruner (1990), meaning formed in the process of interacting symbolically with others is the basis of action, including all forms of communication.

Gephart (1999) has stressed the interpretive process of meaning or sensemaking in a social context: "how individuals or members of society apprehend, understand, and make sense of social events and settings" (p. 5). Citing Berger and Luckman (1967) as the interpretive paradigm developers upon whom others have built, Gephart identifies other social theorists like Schutz (1967), whose complex, phenomenological worldview focuses on common, everyday, lived experiences as they are intersubjectively shared among people in a social environment. Schutz's thinking has been foundational for Weick's (1979, 1995) sensemaking work and for Czarniawska's (1997) narrative theories.

Symbolic and interpretive studies have been closely tied to language and narrative (Fisher, 1984, 1987; Weick, 1995). They represent the approach in the social sciences that

comes closest to narrative knowledge (Bruner, 1990, cited by Czarniawska, 1998). Others have called narrative and language the most essential elements for creating and telling the human story, produced through interpersonal negotiations and implicit understandings and built through shared history and shared experiences (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Fisher, 1984, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1988). Through interpretation, members of a society make patterns of meaning from their activities and then assume the patterns they act upon are reality (Hatch, 1997; Weick, 1995). This socially constructed process, called enactment by Weick (1979, 1995), is an inherent part of human sensemaking from an interpretivist perspective. The nature of this study and its research questions exploring the relationship between how an organization expresses its identity and how visitors make sense of it through expressed narratives and stories in its corporate museum can be placed squarely in a symbolic-interpretive inquiry mode that is also very compatible with a qualitative research approach.

Linking Identity and Sensemaking

Some theorists have addressed organizational identity's complexities by framing them in relation to sensemaking (Brown & Starkey, 1999; Czarniawska, 1997; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Greenburg, 1995; Kleason, 2001; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Weick, 1995; Whetten, 2003). Indeed, identity has been called a sensemaking activity, "a product of a process of sensemaking" (Huff, Martins, & Reger, 1998, p. 111) or "sensemaking focused on itself" (Stimpert et al., 1998, p. 94). An organization's identity has also been understood as an aspect of culturally embedded sensemaking that helps to define and shape what an organization is in relation to the larger social system (Gioia et al., 2000).

Weick (1995) has grounded sensemaking in identity construction with the first of his seven characteristics: "Sensemaking begins with a sensemaker: how can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (p. 18). Though he speaks of the individual sensemaker, he describes the "singular trap of sensemaking," and, citing Mead's (1934) "parliament of selves" concept, he moves from the 'I' to the 'we,' describing complex interactive and enactment processes that are not always clearly understood (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Hatch (2002) also looks to Mead's thinking. When she generalizes from his theory of social identity and the relationship between the 'I' and the 'me,' she describes reflexivity, a sensemaking activity in organizational identity as "the process by which organizational members understand and explain themselves as an organization" (p. 1000). Also drawing from personal identity (James 1890/1950), Whetten (2003) has extended the "theory of being" to a "unique conception of organization as social actor theory" (p. 10), where an organization's spokespersons articulate an organizational identity that is, of necessity to the organization's need for coherence, available to all members.

Linking Identity, Sensemaking, and Narrative

Albert (1998) connected narrative to organizational identity when he said: "Answering the organizational identity question: 'Who are we?' requires a narrative," conjecturing that the study of organizational identity emerged "because these processes are best described in narrative and qualitative terms."

Czarniawska (1997, 1998) linked narrative, identity, and sensemaking in her study of the Swedish public sector, making sense of its identity through autobiographical narrative. Describing the theoretical history that influenced her thinking, she cites literary theorists like Lyotard (1979/1986), especially his concept of the world-as-text that "alerts us to the