«For most of its history, that was not the case»: The importance of corporate archives in the use of past strategy

This paper looks at how Barclays used the services of its in-house corporate archives during a period of severe legitimacy crises. In 2012, Barclays were found to have been rigging the LIBOR rate, another scandal in a succession of scandals for the bank and the banking industry since 2008. To rebuild its legitimacy and create a new set of corporate values for employees, Barclays used its historical resources to construct new values based on its Quaker heritage. Barclays Group Archives (BGA) were integral in conducting the research that underpinned the narrative that was used to disseminate these values. The archives were also used to preserve and provide the artefacts that Barclays would use in its promotional material. This paper will show the importance of the archives and the archivists in this process and how they provided unique resources and professional skills that were integral in pursuing a use of the past strategy.

Introduction

Following the "historic turn" in organisation studies (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004), there has been increasing interest in using historical methods and sources for research on organisations and in studying how organisations use the past and are affected by it (Wilson et al., 2022). This "historic turn" has led to a large amount of history-influenced research, including rhetorical history (Suddaby et al., 2010) and the "uses of the past" (Wadhwani et al., 2018) strands of research. This research has also led to discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of history as a method and how to approach corporate archives as a source (Decker, 2013; Decker et al., 2015; Fellman & Popp, 2013; McKinlay, 2013; Perchard et al., 2017; Schwarzkopf, 2012).

Rhetorical history scholars have shown how history narratives can be used for a variety of purposes, such as gaining legitimacy and removing stigmatisation (Brunninge, 2009; Foster et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2022; Suddaby et al., 2010), as a form of branding for products or the organisation (Foster et al., 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020; Lubinski, 2018), and to create a corporate culture to encourage employees to identify with the company (Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Bal, 2018; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993). However, despite the

interest in how organisations use their pasts and in using historical sources, there has been scant research on how corporate sites of history, such as corporate museums and corporate archives, contribute to this process. Indeed, when scholars have studied corporate archives and corporate museums (Castellani & Rossato, 2014; Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Nissley & Casey, 2002; Vacca, 2014), it has normally been as repositories of resources for managers to use rather than as agents in the process themselves.

This paper argues that corporate archives and archivists are active agents in the process of constructing rhetorical historical narratives using the example of Barclays Group Archives (BGA) and its contribution to Barclays' construction of historical narratives as part of its Transform Programme (TP). Corporate archivists were responsible for constructing the archives that preserve the organisation's memory and allows historical research to take place. Additionally, the archivists acted as a resource themselves as they represented Barclays' commitment to studying and preserving its past. This paper will first review literature on rhetorical history and its connections, or lack thereof, to corporate archives. It will then discuss the methods used for this study before giving a concise history of Barclays to put the TP in context. It will then give an overview of the TP from 2012 to 2015 and how BGA contributed to the research, construction, and distribution of the historical narratives that were part of it. It will then discuss the implication of this research before concluding with suggestions for future research.

Literature review

How organisations use and understand their past has received increased attention from management and organisation studies scholars in recent times. How history affects organisations has evolved from viewing the past as an objective force that influences the contemporary behaviour or structure of an organisation – such as organisation imprinting (Stinchcombe, 1968) or path dependency (David, 1985) – to an understanding that views history as a resource that organisations can use to achieve their strategic aims (Suddaby et al., 2010). In this approach, "the past" and "history" are seen as different things, with the past being the objective events that have happened, and history being the narratives used to link the events together and make sense of the past. Consequently, managers can use the unique pasts of their organisation to construct historical narratives that help them to achieve their strategic objectives. Suddaby et al (2010, p. 149) called this *rhetorical history*, where

«managers use the trappings of *invented* [italics in original] history, tradition, and ritual as a strategic device inside organisations».

An early work showing the use of rhetorical history narratives is Rowlinson and Hassard's (1993) study on Cadbury's use of its past and its Quaker founders as a resource. Rowlinson and Hassard (1993, p. 322) show the value of an organisation's history when constructing corporate culture, stating that «those attempting to effect cultural change in the present without regard to the past want a culture on the cheap». As the example of Cadbury shows, the founder of an organisation can be an important and flexible historical resource, one that can be used in different ways as the temporal distance between the present and the founder's life increases (Basque & Langley, 2018).

Organisations do not necessarily need to use the identities of its founders to construct a historical narrative that supports its stated identity. Foster et al (2011) show how Tim Hortons, a Canadian coffee company, link themselves to symbols of Canadian national identity, such as the military and ice hockey. The utilisation of shared experiences from outside the company has also been shown by Oertel and Thommes (2018) who highlight how some German watchmaking firms have used the history of their regions and the industrial cluster they operate in to connect themselves to narratives of high-quality production despite being relatively new companies. Connecting the organisation with the country it operates in can provide other benefits with Bal (2018) showing how Canadian banks linked themselves to the nation building project, something that also gave the banks political capital. Likewise, Colt likened themselves to the notion of American exceptionalism, the military, and the image of the Wild West to acquire legitimacy for its products (Poor et al., 2016).

History narratives can be used to promote or resist organisational change that may or may not be connected to its corporate culture by arguing that the proposed changes are in continuity with the historical character of the organisation (Maclean et al., 2018). Such strategies can be used to tell stories that lower employee resistance to organisational change (Trabucchi et al., 2022). However, these narratives can also be a site of struggle where various parties use traces of the past to win consent for their proposed changes (McGaughey, 2013; Ybema, 2014).

Organisational forgetting is an important part of constructing an organisational historical narrative. Anteby and Molnar (2012) show how Snecma, a French aeronautics firm, strategically eliminated references to its reliance on foreign expertise, particularly American

and German, in the construction of military aircraft to prove its "Frenchness" (Anteby & Molnár, 2012, p. 522). Such forgetting and re-interpretation of the past can best be effective as long as it is evaluated as trustworthy by audiences (Oertel & Thommes, 2015) and agrees with pre-existing and widely accepted historical narratives (Zundel et al., 2016).

While scholars have shown the flexibility that managers have when it comes to constructing historical narratives, it is still important that those narratives be based on accounts of the past that align with established facts. Booth et al.'s (2007) work on the German publisher Bertelsmann shows the problems an organisation can encounter when it uncritically accepts a historical narrative as a core part of its corporate identity. Bertelsmann's corporate identity was based on a narrative created following World War Two that depicted it as resistant to the Nazi regime and aimed at allowing it to operate under the American occupation, though this affirmation was not based on historical sources. The company accepted that its narrative was flawed and, embracing a narrative that was based on documented historical evidence, replaced a rhetorical history narrative that served its strategic purpose with a strategy that accepted the necessity of embracing «historical accuracy and transparency» (Booth et al., 2007, p. 631) as a core part of its corporate identity.

Scholars have, on occasion, considered the value of corporate archives as part of a rhetorical history strategy. Hatch and Schultz (2017) note the importance of the corporate archive in Carlsberg's rhetorical history strategy that sought to use as historical artefact and phrase – *semper ardens[1]* – as the basis for a new line of products and planned to incorporate into the company's identity statement. While the historical artefacts and archives seem to have been important for employees in inspiring them to engage in a rhetorical history strategy, the role of the archives appears to have been merely to preserve artefacts and provide history to managers. Although history is given agency, seen as potentially «act[ing] on actors» (Hatch & Schultz, 2017, p. 687), the archivists appear to lack agency, tasked with «confront[ing] organisational actors with artefacts carrying the spirit of the past that can help extend the founders' 'and past leaders'' visions for the company into the contemporary context» (p. 687). However, control of the archives does not necessarily mean control of the narrative. Cailleut, Gorge, and Özçağlar-Toulouse (2018) study the difficulties that Emmaus, a French charity organisation, have in managing history resources connected to its founder, the Catholic priests and famous philanthropist Abbé Pierre. The article notes that controlling the

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[1] Always burning.

archives and historical records of Pierre has not been enough to retain control of his public image, as he is a public figure. Therefore, control of the historical records does not necessarily ensure control of the historical narrative of a public entity, something organisations should consider when using history to build its brand.

The role of corporate owned sites of history, such as archives and museums, and how they contribute to the construction of historical narratives, has received scant attention in the literature. Nissley and Casey (2002) show how corporate museums can be important sites for organisational forgetting and can be used strategically to shape the identity and image of an organisation. However, this suggests a passive role for the museum, as a tool to be used by the organisation to disseminate its preferred message rather than a department staffed by professional museum workers with their own interests, ideas, and understanding of an organisation's past. Vacca (2014) presents a more active image of the corporate museum, showing them to be sites of inspiration and knowledge creation for Italian fashion designers. Despite this, the museum workers and their intentions are, again, absent. Castellani and Rossato's (2014) work on corporate museums in Italy does give the curators a voice, as they are one of the groups of interviewees, highlighting the potential of these museums as avenues for dialogue with visitors and the importance of the museum staff in achieving this. This valuable contribution shows that the museum workers are themselves a valuable resource for an organisation but suggests ways for organisations to make better use of their museums rather than how to make better use of the skills of the employees in them.

Corporate archives fair little better in the literature, although there have been some recent works that focus on corporate archives as a department with its own agenda and power relations. Foster et al.'s (2020) recent work interviews 15 archivists from 11 Fortune 500 companies to understand their day-to-day work for their organisations, highlighting two types of work: short-term and long-term memory work. Short-term memory work consists of the activities that construct the archive and make it function, while long-term memory work has links to the construction of historical narrative, consisting of the tasks necessary to construct narratives and memory.

Popp and Fellman (2020) focus on the corporate archives as a department and as a site of unequal power relations. Popp and Fellman conceptualise corporate archives as being subject to conflicting interests from various stakeholders including owners, archivists, historians, and audiences. Both these works provide valuable contributions to our understanding of the

functions of corporate archives within a wider organisation and the tasks archivists undertake. However, neither provide us with empirical evidence of how corporate archives contribute to an organisation's construction of rhetorical history narratives. Coller et al.'s (2016) study of British Airway's (BA) archives does somewhat remedy this. Taking an ANTi-history approach, Coller et al. (2016) show how the archivist is an active participant in the construction of the archives and in shaping the narratives that are told internally at BA, and potentially externally through attempting to influence the narratives told by professional historians based on their own understanding of the organisation's past.

This lack of attention to what archivists do for their organisations when it comes to constructing historical narratives is strange, as it is clear from the archival studies literature that they are involved in the process. Corporate archivists have discussed their roles in preserving organisational memory through capturing and preserving records (Hardman et al., 2008) and through efforts such as oral history programmes (Webb, 2003). Beyond capturing records, archivists have been key in enabling organisations to make active use of its heritage (Lasewicz, 2015) through exhibitions (Staples, 2004), community outreach (Ravenwood & Zijlstra, 2018) and projects with schools (Turton, 2000). Archivists have also been involved in activities that deliver an organisation's strategic objectives by helping the parent organisation absorb new acquisitions; they even help save an organisation money by providing it with relatively cheap media attention (Kemal Ataman, 2009). Unfortunately, much of this work focuses on the projects and their outcomes as examples for other corporate archives rather than focusing on activities the archivists undertook to deliver them. Therefore, while we know corporate archives and archivists are active participants in their organisations, not merely a passive link between managers and an organisation's past, how exactly they contribute to the process of narrative construction, what activities they undertake, and how they provide value from a manager's perspective is not clear.

Methodology

The data for this study came from the research conducted as part of the author's PhD thesis and uses three main data sets. The first dataset consists of observations and memos made by the author while they were embedded in the archives. The author was embedded in the archives and was able to observe the work of the archivists and their processes, spending at least one day per week during the first year of the research at BGA, as well as undergoing its introductory training, and spending two weeks cataloguing new accessions; during the second

and third years, the author spent at least one day every two weeks at BGA, conducting a total of approximately 912 hours of observation across the three years.

The second dataset for this study is documents created by Barclays and BGA. These documents fell into two categories: (a) archives that had been accessioned at BGA as 'archival' and (b) operational records used by BGA to measure its performance. The main operational records that were utilised during year one of the research was the archival catalogue and enquiry records. The catalogue includes various pieces of data on the archives, such as a unique reference number, physical location, creating entity, a description of the record, and any additional notes that the BGA staff thought was necessary. The catalogue was used to find the resources that others had accessed as part of their interactions with BGA. The main archives used were corporate documents that had been formally accessioned to the archives. These records included photographs and recordings of key events held by Barclays, such as their 2012 launch of the TP and the 2015 AGM, as well as records that were created during the planning of these events.

The third data source is 21 interviews with 22 individuals who work for Barclays or for companies paid by Barclays to create digital content for their website. Of the interviewees, 19 were managers at various levels within the bank, including at the executive level; two interviews were held with the group's archivists; and one was with the manager of a company that is contracted to create digital content for the bank. The interviews were semi-structured, with a general interview schedule that would be adapted depending on the interviewee's role at the bank and interactions with the archive. All the non-archivist interviewees had interacted in some way with BGA, using its resources on projects related to their own job roles. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher and the interview schedule and protocols were vetted by the University of Liverpool research ethics committee in advance of the start of the data collection.

The interviews were transcribed and then coded using NVivo, with the first round of coding being open coding (Saldana, 2016, pp. 100–105). The second round of coding combined value coding and descriptive coding, what Saldana calls 'eclectic coding' (Saldana, 2016, pp. 87, 110–115, 188–193). These two approaches to coding allowed the researcher to identify what their reasons for approaching BGA were in their own words, which could be compared to the enquiry data, and why they felt that BGA could add value, or how it had already done so, aiding them in performing their job roles. The final stage was 'codeweaving,' integrating

the various codes into a narrative structure to make sense of them, connect them more abstractly, generate insights, and make the findings more explainable to others (Saldana, 2016, p. 276).

Barclays: A Short History

Barclays dates its founding to 1690 when two Quaker goldsmiths formed a partnership headquartered in Lombard Street, London, a hub for financial business in the city at the time. In 1736, James Barclay joined the partnership to form an organisation named Freame & Barclay, Bankers (Ackrill & Hannah, 2001, pp. 1–7, 14–16). In 1896, Barclays merged with 13 other banks, many also founded by Quakers, to form a joint-stock bank named Barclays & Co. (Ackrill & Hannah, 2001, pp. 55–56). During the 20th century, Barclays would expand domestically and internationally, growing from 265 branches in 1900 to 1,826 by 1920 (Ackrill & Hannah, 2001, p. 399) and becoming one of the "Big Five" British banks. Internationally, Barclays would expand into various areas within the British Empire, having branches in South Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, consolidating these operations under Barclays Bank (Dominion, Colonial, and Overseas). Barclays would launch the first credit card in Britain in 1966 and introduce the first ATM in 1967 (Ackrill & Hannah, 2001, pp. 90–112, 402–407). Following the deregulation of the London Stock Exchange in 1986, Barclays would also expand into investment banking. Despite early difficulties, by the 2000s Barclays investment banking operations, now named Barclays Capital, was making a solid contribution to Barclays' profits and had influenced the culture of the bank to be more risk tolerant and focused on short term shareholder value (Augar, 2018).

During the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) Barclays damaged its relations with British regulators and the British government. In September 2008, Barclays attempted to purchase Lehman Brothers before its collapse. This attempted purchase raised objections from UK regulators and the UK Government, including both the Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling, who all questioned the sense of the purchase and how it may affect Barclays' balance sheet. Despite these objections, Barclays successfully purchased Lehman Brothers after its collapse on the 17th of September 2008 (Augar, 2018, pp. 185–199; Tooze, 2018, pp. 178–181). On the 8th of October, the British government announced that British banks would need to recapitalise themselves to a level that would be decided by the Financial Services Authority (FSA); if they could not raise the money privately, there would be a government fund they could draw on in exchange for the

government taking a stake in the bank. Barclays, along with HSBC and several smaller banks, took the private option despite government requests that they take the safer option of money from the government fund. These decisions, along with Barclays being the most leveraged bank in the UK and therefore in a risky position (Salz & Collins, 2013, pp. 215, 222), suggested to the British government and regulators that Barclays was more concerned with expanding its operations and growing its profits than being prudent, knowing that it could afford to take these risky decisions as they were too systematically important to the British banking sector to be allowed to fail (Cline & Gagnon, 2013; Tooze, 2018, pp. 195–199).

Over the next four years Barclays would be involved in other scandals that would further damage its relationship with regulators and stakeholders. In 2009, Barclays, as well as other British banks, were fined for the misselling of Payment Protection Insurance (PPI). While not the only bank to receive punishment, revelations that PPI sales were responsible for between 32-42% of Barclays UK retail profit and that employees had been incentivised to sell it added to the image that Barclays was a particularly self-serving bank (Dyson, 2009; Salz & Collins, 2013, pp. 56–59). Even more damaging were revelations that Barclays, as well as other banks, had been found to be rigging the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR), essentially the rates at which banks lend money to each other. Barclays were the first bank to be fined by the FSA and the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission, receiving fines from them of £59 million and $200 million respectively and becoming the face of the LIBOR rate rigging scandal ('Behind the Libor Scandal', 2012; CFTC, 2012; Darbyshire & Morris, 2020). This latest scandal would cost Barclays its CEO, Bob Diamond, who was also the former head of Barclays Capital, and its Chairman, Marcus Agius; both resigned in a 24-hour period with Diamond's removal being especially welcome by MPs and regulators ('Politicians welcome Diamond's departure', 2012). Concerns about the culture at Barclays had been raised by the FSA (Goff & Jenkins, 2012) and would be raised at a Treasury Committee hearing where MP John Mann asked Diamond what the principles of Barclays Quaker founder were? When Diamond could not answer, Mann retorted:

> I can help, and I could offer to tattoo them on your knuckles if you want, because they are honesty, integrity, and plain dealing. That is the ethos of this bank that you have spent two hours telling us is doing so well—in fact, from what you have told us, doing so well that I wondered why you had not received an extra bonus rather than the sack (Treasury Select Committee, 2012, pp. 44–47).

It was in this context that the new CEO, Anthony Jenkins, began his tenure having overseen Barclaycard since 2006 before becoming Chief Executive of Barclays retail and business banking divisions in 2009. Jenkins' immediate objective was to overhaul its corporate culture and operations to restore its reputation to external stakeholders. To do this, Jenkins launched the TP in December 2012, running it until his departure in 2015.

The Transform Program and 325th Anniversary

Jenkins stated that his aim for his Barclays' tenure was to «renew and repair our relationship with regulators and other stakeholders» and to begin the process of «embedding a culture and ways of working that give our stakeholders confidence that we will deliver outcomes in the right way» (Jenkins, 2012). To achieve these aims, Jenkins began to construct a clear set of corporate values that the whole organisation could embrace. Indeed, the failure of previous CEOs to embed a set of values across the bank was cited by the Salz Review as a reason for the increase in the number of fines received by Barclays between 2009 and 2012 (Salz & Collins, 2013, pp. 52–55). To create these values, Barclays conducted interviews with over 2,000 staff members as Jenkins was «keen to produce these [the values] organically» and the corporate archives were «the logical place to start (…) to understand where you've come from». Jenkins was also eager that they «anchored it [the values] back to the institution's [Barclays'] place in British history and British society» to counter beliefs that «the bank had become incredibly self-serving» as «for most of its history that was not the case»[2].

Barclays executives were unaware of similar attempts to construct corporate values in the past, with one of the archivists at BGA being asked «specifically whether Barclays had done anything like that [values work] before. The answer was yes, that's well documented»[3]. However, while they were interested in previous attempts at creating the values, they also «had ideas about the things they were hoping to find» and «the onus was on us [the archivists] to come up with those stories».[4] These stories needed to «provide evidence that Barclays had benefited the economy and society» showing that «Barclays have funded good things in the economy, in terms of inventions, manufacturers» and «its charitable work going

[2] Personal interview with Antony Jenkins, 2019.
[3] Personal interview with Nicholas Webb, 2019.
[4] Personal interview with Maria Sienkiewicz, 2019.

back to the early days of the Quakers, philanthropic work, charitable work (…), a lot of what we now call corporate responsibility»[5].

While the executives had clear ideas of what they wanted to find, the responsibility for conducting the research to find these stories was completely on the archivists at BGA. As the Group Archivist, the head archivist at BGA, stated, «the campaign was very dependent on us coming up with interesting stories and Barclays were very keen that the stories be 100%, reliable and authentic»[6]. Indeed, the archivists «were challenged on a legal basis as to what is your evidence for this? (…) [W]e needed some original archival evidence to show that this is what happened». For the archivists «the most difficult part of that was trying to find wording for the Quaker values. We were asked about that (…) there was no wording really because they [Quakers] didn't produce mission statements»[7]. This misunderstanding of what would be available exposes the lack of understanding the executives at Barclays have for the nature of historical evidence and of how Quakers operated. While geography plays a part in why the archivists conduct the majority of research at BGA, with BGA being located in Manchester and most of its users being located in London, the lack of historical research skills in the rest of the bank is another key reason. As the Group Archivist states, «if you're a person working for Barclays, who's in charge of dealing with customer complaints, you have not got the skill set to come to the archives and look through the catalogue»[8].

Despite not knowing what stories were available, the executives were clear about the importance of having these stories come from BGA. Basing the stories from the archives was important for the Director of Barclays Corporate Communications, as it allowed Barclays to portray the values as «enduring values that were consistent with the values they had, the Quaker values, right back to the establishment of the firm»[9]. For the former Managing Director of Corporate Communications, being able to «quote from the various ancestor stewards of the company» allowed Barclays to «look back to the start of this organisation, what people were doing then, what they thought the purpose of this was, what it was for, that is what we are still for»[10]. Being able to present stories from the past allowed Barclays to construct a continuity of corporate values that spanned over 300 years. The TP could be

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[5] Webb, 2019.
[6] Sienkiewicz, 2019.
[7] Webb, 2019.
[8] Sienkiewicz, 2019.
[9] Personal interview with Stephen Doherty, 2018.
[10] Personal interview with Alistair Smith, 2018.

shown as consistent with the vision of its founders and, therefore, as a return to the true Barclays culture, Barclays' historical culture. This continuity also allowed Barclays to make the claim that the recent scandals were an aberration in an otherwise laudable past.

One of the most visible products to come out of the Transform Program was a video called *Made by Barclays* (Huntley, 2012). This four-minute video featured British actor Joseph Fiennes driving a Morris Minor car, painted the same blue as the Barclays logo, in various locations across the world while discussing the bank's history with various historical artefacts and props used to show the stories being told. The stories featured were a mix of historical stories that had been researched in the archives and more contemporary stories highlighting Barclays' business achievements and charity initiatives. The *Made by Barclays* video was shown to all 140,000 employees as part of their training on corporate values and was mentioned by executives in speeches and memos as the official historical narrative of Barclays (Jenkins, 17 January, 2013; Walker et al., 2013).

BGA's archivists conducted the research for the many of the stories used in the video but also aided in constructing the script for the video. During the creation of the script for the videos, the archivists were used «as fact-checkers once the stories had gone out»[11]. Hence, if during the production process «something had gone slightly astray, the onus was again on us [BGA] to correct that»[12]. Barclays were reliant on the expertise and knowledge of the archivists to ensure that their historical narratives could be trusted to reflect the reality of the past. Not all the archivists' suggestions were accepted, with one example showing that the archivists clarified that it was one of Barclays' founding banks, the Backhouse & Co. bank that funded the first industrial railway, not Barclays as the video claims (Barclays, 2012) which was a separate entity at the time. This example highlights that, although Barclays rely on the expertise of the archivists to construct its historical narratives, the resulting narrative is also co-constructed by other employees.

The *Made by Barclays* video spoke generally about what the values of Barclays should be, focusing on the good it has done rather than on specific, named values. However, in January 2013, Jenkins would state what the values of Barclays were to be: *respect*, *integrity*, *service*, *excellence*, and *stewardship*. These values were «fundamental to Barclays' long-term success» and were «not something I [Jenkins] want to do for public relations or political

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[11] Sienkiewicz, 2019.
[12] Sienkiewicz, 2019.

benefit» (Jenkins, 17 January, 2013). Jenkins also emphasised that his change comes after they had «reflected on our history - captured in the "*Made by Barclays*" [my italics] film (...) which shows us what we can achieve when we are grounded in strong values and a common goal» (Jenkins, 17 January, 2013). Jenkins would further invoke Barclays' history as the key to its future success stating:

> Barclays has been around for 320 years. Its success and longevity are based on integrity and its attention to customers and clients. We have forgotten that, and we have paid the price. If we combine the right values with the right strategy, we will build a more successful business, not just this year but in the years and decades that follow (Jenkins, 17 January, 2013).

While the *Made by Barclays* video was the focus of the TP's initial launch and the employee training that followed, some of the managers responsible for creating it were unsure if it was the right approach. As the former Managing Director of Corporate Communications stated: «I have a huge degree of scepticism over the Joseph Fiennes video because you think it's so bloody glossy, and I think it's weird to make adverts for your colleagues for your stuff»[13]. For this manager, creating a «glossy» history that ignores any mistakes in the past risks portraying the organisation in an unrealistic light. Instead, an organisation's past should give the audience something they can take forward as «it needs to be about, where did it come from?, because if you don't know that, you don't know where you're going and what needs to happen».

In 2015 another high-profile event would show Barclays' use of its past had evolved. Despite it being several years since the LIBOR rate rigging scandal, Barclays had still not recovered from damage to their reputation. However, 2015 happened to also be Barclays' 325th-anniversary, and it was therefore an ideal chance to use the bank's past to continue to restore its reputation. As the Vice President for Campaigns, Content and Planning, who was heavily involved in planning content for the anniversary, stated:

> [W]e wanted to remind a lot of the people that we're trying to influence, our customers or politicians or media and our staff, that we are a long-standing institution, that we have done many, many [sic] good things around the world and particularly in the UK and we wanted to create a campaign of activity through the whole of 2015 to mark that.[14]

The most high-profile part of this «campaign of activity» was to take place at Barclays' Annual General Meeting (AGM) where there would a speech by one of the authors of

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[13] Smith, 2018.

[14] Personal interview with James Greenhead, 2018.

Barclays official history, Professor Leslie Hannah, and an exhibition of historical artefacts with the archivists acting as guides to the exhibition. Employees would be able to access the exhibition through the company's intranet site and there were plans to take a smaller version of the exhibition to Barclays' head office (Barclays, 2014). While the aim was to highlight the good things that Barclays have done in the past, the theme of the events was also intended to link to recent speeches by Chairman David Walker, who had said «I think it's really important to contrast this archive with the way we live our lives in 2014 (…) I think this problem of myopia, the short-sightedness, is relevant not only looking forward. We don't look back far enough either» (Barclays, 2014).

The archivists at BGA were responsible for deciding on the content of the exhibition, with Hannah also contributing ideas and third-party content that he could provide via his contacts, for example, footage of the Morris Minor factory held by the BBC (Barclays, 2015a). However, the majority of artefacts on display came from BGA and were selected to be part of one of the five themes of the exhibition: financing pioneers, pioneering payments and processing, pioneers in society, embracing diversity and inclusion, and British roots and global impact (Barclays, 2015b). In total, BGA would provide 57 artefacts for display, with all but eight being the original and archivally authentic items, rather than a reproduction or photograph of the originals (Barclays, 2015c).

The decision to use the physical artefacts and to highlight the Barclays' employees tasked with their preservation was, in part, an attempt to show the Barclays value of *stewardship* in practice. As Jenkins noted, it was important that after «you've described the values that you need to bring them to life through your decision making because if they're just words, people will say, was it just words?»[15] By showing the artefacts and showing that Barclays spends financial resources on professionals to preserve them, Barclays could draw on its implied heritage (Hudson & Balmer, 2013), suggesting that its longevity implies value in the company and that by actively preserving that heritage they were being good stewards of the company.

For the Vice President of Campaigns, Content, and Planning the historical artefacts were also a valuable resource, as:

> [T]here is something fundamentally valuable about tangible artefacts that people can touch and look at and, feel the history behind, that our forefathers used this

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[15] Jenkins, 2019.

and (…) I think that makes a massive difference. We have such an amazing story to tell, and I think each of the artefacts has its own bit of history. I think that you can't put a price on that.[16]

This sentiment was shared by other employees who produced internal and external content for Barclays. A Senior Media Relations Manager said:

When we're moving into such a digital world, it's often those physical stories and assets that actually offer the most interest, and we can tell the best stories with, because […] physical things […] are often seen as a lot more rare than digital copies.[17]

Likewise, the Head of Content and Marketing at Barclays Corporate Bank suggested that «being able to showcase some of the more striking physical artefacts that I know they have up there in person would really draw a lot of attention»[18].

Employees at Barclays who are responsible for producing content for internal and external communications see physical artefacts as a valuable resource for gaining the attention of audiences and telling stories about the company to construct a corporate culture for employees and external stakeholders to embrace. However, as a bank, Barclays does not produce physical products that stakeholders can form an attachment to and the physical assets it does possess – such as the branch network, signage, and bank cards – are not necessarily collectable for security reasons, or easy to use as part of an exhibition. BGA provides unique artefacts that are intimately connected to the Barclays brand and that can be transported as part of a multi-sensory exhibition.

Discussion

Barclays' TP shows the importance of corporate archives for strategies that seek to use the past as a resource. While prior research on corporate sites of history such as archives and museums has shown that they can be useful organisational resources for constructing or distributing historical narratives about themselves (Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Nissley & Casey, 2002; Vacca, 2014), the workers in those departments have rarely been shown to be active participants in the construction, often being seen as passive repositories of resources for others. The experience at Barclays shows that this is not the case. Archivists, as professional

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[16] Greenhead, 2018.

[17] Personal interview with India Smyth, 2018.

[18] Personal interview with Robert Radcliff, 2018.

experts in the bank's past, were active researchers, fact checkers, and even a resource themselves when it came to constructing these narratives.

Initially, the archivists provided an important service as the memory of the company, able to remind executives of when Barclays had conducted similar work in the past. This role is often overlooked in management literature, where organisational memory is often seen as information stored in various retention bins (Walsh & Ungson, 1991) or as a social phenomenon where memory is constructed by groups via their interactions and discussions (Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Rowlinson et al., 2010). While these studies are valuable, they do ignore individuals within a company whose activities include being specifically tasked with preserving and retrieving information from records and communicating that to other employees to use. Understanding how these professionals preserve, organise, retrieve, and communicate this information is crucial in properly understanding how organisational memory is constructed, particularly as it is clear that the archivists at BGA have a skillset that is unique within the bank.

Barclays' experience with the TP shows archivists to be active participants in the construction of rhetorical history narratives. One major reason for this is that they are the only professionals within the company who have the skills to conduct historical research, something that is often overlooked in rhetorical history literature, as the focus has normally been on managers' use of the past rather than on how they know about the company's past (Maclean et al., 2018; Suddaby et al., 2010). While the TP also shows that, in the end, it is managers who have control over the eventual narrative, this is only possible due to the research conducted in the archives by the archivists. Organisations need not utilise internal resources to conduct historical research, as it has been common in the past for businesses to make use of professional historians or former staff members to conduct research into its history. However, these choices can create their own problems, such as the differences that might occur between management and the researcher on what the historical narrative should be, or potentially damaging the credibility of the professional historian (Coleman, 1987; Durepos et al., 2008). There are also external organisations that can perform this work, such as the History Factory, the Winthrop Group, or the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte. Regardless of how an organisation chooses to conduct this research, it is important to consider how it has conducted it in order to understand the narratives that are produced. In the example of the TP, relying on the professional archivists at BGA gave Barclays executives control over the process and resulting narrative, while also showing Barclays'

commitments to preserving its past to a wider audience. However, the decision also limited the claims they could make, as any potential impropriety would further damage the bank and BGA's reputation, hence the need to provide primary sources for all stories.

Barclays' choice to use its archives also provided them with visible resources they could use in the TP. As mentioned above, the archivists were presented as the bank's experts on its past during its anniversary celebrations and as an embodiment of Barclays' value of *stewardship*. Hence, Barclays could show its dedication to its espoused values through actively allocating resources to preserving the bank's past - in Jenkins words, «bringing them [the values] to life»[19]. While much of the rhetorical history literature has focused on the narratives that are produced, how they were produced and how they are disseminated has been less studied. The experience of Barclays suggests that corporate archivists can be a valuable resource as symbols, as well as due to the skills they have, because of the symbolic commitment to an organisation's past that they can represent.

BGA's ability to provide physical artefacts that could be used when distributing the narratives was also important. Various organisations use their products as a means of connecting emotionally with stakeholders, either through connecting their branding with values they espouse (Hatch & Schultz, 2017) or to tell its story (Markley, 2008). Likewise, Barclays have used artefacts in its past to highlight certain values or to depict a particular identity (Barnes & Newton, 2022). However, Barclays rarely produce such physical artefacts due to the nature of its activities in the banking industry. Therefore, BGA is a unique repository of resources within Barclays, as it provides the organisation with historical artefacts that they can tell their story with. While the importance of the physical has been noted in respect to corporate museums (Castellani & Rossato, 2014; Nissley & Casey, 2002; Vacca, 2014), it has generally been ignored in respect to corporate archives, where the holdings have been seen mostly as providing information rather than inspiration or emotional connection. This is a strange omission, considering that archival studies has discussed the emotional impact of interacting with archives and physical artefacts (Dudley, 2012; Steadman, 2002). The TP and accounts of those tasked with creating the media that would distribute the narrative suggests that rhetorical history literature should consider the value of being able to present historical artefacts when distributing a rhetorical history narrative.

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[19] Jenkins, 2019.

It should be noted that most of the interviewees for this study were based in Barclays' head office in London and were fairly senior, thereby not representative of the organisation as whole. Likewise, the Transform Program, which has been the focus of this article, was an extraordinary event and not representative of how BGA is normally used by employees or the activities it normally undertakes. However, it should be noted that the values BGA brought to the TP – the unique skill set of the archivists within the wider organisation, the material artefacts, and acting as the organisation's memory – were often the values that underpinned the services it provided in its quotidian services for other employees of Barclays.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of BGA and Barclays archivists during the TP. Making use of Barclays' past was an important part of the TP, with a historical narrative that could underpin the corporate values that the TP was promoting, considered vital for the success of the strategy. BGA provided unique historical artefacts that could be used as part of the strategy as well as providing records that could be used as proof of the veracity of the stories being told. Likewise, the archivists were crucial to the TP, conducting the research that uncovered the stories, ensuring the historical narrative being told remained largely faithful to the primary sources, and acting as experts on Barclays' history and the embodiment of its value of *stewardship* are roles that no-one else at the bank could have undertaken.

Future research on how organisations use their pasts could build on these findings by focusing on how organisations access their pasts and who in an organisation are responsible for connecting managers to it. Approaching these departments as individuals as actors with their own interests and aims could help to enrich our understanding of what managers can and cannot do with its history. Finally, focusing on corporate archives as a department itself rather than as a resource for others to make use of could help us to better understand the values that archives bring to an organisation beyond them being merely the instrument of others, highlighting the day-to-day activities that often underpin the value they provide in more exceptional circumstances.

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