

Business Legitimacy, Modernity, and Organizational Systems: Corporate Spirit, Esprit De Corps and Corpus Spiritus Throughout History

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Abstract

Organizational reforms often require transformations in motivations. However, often we see old wine in new bottles. Organization studies seem to have ignored the long path dependencies of previous transformations in the ethics of work, cooperation, and organizational communication. In the form of an archeology of the conceptual and semantic layers, the chapter passes from the idea of *corporate spirit* and capitalist work ethics to the analysis of what was called *esprit de corps* in administrations and corporations in early modernity and further on into the late and high medieval constructions of the so-called *corpus spiritus* in Christianity. The chapter demonstrates how immense parts of modern organizational forms are constituted by the medieval semantics of cooperative virtues and their transformations in early modernity. The ideas of legitimacy, virtues, and ethics were most central in the organization of the Christian Church; moreover, they formed and authorized the paradigm of both state organizations and business corporations. Then, as today, problems of delegation, representation, and decentralization appeared as problems of communication to be dealt with in decision-making and at the central levels of corporations and legitimized organization.

Keywords

Organizational history Organizational ethics Corporate spirit Bureaucracy
Communication Organisation Chart Central perspective Synchronization
Virtues Delegation Centralization/decentralization Path dependency

Secularization Coordination

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Introduction: The Present and the Past

Today, reforms and organizational innovation have become big business. Thousands of consultancy firms, HR directors, and huge staffs cope with the subject. Moreover, still more people in the work force try to keep up with new incentives and with an increasing reform fever. Lots of people feel stressed or become outburned while they try to stay inside the inclusion side of an accelerated society at the same time as they shall take care of children, wife or husband, elders, friends, and colleagues, of which, sometimes or even regularly, some get ill or break down and need attention (Sennett 1999; Rosa 2005). The highly esteemed “corporate spirit” and its inclusive “organizational culture” function easily as oil in the machinery of organizations when it functions. Yet it risks to become destructive when all members “shall” follow it and in a still higher and more synchronized speed develop innovations in individualized ways with still more complex rules, formal as well as informal.

Back in the 1980s, business ethics and organizational reforms were legitimized by reflections about post-bureaucratic and post-hierarchical “organizational cultures” and network organization. Often such reforms were described as new and innovative (Frost et al. 1985; Jablin 1987; Clegg 1990; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). French Luc Boltanski was among the first to open this Pandora’s box with a kind of second-order analysis, yet he too did not dig into the long-term historical decision-making premises of organizational forms. Neither did organizational sociology excavate into a history of the past to observe how motivations and organizational communication were constituted all along the formation processes that already, repeatedly, had transformed the legitimacy and virtues of work, organization, and cooperation.

The often-heard contention is that these problems describe new social forms. The acceleration in the competition on the edge between inclusion and exclusion – of firms, institutions, or persons – is told to be a recent phenomenon. It certainly is. Yet a suspicion too, is that we talk about old wine in new bottles. Therefore, we have to dig into the archeology of organizational history. We have to search for those organizational forms that so often are reformed, as if reforms never occurred before. We have to look into the past, in order to find the layers of organizational legitimacy, ethics, and virtues that already often implicitly and invisible are inherited inside the way we work and cooperate. This is a very long history. After all, we have to reflect carefully about what happens in a modern, or, as some may say, postmodern, society that experiences a revolution in communication media, like the it-revolution, the printing press revolution of the Renaissance, or the text revolution in Antiquity (Luhmann 2013, vol 1: 120–180; Eisenstein 1983).

Cooperation and virtues of work and management did not come overnight. Technical and social systems have a very long breath that developed over generations and took hundreds of years, if not thousands. Authority and the legitimacy of cooperative forms developed, with word and concepts used in organization communication way back before what we know as states and corporations. Many of the words, habits, and expectations about how to manage, operate, and cooperate has developed in layers and still more layers of semantics and learning processes. If we look into European organizational history or into Chinese forms and quarrels about centralization and decentralizations, we observe still more cellars with old wine in bricks to be filled into our new bottles.

The present chapter will begin with the quite well-known organizational storytelling about Max Weber's studies of protestant work ethics. This should be joined by an exposition of his French contemporary also highly recognized scholar, Émile Durkheim, and his analysis of conditions for modern division of labor. These conditions certainly were about the spirit of institutions developed in corporations and in particular in state administration as it is known from French state-building. Again, such administrative forms were a reaction and consequence of the broken body of late medieval conceptions about those cooperative virtues that ruled the Catholic Church and those early corporations that developed under its sway. The final sections of the chapter describe the complexities of those forms of confessional communication and their semantics, concepts, and codifications. (In this vein, semantics is broadly defined as the variance of all kind of symbols; concepts are more firm and contrasted to counter-concepts; and codes are binary forms in communication; in a combination of these forms, social meaning emerge.) If we consider that modern cooperation today is reconstructed under the impact of a still intransparent it-revolution, we have to focus those constitutive conditions, which formed our organizational ethics. Albeit some frames should be known from Max Weber's amazingly dense analyses (Weber 1922/1980), major sociologists like Niklas Luhmann, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu have described a number of historical conditions of modern communication and its normative orders. From the point of view of organizational analysis, the frames possible to analyze on that background still needs exposure.

Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Work: Max Weber

One of the most famous narratives about business legitimacy and ethics is German sociologist Max Weber's analysis of *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* from 1904 to which he added a foreword about social forms of rationalizations in 1920 (Weber 1904/1972). His aim was to challenge Karl Marx's history of capitalism. Economics of labor and accumulation of capital was, according to Weber, not the initial strive that was the origin of capitalism. Economic incentives to work, therefore, was not the only nor the most important driver behind that kind of capitalist spirit, which is known from the eighteenth century and, for example, is observed in Benjamin Franklin's writings from 1742

about time as money. If we go back into the sixteenth century, we find another story. Reformation in theology led to uprisings and spread the idea that inclusion among the selected in heavenly life was not merely preserved to noble estates. It was not up to man but to a preselected divine order about inclusion and exclusion given by God. This was the narrative exposed by French theologian and lawyer Jean Calvin, who after Erasmus and Martin Luther, translated the Bible into vernacular language. His theology beside, the impact of Calvinism – according to Weber – was that work was about the realization of God's symbols in earthly life; eternal order should be symbolized in temporal life. Ascetic life demonstrated that strive. However, the combination of asceticism and work accumulated fortunes and capital in urban handwork, small corporations, and rural life. In particular in the United Provinces (the Netherlands), Calvinism led to what Philip Gorski (2003) recently has called a “disciplinary revolution”; in addition such discipline further developed in another form of Protestantism, Lutheran Pietism, in mainly the Prussian States. Undoubtedly, Weber is correct that this paved the way for early modern virtues of work and conducts of life.

However, Lutheran organizational ethics is conceived in a somewhat different form, not really grasped by Weber's influential explanation. Protestant work ethics is not reducible to Calvinist disciplinary forms. The Calvinist interpretation of the Bible came with the translations of the Holy text, which in deep controversies against the Catholic Church led to ideas of the individual reader. This new form of individualism fit well to active urban life and lower nobility and developed further in Anglo-Saxon countries. Yet, Lutheran interpretations developed the idea of the common procedure followed among the readers – and writers. Different interpretations could follow. Each person should – according to the younger Luther – be responsible for his faith toward God, without any intervention by an authoritarian church. Nevertheless, the text was common, words, concepts, and rules were to follow a certain procedure. Terrible quarrels and conflicts about the right interpretation followed, and a compromise had to stabilize. Hence, in the confessional compromise with the Lutheran so-called Augsburg Confession in 1530, Martin Luther and his companion Philip Melanchthon, in its article 16, issued that Protestants should be loyal to their prince and follow his confession (Harste 2018a). Obedience to the prince was primordial in this compromise, simply because it was part of the compromise with the Catholic emperor, Charles V, of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

In fact, since then, protestant work ethics divided in somewhat separate forms. For today's laymen, it is not easy to follow those past theological debates, which escalated into enormous quarrels, religious wars, and ensuing state-building among the military powers. The theological interpretations seem to be obscure, obsolete, and sophist beyond any reasonable modern mind – however this is a wrong perception. The basic point is that the Reformation quarrels were about organizational centralism versus organizational decentralism including the possibilities to find compromises in-between. Moreover, several further aspects should be added since they are still important and even decisive for organizational life today.

Durkheim's Theory of Coordination and Cooperation

In order to get to the problem of a cooperative ethics, sociology, in addition to Weber has to invite his contemporary, Émile Durkheim and his theory of division of labor in *De la division du travail social* (1893/1930). Before, we have to observe the Reformation quarrels a bit closer. Throughout the sixteenth century and even before, disputes in courts, estate assemblies, and councils were regularly about the Eucharist. This was not merely a model about how to interpret the new translations of the Bible; it was also a model about how to make meetings and organization. In Lord's Supper, Jesus was the leader, but how disciplined and centralized should the disciples find a corresponding order? Hitherto, in the Catholic Church, and in its authoritatively given order about the organization of municipalities and council meetings, often the Lord's Supper was painted on the walls. Participants and representatives could not go to management schools. Not before the end of the sixteenth century, schools of political science began to appear, as the famous Leiden school of government (Stolleis 1990). However, models about how to interpret a meeting and an organization were all over, in city halls and refectories at the monasteries. The paintings showed how Jesus, the leader, was the figure in the middle – however sometimes put a bit to the side, sometimes contemplating in his own inner reflections, or authoritatively present, quit, talking, eating, or drinking. In the most disciplined forms, the disciples sat conform to a certain standard, and it is difficult to observe any differences among them. In other paintings, a lot of disorders seem to rule. Leonardo da Vinci's painting is probably the most famous (it is easy to find on the Internet). Rightly so, and there is much to add from the perspective of organizational virtues. In this painting, we find most of what we today learn in textbooks about organizational sociology such as Gareth Morgan's (2006).

The organizational paradigm displayed is about the form of communication, and Leonardo's painting is about what will happen when the printing press, developed at the end of the fifteenth century, will be used in written communication.

What will happen with the words and commands pronounced by the leader and the participants? Will there still, authoritatively, be some kind of conformity around the followers and adherents? Leonardo's painting show four groups of disciples quarrel about the word of Jesus that one of them will betray him – and perhaps several others too. Then, what would decentralization, representatives, and delegation be about? How could hierarchy be authorized? Plenty of organizational themes appear, about inclusion and exclusion, loyalty and disrespect, subcultures and disagreements, consensus and dissent, word and text, command and interpretation, intrigues, position, membership and dismembering, and so on. Many issues from modern organization are already in focus. Moreover, often forgotten, the painting displays this scenario inside what became the

compromise and solution to the quarrels, namely, the central perspective of the room, the hall, in which the supper was held, which, indeed, is at the end wall in the refectory of the monastery at Milano.

The central perspective, then recently developed in Northern Italy, was to become a model for architecture and painting, furthermore for organization too. We see it in organizational diagrams today. It is well known as an administrative form of coordination and delegation, centralization, and decentralization ever since. The central perspective was used to depict the form of state territory and state administration in medium of the gardens of Versailles, Louis 14 and Jean-Baptiste Colbert's enormous and famous palace, build between 1662 and 1683 outside Paris (Mukerji 1997). This palace, and in particular its central view on the garden, became the model for palace building in European states for centuries to come. Diplomats and managers did not go to management schools; they took a walk in the gardens and saw what order, discipline, coordination, centralized observations, and decentral perspectives were about. From that background, it was possible to get an idea of modern bureaucracies. Corresponding to this achievement, Colbert, the French first minister, made his instructions to his "commissaires" about how they should observe and command, find out who they could trust and how they could describe their territories, when they were send to their respective departments in France (Harste 2003).

The virtues among administrative elites and nobles developed according to aristocratic manners as an *esprit de corps*, which secularized the former religious and catholic virtues of communication (Richet 1973). In particular, law, public law, administrative law, private law, and law of peoples, developed and became – once again – the blackboard and measure to which manners and virtues developed. Charles Montesquieu resumed his seminal four volumes *L'esprit des lois*, published in 1748, to explain this differentiation in the functional systems of administration, law, religion, war, education, economy, agriculture, and political decision-making. In 1722 in a penetrating reform Prussian King Fredric William (Friedrich Wilhelm 1722/1997) developed differentiated administrative resorts. The Prussian federal states administration was still of a tiny size, but in 1738, French Chancellor Henri-François d'Aguesseau reformed a much larger administration and law as a structural coupling which his subordinate Montesquieu made famous as a separation of powers (Montesquieu 1749).

Yet here we have to dig further into the archeology of conceptual and semantic history. If the form of organizational architecture was so well established at the end of the fifteenth century that it needed reforms and an ensuing Reformation in the sixteenth century, what, then, was it about before?

Behind the separation of powers and the differentiation of functional systems, well-known to us since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, as a – if not the – form of modern society, there is a problem-solving form about communication between different entities. With Durkheim it has become known as the communication and cooperation form in a society build upon a division of labor.

Durkheim's, for sociologists, well-known description is accurate and quite simple in its basic form. If a division of labor could develop, it was because forms of cooperation, which he later focused as communication, developed. There had to emerge a series of communication virtues, norms, and morals, about how to communicate among those with different occupations, different functions, and different generations, living an urban life or a rural life. Norms and morals had to become more abstract at still higher levels; they had to be more reflexive about the differences and particularities, about commonalities and universal expectation. Moreover, they had to be more open-minded about varieties and contingencies. Norms and morals had to learn and evolve in still new, better educated and higher forms of reflexive ways to deal with those differences. This included learning languages and different manners; otherwise cooperation and coordination would fail and become subject to simple undifferentiated power, authority, and despotic tyranny.

The history of corporations is different from the one of governmental administration. Anyway, they were rather small before the sixteenth century. The conflicts between princes were organized, and their household grew immensely throughout the sixteenth century, as the French monarchical house or estate (Bourdieu 2004). The conception of the estate becoming a state took over at the end of the sixteenth century, and the entire political semantics transformed. After all, the French dynastic household grew from about 7–8,000 nominated officials to 25,000 at the end of the sixteenth century, and some 65,000 employees in the 1660s; remark the difference between part-time nominated and full-time employed civil servants.

Eventually, notions of “reason of state” became more abstract and were reflected in a more secular trans-confessional way. Thereby, new meaningful interconnectivities (Weber: “Sinnzusammenhänge”) emerged between what became states. Law of peoples happened to replace the papal catholic diplomacy. This trans-confessionalist international order did not emerge simply in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia; it took 200 years, from the German trans-confessional *Landfrieden*, between Catholic and Protestant princes, in 1555, and the modern state system, which was not in place before 1748 (the Aachen Peace).

Yet even before, the same secularization process developed in commercial relations and corporations. As with the *esprit de corps* of the state organization (Richet 1973; Mousnier 1974/1980), we observe a transition toward a *corporate spirit* inside the initially small commercial houses, which eventually emerged as the immense East Indian Companies in the Netherlands and in the UK (Hein Jessen 2016).

The Medieval Network of Societal Orders

In both cases, corporate semantics developed from virtues interpreted by the Catholic Church in the form of a *corpus spiritus* of churches and monasteries. This, indeed, is the seedbed of modern organizational semantics and not the least, the virtues inherited in organizations. Those semantics stabilized and were subject to disputes, quarrel, and conflict during a 400-year period before the Reformation.

Throughout the late medieval era in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries as well as during the so-called high medieval era since mid-eleventh century, the Catholic Church authorized what the paradigm of rule and cooperation was about. It developed as a network of churches and five or six different monastery orders (Duby 1978; Spruyt 1994). Thus, it had to develop ideas, semantics, and concepts about how to handle cooperation at a moment when the Internet, the phone let alone a well-ordered postal service, was not invented. How was it possible, what did the church do to integrate and not fall apart? If we visualize it, the size of the problem is amazing, let me take the church organization in Denmark as an example. It was a remote and poor, scattered land placed more or less between the Baltics and the North Sea, sometimes a bit larger (even somewhat including England in the first half of the eleventh century), and with Norway and in particular Southern Sweden in close proximity. Yet in core Denmark, about 1200 stone churches were built and coordinated with the bishop of Roskilde West of Copenhagen as center. It was closely linked with Rome in order to bracket the German emperor. Several huge churches, as the cathedral of Aarhus, began their construction. All over Europe, such constructions were undertaken, albeit around Italy hundreds and thousands of churches and monasteries were already there (Duby 1984). The problem here is, how did it organize?

When the papal power later, in the fourteenth century, moved to Avignon, we know that it had an administrative staff of about 650 persons (Spruyt 1994). Yet the dispersed organization had to be organized. This is what organizational ethics, virtues, and communication is about. Nevertheless, we have to remember that the catholic orders were not the only form of more or less loosely or firm communicative and organized couplings. In the later medieval era, we find series of commercial networks and corporations, including banking services as the Florentine Medici family trading with transitions of different currencies and gaining wealth from this; later, in early sixteenth century, the Southern German Fugger family established a similar network.

Yet, beforehand, further networks of knights and noble orders prevailed in agriculture and military matters. So it was since the eighth century and the moldering of the immense Carolingian Empire in the ninth century. As described by German sociological historian Norbert Elias (1976), centrifugal processes prevailed over centripetal organization in those noble orders. However, Elias certainly underscored the role of the churchly orders and their organization. Nevertheless, the stratification between the social orders as estate orders had some important and lasting authorization, which, at least according to French Pierre Bourdieu (2012), did not completely break down with the French

Revolution. Yet one thing is France, but the hierarchy between upper levels and lower levels, the included and the more excluded, does exist and rule modern business and governmental organization.

When such a social hierarchy emerged and was firmly codified in early twelfth century, the clerical orders, in their symbolic closeness to God and eternity, were authorized to have the upper hand. Then followed the military knights and nobles – who had served in the Crusades. The lower level were the commoners, although they too were somewhat stratified between urban orders and rural farmers eventually with serfs at the very bottom. Among the urban orders, an indeed very strict and firm hierarchy between different corporative orders existed and still has some impact today, albeit the virtue of “honor” is replaced by the virtues of “prestige.” Antic distinctions between virtues and vices still exist, albeit mostly in transformed semantics. Imaginaries have found their way in transformed concepts and semantics all along (Chaussinand-Nogaret et al. 1989).

In the present context, the semantics developed by the clerical orders is probably decisive, in the accurate sense that it is this semantics (Luhmann 1977, 1980/1981/1989a/1995, 2013) and its authorized “conceptual systems” (Weber 1904/1985: 107–108) that more than anything else decided upon the authorized communication used in modern organization. This may occur as an obscure postulate about obsolete ideas, and it is correct that those concepts and semantics from the past has been reformed, reorganized, and even revolutionized several times (Rossum and Böckenförde 1978).

The main semantic development and conceptual codification took place in what sometimes is called the long twelfth century, that is, from the “Great schism” in 1054 between the East Roman Empire seated in Constantinople (today’s Istanbul) and the Western Church, and mid-thirteenth century. The ending of this transformative period was characterized by a number of legal codes constitutionalized almost simultaneously across Europe, from the Melfi Constitution in Sicily to the Land Laws of Scandinavia in the North, the Mainz Edict in the German Empire and Magna Charta in UK. Again, the point is, how were the clerical social orders integrated. This happened in what we may call three semantic and conceptual revolutions, a revolution in theological dogmatics, a revolution in legal dogmatics, and a revolution in corporate dogmatics (Berman 1983; Quillet 1972; Morris 1991).

Authority

These three forms got power in their mutual differentiation. Initially the task for the Western Catholic Church was to develop and take the pace of the clientelism used in Byzantine network organization in the Eastern Roman Empire as well as Islamic network organization conceptualized in the *Umma* or Muslim holy spirit. The medium for such a theological reform of semantics was to reinstitutionalize religious communities and orders from a background described and authorized since Saint Paul (first letter to the Corinthians Chapt. 12). This was about being

member and included into a Christian community. Yet, this semantics of inclusion developed and got hierarchy, since inclusion could include itself and that means exclude others (e.g., Judas). This form was in the sixth century (Gelatius) what (as *auctoritas*) what authorized power (*potestas*). This semantic distinction between legitimized authorization and power has been and is constitutive for Western civilization and by the way, the Chinese organization of power too (Henderson 1998; Phillips 2011). Moreover, we easily see it in the architecture of power and meeting halls. The architecture and rooms of authorization are round, as domes or half circles as in most parliaments (not the British), whereas the church, still in the Roman era until late twelfth century, often builds huge square forms as in the knight's castles. This was a powerful military form of architecture. Still today, sitting in squares appear less legitimized than sitting in circles.

Theological and Legal Dogmatics

For the influential German cardinal Hildebrand, this background of power/authority and inclusion/exclusion of membership in a community appeared obvious to use in reforms in the second half of the eleventh century. He was elected as Pope Gregory VII, and immediately he began an indeed revolutionizing reform of the Catholic Church with the so-called Papal Dictate from 1075 (Berman 1983). In short, this was about the self-inclusion of the church into itself, namely, as a hierarchical order, in which the pope, settled in Rome, should be the bishop of bishops. On the heretic side of the inclusion/exclusion distinction, excommunication from Christianity was organized as an institutionalized semantics.

At the same time, Canon Law developed and was codified as a communication form inside the church to govern communication, inclusion/exclusion, hierarchy, possessions, positions, and competences. The Bologna University formed a Law School, which was the first institutionalized university education in the Western world, somewhat after the Chinese Mandarin schools of administrators under the Tang Dynasty. In difference to China, the Church institutionalized a legal scholarship. In particular, in the twelfth century, Roman compilations of verdicts and laws, established by Emperor Justinian in Constantinople, were rediscovered in Pisa and reconstructed, interpreted, and thoroughly codified by legal scholars as Gratian. The point in the development of legal dogmatics is, that law developed as a university and courtly form of communication about what form of communication was legal, and which was illegal. Legal communication communicated about legal communication with an indeed very similar form to the theological communication, about what was included as authorized communication of religion in distinction to heretic and excommunicated forms of communication (Luhmann 1977, 1989a: 259–357). Sinn and punishment developed along with communication codes of symbolic and diabolic semantics. The church took power over what was authorized as language. Acts, behavior, and persons were judged, included, and excluded with this semantics. Lawlessness was the opposite side of honorable, virtuous, recognized, and legitimized forms.

Organizational Dogmatics

Organizational semantics developed along these lines. The idea of organization has its Christian origin in the idea of the corporal body of Jesus Christ, as well described by Saint Paul. A meeting coordinated liturgically in the form of the Eucharist could authorize a very important form of communication. This liturgical form allowed present decisions to be represented after the theological doctrines were taken in use among the integrated and indoctrinated members of such a holy community. They took part in the *corpus* of Jesus, since Jesus had spoken the words that thou shall eat this bread since it is my body and drink this wine since this is my blood. Peculiar as it is for the modern mind, nevertheless, we shall remember that this was communicated as a symbolic form with an extremely realist package about the use of communication (Kantorowicz 1957; Rossum and Böckenförde 1978; Palmer Wandel 2006). The Catholic Church was in desperate need of a medium of communication at a time, when the Internet, phones, and postal services had no reality. Metaphorically spoken, the Holy Spirit happened to be the communication medium of decisions, doctrines, indoctrinated delegation, and representation, which could “represent” a previous meeting about what was present in a certain situation. The liturgical form guaranteed the sense of communication in such a setting. It appeared as a form of social realism, authorized by nothing less than the words of Jesus Christ. As communication medium the Holy Spirit enabled a form of synchronized communication (Luhmann 2000b). These metaphors were extremely real to those submitted to such an idea of present meeting, represented later on, in delegated forms.

Indeed, this was what constitutionalized the body of the *Corpus Spiritus* that took power in the Catholic Church all across Europe for the next four centuries. Hereby integration of differentiated parts and forms of “participation” developed, and we can see it described, for example, in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* (1159/1993). This, too, evolved as the legal and organizational semantics of “full power” (*plenitudo potestatis*). A representation delegated to the other end of Europe could be in full power to decide upon a king or duke on behalf of the pope. It functioned! For some time.

In early fourteenth century, the dispute about centralization and decentralization began to disrupt the uniformly enforced consensus of the Catholic Church. One thing was the past so-called Investiture Controversy about the autonomy of German cities and the authority to select bishops; this Controversy almost ended with the Concordat of Worms in 1122. Another was about the form of the corporate church and what was authorized as the body of the church and the kings (Kantorowicz 1957). Of course, problems emerged (Thornhill 2011). Increasingly, disputes and quarrels emerged as to the extent of decentral judgments and decisions in situations and context very remote from Rome. The church was aware about the dilemma between decentral judgment and direct heresy. Marsilius of Padua wrote a long treaty, *Defensor Pacis* (1326/2001), in defense of a certain right of delegates to autonomy inside the body of the church. Compromises ruled and controversies occurred increasingly. The papal diplomacy failed to

reconciliate the conflict between the kingdom of France and the English-Norman kingdom finally settled by canons and military organization and not by negotiations (the Hundred Years' War).

Today, we often experience the same dilemma in the paradox of an organized administration that needs some form of local monopoly of autonomous decisions, albeit formal rules tell about another form of control and command. Still, the *corpus spiritus* of the Catholic Church was extremely useful and functional for centuries.

Corporate Law and the Ethics of Trust and Credit

In the late twelfth century, in particular German cities tried to find some kind of autonomy in between the Papal power in Rome and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. This could have led to an escalation in destructive conflicts. Yet a compromise was found with the Peace of Konstanz in 1183. The cities should follow the Canonic Law used by the Church to organize and settle law, decisions, and judgment. However, they got their own courts and simply copied Canonic Law into corporate law of property, contracts, trade, punishment, and litigation. This was an authorized form, which the Emperor could not deny.

Trade and money are not simple affairs. It is easy to conflict about when a thing is handled over, when and in which situation and in which currency payment shall take place. As Luhmann conceives it, contracts are about a reduction of complexity in the communication about matter, social relation, and temporality; they fix and code what, whom, and when (Luhmann 1979). Judgments and decisions shall occur and be authorized in order not to create future conflicts. Therefore, they also have to be incorporated into existing forms of valid law in other cities, in other assemblies. Trade is in need of constitutionalized organization and law (Thornhill 2011). In fact, "constitution" referred to the bodily organic form of the Christian Church, and that word still is about organic health.

Virtues and vices developed all across Europe in this setting. In fact, Europe was deeply integrated by means of the church and its institutionalization of securitized corporations. For instance, we see this conceptual codification of semantics in the communication of credit systems. Credit developed as a trustful form of credibility and religiously authorized form of "creditere" (Latin), to believe. This was about time and trust. Loans should be paid back. Albeit of course, between family members trust was more obvious than between remote people from other cities and different confessions. Therefore, credit systems formalized much better across differences and distances, in fact eventually as international credit systems from the Arab and Jewish traders along the Silk Road to China to the Medicis and Fuggers in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and to the Rothschild network in

the nineteenth century. However, we do not talk about “credit dogmatics,” and banks are not churches, albeit the big trade fairs of Northern France in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were closely connected to merchants financing the amazing gothic cathedrals.

After its emergence in the late medieval era, credit, in particular, revolutionized in the Netherlands as a differentiated system between the banks and in particular the Amsterdam Bank, the East Indian Company, the “beurse,” the equities, and the estate assemblies. The mutuality of invested trust in this complex system did not integrate formally, as one absolute authorized system (as unsuccessfully developed in France early eighteenth century). From 1689, such a financial revolution developed in London’s city. Hence, civic norms about division of labor, of separated powers, and of institutions developed. Civic norms developed in a public sphere that enabled people under civilized manners to enjoy the company of each other while being protected (Habermas 1962; Sennett 1979: 264).

This financial revolution got its takeoff after the immense need of taxes and credits to pay for the supplies to the wars of religion that escalated into the Thirty Years’ War. In fact, those wars were the result of the broken body of the Catholic Church. The Church integrated religious, legal, organizational, and political forms of centralization and decentralization. Yet it broke with the Printing Press Revolution (Elwood 1999). Manners and virtues had to find a form of communication and interaction across opposed partners beyond confessions, in abstract forms of coordination, reflected by new more secular forms of organization.

A first description of the new form came with Jean Bodin (Bodin 1583/1961) who in 1576 in a voluminous analysis established what was to become the new civil servant as a new professional person, who transcends individual confessions (previously called *professio fidei*).

Bodin’s idea was a peculiar rearrangement of the heritage about the corporate body as a continuation of the body of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the temporal earthly individual, could die; however Christ, as the eternal person, could persist – and this was useful to describe the civil servant of the increasing princely households and estates. Offices could persist, whereas the concrete officeholders could die or be dispossessed from their office. This “professional revolution” created expectations toward professional duties, loyalties, and virtues, separated from the church, however, following a more abstract and well-reflected and reasoned normative order.

Indeed, most famous was the consequence for the monarchs; the king could die, and the kingdom, the crown, could persist. Therefore, the chief in office, the king, got sovereignty as decision-maker beyond and above the differentiated form of organization and delegation; yet of course, only to the extent that he centralized a decentralized body. Bodin’s point was that this, indeed, central perspective of the estate administration was a compromise between the Catholic claim for a centralized body and the decentered Calvinist claim for decentralization and

individualism. Probably, the compromise was Lutheran, since this new form was about to claim a reason of state and ensuing loyalty and obedient behavior of civil servants who might have a duty to follow the ruler while simultaneously thinking in terms of a free and independent will (Harste [2018b](#)). “You may think whatever you want, but you have to obey” as Immanuel Kant later ([1783](#)) expressed the idea of King Fredrick the Great.

Conclusion: The Secularization and Its Implicit Results

There is still at least three major lessons to extract from the history of organizational ethics and its reflections about how to reorganize and reform. The real power of Christianity was its invention of a powerful form of cooperation as synchronization. This is a complex matter.

First, its conception of power is far ahead of normal political science concepts of the power concept. The misleading but very popular concept of power has its origin in Max Weber’s idea that power is about how an actor may force another actor to aim for something different than this actor previously intended. (Weber’s conception in fact derives from Carl von Clausewitz’s definition of war as the violent disruption of an opponent’s will; that is a definition, which again is the reversed side of Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative that thou has to will what simultaneously should be a maxim about a principle for a generalizable law. Power is to neglect the will of others.) However, power is more than a relation, and therefore Weber more discussed domination (“Herrschaft”). But “power” is a word that hides a semantics of doing, as very well expressed in the French word “pouvoir” that means power yet also “to do,” as the German verb “machen,” and German “Macht,” power, is a substantiation of “Machen” or doing. “Macht macht Macht” means power empowers power, thus referring to the self-constitutionalization of power, in particular if “Macht” gets “Acht,” that is, authority. In sum, power got the power to define itself and to include its monopolization of powerful semantics and to exclude what was not powerful, or powerless. Whether sociology takes Michel Foucault’s, Pierre Bourdieu’s, or Niklas Luhmann’s reconceptualization of power in use, this is so to say – with Max Weber’s famous words – the “prison of iron,” in which our modern semantics has closed our eyes and neglected observations from outside, for example, from past semantic developments. Modernity was constituted in such a way that social understanding and, in particular, political understanding of legitimacy were turned blind by the invisibility of power (Bourdieu [1994](#): 97; Luhmann [1989b](#): 101–137, [2000a](#): 33; Foucault [1975](#); [1976](#): 117; [2004](#) [1976](#): 117; Harste [2017](#)).

The second concluding point is that high medieval power empowered coordination and cooperation as a communication form that synchronized remote decisions with present decisions and therefore crosscut the distance between near presence and far away delegation (Luhmann [2000c](#)). The medium of this form of communication was the Holy Spirit and its doctrines of presence and re-presence. It was exactly this idea of the represent form of Jesus Christ that broke down with

the printing press revolution and the Reformation: The authorized center of decision-making could not anymore securitize what decisions should be about at the place of the representatives and in their context and situation, in which they had to judge about what to do. This was, indeed, a major crisis in the form of coordination, cooperation, and organization. Yet simultaneously with the printing press, not merely the print of laws and regulation, atlases, and books about administration (Erasmus, Machiavelli, Luther, Bodin, and so on), but the entire idea of a central perspective developed. This central perspective, too, is about synchronization and coordination (Harste [2018b](#)). Indeed, it represented central decisions at remote places and coordinated synchronization among actors and offices, which got a picture about how the other remote part of an administration handled this administration. This was exactly what the absolutist power of the reason of state was about, well established in the extremely influential reforms and instructions of French prime, Jean-Baptiste Colbert in the 1660s: Organization could be reorganized as a form described with the organization chart of the bureaucracy. A bureaucracy is able to synchronize. Power is about synchronized coordination and turns it away from the non-simultaneity of life. This form of power tells us, that thou shall synchronize and forget or neglect what does not fit into such a form. It transforms simultaneous activities into a coherent plan and removes complexities and nonsimultaneous untimely matters into oblivion and neglect (Luhmann [1989b](#), [1990](#)). This is the absolutism of bureaucracies and therefore they meet unrest and revolt. In France, there was even a duty to revolt against its tyrannical or despotic forms (Jouanna [1989](#)). If we consider ethics of synchronization as similar to the Weberian ethics of work and similar to a Durkheimian cooperative ethics, we should consider how equal these Western organizational virtues are to the similar Chinese virtues. The temporal rule of situational cooperation constituted at a theological trans-confessional and transcending level is extremely productive in China (Jun [2005](#); Zhang et al. [2012](#); Poznanski [2017](#)). In China too, there is a long tradition, dis-conceptualized as “legalism” yet rather a military enforcement, that is equivalent to the European idea of a “reason of state” (Phillips [2011](#)).

The third and final point is, to conclude, that most of those virtues that described the explicit semantics and concepts of organizations, corporations, and business ethics, through their secularization turned implicit, if not simply unknown. Their sophisticated complexities sometimes were so differentiated and even well known, described in manner books, that it after hundreds of years of evolution became too complex to reproduce them as explicitly described manners of politeness, respect, and virtues about interaction systems. They became layers and still more layers about what to do in this or that situation, toward these people or those (different) persons. Erving Goffman’s extremely penetrating sociological descriptions of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* ([1959](#)) and *Interaction Ritual* ([1972](#)) displayed how such manners, described historical by Norbert Elias ([1976](#)) and Niklas Luhmann ([1980](#)), today are implicit codes of normal communication. Through their invisible monopolization of state power, and sometimes even absolutist absorption of obedience, discipline, and interaction rituals, they became norms and rules of decent organizational communication. This developed in its early stages in churches, monasteries, and courts and then in public administration and in central offices, to be followed decentered in parishes, remote departments, and regions. From that stage, the norms and expectations

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