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How has the French context shaped the organization of the Airbus Group?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine whether characteristics of French organizations can be found in the Airbus Group, ancient European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS) Group, and how these characteristics have evolved over time in comparison to German ones.

Design/methodology/approach – This article presents an in-depth case study by using a contextual approach, considering influential factors which are likely to influence the evolution of organizations.

Findings – The analysis shows that the Airbus Group reflects characteristics of French organizations: the importance of strategy, the principle of honour, centralization of decision and power, the role of the state in the capital and its influence via professional networks of its elite coming from the Grandes Ecoles. These findings confirm a relative continuity of national peculiarities over time. The recent evolution of the company also highlights the German influence, notably in terms of shares and management positions.

Research limitations/implications – The case study demonstrates that the Airbus Group has become a multinational company where contextual elements and organizational structures regulate intercultural relationships of interests, influence and power.

Originality/value – Five contextual factors are proposed, which allow to understand and structure the peculiarities of French organizations, in comparison to German ones as well as power distribution within the Airbus Group.

Keywords Cross-cultural management, France, Germany, Cross cultural studies

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Important multinational companies (MNCs) are based in France and Germany and embedded in societal contexts, which have produced specific organizational structures and managerial practices (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Heidenreich *et al.*, 2012; Maurice and Sorge, 2000; Redding, 2005). In particular, over the past few decades, French organizations and management practices have been explored from mono-national (Barsoux and Lawrence, 1990; Crozier and Friedberg, 1981; d'Iribarne, 1989; Sorge, 1991; Urban, 1998), bi-national comparative (Barmeyer, 2007; Brink *et al.*, 1999; Davoine, 2002; d'Iribarne, 1989; 1994; Heidenreich *et al.*, 2012; Maurice *et al.*, 1986; Usunier, 2000) or multinational (Mayrhofer, 2013) perspectives.



For many decades, French and German companies have been closely linked by strategic, structural, financial and human relations (Barmeyer and Davoine, 2008). Do we still find “national” peculiarities in organizational and managerial practices or can we observe standardization in a boundaryless Europe? Can we observe a continuity of national institutional and cultural peculiarities? In this sense, Airbus Group – the former European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS) Group – which resulted from the merger of the French company *Aérospatiale-Matra*, the German company *DASA* and the Spanish company *CASA* in the year 2000, represents a particularly interesting case for research (Barmeyer and Mayrhofer, 2008).

Airbus Group is a high technology and future-oriented innovative company with 140,000 employees and an important number of suppliers. In terms of history, structure and evolution, the group can be regarded as a symbol for European integration. Its organization is complex with a political dimension because of the strategic national importance of aerospace, defence and military which leads to a strong implication of the (French) state and represents a counterbalance to the US-competitor Boeing. Airbus Group is embedded in different national contexts with institutional and cultural specifics but it is also an international company having many sites and employees in several, mainly European countries, practicing different languages and serving clients all over the world. Intercultural aspects are also important, as actors from different countries, mainly from France and Germany, interact to find solutions, reach objectives and balance constantly (national) logics and interests of influence and power (Barmeyer and Mayrhofer, 2008; Davel *et al.*, 2013).

French organizations, namely, large companies of the CAC 40, are often characterized by a number of features. First, there is the importance of strategic and long term thinking (Ammon, 1989). The link between private organizations and the French state is still important. The French government influences national industry and organizations through strategic decisions (Barmeyer *et al.*, 2007). Second, in the tradition of companies like Danone and its founder Antoine Riboud, who developed a “dual economic and social project” (“double projet économique et social”) that takes into account economic growth and social objectives to reduce inequalities (Gond and Igalens, 2012), other French companies are socially responsible and try to fulfil societal concerns in creating and saving jobs (Igalens and Gond, 2005). Third, professional networks also play a strategic role in French organizations, as most top managers are educated in influential elitist Parisian *Grandes Ecoles* (Bauer and Bertin-Mouroit, 1997; Davoine and Ravasi, 2013). Finally, French organizations are not only embedded in institutional but also in cultural contexts, where specific values and symbolic practices play a central role. “The logic of honour” and rank seems to be a driving force in French organizations (d’Iribarne, 1989, 1994).

According to Mulder (1977), power relationships, in an organizational context, involve issues relating to influence, persuasion and dependency. For Giddens (1976), power is a causal force producing external effects and consequences in social systems like organizations, this causal force may contribute to the emergence of asymmetric social relations. Similarly, Bourdieu (1991) argues that power is linked to the concept of *habitus*, and is an internalized predisposition, that facilitates the construction of a view of domination linked to social status and economic well-being. Power relations play an important role in MNCs, most notably in international mergers, where there is a fusion of different cultures (Gertsen *et al.*, 1998; Söderberg and Vaara, 2003). There exist a

variety of theoretical perspectives in the literature, most authors describe how power is distributed within organizations (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1990) using approaches like institutional theory (Geppert and Matten, 2006), social network theory (Freeman, 1979) or organizational learning (Forsgren and Pedersen, 2000). Few publications take into account the contextual embeddedness and socio-political issues of international management (Geppert and Williams, 2006; Hasse and Krücken, 2008; Heidenreich *et al.*, 2012). The success of intra-organizational collaboration within MNCs often depends on a balanced distribution of power between the associated entities (Mayrhofer, 2013). However, power relationships are likely to change over time, relatively balanced relationships can become seriously unbalanced and vice versa.

This article focuses on the evolution of power relationships within the Airbus Group and how it is shaped by contextual factors within operations combining stakeholders from different countries. The objective is to identify how the French context has influenced the organization of the Airbus Group since its creation. We will use a case study approach to outline characteristics of French organizations in contrast to the German ones and apply a longitudinal analysis to examine the evolution of influence and power between France and Germany within the Airbus Group.

The article is structured as follows. It starts with a short introduction and a brief methodology. Because managerial and organizational practices are linked to specific societal contexts, we then examine with the help of five contextual factors characteristics of French management and organizations that are found in the literature in general and within the Airbus Group in particular – in contrast to German characteristics of management and organization. The article will also answer the question whether the influence of French management and organizational characteristics have become more important over time.

2. Methodology

The case study is based on a longitudinal (2000-2013) in-depth analysis of the Airbus Group, former EADS Group, which has experienced an important crisis six years after its creation (Barmeyer and Mayrhofer, 2008). Case studies are a form of empirical inquiry, which analyze a phenomenon in its real-life context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Dul and Hak, 2008). They contain qualitative and quantitative evidence including sources, mainly from company publications and media coverage (Yin, 1990). The collected data were obtained from secondary sources (annual reports of Aérospatiale-Matra, DASA, CASA and EADS, internal documents and press review) and interviews. We performed eight expert interviews with French and German actors within the Airbus organization in different functions, sites and divisions (Table I) in the years 2003-2013. To have a more balanced – a French and German – perspective on the Airbus Group case, we interviewed persons of both cultures in their native language. We asked open questions concerning French or German specificities in the organization, French and German influences on working and management practices, micro-politics, influence of stakeholders and institutional factors as the state, education and careers.

For reasons of anonymity and confidentiality background information relating to each of the participants has been restricted. We also agreed not to publish quotes from interviewees.

3. Contextual factors of the Airbus Group

Discussions on how to analyze and understand companies have been going on for several decades, particularly about the institutional and societal approach (Maurice *et al.*, 1992; Maurice and Sorge, 2000; Whitley, 1999) and the cultural approach (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; d'Iribarne, 1994, 2009), but also about the *individual* strategic-actors approach of micro-politics with individual interests (Crozier and Friedberg, 1981; Gmür, 2006; Friedberg, 2005; Mintzberg, 1983). The cultural approach is often criticized for being determinist and too narrow-minded (i.e. based on mono-causality and ignoring other influential factors) (Bourrier, 2005; Friedberg, 2000; Maurice *et al.*, 1992). The institutional approach does not consider implicit assumptions, values and interpretations of individuals and groups (Heidenreich *et al.*, 2012). The strategic-actors approach is criticized for being de-contextualizing and a-historical (d'Iribarne, 2005). In this sense, Redding (2005, p. 126) stresses that:

[...] the most obvious realm is that of society, usually overlapping with the state/language/culture, and the strength of this case comes from the number of determinants of the economic order that derive from state aid shall, either directly by a regulation or indirectly by the institutionalising of norms historically shaped within a society.

To develop an understanding of alternative approaches to organizational management Sorge (1996, 2004) and Whitley (1999) propose a combination of the institutional and cultural approaches. These need to take into consideration political, social, economic and cultural institutions by exploring "national business systems" and "societal effects" approaches (Maurice and Sorge, 2000; Geppert and Williams, 2006). Adoption of a combined approach of this type emphasizes the "embeddedness" of managerial practices in national systems by underlining the interconnection of macro- and micro-levels (Hasse and Krücken, 2008; Heidenreich *et al.*, 2012). d'Iribarne (1994, p. 91) also underlines that the examination of cultural aspects has been underestimated in the past. He comments:

Moreover, most of the contemporary streams of research involved in international comparisons of the functioning of organisations tend to stress actors' strategies, or the role of institutions, rather than culture.

Referring to the work of Elias (1974), d'Iribarne (1994, pp. 92-93) goes onto to argue that:

[...] the cultural frames of reference [...] existed before the emergence of the institutional systems with which they form coherent wholes. [...]. Thus, contrary to the hypothesis of the

No. of interview	Location	Division	Function	Nationality	Year of interview
1	Bremen, Germany	Astrium	<u>HR</u>	German	2003
2	Hamburg, Germany	Airbus	Engineering	German	2003
3	Toulouse, France	Airbus	Engineering	French	2010
4	Marignane, France	Eurocopter	Legal affairs	French	2013
5	Donauwörth, Germany	Eurocopter	<u>Communication</u>	German	2013
6	Paris, France	Airbus Group	<u>Strategy</u>	French	2006
7	Friedrichshafen, Germany	Astrium	Engineering	German	2006
8	Stuttgart, Germany	Daimler Benz	<u>Human resources (HR)</u>	French	2003

Table I.
Interviewed persons

Aix school (Maurice *et al.*, 1986), these frames of reference cannot be interpreted as the consequence of institutional specificities, but rather as the source of such specificities.

These different approaches are conceptually related:

[...] individual behaviour and social structure are reciprocally constituted; it is impossible to imagine a normative custom, instituted to be more or less binding, as not being kept in place by acting individuals. Likewise, individuals do not make behavioural choices without regard for norms (Sorge 2004, p. 119).

The comprehension of managerial practices and hierarchical relationships within the company requires knowledge of the legal framework, which governs corporate governance, co-determination and training systems (Barmeyer and Davoine, 2011). In addition, the history of a country, its identity and related set of values constitute a framework of reference which conditions and gives meaning to the stakeholders' social practices, even within the organization and its actors (Chanlat, 1990; d'Iribarne, 2009).

In the following section, five contextual factors, which take into account an interpretative approach (Geertz, 1973; d'Iribarne, 2009; Redding, 2005), will be applied to the Airbus Group case. Each factor has a specific focus:

- (1) the regulatory role of the state;
- (2) the structural role of corporate governance;
- (3) the embedded role of professional networks and elite education;
- (4) the strategic role of career patterns; and
- (5) the interpretative role of culture.

Our focus lies on the French characteristics of the Airbus Group as an organization in contrast to German ones and the evolution of power between the two partners.

3.1 Role of the state and the Airbus Group

Stakeholders exist in an area linked to political and economic institutions, constructed by history (d'Iribarne, 1994; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Hancké, 2009; Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Whitley, 1999). Ideas, strategies, intercultural interactions and work experience are the fundamental characteristics that have developed as the Airbus Group has emerged from the cooperation of aeronautical companies originating from the three European countries – Great Britain, France and Germany. These companies have different notions of the role of the State in economic systems.

In France, strategic and long-term thinking are important (Albert, 1991; Ammon, 1989). Indeed, these factors have played a key role in the development of nationally important sectors such transportation, aerospace, energy, infrastructure or civil engineering. In this sense, Ammon (1990, p. 123) stresses that economic thinking is mainly politico-strategic thinking:

It is less concerned with economic criteria, such as supply and demand, market potentials, market niches and sales opportunities, but is concerned with economic strength in sectors/branches which are considered as strategically important (translated by the authors).

Therefore, the French state takes part as a shareholder in some French organizations through financial participation (Barmeyer *et al.*, 2007; Mayrhofer, 2001) and/or its influential professional networks of state linked managers (Bourdieu, 1996). In this way,

the state can be regarded as a regulator with a constraining element that influences organizational structure and behaviour. Indeed, in the case of Airbus Group, the French state has played a major role since its creation. Conversely, in the German conception of social market economy (*soziale Marktwirtschaft*) (Hall and Soskice, 2001), the state's regulatory role is one to institute and maintain this order (Barmeyer and Davoine, 2008; Mayrhofer, 2004), but not get involved in corporate decisions (Sattler *et al.*, 2003). This is why the German state was not an Airbus Group shareholder unlike the French state that has been part of the group's capital since its creation.

Shareholding parity between France and Germany, which was decided during the creation of the Airbus Group, had been maintained from 2000 to 2007: French shareholder Sogade (50 per cent of whose capital is owned by the Lagardère group and 50 per cent by the French State) and German shareholder, DASA (owned by DaimlerChrysler), held 30.28 per cent of the Airbus Group group's capital; 5.54 per cent was held by the Spanish State and 33.9 per cent was floating. Recently, German managers have adopted a new attitude *vis-à-vis* Airbus Group. At the beginning of 2007, DaimlerChrysler reduced its shareholding from 22.5 to 15 per cent but retained its voting rights. Thus, the balance between French and German shareholders was maintained. The shares were purchased by a consortium of 15 investors, seven of whom are from the private sector (Allianz, Commerzbank, Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, Crédit Suisse, etc.) and eight from the public sector (KfW - *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* – Credit Institute for Reconstruction). At this time, the German federal government, which had previously refused to get involved, welcomed this initiative because it preserved the Franco-German equilibrium within Airbus and Airbus Group. Since then, this balanced distribution of capital has been challenged several times. In 2013, the French shareholder Sogade owned 22.16 per cent and the German shareholders Daimler and KfW, respectively, 14.77 and 2.75 per cent. At the Annual General Meeting of Shareholders of Airbus Group in 2013, it was decided that state participation in the shares must not exceed 30 per cent. Because Daimler wants to sell most of its shares – the German government will become – against its convictions – a shareholder to balance the French state influence.

The state is also involved in political, social, labour-market and even geographical issues. The important number of production sites of the Airbus Group in Europe does not facilitate cooperation and coordination. In fact, the different parts, of aircrafts for example, are often transported from one site to the other, and the site itself is a central location for job creation. The Toulouse (France) and Hamburg (Germany) sites have significantly benefited from the expansion of the Airbus company. The final assembly of the A 380 is carried out in Toulouse where a large number of jobs have been created. In light of political and social issues, each country strives to attract as many projects as possible to stimulate the reinforcement of it's the industrial fabric. The French State also acts as a social actor and employer, and was a strong supporter of the Toulouse region in its bid for the A 380 and the A 350 aircraft models. National choices sometimes override a coherent and efficient industrial logic and affect Franco–German cooperation. The issue of influence and power arises in these situations. Recently, Tom Enders, the German CEO, decided to move strategic functions of the headquarters of the Airbus Group from Paris and Munich to Toulouse, where an important part of research and development takes place. Thus, France will become more powerful and Paris will lose power to the French city of Toulouse.

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3.2 Corporate governance and the Airbus Group

To analyze the evolution of influence, corporate governance systems, and especially governance structures, are important. Since its creation, the Airbus Group is managed by an Executive Committee and a Board of Directors. The Executive Committee supports the Chief Executive Officer in the management of the day-to-day operation. It is chaired by the CEO and comprises the heads of major business functions and divisions. The Board of Directors is appointed by the shareholders and is responsible for the overall conduct of the group. It plays a crucial role in coordinating management, providing direction and monitoring business performance. Table II presents longitudinal data from 2000 to 2013 regarding the composition of the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors. The data reveal two important trends. First, in 2013, there is no longer a Franco-German parity in the Executive Committee – in terms of numbers. There are six French managers in top positions, but only four Germans. In 2000 and 2005, France and Germany are represented by an equal number of top managers in strategic power positions (five, then four) to ensure the balance of power, respectively. Second, over time, the group's internationalization is now more reflected in the composition of the Board of Directors and in the Executive Committee than in 2000. We can, therefore, observe an evolution from bi-national to more multinational compositions of governance systems and power relations.

Concerning the relative importance of the Airbus Group operating divisions (Table III), we can see that in 2012 most divisions are headed by French managers. With successful divisions like Airbus and Eurocopter, the French influence with 85 per cent of the turnover is very high, compared to Germany (10 per cent) or Spain (4 per cent). From a longitudinal perspective, the French influence has grown significantly, even if the CEO of Airbus Group, Tom Enders, is German. We can also observe a more pronounced continuity and stability from a French perspective. Francois Augue (F) has headed the space division Astrium since the beginning of Airbus Group for over 13 years and Fabrice Brégier (F) leads the helicopter division Eurocopter in 2005 and Airbus in 2013. The low influence of the French managers in 2005 is due to the fact that Airbus, for the first time, was lead by a German, Gustav Humbert. This was a French concession offset by Noël Forgeard's hierarchical supervision, as he was CEO of Airbus Group and also appointed Chairman of the Airbus Shareholder Committee.

Year	Members	Executive committee			Members	Board of directors		
		French	German	Others		French	German	Others
2000	11	5	5	1 Spanish	11	5	5	1 Spanish
2005	11	4	4	1 Spanish, 1 American, 1 Finn	11	5	5	1 Spanish
2013	13	6	4	1 Spanish, 2 American	12	4	4	1 Spanish, 1 British, 1 Indian, 1 American

Table II.
Evolution of the
composition of the Airbus
Group executive
committee and board of
directors

diversity

Governance structure	Division	Airbus	Military transport aircraft	Helicopters	Space	Defence and security systems	French influence
2000	Management % of turnover	Noël Forgeard (F) 64	Francisco Fernandez (S) 2	Dietrich Russell (G) 16	François Auque (F) 8	Thomas Enders (G) 10	2 managers 72
2005	Management % of turnover	Gustav Humbert (G) 60	Francisco Fernandez (S) 4	Fabrice Brégier (F) 12	François Auque (F) 8	Stefan Zoller (G) 16	2 managers 20
2012	Management % of turnover	Fabrice Brégier (F) 65	Domingo Ureña-Raso (S) 4	Guillaume Faury (F) 11	François Auque (F) 10	Bernhard Gerwert (G) 10	3 managers 85

Table III.
Evolution of the relative
importance of the Airbus
Group operating divisions

3.3 Professional networks and elite education within the Airbus Group

Another important factor is professional networks. However, where are important strategic networks built in France? Particularly influential are the elitist *Grandes Ecoles*, which exist in addition to public universities and are considered to be the “talent hotbed” (*pepinières*) of the future elite in the fields of administration, management and engineering (Alexandre-Bailly *et al.*, 2007; Hartmann, 2007; Joly, 2005). In general, graduates from the *Grandes Ecoles* achieve employment fairly easily in public administration or private sector companies at relatively high positions without undergoing the process of professional in-house socialization – a situation that Bauer and Bertin-Mouroit (1997) compare to “skydiving”. Consequently, French managers have a high rate of inter-functional mobility and inter-company mobility, Bauer and Bertin-Mouroit (1996) describe these managers as “helicoptered” or “catapulted”. In this sense, MacLean *et al.* (2010, p. 339) state:

Recognition and rapid promotion are accorded to those with the willingness and capacity to undertake complex strategic and general management roles predicated upon establishing productive relationships with external organisations, regardless of specialist background.

Recent comparative studies on the managerial elite in France with other countries like Great Britain (MacLean *et al.*, 2006, 2010) Germany and Switzerland (Davoine and Ravasi, 2013) confirm relatively stable career patterns, organizational functions and hierarchical status that continue to be determined by cultural and institutional factors. Most French top managers of CAC 40 companies graduate from the *Grandes Ecoles*, especially from three institutions, *Ecole Polytechnique*, *HEC (Hautes Etudes Commerciales)* and *ENA (Ecole Nationale d'Administration)* (Dudouet and Joly, 2010).

The centralized education and training of the elite in Paris fosters the formation of influential networks, described as “state nobility” by Bourdieu (1996). French managers can, therefore, easily defend social and political interests (Segella *et al.*, 2001). In particular, graduates from the most prestigious and Parisian-based public *Grandes Ecoles* will start their careers in a French administration or ministry in Paris. After a few years of service, they have the possibility of entering a CAC 40 company such as Renault, Thales or EDF (Electricité de France), while still remaining civil servants. They are, thus, able to return to the public service at any time (Maclean *et al.*, 2006). This French phenomenon is called *pantouflage*, which literally means that the actors can regain their “slippers” that they left in the administration. These actors are closely linked by an *esprit de corps* that leads to strong, stable and lifelong interconnections between politics, administration and private finance. In this sense, the coordination of economic actors is not predominantly fulfilled by the market but by “elites in the state apparatus, large firms, and high finance, which assured that large firms were able to construct a novel institutional environment [...]” (Hancké, 2001, p. 333).

On the contrary, in the German system, the assumption of functions and the development of technical competence in various areas of a company are akin to “mountaineering”, so that a career develops through ongoing growth in expert knowledge (Bauer and Bertin-Mouroit, 1996; Davoine, 2002; Klarsfeld and Mabey, 2004). Another specificity of the German system is the high rate of doctorate holders (Joly, 1996; Opitz, 2005), “which shows that German society and its companies value the expertise of the academic elite that is selected by universities based on the Humboldtian principle of educating by researching” (Davoine and Ravasi, 2013, p. 154).

Table IV presents a breakdown of the composition of the Executive Committee which takes into account educational background, network and career paths and indicates some characteristics of French and German senior managers. This seems to be important for the understanding of the French conception of organizations and their approach to management.

Table IV shows some typically French characteristics of the education and career paths of managers (Bauer and Bertin-Mouro, 1996; Evans *et al.*, 1989; Davoine, Ravasi, 2013). Many of these have originated from the elitist *Grandes Ecoles* mostly based in Paris and Toulouse and have worked in a range of different industries (bank, automotive, electricity etc.). French Airbus Group managers have often studied engineering (three in *Polytechnique*, *Ecole des Mines*), but also Political Sciences (*IEP*), Business Administration (*HEC*) or Administration Science (*ENA*). Only one French manager, Jean Botti, has studied abroad, in the USA. They have a generalist orientation and, with one exception, served the state. However, there are also the so-called *Lagardère Boys* (Auque, Brégier), who worked for Matra and belong to the *Lagardère Group* and its network. One French and one American manager got the prestigious and French *Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur*, a distinction given personally by the President of France to exceptional persons who have served France. The Spanish manager also studied at the French business school *ESSEC in Paris*.

This contextual background of centralization in France leads to stronger professional, mostly Parisian, networks than in Germany. The German managers, often engineers, have studied in universities in different parts of Germany and even at different university levels (sometimes high-ranked universities like Munich, sometimes the more practical oriented "universities of applied science" (*Fachhochschulen*). As for the French, only one German manager, Tom Enders, has studied abroad (i.e. the USA). German managers are much more linked to a company or an industry than to professional networks. Networks also exist in Germany, but the links between the private sector and the state are much closer in France because of the centralization of network heads in Paris and the student status of civil servants. Decentralization is facilitated by the *Länder* which have significant power and are responsible for local economic, cultural and education policies and also the extensive network of major companies throughout the country (Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich, Cologne, etc.). In such decentralized structures, it is difficult to create a single national network between managers and politicians (Barmeyer and Davoine, 2008).

Interestingly, Tom Enders' career is an exception in Germany. Although he holds a doctoral degree, his career shows some similarities with his French counterparts. He has worked for the (German) state and has built external professional networks. He can also be considered as a *pantoufle*, which may help him to better understand the logics and functioning of French organizations.

The question remains whether or not career characteristics are linked to the specifics of an industry sector rather than national institutional factors. For this, the authors looked at the German aeronautic and defence industry and its characteristics, which are different from those of their French counterparts, such as Thales or Dassault, and not part of the DAX 30 like Thales in the CAC 40. Companies like Diehl are family-owned foundations, GmbHs (*Gesellschaften mit beschränkter Haftung* – companies with limited liability), like Krauss Maffei or Dornier, or stock corporations like MTU and Rheinmetall. Due to the German past, the *Third Reich*

Table IV.
Composition of the Airbus
Group executive
committee in 2013

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Managers	Function	Educational background and academic degree	Network	Career state "Pantouflage"	Career in companies
François AUQUE (F)	CEO of Astrium and Coordination of Space and Defence	HEC (Business School), Paris IEP: Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris ENA: École Nationale d'Administration, Paris IGS: Institut de Gestion Sociale, Paris	Aérospatiale Matra (Lagardere Group)	French government's audit agency: Cour des Comptes	Bank La Hélin Suez Group Aérospatiale Matra
Thierry BARIL (F)	Chief Human Resources Officer Airbus Group and Airbus		Alstom Energy Group	–	Boccard SA Laborde & Kupfer-Repelec Alstom Energy General Electric Alcatel Space Eurocopter Airbus Group & Airbus
Dr Jean BOTTI (F)	Chief Technical Officer	Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Toulouse Central Michigan University CNAM: Métiers MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Society of Automotive Engineers Various engineering and technology societies European Research Board Honorary doctor of the University of Cardiff and Bath Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (BDI) Matra (Lagardère Group)	Centre National Recherche Technologique (CNRT)	Renault General Motors Delphi Corporation
Fabrice BREGIER (F)	CEO of Airbus	Ecole Polytechnique, Paris Ecole des Mines, Paris		Ministry of Industry Ministry of Agriculture	EDF Pechiney Matra Défense - Apache MAW GIE Matra BAe Dynamics
Günter BUTSCHEK (G)	Chief Operating Officer of Airbus	Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University	–	–	Mercedes-Benz AG Daimler-Chrysler South Africa (DCA) Mitsubishi Motors Corporation Beijing Benz Automotive Co., Ltd Airbus

(continued)

Managers	Function	Educational background and academic degree	Network	Career state "Pantouflage"	Career in companies
Guillaume FAURY (F)	Head of Eurocopter	Ecole Nationale Supérieure de l'Aéronautique et de l'Espace, Toulouse	–	French Defence Procurement Agency DGA	Eurocopter Peugeot S.A.
Thomas ENDERS (G)	EADS Chief Executive	Ecole Polytechnique, Paris University of Bonn University of California in Los Angeles	German Aerospace Industries Association BDLI Atlantik-Brücke e.V	Assistant of a member in the German Federal Parliament German Council on Foreign Affairs German Ministry of Defence	MBB/Dasa Airbus Group
Bernhard GERWERT (G)	CEO of Cassidian (Defence & Security)	University of Applied Science in Bielefeld University of Paderborn	–	–	MBB/Dasa Dornier Daimler Chrysler Aerospace Airbus Group/Cassidian
Marwan LAHOUD (F)	Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer	Ecole Polytechnique Ecole nationale supérieure de l'aéronautique et de l'espace	l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur	Délégation générale pour l'armement (DGA) French Ministry of Defence	Aero-spatale MBDA
John LEAHY (USA) Sean O'KEEFE (USA)	Chief Operating Officer of Customers of Airbus Head of Airbus Group North America	Syracuse University Fordham University Loyola University, New Orleans Maxwell School of Syracuse University	l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur	Minister of the US Navy US Ministry of Defence Finances Louisiana State University (LSU)	Piper Aircraft Airbus North America General Electric
Domingo UREN̄A-RASO (S) Harald WILHELM (G)	Head of Airbus Military Chief Financial Officer of Airbus Group & Airbus	Polytechnic University of Madrid ESSEC Paris Ludwig Maximilian University Munich	–	–	CASA Aircelle/Air-bus/SNEC-MA Daimler-Chrysler-Aerospace Daimler-Benz Aerospace

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Table IV.

and the extremely interlinked relations between the defence industry and the Nazi government, this industry sector is strongly controlled and there are no direct visible and (personal) links to the German state.

Examining the education and careers paths of the Executive Committees of the five aforementioned German defence companies, we find confirmation of uniquely German characteristics. Top-managers are experts, most are engineers (*Maschinenbau* – machine engineering – or *Luft- und Raumfahrttechnik* – aerospace engineering), some have studied business administration and some hold a German doctorate. Most worked for a long time in the same company, with some of them coming from companies in other industrial sectors such as Daimler Benz, Dornier System, General Electric, Robert Bosch or Siemens. Most importantly, none of the members of the Executive Board was linked to the German state. This underlines the assumption that Tom Enders' career is not linked to the military sector and highlights that this is quite exceptional for the German context and is more in-keeping with what is observed in the French context.

3.4 Individual career paths and the Airbus Group

At the individual level the strategic-actors approach to micro politics focuses upon personal characteristics, competencies and roles of managers and highlights the role of strategic interests and actions (i.e. voluntarist approaches) (Child and Kieser, 1979; Crozier and Friedberg, 1981; Mintzberg, 1983).

Crozier and Friedberg (1981) focused on individuals ("players") strategies within organizations. Their studies show that the personal strategies and tactics of the players who wish to obtain and retain power and influence are often as important in the life – and survival – of organizations as so-called "rational" economic and financial strategies. Thus, power modifies the organization's formal framework and can even lead to malfunctions (Bourdieu, 1991; MacLean *et al.*, 2010). The role of players is not always fixed it tends to develop in uncertain and ambiguous ways, which leave room for manoeuvre. Players are free to pursue individual objectives, which do not necessarily match those of the organization, even where common interests can exist (Amado *et al.*, 1990).

At first glance, the main players are the managers who are part of the company's management team, notably the members of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors. Within the Airbus Group there were several influential CEOs. We will concentrate on the three incumbents who were in post after the abandonment of the bi-national structure. Noël Forgeard, who was once CEO of Airbus Group, can be considered a key player and the strategic architect of the very successful Airbus A 380 model.

Forgeard's career (Table V) is a typical example of French senior managers creating influential networks by alternating between political and business spheres (Bauer and Bertin-Mouro, 1996). It has to be emphasized that this connection between the state and companies is usually not a formal, official arrangement, but rather an informal "officieux" one, which contributes to a growing "osmose of the elites" (Barmeyer *et al.*, 2007). These actors are closely linked by an *esprit de corps*, which leads to strong, stable and lifelong interconnections between politics, administration and private finance.

Forgeard graduated from two *Grandes Ecoles*, and worked as a civil servant before joining a major industrial group as a member of the management team. During his career, he met with eminent and influential personalities such as Jacques Chirac,

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Table V.

Noël Forgeard's career

Noël FORGEARD

Born in 1946

Education: *Ecole Polytechnique, Ecole des Mines*

1972-1978:	Chief Engineer for the ministry of Industry
1978-1981:	Technical advisor for the ministry of Transport and Defence
1981-1986:	Deputy Director of Usinor subsidiaries, in charge of strategic reorganisations
1986-1987:	Industrial affairs advisor to Jacques Chirac
1987-1992:	Senior Vice-president in charge of Space and defence activities for Matra
1992-1998:	Managing Director for the Lagardère group
1998-2000:	Chief Executive Officer for Airbus Industries
2000-2006:	Member of the Airbus Group Executive Board and Chief Executive Officer of Airbus
2005:	Replaces Philippe Camus as co-Chief Executive Officer of Airbus Group
2006:	Resigns from Airbus Group

Jean-Luc Lagardère and Philippe Delmas, former advisor to the minister of Foreign affairs, and Roland Dumas, author of *De la prochaine guerre avec l'Allemagne* (The next war against Germany, 1999). Forgeard was followed by Louis Gallois in 2007 (Table VI).

In contrary to most of his French colleagues in top positions in the Airbus Group, Louis Gallois is not an engineer, but he is a typical *généraliste* with high strategic competences, a *pantoufleur*, sharing professional networks with former ministers Alain Juppé or Jean-Pierre Chevènement. He has special diplomatic leadership qualities. In an article published in the Financial Times (12 February, 2012), Gallois is described as follows:

The Jesuits have clearly left their mark on Louis Gallois. Despite being a typical product of France's *Grandes Ecoles*, with an impressive career running some of the country's largest industrial companies, the 68-year-old has always been a modest man. The outgoing chief executive of EADS, the Franco-German aerospace and defence group, pays for stamps for his personal letters, drives an unflashy Citroën saloon and helps his wife stack the dirty dishes in the dishwasher. In the realm of business, he has advocated moderation in top executive remuneration, handed a large chunk of his annual pay to charity and has even argued for the abolition of stock options.

Louis GALLOIS

Born in 1944

Education: *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, Ecole Nationale d'Administration*

1972-1988:	Various posts for French Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of Research and Industry and Ministry of Defence
1988-1989:	Head of the civil and military cabinet in the French Ministry of Defence
1989-1992:	Chairman and CEO of SNECMA (Design and Construction of Aviation Engines)
1992-1996:	Chief Executive Officer of Aérospatiale
1996-2006:	President of SNCF (National society of French railways)
2000:	Member of the Airbus Group Executive Board, Chairman of Executive Committee and Member of Strategic Committee
2006-2007:	Co-Chief Executive Officer of Airbus Group with Thomas Enders
2007:	Chief Executive Officer of Airbus Industries
2007-2012:	Chief Executive Officer of Airbus Group, replaced by Tom Enders

Table VI.

Louis Gallois' career

Gallois, who had been the CEO of SNCF (the state-owned railway company) for ten years, had a great talent for talking to shareholders, politicians, unions and employees. For this reason, he was approached by the *Elysée palace* (the French president) to streamline the Airbus Group’ complicated Franco-German governance and to turn it into a more “normal” company. Gallois, who restored confidence between the shareholders and politicians on both sides of the Rhine, led the Airbus Group with French principles. He explained in *The Guardian* (3 June, 2011):

You could say that I am a Republican in the French sense of the word, which is not the American one. You know the motto of France: liberty, equality and brotherhood.

Important to Gallois was the pioneering role of Airbus Group as a European intercultural management model and the challenge of operating without a national home base. This can also be regarded as a negative aspect for Airbus Group, because the company is never seen as completely French in France or completely German in Germany. However, this diversity can also represent an important asset outside of Europe by demonstrating how organizations can overcome cultural differences. By learning about cultural diversity within its own organization, Airbus Group is better placed to facilitate the integration organizational activities with cultures of other countries such as India.

In 2012 Gallois was followed by the current CEO of Airbus Group, Tom Enders (Table VII).

Enders relates personal stories, like being the son of a shepherd in rural Germany, having completed 1,200 parachute jumps and having developed his leadership qualities during his time at the military as an active reserve officer. Due to his direct, task orientated authoritarian leadership style, he is also called “Major Tom”. He studied history and economics, worked at the ministry of defence and accomplished a German doctorate (PhD). He then entered DASA before becoming co-director of Airbus Group with Noël Forgeard in 2004. Interestingly, It is interesting to mention that Enders’s career path combines German elements that demonstrate his expertise, such as “mountaineering” and having done a PhD (Davoine and Ravasi, 2013), along with

Thomas ENDERS	
Born in 1958	
Education: <i>Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, University of California Los Angeles</i>	
1982-1985:	Assistant to a member in the German Federal Parliament
1985-1987:	Doctorate grant of Foundation Konrad Adenauer
1988:	German Council on Foreign Affairs (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik)
1989-1991:	Member of German Ministry of Defence “Planungsstab”
1991-1995:	Various posts for MBB/DASA (Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm/DaimlerChrysler Aerospace Inc.)
1995-1996:	Chairman and CEO of DASA
1996-2000:	Head of the department for Corporate Development and Technology of DASA
2000-2005:	CEO of the Airbus Group Defence and Security Systems Division
2005:	Appointed co-CEO of Airbus Group
2005-2012:	President of the BDLI (German Aerospace Industry Association)
2012:	Chief Executive Officer of Airbus Group

Table VII.
Tom Enders’ career

French elements such as “catapulting” and the link to the state at the beginning of his career (Dudouet and Joly, 2010).

3.5 Culture and the Airbus Group

The *cultural* factor completes the four other factors and plays a central role. It is important because individuals operating in a given context are heavily influenced by the cultural socialization which has shaped the way they perceive reality, the way they think and act according to perception and interpretation (Barmeyer, 2007; Geertz, 1973; d'Iribarne, 2009). Therefore, culture can be defined as an acquired system of orientations and references which underpins the values and habits experienced collectively by the members of a certain group or society, distinguishing them from other groups and societies (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010).

This system of reference enables actors to make sense of their own actions (Geertz, 1973). They establish criteria for distinguishing right from wrong; the legitimate from the illegitimate (d'Iribarne, 1994). Consequently, every society has its own specific sets of values, which enable it to function (Parsons, 1952). Values are not seen as restrictions on behaviour. Rather, they offer suggestions about tried-and-tested solutions and behaviour (Inglehart *et al.*, 1998).

Since some cultural elements have already been treated implicitly within the other contextual factors, we concentrate on one important French value orientation: the *logic of honour* and rank provided by d'Iribarne (1989, 1994). A specific French and historically steady value orientation is *honneur* (honour) because it determines social relations as well as work relations. *Honneur* assigns to every individual a social standing, a rank with certain privileges and duties. According to d'Iribarne, France remains a court society (*société de cour*) as described by Elias (1974) and even contemporary organizations and relations in society are still based on the pre-revolutionary social structuration of the *ancien régime*: nobility, clergy, bourgeoisie and farmer. Principles, values and practices of the court society spread to the provinces and to bourgeois milieus, and became institutionalized as the frame of reference in French society. As a consequence, d'Iribarne (1989, p. 258), translated by the authors, states:

France remains the fatherland of honour, rank, the opposition of noble and vulgar, of orders and of the states, which are characterized as much by their duties as by their privileges. Nobody is willing to yield to the common law but everyone will have the heart to meet the responsibilities, which are determined by the tradition of its rank. And the sense of honour prohibits those who claim to defend their interests in the petty way, which belongs to the vulgar.

Airbus Group can be considered as a “noble” organization. This is emphasized by the following quote that links honour to successful French industrial sectors:

Honour is only poorly nourished by laborious, honest, invisible and repetitive tasks. It likes big challenges, where it can excel. It can easily cause to get people involved with passion on a glorious adventure [...]. Honour plays an outstanding role in the success of the French industry in areas of which one dreams: aviation, aerospace, nuclear, mineral oil (d'Iribarne, 1989, pp. 126-127, translated by the authors).

It must, however, be emphasized that culture is used as a descriptive and interpretative framework to illustrate particular features and patterns, complementary to those of

institutions. Otherwise, it is a form of cultural determinism, which disregards the particularities of contextual features. As d'Iribarne (2009, pp. 310-311) outlines:

[...] when national cultures are concerned, the aim is not to highlight the supposedly persisting characteristics of certain cultures. It is rather a matter of analysing how, within a given organisation, the encounter of people coming from different societies and with different habits leads to the emergence of a specific culture, understood as a common way of doing things.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The analysis developed in this article shows that the Airbus Group strongly reflects characteristics of French organizations, which do not originate from the industry sector, but rather are rooted in national institutional elements. We can, thus, find central elements like the importance of strategy, the principle of honour, centralization of decision and power, the role of the state and the influence, via professional networks (*pantouflage*), who originate from the *Grandes Ecoles*. For example, former French Lagardère managers (Matra) can be found in a senior management position in the Airbus Group. Moreover, the three most important divisions Airbus, Eurocopter and Astrium (accounting for 85 per cent of turnover in 2012) are headed by French senior managers. These findings may confirm the maintenance of institutional and cultural peculiarities in Europe, despite globalization processes and discourses of harmonization (Hancké, 2009; Hasse and Krücken, 2008; Heidenreich *et al.*, 2012).

At the same time, Airbus Group can also be considered as a European company with a strong German influence, where institutional elements, structures and rules regulate complex relationships of interest, influence and power. The headquarters of Airbus Group are located on "neutral ground" in Amsterdam. Strategically, the purpose of Airbus Group has been to counterbalance the power of US competitor Boeing. Positions taken in the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors and the operating divisions underline that Airbus Group is an MNC with German influence. For instance, the German CEO Tom Enders tries to limit state influence. The selling of Airbus Group shares by Arnaud Lagardère, son of the founder Jean-Luc Lagardère and owner of the Lagardère group, diminished French (state) influence and demonstrated that he does not have the same commitment and vocation to this (strategic) European project. It is interesting to observe some adaptations from the German side, approaching the French way of organizing. With the objective to keep the balance of power, the German state is currently increasing its influence in the Airbus Group shares – even against the principle of German social market economy. The German CEO Tom Enders seems to act like a French *patron* with an imposing and directive leadership style. For instance, he autonomously decided to centralize Airbus Group headquarters.

The contextual factors presented in this paper contribute to a better understanding of the French organization in a European context and the important question of – intercultural – distribution of power in multinational corporations. By taking account of the French influence, the case study identifies the underlying forces driving the evolution and coordination processes within the Airbus Group. Several factors – state, corporate governance, professional networks and elite education, career patterns and culture – can be used for understanding the complex processes in the reality of multinational organizations. They allow considering different aspects on the individual level of actors, on the level of organizations, on the societal level and help to overcome mono-causal explanations. They demonstrate that the evolution of relationships has

been strongly influenced by national interests and other contextual factors, which have also shaped the attitudes and behaviours of managers.

The case study also shows the difficulties faced by multinational managers, operating in a strongly politicized context such as the aeronautic (and military) sector. It raises issues linked to influence and power. For instance, the dual leadership, with the nomination of two chief executive officers, that has been practiced from 2000 which appears to lead to tensions and conflicts. A single leadership system, as it is used by a majority of *monocultural* companies, seems to provide the organization and its economic activity with more stability than a *bicultural* dual leadership structure. The principle of – intercultural – symmetry adopted by Airbus Group has been abandoned by Louis Gallois and Tom Enders.

The analysis reflects the dialectic tension of the globalization and localization question. The need to simultaneously standardize and differentiate is found in many multinational organizations (Barmeyer and Davoine, 2011; Geppert and Williams, 2006; Maurice and Sorge, 2000; Tempel and Walgenbach, 2007). Airbus Group is a good example of such a company – it has strong European *and* French identities, embedded in socio-cultural contexts – that acts globally in many countries of the world. It seems that in many ways Airbus Group succeeds in balancing this dialectic tension by having national distributed functions and locations.

The relationship between “careers and institutions” developed by Jones and Dunn (2007, p. 443, p. 437) helps to explain these organizational dynamics. Airbus Group is embedded in different national contexts and driven and governed by managers who have been socialized mainly in *one* national context. Drawing upon the extensive literature review and starting from the assumption that “careers link persons to institutions through organizations”, the authors discuss – institutions and careers as well as properties and processes:

Careers and institutions are ends and means – both have properties and processes. A career highlights the relationship between persons and institutions, whereas institutions highlight how knowledge is socially constructed but locally enacted through individuals (Jones and Dunn, 2007, p. 441).

Concerning the interdependence of properties and processes in institutions and careers, a distinction between three forms or phases is made (Jones and Dunn, 2007). *Creation*, *reproduction* and *transformation*, which will be useful to understand from a longitudinal perspective the evolution and distribution of power within the Airbus Group. This is a process where stability and change simultaneously take place and where French peculiarities appear. *Institutional creation* happens, when leaders enter new arenas and fields and, realizing visions, develop strategies and implement structures, regulations and processes in organizations. Leaders form the organization with their beliefs, skills and roles, which become institutional building blocks (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In the Airbus Group case, this phase occurred in 2000 when the company was formed from the merger of CASA, DASA and Aérospatiale-Matra. Power was mainly distributed between German and French managers. The second phase, *institutional reproduction*, happens when new leaders enter the organization and adhere to the dominant existing regulations, practices and roles. Selection and professional socialization contributes to the reproduction of practice and roles and assures the continuity of the organization. In the Airbus Group case, the

strong influence of the French state and the link to the Parisian *Grandes Ecoles* with their specific careers and professional networks (managers who are quite similar in terms of attitude, knowledge, skills) create a sort of “pool of almost interchangeable individuals” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 152) and contribute to a certain stability and a rise of French power and influence. This stability was not only given by the French CEOs, Philippe Camus, Noël Forgeard and Louis Gallois but also by the members of the Executive Board. For example, in 2013, three from six French members originate from the same Grande Ecole, the *Ecole Polytechnique*. The third and final phase, institutional transformation, occurs where goals, strategies and practice are supplanted and evolve by new (external) elements, but do not change the whole organization. This may become a hybridized process where “new” practices replace “old” practices. Concerning the Airbus Group, this happened, when the German Tom Enders became CEO in 2012 and undertook important decisions that had effects on structures and processes, sometimes close to a French mindset, sometimes close to the German mindset. Despite his length of service with Airbus Group Tom Enders, with his German cultural background, can be seen as a “transformer”, a boundary spanner who brings new practices in the group.

The article has several limitations and offers a range of future research perspectives. The empirical investigations concern one single case study, combining characteristics of French (and German) organizations. Also, the case study is about a European organization in a specific sector, aeronautics, linked to defence and military, which by definition is related to national interests and therefore the state. The strong influence of the French state may also be explained by this fact.

Moreover, social systems and organizations like Airbus Group are not stable entities that are fixed, but fluent and dynamic systems that are in constant evolution and change, as shown in the longitudinal analysis concerning changes of influence and power.

It will be of special interest to see how the possible convergence of social systems, especially values and practices (culture), or education systems and career paths, a new generation of “less complex” young French and German managers (players) and different economic and social regulations in the concerned countries (institutions, context) contribute to changes in the future and affect the balance of influence in European companies like Airbus Group.

Finally, it would be interesting to observe the evolution of power relationships over a longer period. This also concerns the evolution and shift in governance systems and power positions from bi-national groups to more multinational groups.

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