



Organizing Control: August Thyssen and the Construction of German Corporate Management (Harvard Studies in Business History)

Jeffrey Fear

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In a pioneering work, Jeffrey Fear overturns the dominant understanding of German management as “backward” relative to the U.S. and uncovers an autonomous and sophisticated German managerial tradition. Beginning with founder August Thyssen—the Andrew Carnegie of Germany—Fear traces the evolution of management inside the Thyssen-Konzern and the Vereinigte Stahlwerke (United Steel Works) between 1871 and 1934.

Fear focuses on the organization and internal dynamics of the company. He demonstrates that initiatives often flowed from middle managers, rather than from the top down. Shattering stereotypes of the overly bureaucratic and rigid German firm, Fear portrays a decentralized and flexible system that underscores the dynamic and entrepreneurial nature of German business. He fundamentally revises the scholarship on Alexander Gerschenkron and Germany’s Sonderweg, and critiques Max Weber’s concept of the corporation and capital accounting. He develops a loosely coupled relationship among enterprise strategy, organization, the structure of responsibility, and its accounting system, which links information, knowledge, and power inside the firm. This method of organizing control is central to understanding corporate governance.

Original and provocative, this work will generate much debate among historians, organizational theorists, and management and accounting scholars.

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