Work in progress:

Responsibility and guilt in organizations

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**Abstract:**
This paper presents an analysis of 12 interviews with managers from the public sector. The managers work within various areas of the public sector such as education, health, social care, cultural life, and law.

The interviews took place in Spring 2012. In the interviews I asked the managers how they handle accusations of guilt, or being guilty, when an incident within the organization, or on the basis of the organization’s decisions, shows to be doing a citizen wrong. I also asked them on their understanding of responsibility versus guilt and blame.

Two of the findings of the interviews were the following:

1) Managers avoid discussions of guilt, since this is “a too strong word”.
2) Managers have several examples of how guilt and blame is being negotiated in the organization.

This lead to a 3. finding: Guilt is the negative flipside of responsibility.

The first two findings show an intriguing contradiction, since managers do not deliberately talk of guilt. However, the interviews showed how discussions on guilt is around in the organization. This means, that the managers contradict themselves: They say it is not a concept they themselves use. However, they have lot of examples of have it is used by others. An example: When the organization has made a mistake or not taken action in time, e.g. in the case of child abuse going on for several years while civil servants are well aware of the abuse taking place, the question of “guilt” enters the hall room. And often as a discussion on who is to blame.

Having presented quotes from the interviews, I investigate the historical understanding of blame, shame, and guilt, looking into Norbert Elias’ analysis of guilt as part of the civilizing process. The process of educating to feeling guilty is long, and has taken place since the 16.th century. Interestingly, the 16.th century is also the century where we find the reformation’s discussion on responsibility and guilt, e.g. Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther’s discussion on free will. Here, I particularly look at how Erasmus and Luther discuss responsibility and guilt. I do this to drill into Elias’ concept of guilt as socializing process.

I then relate these Protestant concepts of responsibility and guilt to Goffman’s idea of facework, since the loss of face seems not only to be main reason why managers refuse to apologize. Also the strong theological connotations on the concept of responsibility and judgment seems to be playing along, when refusal of faults, and thus blame, take place. Guilt is a strong word, and there is a historical process behind that.
The process of socializing to feel guilt is historically long, and apparently, I claim, still at play in contemporary organizations. I argue that though organizations within a Protestant shaped culture is proud of the concept of responsibility, and say that they try to avoid blame, guilt is not something we should wish to get rid of.

**Introduction**

“Shame takes on its particular coloration from the fact that the person feeling it has done or is about to do something through which he comes into contradiction with people to whom he is bound in one form or another, and with himself, with the sector of his consciousness by which he controls himself” (Elias s.415)

Norbert Elias wrote his famous book on “The civilizing processes” in 1936. The focal point of the book is that modern civilization is built on shame. Elias’ claims that centuries of focus on conduct of manner, particularly in relation to children’s upbringing and the pedagogics related to that, had led to a so called civilized culture, which basically was, and is, built on self-constraint, and that is, related to the capacity to feel, or at least, perform shame. The context of the book was the upcoming fascism in Europe, and Elias’ work can be viewed as an outcry to call the world back to order, and civil coexistence. As we all know too well, the Holocaust of the 2nd World War stands as an icon exactly for lack of civilized treatment of one’s neighbor. However, what is shame as such?

I wish to explore what the quote above tells us, and secondly, return to the context of the idea of shame’s civilizing role:

1) Shame is a culturally shaped feeling.
2) Shame is connected to a contradiction between a self’s surrounding and a self’s perception of itself.
3) This contradiction shapes a relationship between a self’s surrounding and a self’s perception of itself.
4) This particular relation come into place because of the self’s socalled consciousness.

The latter point articulates consciousness as the place that transforms the surrounding’s expectations into being those of the self. This is usually labeled “internalization” by Freud. The relation between outside the self and inside the self is thus already in its offspring shaped as complex, meaning, that what the self
perceives as the surrounding’s expectation may not be what is actually the surrounding’s expectation. Also, the surroundings tend to change, even parents change over the period of a child’s childhood. These few examples show that it is not at all certain what is meant by consciousness related to guilt and shame. Is consciousness just shaped by culture? If so, what kind of shame and guilt is imposed through childhood, and that is, also on persons becoming leaders? Does anyone any longer feel guilty or ashamed? Looking at the amount of help-your-self-literature, guilt and shame is something we may see a shadow of (since the literature is sold after all), but the point of help-your-self is exactly, that there is nothing to feel ashamed about anything in a modern world: “Go live your life”, and carpe diem. No more shame here, please. It is waste of time. However, Elias in his book from 1936 had a slightly different focus: He wanted to show how guilt and shame is necessary for civilization, or rather “the civilizing processes” which has helped us reach a stage where we don’t run around any longer and knock each other down whenever we are annoyed, as they used to do until Medieval age (Elias 416). The modern age is exactly defined by giving up upon old warrior culture and slowly introducing new manners of conduct which has had impact also on the fashion of leadership (see e.g. Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011).

To put it short, guilt and shame replaces violence between people. Guilt and shame is therefore not solely something to get rid of, but it apparently plays a purpose: Keeping thing in place without violence, but with rules. This means, that the price of no-violence and order is exactly guilt and shame when something goes wrong.

1. Research interest
The scope of article is to look closer into guilt and shame in present thinking. What is the meaning of these concepts today? And how are they related to the concept of responsibility, particularly when related to decision-making in organizations?

The context of the interview is contemporary management, and I asked contemporary managers in order to tease out whether the issues of guilt and responsibility are still at stake in modern management thinking. And if so, how are they present? If they are not present, what does that mean? If we have gotten rid of self-constraint in relation to guilt and shame, what does that mean for modern organizations? Particularly I’m interested in whether contemporary management experience guilt and shame in relation to decision-making, particularly when these appear to either be wrong or upsetting for citizens or employees. What do they do towards blame of guilt and lack of responsibility?
1.1. Method
I looked into the literature on guilt and responsibility, but didn’t find anything in the relation between the two. Discussions on “guilt” are hardly ever taken in literature on leadership or management. Even the word “responsibility” is not represented in the index of Henry Mintzberg’s recent book “Managing” (2009). Guilt and responsibility are having hard times being talked of in leadership.

I therefore decided to interview 12 managers from the public sector on their experiences of guilt. The conclusion in short is that none of them had ever discussed guilt. Or rather, not in the open. It is rather in the backstage, giving various sorts of problem. Further, most of them did not see decisions, made by them or by their organization, as being primarily the managers’ own fault. There would always be more complexity to the situation which would tend to mean that many more people were to blame: Not only them. This means that guilt, and placement of guilt slips away.

The situations that the managers were giving in the interviews pointed to that people not often talks explicitly of guilt, but behind the scene it is still very present: people discuss why things happen and who to blame. This means that guilt as related to responsibility is present as rejected. It is formulated as a taboo that people, however, transgress in social situations of anger, and in this way doubly attacks their manager: doubly because 1) guilt in itself bears accusation, and 2) since guilt is denied by the managers as part of the game, the accusation becomes a way of breaking the rules and intrude manager as person, claiming that he or she as person is bad. This means that the leader loses face.

1.2. The interviews
The interviews took place in Spring 2012. The managers work within various areas of the public sector such as education, health, social care, cultural life, and law.

I took guilt to be related to event, i.e. that someone is accused of being guilty or blamed to be so, when something goes wrong. Guilt, or “who is guilty and to blame” “who is responsible?” seems to be discussed behind the scene, and therefore is closely related to concrete situations of failure. Guilt is therefore not something abstract, but concrete.

In the interviews I asked the managers how they handle accusations of guilt, or being guilty, when an incident within the organization, or on the basis of the organization’s decisions, shows to be doing a citizen, or employee, wrong. I also asked them on their understanding of responsibility versus guilt and blame.
The interviews showed that guilt is not only a feeling, but rather an experience that managers have in their work as managers.

The interviewees were taken from the Master programs at CBS and public lectures I gave in the year 2007-2012. None of the interviewees were chosen due to particularly experience with scandals or crimes. On the opposite, I wanted managers who reflected on everyday life in the organizations and the experiences here with negotiations on guilt and responsibility.

The interview guide was the following:

1. How do you understand the concept “responsibility”?
2. Would you please describe a management situation in which your employee wanted to discuss guilt while you wanted to discuss responsibility?
3. Did you ever experience managers, whom you wouldn’t label “good people”? If so, what would you call them instead?
4. Why do you think this is the case?
5. How do you understand the concept of consciousness?

1.3. Theoretical framework
Steinar Kvale points to the rationality of asking people themselves, when you want to know of people’s lives (Kvale p.15). However, the difficulty of discussing questions like responsibility and guilt is that these are not concepts people generally discuss explicitly in their organizations. My point of worry was whether anybody would be able to talk explicitly on such questions? I therefore emphasized the value of concrete examples in which the interviewees had experienced discussions on responsibility and guilt (see also Kvale p.136). As seen from the interview guide, I took guilt to be related to responsibility, though I wasn’t quite sure on beforehand what that would lead to. The overall conclusion that guilt needs to be viewed as the flipside of responsibility in order to make sense of responsibility, surprised me.

I sent the interview guide for the interviewees approximately one month in advance. The reasoning behind this was that I wanted the interviewees to have a chance of preparing their questions. Further, I wanted the interviewees to consider carefully their examples, and that I wouldn’t catch them in giving an example of illegal malpractice. Or rather, that if they wanted to give such examples, they had prepared themselves for doing so. An example of the beneficial approach in this was an interviewee whom by mistake had not
received the interview guide in advance. I didn’t know that (and she didn’t know that she should have received it in advance), so under the interview she got more and more annoyed: Simply because she considered the questions very intrusive. She therefore all of a certain bursted: “Why don’t you ask the mayor those questions? They are the ones to make responsible!!” I asked her “but didn’t you receive the questions in advance?” And she said no.

Another reason for sending out the questions in advance was to make sure, that if any of the interviewees wanted to give examples of legal malpractice which could lead to a law suit, they had at least had the chance to prepare telling me the case, instead of regretting having told me of the cases.

The cases they told me varied over a broad range. They were cases of child abuse; mocking between colleagues, and upset employees. None of the managers were very eager in discussing guilt related to responsibility. Some said straight out that guilt was never discussed in their organizations. However, they still gave examples related to guilt, and sometimes, I got the feeling, that the examples they gave were surrounded by some kind of shame: it is shameful to claim that somebody is guilty. In general, the interviewees would tell that managers avoid discussions of guilt, since this is “a too strong word”. However, managers have several examples of how guilt and blame is being negotiated in the organization. Guilt is popping up as a question to be handled, whenever something has gone wrong.

This led to an overall conclusion: Guilt is the negative flipside of responsibility.

The findings suggest that guilt is something managers avoid. One reason for that could be that guilt is a challenge to your persona as a leader or manager. Guilt gets too close to who you really are.

### 1.4. Findings

The relationship between guilt and responsibility lead to the following three constructions of that relationship:

You may as a leader become guilty for not taking responsibility in due time
You may as a leader become guilty in the eyes of others, though you might think yourself that this was the right decision
You may as a leader become scapegoat for decisions you haven’t made yourself

In the following, I will give examples of two managers’ reflections on guilt, and relate them to the first two of the above three findings.
2. Analysis of the interviews

The overall conclusion that there is a relationship between responsibility and guilt, shows an intriguing contradiction, since managers do not voluntarily talk of guilt. However, the interviews showed how discussions on guilt are around in the organization. This means, that the managers contradict themselves: They say it is not a concept they themselves use. However, they have lot of examples of have it is used by others. An example: When the organization has made a mistake or not taken action in time, e.g. in the case of child abuse going on for several years while civil servants are well aware of the abuse taking place, the question of “guilt” enters the hall room. And often as a discussion on who is to blame.

In the following, I will give examples of three managers’ reflections on guilt, and relate them to the above three findings.

2.1. To become guilty for not taking responsibility in due time

The interviewee, a leader of around 40 nurses, works at a hospital. She describes what she calls ”negative incidents” which take place when a certain employee is at work. The problem is that these negative incidents mean that the patients die.

“But <.....> there are a lot of debriefings after such incidents, but we are very aware not to blame anybody, but I have worked at a section where people would agree when being in the group room, but afterwards, after the meeting.... People would start discuss, saying “but why does it always happen when Mogens is at work?”. This was something people couldn’t figure out” <Mogens is a fictive name, CS>.

During the interview, she shifts from this subject to saying that this type of incident cannot be avoided. I asked her, how do you talk to the employees about these issues:

You talk to them without putting blame at the table, but I’m quite sure that after the meeting, they continue to think about their own share in these incidents. You talk to them, and then you upgrade teaching, and maybe also the amount of staff members.

In relation to guilt, it is thought provoking that when an organization can’t handle pointing out particular employees as being the reason for the “negative incidents”, then the whole organization is to blame. Everybody becomes guilty when no one wants to be guilty.
2.2. To become guilty in the eyes of others, though you might think yourself that this was the right decision

Interviewee 7, a leader, describes a case about an employee, a middle manager, where the employee is trying to place guilt, or responsibility, on the leader for the middle manager not getting a one-off-allowance.

The case was that the middle manager wasn’t functioning very well. She was aggressive and hysterical towards the employees and there was a huge amount of people, quitting their job due to her hysteria. Due to the fusion, the interviewee had the possibility of moving the middle manager to another role in the organization, i.e. she would no longer have any management role. The leader does not explicitly tell this to the middle manager that the reason for this moving is that she is hysterical and people leave. What happens next is that when the middle manager applies for a one-off-allowance, she doesn’t get any. It is the leader above (called: the boss) the interviewee who decides upon that. The sacked middle manager goes to ask the boss why she doesn’t get her one-off-allowance. The boss answers:

"You, who treats your employees so bad that they leave!! You haven’t deserved anything. How would that look if I gave you a bonus!!"

She then returns to her leader, the interviewee, and asks her how the boss knew about this, and why the leader hadn’t told the sacked middle manager the real reason for her being sacked.

She says that she didn’t want to give feelings of guilt to the middle manager in question, for people leaving. She thought it might be the easiest thing not to tell her, but eventually she found out herself.

The interesting point is that the manager tried to be protective over the sacked middle manager, who is also her employee, and therefore, she didn’t tell her. She didn’t want to place guilt, she says, on the sacked middle manager, but it end up, in her words, that the three of them (the interviewee, the boss, and the sacked middle manager) all feel a little bit of guilt related to the case of the one-one-allowance.

3. What are the possibilities for apologies in the public sector?

Informant 7 is like informant 1 busy with asking which type of apology an organization can give. He says:

You learn have how to apologize in legal language.

The interviewee is laughing shyly during the interview. He sighs several times, and tells, that whether the organization is to apologize at all, or not, is something often discussed in his organization. His experience is
that to comment on a case, i.e. to give an answer, is the greatest apology of all in public sector. The point is that often the public sector chooses to ignore cases of guilt or accusations of guilt.

To apologize in legal language is explained like a “system’s type of apology”. He refers to the socalled Brønderslev case which involved child and sexual abuse over a period of 15 years, without the legal authorities intervened.

And in the end, this shitty case lands on the table of some arbitrary civil servant who probably considers that he hasn’t done anything wrong personally, but who stands as a representative of the system, and who also has to stand up to political decisions, where politicians failed to show agency and did not show ethical responsibility, but let go of ethical values and ideals. And this civil servant has to put himself out there saying: “It is indeed regrettable what happened”.

The interviewee clearly shows that he is an ethical dilemma, since he is representing a system whose values, or rather, whose way of dealing with concrete cases and through this show which values the system/the politicians, is not often in accord with his own mind set. He also tells of the dilemma related to colleagues and the difficulty of pointing fingers at these, when a case runs in the media. He is complaining that the system, and the politicians, do not seem to learn from these cases, but just want them to go away. During the interview I get a feeling of how these matters are touching upon his inner self, called, the private room, of his being.

4. “Behind enemy lines”: How guilt relates to a leader’s face

If I had the chance, I would have re-interviewed the interviewees, since the interviews left me with new question. First of all, how the cases they brought forward where touching upon themselves as private persons, i.e. as something outside their job. Not all of them told me about this, which also makes one wonder how to understand guilt. Some of the interviewees, however, mentioned how the cases they chose were somehow embarrassing for themselves. Therefore, when analyzing the interviews and trying to understand why they had chosen the cases they had, and how they would formulate guilt, I was inspired to look at their answers in relation to face. It was actually not Erving Goffman (1959) whom I first looked at, but Goffman’s own inspiration, namely Kenneth Burke. Kenneth Burke’s dramatism is divided into five points: Act: What was done, Scene: Where was it done, Agent: Who did it, Agency: How the speaker did it,
Purpose: Why it happened. Further, Burke actually defines and discuss what is guilt in “Attitudes towards history” and “The Rhetoric of Religion”. His notion of guilt is that is a “gospel of service” (Carroll 2002), meaning, that someone is paying something to the community. It is a discharging of debt. The way of paying is by giving service. One could add, that which kind of service and whether a service is good or not, is decided by the community, not by the debt-owing (i.e. the guilty). Burke’s theory also inspired René Girard to formulate his theory of guilt in relation to scape goating.

Erving Goffman (1959) reduced Burke’s points to question of face in order to describe the various social roles we are playing in our social lives.

In order to understood to the interviews in relation to guilt, or maybe rather, why guilt was such a difficult issue, I analyzed the interviews by operating with between difference between the following:

1) the private, inner self of the interviewee
2) the professional role of being a leader, and 3:
3) a kind of filter, which I named the “persona” which makes it possible to show a more human side of oneself.

I want to emphasize that there is no value added to any of the three, e.g. that professional should be better than private, or the opposite.

From a cynical point of view, all three could be claimed to be roles to be performed. The whole interview of the setup, that I interview them about management situations of guilt could be an argument against any idea of the managers presenting their inner self. However, the distinction between the three gives reason to understand why guilt is a difficult issue. As one of the interviewees said: “Guilt is a big word….”

The point in looking at “facework” is that the avoidance of guilt might be due to its relation to the inner self of manager as person.

4.1. Face work

Presupposed to the concept of guilt is that something has to be apologized for. Keith Hearit has in his book “Crisis Management by Apology” pointed to the essence of apology, that in order for an apology to work, it has to be personal and trustworthy (Hearit fx s.207). This means that the question of guilt goes “under your skin” and makes a claim: You as a person have to mean it and stand up for it. In the case of organizations
doing wrong, Hearit’s claim is that most organizations do not know how to do that. This only leaves the victims even more angry. One good reason for organizations not wanting to make their leaders and managers apologize is that, as shown above, guilt is a big thing, and it is a big thing because it touches upon your inner self: Who are you? Erving Goffman’s work on role, face and facework shows us how face is necessary in social forms of life (Goffman 1959, og 1974; Hearit p.2). However, when it comes to guilt, the difficulty of making the right face can be too big. Kenneth Burke, whom Goffman was inspired by (Mitchell, 1978), goes closer into the concept of guilt in his dramatism. By combining Goffman and Burke, we get to understand, that Goffman’s concept of face is useful for understanding social roles, but there is a limit to the use of face. That limit may be guilt, which Burke works with in his concept of dramatism, saying, that guilt is not a face to perform, but rather, that guilt is what any social drama is centered around. He is particularly analyzing Shakespeare, pointing to an epistemology in which guilt is in the center of human existence. Though Burke and Goffman differ in epistemology, they both point to guilt as being something personal.

5. The historical framework: Protestantism
Having presented the interviews, I now investigate the historical understanding of blame, shame, and guilt, having Norbert Elias’ analysis of guilt as part of the civilizing process as backdrop of that historical analysis of Protestantism. The reason for my presentation of the Protestant understanding of guilt and responsibility is to show how the connotations related to these issues are quite heavy. The strong theological connotations on the concept of judgment and predestination to salvation or fall seems to be playing along, when refusal of faults, and thus blame, take place.

Further, when Protestantism discusses guilt and responsibility, they do it related to the person’s inner self. These are not matters of personae, face work or performance. Rather, guilt and responsibility touch upon who you really are. Also this seems to be a legitimate reason for not wanting to take blame. However, the question stands back: Is it possible to talk of responsibility without discussing guilt?

Therefore, there seems to be obvious reasons for managers rejecting to call themselves guilty. The process of educating to feeling guilty is long, and has taken place since the 16.th century. Further, I want to relate briefly to Protestantism and the concept of guilt. Interestingly, Elias’ focus on the turn point for the
civilizing process is 16.th century (Elias p.414ff), the same century where Protestantism entered the historical scene. Particularly, the reformation’s discussion on responsibility and guilt, e.g. Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther’s discussion on free will is important here. I do this to drill into Elias’ concept of guilt as socializing process. The shaping role of Protestantism in relation to guilt is therefore also of interest when investigating how and if guilt and shame play a role in contemporary thinking, when looking at e.g. management.

5.1. Erasmus and Luther
Norbert Elias points to the 16.th century as the time in history where new ideas of proper conduct slowly took its form. This was also the time of reformation where the Catholic church lost Northern Europe and partly Great Britain to a new Christian denomination, usually labeled Protestantism. Already Max Weber in his book “Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus” from 1905 pointed to the enormous impact of Protestantism on social forms of life, particularly the relationship between the capability of creating a capitalistic society as a replacement of the former barter economy. Also the psychologist Erik Erikson in his book “Young Man Luther” from 1958 uses the changing life forms in Medieval society in order to analyze the psychology of Luther, the reformer. Protestantism, or rather, Lutheranism, has played an enormous role also in the Danish society, first of all the educational system through the use of Luther’s book: “The small cathechisme”. The impact of this book on Danish society and it’s values has been analyzed e.g. by Ole Korsgaard in his book: “Kampen om folket” (The Battle over the people), 2004. Semantically in everyday Danish, the word “skyld” (guilt) seems to draw connotations to the religious understanding of guilt.

It is therefore of interest to analyze what guilt is in its religious connotation in order to understand why the interviewees have such difficulties with talking about guilt. One obvious reason seems to be that guilt is too difficult and draws heavy connotations to judgment, salvation and condemnation. A closer look into Martin Luther’s discussion with Erasmus of Rotterdam from 1524 and 1525 will show us that.

In Erasmus af Rotterdam’s book ”De libero arbitrium” (1524) Erasmus argues that the human being, as a mirror of God himself, is born intrinsic good. For that reason, the human being is born free to choose between good and bad.

Martin Luther answers in 1525 with his book ”De servo arbitrio” that he doesn’t agree at all with Erasmus. The Latin concept that they are discussing is ”vis voluntatis”, the power of the will. Luther says that the human being has power over the lesser important things like householding, politics, etc. These matters are rebus inferioribus (1908, 18:672, 8-10, and 1908, 18:671, 37). However, the human being is 1) always under
the power of something bigger, i.e. God (fx 1908, 18:709, 18-21), and 2) the human being does not decide over the more important matters of life: res divina (1908, 18:662, 6). The divine matters are love, hate, death, evil, and sin (1908, 18:664, 8f). These are under God’s control, or to use Luther’s word: under God’s operatio.\(^1\) Anything the human being does is therefore in cooperatio with God’s overall operatio.

Another feature of the human being is that it does not have the capacity to will the good (1908, 18:670, 10). Without God, the human being is evil and sinful due to peccatum originale, i.e. Adam’s sin and man’s fall (1908, 18:786, 11). This fall installed evil in the shape of Satan as master (1908, 18:786, 8). However, Satan does not rule alone (1908, 18:689, 32f - 690, 1).\(^2\) God is stronger and uses his power to avoid Satan ruining it all. Why God does not right away gets rid of Satan, the great theodicee-problem, Luther answers by operating with deus absconditus, the hidden side of God. This side of God is hidden in the socalled three light: tria lumina.

In the text by Luther “Von weltlicher Obrigkeit. Wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei” (1523) the socalled two realms-doctrine is presented. Luther didn’t label it so, but it has been labeled that, e.g. by Anders Fogh Rasmussen in the socalled Cartoon crisis (see Sløk 2005). The doctrine tells that authorities must be served since their role is to protect society. Therefore, also Christians have to serve the authorities, although their real lord, of course, is Christ (Luther s.101ff). However, authorities are necessary to secure order in society. This book shows us how Luther differs between legal matters and Christian matters. Legal matters relate to worldly responsibility, and guilt to questions of salvation.

Already this little bit of the huge work on “De servo arbitrio” shows us that guilt and responsibility are complex matters. No doubt that shame is installed, as Elias points out, since Luther’s concept of uncertainty on salvation or condemnation install doubt in the individual on whether he or she is doing things right (or wrong) in the surrounding’s eyes, primarily God’s eyes and secondly how God’s eyes are perceived by other human beings to be. Shame thus is, that you never know what the surroundings want from you. From now on, the Protestant man cannot any longer feel certain of what he is. Responsibility and guilt also seems somehow intertwined: the human being has responsibility over the lower matters, and that is worldly matters; how to organize things etc. Here, s/he is held accountable. On the other side, the human being does not decide or has any kind of responsibility over the greater matters. Here, only God, and his “bad servant”, Satan, are to blame. This means, that in the really important matters, man is set free, because God decides over life, love, death, and evil. But then again, the human being does not know his own role in

\(^1\) Antti Raunio says: “Seine Grundrichtung kann der Wille nicht selber erreichen. Die Freiheit ist also eine Eigenschaft, die dem Willen gegeben ist, wenn er auf Gott gerichtet wird” (Raunio 1997, 72). On Satan, Luther says: “Huius itidem Dei incarnati est flere, deplorare, gemere super perditione impiorum, cum voluntatis maiestatis ex proposito aliquos relinquat et reprobet, ut pereant” (Luther 1908, 18:689, 32ff- 690,1).
God’s operation: One individual may be chosen to be saved, while another, who is doing evil, is not chosen, and will be lost. This leaves the human being with a new question: What is evil? As postmodern and poststructuralist modes of thinking have already pointed out, what evil is depends on who is defining it. While notions of god and bad was somewhat more easy in times of Luther and orthodox Lutheranism, since these were closely related to social norms and moral, such commonality on social norms and moral seem to lack today. People have various opinions on various matters. The point of all this is to show, that at least the concept of guilt suffers from a concrete meaning in contemporary management thinking. Still, the examples, that the interviewees offer show that everyday organizational life is full of such accusations between managers, leaders, employees and citizens.

**Summary**

The paper analyzes interviews on guilt and responsibility and their intrinsic relation. The interviews showed that guilt is not only a feeling, but rather an experience that managers do in their work as managers. I took guilt to be related to event, i.e. that someone is accused of being guilty or blamed to be so, when something goes wrong. Guilt is therefore not something abstract, but concrete.

Through a presentation of the Protestant reflection on guilt, I wanted to show the cultural context of the meaning of guilt. The presentation hopefully showed that the Protestant understanding of guilt and responsibility is quite heavy, and therefore, there seems to be obvious reasons for wanting to avoid calling oneself guilty. And more, the question of guilt is personal, while most leaders and managers see the problems (and fault) that their organizations encounter as contextual. However, the question stands back: Is it possible to talk of responsibility without discussing guilt? And what do we think of organizations, as citizens and employees, that is not capable of showing regret or emotion, e.g. shame over wrong decisions?

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