How Can Roman Catholic Church Be Developed By Changes In Society? An Economic Analysis

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Organizational ambidexterity is a young research concept in analyzing organizations using the categories “exploration” (i.e. dealing with new knowledge) and “exploitation” (i.e. use of existing knowledge) (March 1991; Levinthal/March 1993). The general question the ambidexterity concept deals with is: How can an organization ensure both at the same time: to be aligned on the objectives of the company and to adapt the new efforts given by the environment?

The number of studies presented in leading journals has increased within the past ten years (Raisch 2009, 685; Nosella et al. 2012). In the beginning, ambidexterity research put mainly the focus on basic questions of this research paradigm concerning innovations in big firms. In the recent years, there have been increasingly explored family businesses. Now, this paper deals with another field, namely the third sector. The delimitation of the topic is made by examining Church as a big and global institution of the third sector.

The analysis claims to be innovative:

On the one hand, Catholic Church generally seems to be an institution that ignores potentials for change. On the other hand at least since the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) it is part of Church’s self-understanding that it has to deal with social changes: Church – so the conviction – can and must learn from society.

So the paper regards this ambivalence and examines the church’s capacity for innovation by means of the ambidexterity concept. Specifically, the subject is the global Church: The starting point is the current and highly acclaimed interview given by Pope Francis in the summer of 2013 (Spadaro 2013) which was interpreted by many observers as the beginning of organizational innovations. In addition, the interview is related to the innovations of the Second Vatican Council. In this way, there are identified the main factors which cause the perception of social changes by church leaders. Then the processes and structures of Church are analyzed on the basis of ambidexterity theory to represent the Church’s innovation potential in a business perspective. So the methodology of economics is used for analyzing Church’s innovation potential and Church’s management.

The main arguments are the following: (1) Church can be regarded as a part of the third sector. In this view, the Church is both: influenced by the society and a social player. (2) Change processes within the Church follow to a large extent the processes that are relevant in profit organizations. (3) So Church as a global organization has to deal with exploration and exploitation. (4) According to the ambidexterity research of the role of top management (Lubatkin et al. 2006; O’Reilly/Tushman 2008), it is a fundamental task for top management to develop the structural requirements for innovation. With regard to Church especially the management functions for developing and enforcing innovations must be considered (Frank 2010). (5) Here, the distinction of "teamcentric model" and "leadercentric model" (Smith/Tushman 2005) is the basis for the analysis.

This study deals with the question of management of one third sector organization. The results on the topic of Church should be relevant for other third sector organizations: Leaded by an important theoretical methodological approach, the contribution to the further development of the concept of ambidexterity is discussed. The results represent a contribution to the question, what the relevance of this concept may be for the non-profit sector.

References

