



The Emergence and Decline of a Rite: Speeches Given at the Award of Work Medals in the French Iron Industry from the 1930s to the 1970s

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This study examines the history of a specific French rite: the bestowing of work medals in the French iron and steel industry. The paper compares two stages in the development and decline of this rite: first, the golden age of the award ceremonies in the 1930s and 1940s; second, the disappearance of the ceremonies in the 1960s and 1970s. The paper is based on the study of 52 speeches given in these ceremonies at two French companies (de Wendel and Schneider). We try to understand how and why these ceremonies – which also provided occasions for the disclosure of company financial information – thrived and subsequently declined. We identify a paradox: when the financial information given in the speeches was vague in the 1930s and 1940s, the rite flourished. When information became much more precise in the 1960s and 1970s, the rite declined and disappeared. We examine this paradox using the notion of rite as defined by Pierre Bourdieu and show how a speech is embedded in the etiquette that supports the rite. The analysis of these two dimensions (speech and etiquette) allows us to understand why limited financial disclosure could be effective and, conversely, why detailed disclosure could subvert the efficacy of the rite. The coherence between speech and etiquette is the central element to understanding this apparent paradox.

The question of managers' communication with employees comes up regularly, especially in context of downsizing measures or collective bargaining. A managerial doctrine promoted in professional handbooks promotes transparency as a good practice. The assumption is that disclosure of information improves the link between managers and

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employees and allows both parties to unite with the same focus. However, these studies have not explored the issue of the context in which financial information is disclosed.

Our study proposes to reconsider the conditions that affect the efficacy of a speech. Instead of examining content, we propose an alternative approach by studying the coherence of speeches with the context in which they are delivered.

We study a particular example: the speeches given by bosses to employees during ceremonies marking the bestowment of work medals in France from the 1930s to the 1970s. These ceremonies, which are under researched, were an opportunity to divulge information about the company's status to its employees. We show how the disclosure of information to employees was inseparable from the rite itself, as we consider its emergence and decline during this period.

Work medals – *médailles d'honneur du travail* – awarded by the French Ministry of Commerce and Industry were instituted by a decree dated July 16, 1886,¹ and honored laborers and clerks with more than 30 years of service in the same company.² As an indication of its success, the number of eligible recipients increased progressively in the first half of the twentieth century.³ Work medals are still awarded in France today, although the conditions of the award have changed. Our historical approach enables us to consider the phenomenon at its height and during its decline.

From a theoretical perspective, the ceremonies of awarding work medals can be described as a rite, in the terms of Trice and Beyer's definition.⁴ The award ceremonies were annual events with established formats: employees and employers met in the same place, the boss gave a speech from a stage, and the awards were presented along with a gift that accompanied the medal. All of these common elements demonstrate the planning behind the ceremonies and the social interaction between participants. In this paper, we examine how this ceremony influenced the disclosure of financial information to employees.

Adopting Pierre Bourdieu's approach to sociology, this analysis compares two periods, one in which the rite of the award ceremony worked and a second in which the rite lost its initial meaning and became a forum for confrontation.

This study makes two main contributions. On the one hand, our research explores the conditions for effective financial communication, especially from management to employees, by analyzing the speeches given at these ceremonies. On the other hand, and from a methodological perspective, we go beyond the text and the context of these speeches to examine a third element: the etiquette surrounding these occasions. This analysis of etiquette, taken from the concept of rites and ceremonies, allows us to understand both the efficacy of the speeches and the dynamics of the rite. Beyond the award ceremonies themselves, our observations seem to be generalizable to a set of managerial rites linked to financial communication.

¹ Published July 20, 1886.

² Marie-Charlotte Auger *L'honneur au travail. Les médailles du travail dans le département de l'Isère de 1886 à 1914*. (Master dissertation Grenoble, 1998), 8.

³ Jules Martin, *Les décorations françaises* (Paris, 1912), 100-102.

⁴ Harrison M. Trice and Janice M. Beyer, "Studying Organizational Cultures Through Rites and Ceremonials," *Academy of Management Review*, 9(4) (1984): 653–669. The rite is "a standardized, detailed set of activities and behaviors planned that manage anxieties but seldom produce unintended technical consequences of practical importance" (p. 655).

The paper continues as follows: the first part presents the use of Bourdieu's work to examine the conditions that affected the efficacy of speeches.⁵ The second part presents our research methodology. The third and fourth parts propose a cross-analysis of the emergence and decline of speeches at these award ceremonies. We end with a discussion of the implications of our results for future research.

rites, discourse, and etiquette

Rites, Rites of Passage and Instituting Rites

To Trice and Beyer's classic definition of management rites, we can add that of Moore and Myerhoff, who identify six characteristics of secular rituals: they are planned, they are held regularly, they are special occasions, they take place in an organized space, they include an attention-holding event or gesture, and they bring people together.⁶

Trice and Beyer⁷ distinguish several types of managerial rites, among which work medals fall into the category of a rite of passage. Van Gennep⁸ and Bourdieu⁹ give differing analyses of the functions of these rites. Van Gennep was the first to identify the notion of a rite of passage from one state to another. He uses this notion to characterize ritual ceremonies in folklore. Several decades later, Bourdieu¹⁰ looked at the social function of rites of passage. It is the effect of distinction in these rites that interests Bourdieu rather than the details of the rites themselves. By distinguishing some individuals but not others, rites of passage create separations – for example, medalists and non-medalists.¹¹ Bourdieu prefers the term “institutional rite” to rite of passage, as it highlights that the essential element of these rituals is not the passage from one state to another but the distinction that it strengthens.

The bestowal of work medals can be viewed in two ways. Van Gennep highlights the way in which individuals pass from one group to another through similar rites. Studies in management generally take this perspective.¹² Bourdieu¹³ underlines the demarcation between groups that results from the rite. In our case, there are two demarcations: one between workers and bosses and another between medalists and non-medalists. In establishing these demarcations, the rite allows the creation and construction of a communication space within which managers present the information they choose to share with selected workers (medalists) about the economic situation of the company.

The archives allow us to examine these ceremonies in two ways: first, there are the texts of the speeches given; second, we find evidence of the immediate context of the ceremonies, which gives insight into the etiquette involved.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique* (Paris, 2001).

⁶ Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, *Secular ritual* (Van Gorcum, 1977).

⁷ Trice and Beyer, “Studying Organizational Cultures Through Rites and Ceremonials”, 653.

⁸ Arnold Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris, 1909).

⁹ Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, 175-176.

¹¹ Anne Monjaret, “La fête, une pratique extra-professionnelle sur les lieux de travail” *Cités*, 4, 8 (2001): 87-100.

¹² Ken Kamoche, “Rhetoric, Ritualism, and Totemism in Human Resource Management” *Human Relations*, 48, 4 (1995): 367-385.



¹³ Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, 176.

Characteristics of secular rituals¹⁴	Award ceremony	Examples
Held regularly	Held annually, around the same period.	<p>Schneider & Co: Until the 1930s, the ceremony took place between December 28 and January 3 (SS0183, AFB)¹⁵. From the 1950s, between June 15 and July 5 (SS0060616, AFB).</p> <p>de Wendel & Co: Employees received medals in the period from late August to end September (AAMF¹⁶: C146, 169-C-10, C133, EAV100186, C132, C131, C686, C3953, C687, C689, C690).</p>
Planned	The same stages in the same order and the same place (community center or stadium).	<p>Schneider & Co: the staging of the ceremony was always the same (SS0602, AFB):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short speech from the plant manager Distribution of medals Speech by M. Schneider Champagne Toast proposed by M. Schneider Distribution of cakes and cigars Distribution of medals <p>de Wendel & Co: the celebration took place in the stadium in Hayange (sources: as above)</p>
Special occasion	Workers dress in suits, the boss's wife attends, etc.	Example of iconographic document: 01PHCHRONO2PF006529, AFB. Award ceremony at the community center in Saint Quentin, June 1956.
Take place in an organized space	Workers sit and the boss speaks from a stage.	Schneider & Co: plan of room, 1945 (SS0603, AFB).

¹⁴ Moore and Myerhoff, *Secular ritual*.

¹⁵ Schneider & Co archives, Académie François Bourdon, Le Creusot.

¹⁶ De Wendel & Co archives, Archives Arcelor Mittal, Florange.

Characteristics of secular rituals ¹⁴	Award ceremony	Examples
		 <p>de Wendel & Co: M. de Mitry delivering his speech (1958) with the guests of honor in the background. (C132, AAMF)</p>
<p>an attention-holding event or gesture</p>	<p>Distribution of gifts, a glass of champagne and brioche.</p>	<p>Schneider & Co: Cocktail reception organized in the early 1930s. In 1950, for 1,152 guests, Schneider & Co provided 144l (38 gallons) wine, 1,152 brioches and <i>voltigeurs</i> (small cigars) for a total cost of 46,656 francs (around 1,300 €). [SS0603, AFB]</p>
<p>Bring people together</p>	<p>The meeting of managers and workers and delivery of a speech to everyone present accentuates the collective nature of the event.</p>	<p>Schneider & Co, award ceremony, 1929 [01PHCHRONO01PF, AFB]</p>  <p>de Wendel & Co, award ceremony, 1962, Sidelor [EA41754]</p>


Characteristics of secular rituals ¹⁴	Award ceremony	Examples
		

Table 1: The rites observed during work medal award ceremonies

Approaches to Discourse and the Significance of Etiquette

Phillips and Ravasi¹⁷ summarize the different approaches of discourse analysis along two dimensions. The first is to focus on the text or its integration with its context. By examining these award ceremonies as rites, we integrate text and context and analyze this means of communication within a wider framework of significance. The second approach deals specifically with the relation between communication and power. Managers’ speeches at work medal award ceremonies enact the ratio of power between boss and workers, for example – the workers listen while the boss speaks.

	Constructivist	Critical
Context	Interpretive structuralism	Critical discourse analysis
Text	Social linguistic analysis	Critical linguistic analysis

Table 2: Different approaches to discourse analysis

However, these same speeches are not just demonstrations of the ratio of power; they are also an attempt on the part of managers to manipulate workers’ perceptions of the financial situation of the company. In other words, they are also occasions to transform reality. Our interest is in the reality, always remembering that discourse is a product of a specific context and will prevent the revelation of some things.

In this sense, we refer to Bourdieu’s work on language, which allows us to concentrate on the conditions of the production of communication and its effects. Bourdieu’s starting point is the rejection of traditional linguistic approaches that look for the effectiveness of a speech in its wording.¹⁸ On the contrary, the power of the words used is just the power of the speaker. The context (the etiquette, in our case) and especially the implicit ratio of power are fundamental to understanding the relation between discourse and context.

¹⁷ Nelson Phillips and Davide Ravasi “Analysing social construction in organizations: discourse analysis as a research method in organization and management theory”. *London: 3rd International Conference on Organizational Discourse*. (1998)

¹⁸ Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, 159-161.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, all discourses are socially located. Speakers are linked to the context not only by social determinism but also because their social positions create expectations; the efficacy of discourse results from the confrontation of these expectations. As Bourdieu explains: “The most conditions required for a performative utterance are only the harmony between the speaker – or his social function – and the speech pronounced: a performative utterance will be doomed to failure when the speaker has not the power to pronounce the speech.”¹⁹

This means that the boss’s speech at the work medal award ceremony has no efficacy outside the context in which it is delivered. The context of the speech (addressed regularly to workers, once or twice a year) enables the construction of a discourse that confirms the boss’s image, thanks to the established etiquette of these occasions. In other words, the boss who speaks to workers has two functions: first, he conforms to his position and the pre-existing ratio of power (critical analysis of discourse); and second, he can try to transform reality and individuals’ perceptions by playing with their representations.²⁰ The boss must conform to his position using the established codes of etiquette and also attempt to deliver a message about the financial situation of the company.

In our analysis, etiquette has the same two functions that context has for Bourdieu: first, it helps reveal the pre-existing ratio of power and second, it plays a role in the performative dimension of discourse by contributing to its efficacy.

The Efficacy and Reception of Bosses’ Speeches

Using Bourdieu’s approach, we can highlight the conditions that determine the efficacy of a speech. These conditions have nothing to do with the power of words. Bourdieu gives clear insights about the discourse of authority: “The specificity of discourse of authority (professorial courses, sermon, etc.) lies in the fact that it is not enough that it would be understood (it could be not understood without lost its power) and that it has its own effect at the condition to be recognized like this. This recognition – gone or non along with understanding – is given that goes without saying under several conditions that define the legitimate use: it have to be pronounced by a person legitim to pronounce it... known as entitled and able to produce this particular type of discourse (priest, teacher, poet, etc.); it have to be pronounced in a legitimate situation, i.e in front of legitimate audience... it have finally to be formulated in legitimate forms (syntactic, phonetic, etc.)”.²¹

In our case, this means that the speech given by the boss during the award ceremony must conform to certain standards. The first condition for Bourdieu is the presence of a legitimate speaker (here, the boss). The second condition is a legitimate audience (here, the medalists and, more generally, all employees prepared to listen to the speech). The final condition is expectation of the form the speech will take, i.e. that it will celebrate the workers’ labor and its beneficial effect on the company. We look at the evolution of the efficacy of bosses’ speeches to medalists in light of these three conditions.

Bourdieu sees efficacy as the ability to perform a rite and ultimately to perpetuate the social order of the firm by strengthening each position.

The last element in this approach is the workers’ reception of these speeches. Usually, the efficacy of a speech is judged in terms of whether the audience (here, the

¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, 163-165.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 187.

²¹ *Ibid*, 165-167.

workers) understand and agree with it. But Héran, taking Bourdieu's perspective, has a different way of looking at how a speech is received.²²

Héran distinguishes individual conviction from collective adherence and maintains that ritualistic ceremonies are an attempt to build the latter rather than create the former. The goal is therefore involvement in the rite through anticipation of the demarcation effects that it generates.

In other words, the aim of the ceremony is not to get individual workers to believe in the truth of the boss's speech; the aim is their participation in the ceremony itself. Similarly, in church, individuals are not asked to state their belief; they are asked to say prayers.²³ No one asks a medalist what he thinks of the boss's speech; he is asked to take part in the ceremony and to do what is expected of him.

The aim of a rite is not "individualized doctrinal persuasion"²⁴, but simply the performance of well-known actions. In the setting of a work awards ceremony, the objective is the same: it is not to persuade individual workers that their boss is telling the truth; it is to use the fact of their presence as a collective and implicit agreement with whatever the boss is saying.

This opens another approach to the notion of the efficacy of discourse. It does not matter whether individual employees understand the boss's speech; efficacy is measured in terms of the form and regularity of the ceremony itself. Again, from a Bourdieusian perspective, the efficacy of a ceremony is not measured by an individual's belief in the content of the boss's speech. It is measured by individuals' participation in the actions and etiquette of the ceremony itself.

The study of the efficacy of a ceremonial speech turns out to be indivisible from the study of the ceremony of which it forms part. Their efficacy is combined; the one supports the other, in much the same way that the efficacy of prayers and Mass is linked.²⁵

Consequently, to understand the efficacy of a speech, we have to study the efficacy and dynamics of its context – the ceremony itself. The dynamics of a ceremony allow us to understand the emergence and decline of a rite; and for this we need to take a historical approach.

Traditional rites in western societies have usually been the subject of sociologists and anthropologists, and are particularly studied in the sociology and history of religion. In these disciplines, the efficacy of rites is focused less on the anticipated effect (healing, miracles) than on strengthening the links that bind participants together in the rite. This notion was imported into the study of management in the 1980s, demonstrating that symbolism, represented by rituals and ceremonies, finds its place in a field where efficacy and rationality are considered equally critical concepts.

²² François Héran, "L'institution démotivée. De Fustel de Coulanges à Durkheim et au-delà". *Revue française de sociologie*, 28, n°1 (1987): 67-97.

²³ Héran, *L'institution démotivée. De Fustel de Coulanges à Durkheim et au-delà*.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 232.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

METHODOLOGY

Companies Studied

Our analysis of award ceremonies is based on two French steel manufacturing groups. Steel has been an emblematic sector of the French economy for a long time: by the middle of the nineteenth century it was the second largest industrial sector and it remained a major sector until the end of the twentieth century. One advantage for the researcher is that, unlike the textile industry, the steel sector contained large groups of companies with well-conserved archives.

The first group is Schneider & Co, whose principal site is located at Le Creusot, in eastern France. Created in 1836, Schneider & Co specializes in the use of steel in a wide range of industries (railways, armaments, nuclear power, etc.). At the end of the 1940s, Schneider & Co became the Société des Forges et Ateliers du Creusot (SFAC) and in 1970 Creusot Loire.

The second group is de Wendel & Co and its subsidiaries. The story of the Wendel family and the ironworks began in the eighteenth century. Production by de Wendel and its subsidiaries companies peaked in 1929.²⁶ At the time, 69 percent of French steel was produced in Lorraine (a large proportion by de Wendel) and France was the third-largest producer of steel in the world.²⁷ After the Second World War, de Wendel pooled its investments with other companies in Lorraine to transform molten steel into flat steel (with Sollac in 1949) and to build a basic oxygen steelworks (with Sacilor in 1964). In the 1970s, de Wendel and its subsidiaries became Sacilor. Today, the company has been absorbed by Arcelor-Mittal.

Period Studied and Sources Used

The period studied is constrained on the one hand by the existence of the award ceremony and on the other by the availability of sources. Even if an award ceremony was held,²⁸ no speeches were retained in the de Wendel archive before 1945. At Schneider & Co, speeches were archived from 1934. However, there are other sources. In the Schneider archives, we found reports of award ceremonies dating back to 1906²⁹ and some photographs from 1929,³⁰ but most of the Schneider documents date from the 1930s and de Wendel documents from the late 1940s. During the 1950s, splendid brochures were produced for award ceremonies and used in institutional and commercial communication. However, as the prestige of the ceremonies began to decline, the archived sources become thinner. After 1978, no speeches are archived, the presentation of medals is no longer marked by large ceremonies, and reports of the presentations are briefer and briefer and appear only

²⁶ Jacques Marseille, *Les Wendel, 1704-2004* (Paris, 2004).

²⁷ Bernard Sinou, "La Lorraine face à la crise sidérurgique", *Economie et statistique* 92 (1977): 29-36.

²⁸ Bonnet (1977, pp. 149–151) indicates an article in the local newspaper *Lorrain* (July 30, 1939) reporting on the de Wendel award ceremony at Hayange.

²⁹ SS430, AFB.

³⁰ 01PHCHRONO01PF2904, AFB.

in internal publications. Table 3 summarizes the main sources for our survey. Bonnet's work on steelworkers in Lorraine completes these sources.³¹

Objectives	Types of archives	Schneider & Co	de Wendel & Co
Study the text	Speeches	30	22
Study the etiquette	Notes on the preparation for the ceremonies and reports of the ceremonies	Documents from the personnel office about the organization of the ceremonies: seating plan, guests, logistics. The first report is dated 1906 but the sources intensify after the 1930s	
	Correspondence	Letters from the boss's wife about favors asked by laborers or more usually their wives	
	Commemorative brochure		18 commemorative brochures illustrated with photos of the award ceremony
	Photographic documents	Around 200 pictures kept in the archives of the François Bourdon Academy. Pictures date from 1920 to the 1970s	
	Articles in internal publications	11 articles on award ceremonies published between 1965 and 1972 in <i>SFAC Informations</i> and <i>Creusot-Loire</i>	

Table 3: Sources

The Invention of a Managerial Rite: Speeches to Work Medalists

In this section we look at the early days of award ceremonies. More precisely, we show how a speech delivering very limited information to workers, far from arousing feelings of discontent or frustration, was acceptable because it formed an integral part of an acknowledged rite.

³¹ Serge Bonnet, *L'homme du fer : mineurs de fer et sidérurgistes lorrains. Tome I 1889-1929* (Nancy, 1976). Serge Bonnet, *L'homme du fer : mineurs de fer et sidérurgistes lorrains. Tome II 1930-1959* (Nancy, 1977). Serge Bonnet, *L'homme du fer : mineurs de fer et sidérurgistes lorrains. Tome IV 1974-1985* (Nancy, 1985).

From a Republican to a Managerial Rite

At first, work medals were a selective honor.³² Managers nominated workers and clerks who satisfied the conditions of seniority of service, and the awards were made publicly by the prefect or local mayor. However, in the late nineteenth century, the state began to use work medals and other honors to promote the Republic and its values, in an attempt to build a “workers’ Republic.”³³ Limiting the number of medal recipients increased the value of both the medals and the recipients. These are characteristics of an instituting rite and made a clear distinction between those workers who were medalists and those who were not.

The rise in the number of medalists in the early years of the twentieth century was due to changes in the methods of nomination. The honor became automatic as soon as the conditions of seniority were fulfilled.³⁴ The employer’s role was strengthened because the employer proposed the candidates.

At the same time, bestowing work medals became an employer and managerial rite rather than a Republican rite. This passage from Republican to managerial was reflected in the appropriation of the original Republican codes. The employer’s role in the ceremony was asserted and instead of being held in a public space, awards were presented on company premises.

Schneider, in Le Creusot, was typical of this change. Le Creusot had been Schneider’s main production site since 1836. The Schneider family was closely associated with the town; a member of the family had been mayor from 1841 to 1870 and from 1871 to 1900. Until 1939, the mayors were very close to the Schneiders, except for the period from 1925 to 1929.³⁵ The change of location for the award ceremony from the town hall in Le Creusot to the Schneider factory did not affect the people involved; indeed, it helped to create a sense of community between the town and the factory.

In 1906, the distribution of medals took place in the Clerks’ Circle at Schneider & Co.³⁶ From a Republican space (the town hall), the ceremony moved to a location linked explicitly with the company (the Clerks’ Circle). From a Republican honor, the work medal became a combination of Republican and company award. The mayor and vice-mayors were still present, but it was the manager who gave the congratulatory address. From an individual honor, the work medal had become a collective and company award. Le Creusot was not an isolated case. For example, something similar was happening at another great French iron company, Pont-à-Mousson, in northeast France. In 1925, the boss, Camille Cavallier, organized a ceremony for work medalists in his own factory.³⁷ The prefect and 250 guests, as well as the medalists, were invited to the ceremony, which

³² Auger, *L’honneur au travail. Les médailles du travail dans le département de l’Isère de 1886 à 1914*.

³³ Olivier Ihl, “Gouverner par les honneurs. Distinctions honorifiques et économie politique dans l’Europe du début du XIXe siècle”, *Genèses* 55, n°2, 2004: 4-26.

³⁴ Auger, *L’honneur au travail. Les médailles du travail dans le département de l’Isère de 1886 à 1914*, 100.

³⁵ Marie-Claire Laval-Reviglio, “Évolution politique du Creusot de 1836 à 1983”. *Revue française de science politique* 36, n°1, (1986): 64-92.

³⁶ This association had some “comfortable rooms, made available” by Schneider.

³⁷ Serge Bonnet, *L’homme du fer : mineurs de fer et sidérurgistes lorrains. Tome I 1889-1929*, 238-239.

coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the company. At de Wendel, a ceremony was organized annually.³⁸

At Schneider's ceremony in 1948 there were 15 guests of honor who sat at the back of the platform, just behind Monsieur and Madame Schneider. At this ceremony, 421 employees were honored. In 1950, when 1,008 medalists received awards, guests included 20 public figures, 10 musicians, 15 medal distributors, 42 clerks, 42 girls and 15 others (electricians, etc.). The de Wendel archives give the names of all the participants: representatives of the state, parliament, army, and the church. The religious element strengthened the solemnity of the ceremony.

By the 1930s, the work medal award ceremony had become established and formalized and a new tradition emerged. The long speech the boss made to the assembled medalists was preserved in the company archives, as were reports of the ceremonies. The ceremonies were organized and timed to precision. At Schneider, there were references to the Republic as well as to the world of work. The room in which the ceremony took place was decorated with French flags. Local schoolchildren and the plant orchestra provided a musical interlude.³⁹ The boss stood at the center of the room, and the distinguished guests sat to either side of Monsieur and Madame Schneider.⁴⁰ The only speaker was the boss (Eugène Schneider II, until his death, and then Charles Schneider).



Figure 1: The work medal award ceremony at Schneider & Co, 1952, AFB, Le Creusot.

³⁸ Serge Bonnet, *L'homme du fer : mineurs de fer et sidérurgistes lorrains. Tome II 1930-1959*, 149.

³⁹ The school at Le Creusot was owned by the Schneiders until 1969. It only became a public school after that date.

⁴⁰ Report of the work medal award ceremony, Schneider and Co, 1947. "The area just below the stage, with a table, is reserved for M and Mme S[chneider]. On this table are the diplomas and citations for the vermilion medals [awarded for more than 60 years working for the same company]. To the right and left are two large tables with the vermilion medals on the right and the silver medals on the left. In the left-hand corner is the orchestra and in the right-hand corner a large platform for the school choir. Potted plants (ferns) decorate the area, with greenery to hide the pots. There are flags throughout the room, at the entrance and on the stage" (SS0603, AFB).

The ceremony was organized around the Schneider family: in 1930 guests and medalists were with toasted with champagne and offered cake and cigars.⁴¹ In the 1940s, the ceremony became even more significant: the war made the situation of widows and prisoners' wives very delicate. Madame Charles Schneider dealt personally with the most vulnerable women and found them work when needed.⁴² In 1944, she received requests for work from three widows and five requests for aid packages for the mothers of prisoners of war and others. All these requests were honored.⁴³ The ceremony at de Wendel was very similar.⁴⁴

Poor Speeches, Low Expectations

At first sight, the speeches delivered to work medalists seem merely an indication of the paternalism that prevailed in the iron and steel industry.⁴⁵ The speeches given at the Schneider and de Wendel ceremonies were clearly of this type: there are numerous examples that demonstrate the motive of influencing the day-to-day working conditions of employees,⁴⁶ almost amounting to exercising "total control" of workers' lives.⁴⁷ This analysis sees speeches as a reflection of the company's production conditions (critical analysis of discourse)⁴⁸. However, it is only one part of their purpose. The other is an attempt to change reality and encourage commitment to the company and its leader.

The boss presented himself as a father gathering his family together to provide the wise counsel of an elder.⁴⁹ He took center stage but did not give any justification for his actions: references to the context (the economic crisis of the 1930s) underlined that the company was taking care to provide each worker with a job.⁵⁰

Gifts were also made to each medalist (an envelope containing money, cigars, etc.), additional support for the authenticity of the message in the boss's speech.⁵¹

Even a poor speech could be effective (whatever was said), because it was credible. The workers only expected a speech about the well-being of the company. All the boss

⁴¹ Document dated December 29, 1930. SS0602.

⁴² Document dated January 13, 1944 and letter dated February 23, 1944. Pièces SS0603 et SS0872.

⁴³ SS072, AFB.

⁴⁴ "The rite did not change from one year to another: there was a speech from a representative of the family and a response from a medalist, usually the oldest. Then the medals were presented with hugs, congratulations, photographs and a toast" (Bonnet, 1977, p. 149).

⁴⁵ Donald Reid, "Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth-Century French Mining and Metallurgy", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, n°4, (1985): 579-607.

⁴⁶ Jean-Pierre Frey, *La ville industrielle et ses urbanités. La distinction ouvriers/employés, Le Creusot 1870-1930*. (Bruxelles, 1995).

⁴⁷ Gérard Noiriel, "Du "patronage" au "paternalisme": la restructuration des formes de domination de la main d'œuvre ouvrière dans l'industrie métallurgique française", *Le Mouvement social* 144, (1988): 17-35.

⁴⁸ Phillips and Ravasi, *Analyzing social construction in organizations: discourse analysis as a research method in organization and management theory*.

⁴⁹ C146, AAMF.

⁵⁰ Speech delivered at the work medal award ceremony, Schneider and Co, 1934. "I see what is happening elsewhere and the mass unemployment in other companies. Here, we take many loss-making orders and in most of our departments, these orders are significant. I'm continuing to keep our company going and to keep each and every one of you in work." (SS0183-01, AFB).

⁵¹ SS0183-01, AFB.

needed to say was that the company was in good shape and that he was doing his best; there was no reason to say anything more.

A Bourdieusian Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Rite

There are two ways to understand the effectiveness of these ceremonies and speeches. The first is static. The rite was a simple reflection of existing power relations. On the one hand were the bosses, who were embedded in a paternalistic culture,⁵² and on the other were the workers, who were used to secrecy about the business and did not yet have the benefit of representation.⁵³ Workers did not expect information to be disclosed by managers and so were unlikely to be disappointed that the information they did receive was so limited. This analysis remains static, because it is simply an analysis of the way the speeches and the ceremonies in general sit within a specific context. It is specifically the critical analysis of discourse.⁵⁴

A Bourdieusian analysis is helpful for understanding the performativity of speeches and the way a rite can create and sustain a general environment. The work medal award ceremony was first and foremost the staging of the employer's power at a symbolic level (appropriation of Republican codes, spatial organization) and linguistically (confirming the well-being of the company). From this point of view, the fact that the number of factory orders placed during this period was sufficient to keep everyone at work strengthened this representation. Workers not only heard a speech about the well-being of the firm; they were also given concrete assurances of it (an envelope containing banknotes, a cigar) or indirect proof (for example, the help given to soldiers' wives). Including commentary about the state of the company in the speech had an amplifying effect on the appearance of power. The boss did not need to go into any technical detail (e.g. about financial figures or company strategy); what was needed was the clear demonstration of the well-being of the company by means of the ceremony. For the individual medalists, this demonstration should appear as the result and reward of years of labor and therefore give meaning to their work.

Bourdieu identifies what makes such rites so effective: the boss was the default speaker and the speech was both constrained by his status and reinforced by the use of expected codes. Even limited disclosure of financial information about the firm within the context of a ceremony that had strong Republican origins had a clear consequence: it increased the boss's legitimacy by creating a link between the boss and the health of the firm. Bourdieu's work reveals other characteristics of these ceremonies beyond their paternalistic aspect. As long as they produced these results, the ceremonies retained their meaning. However, the difficulties faced by the iron and steel industry entailed a major change after the 1960s.

⁵² Reid, *Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth-Century French Mining and Metallurgy*.

⁵³ Jean-Pierre Le Crom, *L'introuvable démocratie salariale* (Paris, 2003), 8-9.

⁵⁴ Phillips and Ravasi, *Analysing social construction in organizations: discourse analysis as a research method in organization and management theory*.

Decline and Loss of Direction

Forty years later, we find the same speeches being given and the same ceremonies being staged. But the speeches are no longer paternalistic; they are propped up by justifications for strategic choices and references to the regulatory context or the competition that affects the companies. Far from reinforcing any kind of bond between employers and employees, these more content-rich speeches mark the complete collapse and delegitimization of the employers' position.

Fatalism

Speeches delivered to medalists in the 1960s and 1970s had evolved from the earlier models. Certain themes made their appearance and the speeches were more technical, commenting on costs, payroll, financial difficulties, poor results, and so forth. At Schneider & Co in 1976, the speech was given by a former senior civil servant, Jean Forgeot, not a member of the Schneider family.⁵⁵ He saw company strategy as constrained by both the market and politics and felt himself to be a powerless observer of the decline in market conditions. In the course of a pessimistic speech, he referred to the sacrifice made by shareholders.⁵⁶ The economic environment was changing. The CEO had to take into account new issues: unemployment, training, and restructuring.⁵⁷

The image of the all-powerful boss in the 1930s and 1940s clashed with the reality of the crisis in the iron and steel industry. Companies relied on state intervention for funding but were obliged to restructure and merge. CEOs had to make some compromises and negotiate with workers' representatives.⁵⁸

Tables 4 and 5 examine the vocabulary of speeches delivered during the period of 1960 to 1970; Table 3 lists some specific terms and Table 4 lists missing words, comparing frequency during the stated period with frequency in the whole body of the speeches recorded (significance < 1 percent).

⁵⁵ Speech delivered at the work medal award ceremony at Schneider & Co, 1976. "An income of 40 million for a company that makes the equivalent of 4 billion francs (400 billion old francs) of turnover, is nevertheless very weak, hardly 1 percent, which we will distribute to our shareholders. However, without dwelling on shareholders' problems [...] we distributed 19 million in 1971 and 24 million in 1975, which is practically 25 percent less than the rise in prices, which means we have been able in effect to put aside [only] 17 million for the company." 066Z010602, AFB.

⁵⁶ C700, AAMF.

⁵⁷ Speech delivered at the work medal award ceremony at Schneider & Co, 1977. "We make strenuous daily efforts to ensure work for employees in sectors where activity is declining. I'm sure you will understand that, in these conditions, some changes are necessary for you to keep your jobs. I don't think you should fear such changes, because, on the one hand, we will provide in-house training for your redeployment and, on the other hand, these new directions will in many cases help progress your career" 066Z010602, AFB.

⁵⁸ Wendel-Sidelor speech, 1968, C318, AAMF.

Word	Total frequency	Frequency during the period 1960–1970
agreement	29	21
adapt	27	21
expenses	19	15
difficult	56	35
workforce	15	13
jobs	17	17
francs	51	41
market	153	90
issue	85	70

Table 4: Specific words during the period 1960–1970

	Total frequency	Relative frequency during the period 1960–1970
friends	19	1
children	40	3
family	51	5
France	272	61
home	109	12

Table 5: Words missing from speeches during the period 1960–1970

These speeches reflect that the position of the CEO had changed: no longer in total control of the company, he was now a professional manager who had to reconcile multiple interests. The workers were much better informed by these speeches than they were in the 1930s. However, the effects of such speeches are not inevitably positive. More honesty has its drawbacks.

A Change of Scenery

It is difficult to find proof of the decline in these ceremonies in the archives, which tend to diminish along with the events they record. However, this is in itself evidence to support the hypothesis. From the end of the 1940s, the de Wendel group published an annual brochure commemorating the work medal award ceremonies (Annexes 1–4). Each brochure contained about 15 pages of photos and transcripts of the speeches. The covers of these brochures (see Figure 2) declared them to be an amalgam of official state documents (the French flag, the Republican image of Marianne) and corporate documents (the company logo).

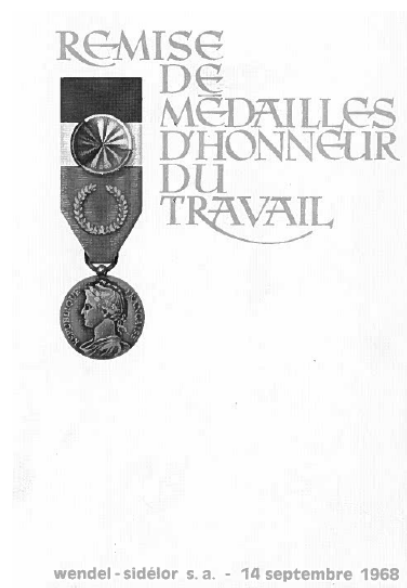


Figure 2: Cover of the brochure commemorating the work medal award ceremony at de Wendel & Co, 1968 (AAMF, C318).

The last of these brochures to be found in the archives dates from 1970. As other issues of this brochure have been scrupulously archived (18 documents between 1950 and 1970), it is likely that no further brochures were published after 1970.

At Schneider and Co's steel companies, reports of the work medal ceremonies were published in the company newspaper, *SCAF Informations*. The main ceremony was staged in Le Creusot, with others held at the group's other sites in Nantes,⁵⁹ Pamiers,⁶⁰ Imphy⁶¹ and elsewhere).

At the end of the 1960s, these reports gave detailed accounts of the ceremony. Some illustrated articles included a summary of the speech and profiles of exemplary workers; the general tone in these descriptions was lyrical.⁶²

Over time, less space was given to reports of the ceremony (see Figure 3). For example, in 1970 there was only a list of medalists and no reference to the speeches given; in 1972 the number of medals presented was listed; and by 1975 all mention of the ceremony had disappeared.

⁵⁹ Speech in Nantes 1964 (01MDL0041-02, AFB); *SFAC Informations*, n°82, 1970, pp. 4–5 (PO639, AFB).

⁶⁰ *SFAC Informations*, n°75, 1969 (PO639, AFB).

⁶¹ *SFAC Informations*, n°86, 1970, (PO639, AFB).

⁶² *SFAC Informations*, n°56, October 1967, p. 6, work medal award ceremony.

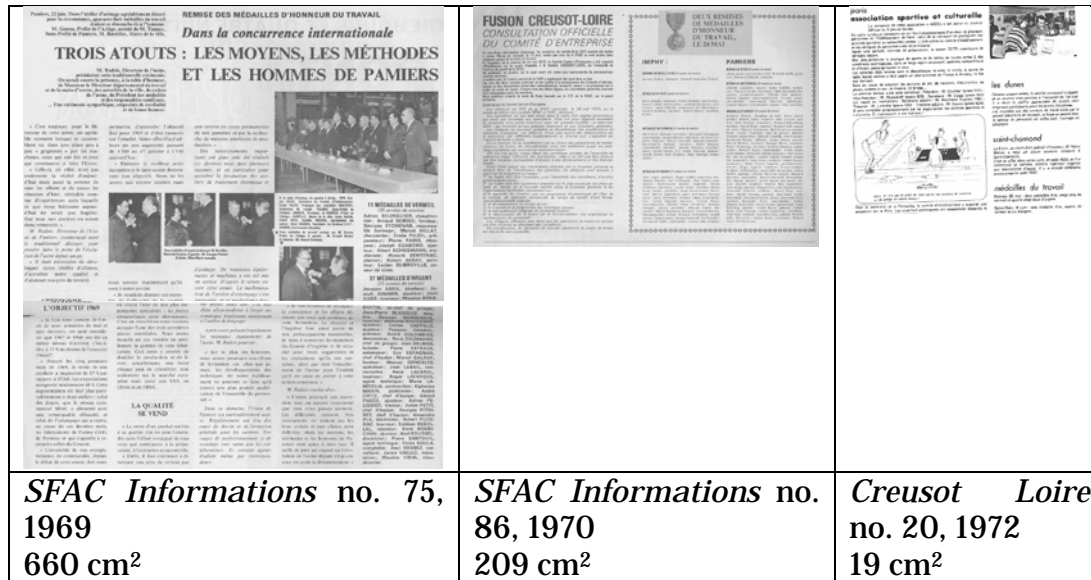


Figure 3: Space allocated to reports of work award presentation ceremonies in succeeding editions of the Schneider & Co company newspaper.

Another sign of the decline of the ceremony is the disappearance of the boss as a corporate figurehead. After Charles Schneider, the last family member to head the group, died in 1960, Schneider and Co did not replace its master of ceremonies. The head of SFAC and CEO of Schneider and Co took turns for several years and between 1960 and 1975, at least five different bosses gave a speech.⁶³ Although these changes could be explained by governance problems within the group during this period, the revolving door of speakers was also a sign of the difficulty the group had with projecting an image of its leader.

It was not only Schneider within the industry that experienced such changes. The de Wendel family decided to quit the iron and steel industry and moved into finance in the 1970s. The state bought the firm's steelworks but did not represent the same kind of father figure.⁶⁴

The final nail in the coffin (almost literally) for the work medal award ceremonies was the use of the medals as a form of protest by workers and as a means for contesting the power of the CEO. For many years, work medals had been a powerful symbol of the link between employers and employees for the well-being of the firm.⁶⁵ But during the 1970s, as layoffs rose dramatically, the medals began to lose their meaning. In 1977, fifty medalists from de Wendel & Co sent their medals to French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in a coffin. Their action was widely reported in the local press.⁶⁶ From a demonstration of unity, the award ceremony became a way to challenge the behavior of the CEO.

⁶³ Delpech (66) [SFAC informations, no. 38, p. 2, PO639, AFB], Gaspard (67) [SFAC informations, no. 48, pp. 5–7, PO639, AFB], Boulin (69) [SFAC informations, no. 79, p. 4–6, PO639, AFB], Malcor (72) [speech April 8, 1972, 01MDL0041-02, AFB], Forgeot (74) [speech September 26, 1974, 066Z010602, AFB].

⁶⁴ Harold James, *Family Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2006), 326–327.

⁶⁵ Bonnet, *L'homme du fer : mineurs de fer et sidérurgistes lorrains. Tome IV 1974-1985*, 243.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 159–160.

As a result, CEOs lost credibility. In the face of more violent demonstrations, the CEOs' speeches were devalued, and seemed to do no more than express their inability to challenge major changes in the iron and steel industry. At the same time, new means of communication started to appear, including management seminars, which began to proliferate, and the media.

The Loss of Effectiveness of a Rite: A Bourdieusian Analysis

An initial analysis links the decline of the rite and the decline of paternalistic practices in the iron and steel industry. From this perspective, the rite is merely a reflection of the evolution in management practices and eliminating the speeches to work medalists simply a contingency of that evolution. The decline can also be explained by economic issues specific to the industry, and the disappearance of traditional stakeholders.

However, this is only a partial explanation, which sees the ceremonies as a reflection of social reality and power relationships. It omits a significant element, which is that their decline in the 1970s reflected the loss of their effectiveness. They no longer fulfilled their original function. Instead, a spirit of collectiveness was established through workers' activism.

The absence of the CEO from the award ceremony of work medals, or the tendency for speeches to dwell on technical explanations for poor results, contributed to the delegitimization of employers. During the 1930s, the speeches delivered – even weak ones – demonstrated the power of the CEO. There was no direct statement about company performance but the boss's gifts and the firm's hiring practices were tangible proof of the company's well-being. Paradoxically, more informative speeches, unaccompanied by any other direct or indirect gesture, diminished the power and status of the CEO. Nothing occurred to redress this during the 1970s.

There are other possible interpretations of the decline in the work medal award ceremony, apart from the acknowledgment of a decline in paternalism. It can also be seen as the result of the loss of a powerful figurehead. One of the immediate consequences of this was that workers looked for a substitute for this father figure, and in the 1970s they found it, in that the ceremony itself became a forum for workers' activism in which management no longer participated.⁶⁷

As the ceremony collapsed, the boundaries of collective identity were displaced.⁶⁸ The old adversarial categories (medalists versus non-medalists) no longer made sense. A new collective identity (medalists and non-medalists) emerged, united on the basis of anti-management opposition. The work medals became emblematic of this struggle.

⁶⁷ Charles Tilly, *La France conteste : de 1600 à nos jours* (Paris, 1986).

⁶⁸ Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Politique(s) du conflit: de la grève à la révolution* (Paris, 2008), 139.

DISCUSSION

Disclosure of Information to Workers

Our analysis has shown that it is less important to share detailed information with workers than it is to reconcile the information with the format of the ceremony in which it is disclosed. Management doctrine holds that disclosure is good practice.⁶⁹ But we show, conversely, that disclosure and management's loss of legitimacy can go hand in hand.

The decline of work medal award ceremonies accompanied the emergence of new management practices – transparency in financial disclosure to shareholders, CEOs' road trips, meetings with financial analysts, interviews in the media, internal publications.⁷⁰ These new practices amounted to new rites with their own etiquette. They helped transform the image of the CEO from a figurehead to a management professional. And these new, more targeted, forms of communication were less easily challenged by workers.

Unlike other researchers in this field, who look at the way financial disclosure is used by management or workers to affect the balance of power in collective bargaining, we take a different perspective. We want to understand the reasons for the effectiveness of financial disclosure in a ceremony. We have shown the link between speech, ceremony and etiquette. We maintain that this global coherence forms the foundation of the effectiveness of a speech.

Methodological Discussion

Phillips and Ravasi's classification of the approaches to discourse analysis inform our understanding of the history of work medal award ceremonies in France.⁷¹ Financial disclosure to shareholders is a rite that has specific codes. Phillips and Ravasi make a distinction between text and context. Context can be subdivided into two parts: first, the immediate context (where the speech is given, who is present, guests, speaker, gifts, program), which we call etiquette; second, the environmental context (paternalism, technical management, changes in governance, redistribution of power, changes in industrial relations, etc.), which we call a structuring environment.

Obviously, both text and context can explain change. However, applying the notion of a rite is a way to understand the global dynamic between environment and speech. Table 6 is a schematic demonstration of the links between speech, rite, text and context.

⁶⁹ Mathieu Floquet and Marc Nikitin, "Should companies disclose financial information to employees? A case study of three works councils in the French steel industry from 1945 to 1982", *Paris : EAA Congress* (2013).

⁷⁰ Catherine Malaval, *La presse d'entreprise française au XXe siècle. Histoire d'un pouvoir* (Paris, 2001) 318-319.

⁷¹ Phillips and Ravasi, *Analysing social construction in organizations: discourse analysis as a research method in organization and management theory*.

		Constructivist	Critical	} Rite
Context	Structuring environment	Interpretive structuralism	Critical discourse analysis	
	Etiquette			
Text		Social linguistic analysis	Critical linguistic analysis	

Table 6: Links between text and context within a rite.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have studied work medal award ceremonies – a specific event held by companies in the French iron and steel industry – applying the notion of rite to our analysis.

There are two main explanations for the development and decline of these ceremonies. The first is that they reflect the emergence and decline of paternalism. However, this is only a partial explanation. The second is the element of coherence between the immediate context (the etiquette) of these ceremonies and the speeches that formed a part of them. Initially, this coherence was strong, but it declined in the 1960s and 1970s with the professionalization of management, problems in the industrial sector, and the redistribution of power between employers and workers.

There are some obvious limitations to our study. We worked from data on two major groups in the French iron and steel industry over a period of 50 years. We are not aware of any other study of the history of work medals in France at this time. It would be useful to know whether these medals were exclusive to the iron and steel industry or were awarded more generally. Finally, despite the wealth of material in the archives of these companies, we cannot know how these speeches were received by the workers to whom they were addressed.