

The Free-Riding Issue in Contemporary Organizations: Lessons from the Common Good Perspective

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Free riding involves benefiting from common resources or services while avoiding contributing to their production and maintenance. Few studies have adequately investigated the propensity to overestimate the prevalence of free riding. This is a significant omission, as exaggeration of the phenomenon is often used to justify control and coercion systems. To address this gap, we investigate how the common good approach may mitigate the flaws of a system excessively focused on free-riding risk. In this conceptual paper featuring illustrative vignettes, we argue that the common good perspective is realistic and effective in preventing this excessive attention by promoting trust as an unconditional gift and a response to vulnerability. We discuss the common good perspective's originality over the dominant approaches and propose a set of ethical and managerial recommendations that may be the best protection against this excessive focus and maybe even against free riding itself.

Key Words: common good, free riding, trust, trustworthiness, reliability

The temptation for an individual to free ride in the course of collective action is a “universal problem” (Ostrom, 2000: 138) which gained serious attention in the 1960s (Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965). It has since become a central issue in studies of social and organizational interactions and of collective actions (e.g., Albanese & Van Fleet, 1985; Axelrod, 1984; Ostrom, 1990, 2000). Free riders are generally thought of as rational and self-interested people who benefit from common resources or services (public or common goods) without participating (at least proportionally) in their production or maintenance. They “enjoy the benefits of group [collective] action without incurring the costs” (Booth, 1985: 253). Such behaviors may lead to a

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collective dilemma, namely the failure of cooperation among group members, and it may be that “choices made by rational individuals lead to outcomes that no one prefers” (Bates, 1988: 387).

An ever-growing fear of free riding is developing within organizations and society. Indeed, teleworking and task compartmentalization resulting from increased organizational size may lead some members to suspect that others are engaging in fictitious or low-utility activities while enjoying the benefits of organizational membership. The fear of free riding is also a central issue in freer organizations (Laloux, 2014) and liberated companies (Carney & Getz, 2009; Sferrazzo & Ruffini, 2021), which can only value spontaneity of action by accepting the risk that autonomy will be used by some employees for their own selfish purposes.

Although there is no doubt that some members of organizations choose to free ride, we may well overestimate, both in theory and in practice, the frequency of free-rider attitudes and misinterpret certain behaviors, thereby justifying the implementation of coercive systems (Carney & Getz, 2009). Those entail offering incentives, imposing sanctions, and establishing monitoring processes for all on the pretext that a few individuals are actual or potential free riders. The risk of excessive control over the actions of all the members of a group is reinforced by classical economic approaches regarding free riding as an inescapable phenomenon against which action must be taken (Olson, 1965). Even the new institutional theory of the commons tends to focus on free riding by proposing a set of rules to induce individuals to adopt cooperative conduct and to renounce the opportunistic behavior of seeking their own interest in a deceptive way (Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Ostrom, 2010).

Unlike the theory of the commons, the common good research stream has not given much consideration to the free-riding issue. Although the idea may have emerged that “the common good principle helps to understand the free-rider phenomenon” (Peredo, Haugh, Hudon, & Meyer, 2020: 667), we observe a lack of studies regarding the common good perspective on free riding. The common good refers to a set of conditions enabling all members of an organization to cooperate through work and to benefit from the effects of cooperation (Messner, 1965). In the business context, the common good of the firm covers all the conditions that allow organizational members not only to produce goods and services but also, and more importantly, to develop technical or artistic skills and intellectual or moral virtues (Sison & Fontrodona, 2012, 2013). As can be seen in *Business Ethics Quarterly* (Argandoña, 2018; Cabana, 2021; Dobson, 1997; Frémeaux, 2020; Moore, 2005a, 2005b; Rocchi, Ferrero, & Beadle, 2021; Sison, Ferrero, & Guitian, 2016; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012), the common good perspective develops a specific anthropology and a particular understanding of community and cooperation.

In this study of the originality of the common good perspective on free riding, we proceed from the idea that people have a set of unconsciously held beliefs which guide their actions; what Argyris and Schön (1974, 1996) call “theories-in-use.” Rather than examining the explanations that people can give to themselves and others to make sense of what they do, we are interested in the ethical behaviors possibly operating within organizations. These behaviors are not necessarily congruent with the moral ideal formally established by the organizations and referred to

by these same authors as espoused moral theory. However, these behaviors can be shaped by theories-in-use, which we can observe have similarities with the assumptions in existing theoretical perspectives (Al-Kazemi & Zajac, 1999; Marnburg, 2001). Two approaches can be internalized by members of organizations: the dominant economic and managerial approaches, which focus on free riding and attach little importance to trust, and the common good approach, which defocuses on free riding and, on the contrary, places importance on trust.

Our research aligns with these studies by addressing the following question: To what extent may the common good perspective help to prevent an excessive focus on the free-riding risk? In this conceptual paper featuring illustrative vignettes, we demonstrate how adopting this approach can be particularly effective in avoiding the flaws of a management system that is overly centered on monitoring and coercion by advocating a particular vision of trust as an unconditional gift and a response to vulnerability.

We begin the paper by presenting the limitations of the dominant economic and managerial approaches, which are excessively focused on the free-riding risk. We then explore the anthropology underlying the common good perspective, according to which human beings are social animals particularly concerned with community development and internal goods. We investigate how adopting this common good approach prevents paying excessive attention to the free-riding risk by promoting trust as an unconditional gift and a response to vulnerability. To illustrate the potential relevance of the common good perspective to free riding, we draw on two vignettes based on the observation of two companies that operate in common good economies in the Philippines and South Korea, and are particularly attentive to the development of a culture of trust and the vulnerability of people sharing the same territory. Finally, we discuss the originality of the common good perspective as compared with the dominant approaches and propose to consider it as a theory-in-use that avoids the drawbacks of an approach overly focused on free riding.

1. THE EXCESSIVE FOCUS ON FREE-RIDING RISK

In the context of collective action, free riding involves limiting one's own contribution while enjoying the collective benefit generated. Free riding can take multifarious forms, including colleagues who do not contribute enough to a project but benefit from its overall quality due to others' efforts, employees who benefit from trade union negotiations without being members (Olson, 1965), and people overharvesting common goods (such as pastures) without caring about sustainable maintenance (Hardin, 1968). Economic approaches, especially the zero-contribution approach (Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965) and the new institutional approach (Ostrom, 1990), justify the implementation of coercive managerial systems within organizations, with the main objective of controlling employees' uncooperative behavior. More specifically, in line with the discussion on theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974), it may be that the theoretical assumptions contained in these approaches, once internalized by managers, increase their determination to implement coercive mechanisms to prevent free riding.

1.1. The Limitations of Economic Approaches Focused on the Risk of Free Riding

The classical economic view of free riding rests on the anthropological supposition that individuals are rational, self-interested and opportunistic beings (Williamson, 1993) who tend to maximize their utility or net benefit by relying on an individual set of preferences (Albanese & Van Fleet, 1985). They do not care about the collective outcomes of their actions and avoid any personally costly contributions to such outcomes. As a consequence, as Olson (1965: 2) observes in his zero-contribution thesis, in the absence of external pressure, “rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests.”

In such a view, an individual’s focus on short-term self-interest impairs long-term self- and group-interests (Gabaldon & Gröschl, 2015). That constitutes an organizational threat which economists seek to combat by advocating for tighter controls, coercion, and individualized incentives (Hardin, 1968). Such measures take the form of social mechanisms such as:

policies and procedures, management directives and controls, ostracism by the group, and threats of exclusion from the public good. Special incentives include increased shares in the public good and various individual incentives, such as personal recognition, a bonus, and so on (Albanese & Van Fleet, 1985: 247).

Those mechanisms can also be informal, including reputational damage and peer pressure (Booth, 1985; Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck, 2002). This vision is Hobessian in nature, as it adopts a pessimistic view of human nature and suggests that individuals can only escape their opportunistic inclination if they are guided by constraining rules (Cole, Epstein, & McGinnis, 2014; Ghoshal & Moran, 1996).

Underpinning the presumption that individuals need to have externally enforced rules to achieve their own long-term self-interest, the zero-contribution approach to free riding has been challenged by various researchers, primarily new institutional theorists, particularly Elinor Ostrom, who offers the most comprehensive solution to the free-riding issue to date (Ostrom, 1990, 1999, 2000, 2010), as documented in numerous case studies (Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Ostrom, 1990, 2010). Ostrom refers to the “substantial gap” between zero-contribution theory and “the reality that ... cooperative behavior is widespread, although far from inevitable” (Ostrom, 2000: 138). According to Ostrom’s anthropology, some individuals aspire more than others to initiate reciprocity and cooperation. Ostrom particularly highlights the human tendency to adopt conditionally cooperative behavior, that is, to cooperate “so long as almost everyone reciprocates” (Ostrom, 2000: 149; see also Gabaldon & Gröschl, 2015). If some group participants are likely to free ride, conditional cooperators may fear becoming “suckers,” and they consequently renounce their cooperative behaviors to engage in free riding themselves (Albanese & Van Fleet, 1985). That “sucker effect” (Kerr, 1983) may engender a downward cascade of free-riding contamination (Ostrom, 2000) which could eventually prevent the group from continuing to collaborate or even from entering collective action (Dargnies, 2012).

The new institutional approach makes reciprocity its central social principle, which can be preserved through a set of institutional social mechanisms, norms,

and rules (Crawford & Ostrom, 1995) defining access and withdrawal conditions (setting clear boundaries between users and nonusers), implementing operational procedures (defining rules consistent with local needs and conditions), developing monitoring and control rules regarding members' behavior, establishing various levels of sanctions for rule violators, and implementing accessible, low-cost mechanisms for dispute resolution (Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Ostrom, 1990). To be effective, such institutional rules relying on tight control of behaviors and levels of punishment (up to exclusion) of transgressors should be known by all, applicable, and certain. Monitoring and coercion aimed at punishing free riders and changing their payoff serve as a signal to all conditional cooperators that noncooperators are discovered and punished, and that members who are not caught are probably cooperators (Ostrom, 1990). Finally, institutions can enable agents to exchange "credible commitments" (Williamson, 1983, 1993) whereby they give to and receive from others proof of their trustworthiness, ability, and willingness to avoid opportunism. By developing such institutions, local communities can self-regulate and solve collective action problems—particularly free-riding behaviors—while escaping purely individualistic logic or state regulation (Ogus, 1995; Ostrom, 1990).

The zero-contribution approach (Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965) and the new institutional approach (Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Ostrom, 1990, 2010) have in common that they are based on the idea that most individuals act rationally, and may cooperate only conditionally. Under both approaches, workers tend to be: 1) focused on their own interests, which they perceive as disconnected from their collective interest; 2) focused on economic outcomes; and 3) particularly responsive to control, coercive measures, and individual rewards. As free riding is perceived as inevitable, and even frequent, those approaches attempt to make cooperation rational for individuals by aligning their self-interest with the general interest (Bates, 1988). The new institutional framework is contractarian in nature (Bates, 1988; Bernacchio, 2021; Ostrom, 1990), based on the calculative reciprocity of "give and take: users can appropriate resources in return for participation in care/maintenance" (Fournier, 2013: 448). From an ethical perspective, it is part of an "I give *so that* you give" approach, a deviant interpretation of the Golden Rule whereby we are invited to treat others as we would like them to treat us (Melé, 2009; Ricoeur, 2008; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012).

When these economic perspectives as theories-in-use shape the beliefs of people in positions of authority in organizations, they can support coercive managerial approaches which tend to perceive opportunism even in some behavior that is, in fact, devoid of it.

1.2. The Limitations of Managerial Approaches Focused on the Risk of Free Riding

When internalizing the view that free riding is an inevitable and pervasive behavior within a social group, management may decide to establish monitoring and control mechanisms that are excessively restrictive for all, misinterpreting certain actions (Carney & Getz, 2009; Ghoshal, 2005; Ghoshal & Moran, 1996), and overestimating the number of cases of uncooperative behavior. This free-riding approach can reinforce managerialism, that is, an ideology that favors the establishment of norms

and processes which exert pressure on employees and serve managers' interests (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016; Clegg, 2014).

1.2.1. Excessive Coercion of All Employees

An approach excessively focused on the fear of opportunistic behavior is conducive to the development of a coercive managerial system. This management control system consists of multiplying the standards of comparison, imposing increasingly scientific and measured work, objectifying the evaluation criteria, and building coercive forms of power (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). That development of rules and processes focusing on the sole objective and quantifiable reality of work reflects the soft domination of contemporary organizations over all workers, not just the free riders. That phenomenon may have become more prevalent during the COVID-19 health crisis. Indeed, some managers, fearing the development of uncooperative behavior during periods of teleworking and a loss of direct control over their team members' actions, were able to multiply more or less consistent control mechanisms and increase the expected objectives at a time when employees were deprived of the possibility of interacting with their colleagues to discuss the difficulties encountered in their work (De Vaujany, Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, Munro, Nama, & Holt, 2021; OECD, 2020).

Carney and Getz (2009) call that phenomenon "management for the 3%," which consists of developing procedures, rules, and reporting to counteract the harmful behaviors committed by a small number of employees, with the result that unnecessary processes are imposed on the bulk of the staff. That managerial system can become counterproductive when the 3 percent manage to circumvent the new rules, while the 97 percent feel demotivated or even infantilized by them: indeed, "the use of rational control signals [to employees] that they are neither trusted nor trustworthy to behave appropriately without such controls" (Ghoshal & Moran, 1996: 24). This pessimistic view of people's intentions leads to pathological managerial behaviors that focus more on the dangers of opportunism than on the benefits of cooperation, thereby arousing resentment against coercive control systems and enhancing opportunistic behavior among people to the extent that they provoke the very phenomenon they were trying to combat (Ghoshal, 2005; Ghoshal & Moran, 1996).

1.2.2. Misinterpretation of Certain Behaviors

An excessive focus on free riding can lead managers to view any attitude as opportunistic and to reinterpret acts of withdrawal—that is, refusal to engage in certain responsibilities or projects or the inability to perform a prescribed task due to personal difficulties—as uncooperative behavior. The risk is that managers rely on a restrictive interpretation of cooperation that recognizes as cooperative attitudes only those geared toward the company's economic success and achievement of quantitative targets.

However, the literature on identities at work shows that there are different ways of conceiving one's work and professional commitment (Sainsaulieu, 1977). Work can be a means of subsistence, a place of solidarity, a source of self-fulfillment, or a way of climbing the ladder. The work of Alter (1991) revisits the distinction between

those willing to move up the hierarchy and those who shun the difficulties of taking on responsibility and do not wish to become overly involved in the professional sphere. That refusal to take on responsibility is not necessarily a sign of opportunistic behavior, that is, wanting to benefit from cooperation without participating in it. Withdrawal may be an expression of a desire to find a balance between work and personal life, to protect one's family and health, to express disagreement with the pursued objective or the means of achieving it, or sometimes even to resist the logic of performance, evaluation, and control. In particular, workers who are aware of the dangers of an excessive focus on professional success may choose to resist managerial pressure by refusing certain forms of career progression (Lazzarato, 2009). Such an attitude of withdrawal marks a refusal to participate in the development of a positive and totalizing discourse centered on performance (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Shymko & Frémeaux, 2022) that they would inevitably have to relay were they to take on further responsibilities.

Absences due to personal issues and refusal to take on responsibility are the most frequent reasons for why some members of organizations may give the false impression of adopting an opportunistic attitude. However, misinterpretation is not just linked to managerial ignorance of the intrinsic motivations for individuals refusing to perform certain actions. It can also be linked to the suspicion that managers develop toward modest commitments while overlooking the fact that those with greater commitments may in fact make excessive contributions (Berglas, 2006; Delong & Vijayaraghavan, 2003).

Finally, misinterpretation may stem from a lack of managerial understanding of acts of positive deviance. Any act that deviates from the rules of productivity established in the company risks being considered opportunistic behavior aimed at obtaining a personal benefit without participating in the construction of a collective benefit. However, deviance is not necessarily an opportunistic act (Robinson & Bennet, 1995); it can authorize new forms of cooperation, different from those which have hitherto constituted the normative reference. Unlike negative deviance, which reflects a voluntary attack on the proper functioning of the company in the name of individual interest, positive deviance is reflected in a change "that significantly departs from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004: 832; see also Mazutis, 2014). Such positive deviance does not call into question the legitimacy of the rule; it seeks to achieve the ethical project for which the rule exists or is supposed to exist by using new means which are different from those expected (Alter, 2005).

That deviant behavior, which may result in a reduction in objective and quantifiable tasks, or even a less professional approach to tasks, risks being interpreted as an opportunistic act of free riding, whereas it is actually aimed at improving the quality of the service and the work. Such errors of interpretation lead to an overestimation of the number of cases of free riding and to the rationale of applying to all a coercive managerial system which would only really be necessary for a very small number of individuals.

Since this approach to regulating free riding leads to excessive coercion and misinterpretation, it can have the opposite effect to that which was initially sought.

This observation invites us to seek an alternative approach to free riding that liberates itself from this excessively pessimistic view of human nature and human behavior. This alternative approach is neither idealistic nor disconnected from reality; we consider it to be a profoundly realistic approach, which as a “theory-in-use” can also shape the actions of individuals.

2. TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO FREE RIDING: THE COMMON GOOD PERSPECTIVE

Based on Aristotelian–Thomistic philosophy and Catholic social thought (John XXIII, 1961), the common good is often presented as a set of conditions which allow people to cooperate and to benefit from the effects of cooperation. More specifically, within this tradition, *Gaudium et Spes* defines the common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” (Paul VI, 1965). The common good perspective highlights “relationships governed by norms of uncalculating and unpredicted giving and receiving” (MacIntyre, 1999a: 117) over calculative reciprocity and egoistic interest. It has advocated the integration of the human person’s multiple “slices of life” against the view of the agent as a “divided self” (MacIntyre, 1999b: 324) whose business life could be disconnected from their whole life. The pursuit of the common good is closely linked to the development of virtues, in particular the cardinal virtues (justice, courage, practical wisdom, and temperance), and other more specific virtues such as those of acknowledged dependence (Bernacchio, 2018; MacIntyre, 2007; Rocchi et al., 2021). If all of those are necessary and complementary for participating fruitfully toward a communal practice, it may be that trust is the main virtue in fighting the temptation to suspect free riding.

The virtue ethical—or Aristotelian–Thomistic—conception of the “common good” draws on grounded human rationality, rather than the rationality of pure *homo economicus*, and promotes the cooperative attitude of each member (Akrivou & Sison, 2016; Albareda & Sison, 2020; Frémeaux, 2020; O’Brien, 2009; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012, 2013). Based on an anthropological approach whereby human beings are social animals concerned with community development and the pursuit of internal goods (Aristotle, 1944: 1253a, 1278b), we argue that the common good perspective avoids overestimating the free-riding risk.

2.1. *The Importance Granted to Community Development*

Since the common good is considered to be the community dimension of the moral good, it is through the participation in a community that its members can realize their personal good by developing their skills and virtues (Frémeaux, 2020; Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017; Melé, 2009; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012, 2013). The notion of the firm’s common good, which covers both the production of goods and services and the acquisition of skills and virtues, reminds us that these two aspects of the common good are closely linked: the practice of virtues within an organization is difficult to envisage without considering the quality of products and services; conversely, the objective response to societal needs is hardly conceivable without a practice of

virtues. Therefore, as the common good of the firm is oriented toward the common good of society, the pursuit of the common good implies the production of real goods that meet society's needs. Organizational members are all the more able to work together if they share this purpose (Albareda & Sison, 2020) and care about the community, that is, the communal aspect of the common good (Dupré, 1993; Hussain, 2018). However, based as they are on self-interest, free-riding practices jeopardize both community development and the personal good of each member of the community:

Only if they believe that there is some other and stronger type of connection between their ends and purposes and the flourishing of their political society do [people] have good reason to be willing ... to resist the temptation to act as free riders on occasions in which they could do so without penalty (MacIntyre, 1998: 242).

2.2. *The Importance Granted to Internal Goods*

Based on a quest for virtues, and in particular on a search for practical wisdom that allows the possession of all virtues in a systematic, interconnected way (MacIntyre, 1998; Sison & Redín, 2023), the common good approach assigns a special role to internal goods, that is, goods intrinsic to a specific practice, corresponding with the excellence of both the production and the producer, as well as the good of participating in that activity and community (MacIntyre, 2007; Moore, 2012). Even if the internal goods, and more particularly virtues, can be contrasted with external goods, such as profit, power, and status, both types of goods are necessary. From this perspective, the common good cannot be reduced to internal goods or to the practice of virtue. The other goods deserve to be valued, particularly in the organizational context, insofar as they also contribute to the construction and development of the community. The interplay between these different kinds of goods is particularly significant in cooperative activity and management (Sison & Redín, 2023) since, in this field, external goods (effectiveness) should lead to the achievement of internal goods (excellence) (MacIntyre, 2007). Both types of goods are genuine and legitimate, but internal goods should be prioritized if the good life is to be achieved (Arjoon, Turriago-Hoyos, & Thoene, 2018; MacIntyre, 2007; Moore, 2005a).

Unlike external goods, which are subtractable, or rival, goods (MacIntyre, 2007), the achievement of any internal good does not prevent other agents from achieving it (Dobson, 2009); it may even favor the achievement by others and benefit all those engaged in the practice (Moore, 2002). Internal goods are part of communal and cooperative goods (Dobson, 2009; Moore, 2005b). They cannot be acquired or evaluated individually, only within a practice tradition (Brewer, 1997; MacIntyre, 2007), that is, with the help of people who have participated in the development of such excellence. In other words, the search for internal goods is a *praxis* (Aristotle, 1944: 1254a; Moore, 2012; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012), an immanent action whose outcome, that is, the good of participating in the practice and the community, is inherent in and inseparable from the excellence of the worker (Sison & Fontrodona, 2013). This quest for internal goods radically excludes the separation of contribution and benefit, which is the essence of free riding.

From this reflection on the common good perspective, we can see, first, that free riding can be the result of a focus on individual goods at the expense of community development and, second, that it can also be the result of a focus on external goods coupled with a denial of internal goods. This raises the issue of how the common good perspective can inspire cooperation by restoring the attention to community along with internal goods. To address this issue, common good thinkers use the concept of trust because a belief in the reliability of other members of a community and the will to enter into trusting relationships can encourage the contribution to community and the development of internal goods (Arjoon et al., 2018; Cremers, 2017; Kohn, 2008; Martin, 2011; Melé, 2003).

3. THE ORIGINALITY OF THE COMMON GOOD PERSPECTIVE: A FOCUS ON TRUST

In the common good perspective, the logic of trust (Arjoon et al., 2018; Cremers, 2017; Martin, 2011; Melé, 2005), through which every individual and group can participate in a relationship of trust (Arjoon, 2006; Cremers, 2017) and build trust (Kearns, 2017), is the main way to prevent an excessive focus on the free-riding risk. The common good approach does indeed offer a particular vision of trust by considering it both as an unconditional gift and as a response to vulnerability. We include illustrative vignettes presenting two companies that have placed this common good approach to trust at the heart of their operations and whose members seem to have internalized this approach in their organizational behavior. **Box 1** depicts the methodology that was used to create the two illustrative vignettes on how the common good perspective can be particularly effective in preventing this obsessive attention to free riding.

3.1. *Trust as an Unconditional Gift*

Defined as the hope that the trustee will be trustworthy (Caldwell, Davis, & Devine, 2009; McLeod, 2020), trust is “the glue that holds relationships together” (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010: 94)—in other words, the crucial element for maintaining and improving harmony in relationships, group cohesion, and cooperation (Brien, 1998; Melé, 2003; Ruiz Jiménez, Vallejo Martos, & Martínez Jiménez, 2015) and for enhancing employees’ self-efficacy and empowering them (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010). In turn, trustworthiness “enables an actor to become a member of a community and maintain membership, and in that way flourish as a human being” (Brien, 1998: 404). Whereas new institutionalists tend to make trust conditional on the ascertainment that the trustee will reciprocate (Williamson, 1983, 1993), thus suggesting that trust can be calculative, strictly reciprocal, and self-interested, the common good perspective promotes trust not just as a response to the trustee’s ascertained trustworthiness but as an unconditional gift to the trustee (Cremers, 2017) that is given before or beyond any evidence of the trustee’s trustworthiness (McLeod, 2020). In this perspective, trust is based primarily on the trustor’s character, with the trustee’s reliability becoming secondary: “Agents should not condition their cooperation toward the common good, for fear of free-loading, on others taking the first step” (Sison & Fontrodona, 2012: 237).

Unconditional trust accepts a partial decoupling between contributions and benefits: “All contribute and all receive (probably not in the same measure as they

Box 1: Learning from the Common Good Economy

We illustrate our theoretical demonstration with two vignettes drawn from the research of one of the coauthors who delved into a form of the common good economy known as the economy of communion because of its particular concern for developing communion among its members and with severely deprived people, following the intuition expressed by Chiara Lubich in 1991 (Bruni & Grevin, 2016; Bruni & Zamagni, 2004; Frémeaux, Grevin, & Sferrazzo, 2023; Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017; Gallagher & Buckeye, 2014). The investigation on which the following vignettes are based was conducted between 2011 and 2021 on companies operating in this economy and located on different continents (in particular, in Asia and South America) (Grevin, 2022). We focus on two companies that practice communion, which involves the dissemination of the culture of giving to and among the most vulnerable, while privileging wealth creation over redistribution to preserve their sustainability. These companies hire or otherwise support particularly vulnerable people whose precariousness could lead to opportunistic behaviors aimed at prioritizing their interests over the proper functioning of the organization. Due to their size, these organizations, each with several hundred employees, may be particularly exposed to the free-riding problem, or at least to differences of opinion around how cooperation is expected to take place. However, observation of these companies led us to the opposite conclusion: Because they adhere to the common good perspective described in the previous section, these organizations are rather less affected by opportunistic behavior, while also addressing the issue of free riding in a more transparent way. The two vignettes are “stories generated from a range of sources including previous research findings. They refer to important factors in the study of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes” (Hughes, 1998: 381; see also Hughes & Huby, 2004). Like other academics who have used similar methods in an increasing number of qualitative studies (Daudigeos, Edwards, Jaumier, Pasquier, & Picard, 2021; Dey & Steyaert, 2016; McCarthy, 2017), our purpose is “not to provide evidence for an empirical article, but rather to provide accounts as windows into other worlds” (McCarthy, 2017: 610). These other worlds that we unveil through this journey into a common good economy are affected by the free-riding problem to a notably small degree.

contribute)” (Argandoña, 1998: 1095). The observation of each person’s contribution to the common good cannot give rise to an accurate calculation: “We do not feel compelled to calculate and second-guess each of our friends’ moves. We can trust them instead” (Koehn, 1997: 15; see also Bernacchio, 2018). Beyond finding meaning in trusting others, community members also make sense of renewing the experience that the more they give, the more they will receive, not only from those to whom they have given but also from other individuals who participate in or join the community. **Box 2** describes this experience of unconditional trust as a driver of generalized reciprocity.

3.2. *Trust as a Response to Vulnerability*

From the common good perspective, trust is not only an acceptance of relational vulnerability (Bruni, 2008) but also a response to the fallibility of the trustees (Melé, 2003; Solomon & Flores, 2003): trust is granted not only to those who can prove their trustworthiness but also to those who may find it difficult at some point to be trustworthy: “One can and sometimes must or should trust someone who is untrustworthy or untried” (Flores & Solomon, 1998: 209).

Trust is a response to all forms of vulnerability, the specific vulnerability of certain categories of individuals to which the other members of the organization seek to react in a positive manner, and a more general, positive vulnerability based on an acceptance and revelation of one’s own human fragility, thus enabling the

Box 2: Promote Trust Unconditionally

This first vignette is based on an in-depth analysis of the data extracted from 21 interviews with leaders, managers, and employees at a bakery in South Korea. This company makes more bread than can be sold so that it can give some to those in need at the end of each day. In pursuing this social mission, it has grown considerably from employing around 100 in 2011 to almost 900 people in 2023. Its objective is to put this economic development at the service of the region, by moving forward with the opening of a new bakery or restaurant only insofar as it would promote the region's influence: "*Other companies want to grow indefinitely. [company name] could have been all over the country, but it chose to stay only in [city name], because that way it helps the city to grow*" (supervisor). Employees are aware that the quality of products and services has enabled the company to become representative of the town: "*The managers invite us to do things well for everyone ... not just for our own good, but for everyone else's, for the stores around us. We want our partners to be satisfied and to sell a lot. We're not a tourist town, but now many come to buy our products in [name of town]*" (Baker).

The bakery's employees agree that their leader has an increasingly confident attitude and does not seem to doubt the reliability of his employees:

He does good things, he contributes, he gives, he is very sober, he thinks of the employees as his own family. He comes very early in the morning with his wife; they are the ones who work the most. He gives the bread [to the poor]. And if something happens to an employee, he immediately cancels all his work to go there, whether it is a funeral or a wedding. He always greets, encourages (sales employee).

The unconditional trust that the leader demonstrates toward his employees leads him to grant scholarships to some young people, thus allowing them to obtain master's degrees in baking or pastry-making: "*There are many people who are qualified thanks to the company ... so we can learn a lot. We are encouraged to participate in competitions, in bakery fairs*" (pastry cook).

Since employees feel unconditionally trusted by the leader, they strive to carry out their work with the greatest care and above the expected standard. They trust their leader and their colleagues, but more generally they also trust that "*in giving to others, we experience that we receive much more*" (customer service officer). Trust results not only from the leader's acceptance of relational risks but also, and more importantly, from a shared belief in the merits of generalized reciprocity.

For this reason, many of them are involved in volunteering:

By learning the culture of love and trust, we learn to look at others and society differently ... We got together with our colleagues to understand together how we could give. The wife of one of us was working in a center for disabled children. We started with a few, now we are about 30 (sales employee).

This extreme commitment of employees inside and outside the company in turn encourages the expression of trust by the leader to the organization's various members, thus forming a positive spiral.

emergence of trusting relationships (López, 2022). This vulnerability, which is both negative and positive, can affect all categories of individuals, including free riders. Indeed, in certain cases, free riders may be considered as vulnerable people who lack knowledge, reason, competence, willingness, and, most importantly, virtue education, and who thus need the help of other members in their quest toward their own good. The trustor's response is decisive (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010; McLeod, 2020) and can have a therapeutic effect on the trustee: "by placing trust in him [the trustee], she [the trustor] hopes that he will realize he is being trusted, and rise to the challenge of meeting her expectations" (Nickel, 2007: 317).

Individuals who obtain more resources than they produce can also make invaluable contributions to the common good, provided that their supervisor's trust allows

them to express their vulnerability (Sison, 2007). Indeed, trust does not only benefit those who receive it but also those who provide it, as it nurtures the experience whereby the practice of giving something of benefit to other people without expecting them to give something back produces strong social bonds (Bruni, 2008; Whitham, 2021).

Therefore, the common good approach invites us to consider trust as a response to others' vulnerability, and even as a source of genuine cooperation, because it helps us to express our own needs and to treat the needs of others as reasons for action (MacIntyre, 1999a) and as drivers of social cohesion (Bernacchio, 2018). Trust as a response to vulnerability is presented in [Box 3](#).

4. DISCUSSION

What the common good approach proposes is an alternative to the entire organizational context, the dominant economic and managerial "theory-in-use," the internalization of which leads to an excessive focus on the free-riding risk and the implementation of coercive responses (Ghoshal, 2005; Ghoshal & Moran, 1996). Using these mental shortcuts to process the large amount of information, some managers can give preference and conform to shared stereotypes that generate prejudices about anthropological assumptions (Allport, 1954). On the contrary, the common good perspective supports beliefs, values, and assumptions that can guide individuals' and organizations' behaviors in a radically different direction by switching from an excessive focus on the free-riding risk to an unconditional trust toward others.

Going further, we suggest that by adhering to the same assumptions as those of the dominant economic theory, managers not only focus excessively on the free-riding risk but also contribute to the development of free riding by proposing erroneous interpretations or implementing inappropriate control rules that lead employees to resist, flee, or at least hide their vulnerability (Ghoshal, 2005; Ghoshal & Moran, 1996). Similarly, and conversely, those who conform to or let themselves be shaped by the common good approach will have a low propensity to free ride and place less emphasis on the free-riding risk; these attitudes are mutually reinforcing, since adopting a positive view of human nature reduces the risk of free riding proliferating (Bregman, 2020) by encouraging community development, the pursuit of internal goods and, consequently, genuine trust.

We therefore argue at this stage of our research that the common good approach can be more sustainably effective in preventing free riding by—paradoxically—not focusing on free riding, that is, by paying attention to the community project that transcends individual interests and to the trust that results from participation in this project (Adler, 2022). By uncovering and adopting the common good perspective as a theory-in-use, members of organizations can become more aware of the importance of unconditional trust and better align their actions with their virtues. That approach offers a solution to free riding which is more deeply embedded in communal life and may even resist potential institutional weakening, particularly in empowerment- and liberation-oriented organizations (Sferrazzo & Ruffini, 2021).

Box 3: Considering Vulnerability Rather Than Fault

This second vignette is based on an in-depth analysis of the data extracted from 22 interviews with leaders, managers, and employees at a Paraguayan cleaning company. This company pursues a social mission to hire 900 women from slums who would otherwise have no chance of accessing employment. As part of this, it also declares their work to ensure that these women benefit from full social security (even if they do not work full time). This has not prevented the company from becoming a leading provider of maintenance services in the country, without ever doing any advertising or canvassing: *“Our sales department receives orders directly, it doesn’t go looking for them. Our advertising comes from our customers, nothing more. Our advertising is free! ... Thanks to this, we’re still growing”* (supervisor). Information on the quality and reliability of the team’s work has been transmitted by word of mouth, giving rise to *“annual growth of 10% over the last 10 years”* (entrepreneur).

This company provides each employee and their family members with supplementary health insurance, pays a bonus that is the equivalent of a month’s pay, and sometimes grants employees wage advances. The employees are often mothers with large families and no qualifications whose personal circumstances can hamper their professional prospects and lead to repeated absences. The company founder confided in the researchers that she *“selects the people who need to work”* (entrepreneur). The employees are grateful to be offered decent work despite their lack of qualifications and to feel respected in their relationships with their leaders:

Not all companies are like this. I’ve worked in other cleaning companies, they are not like this. They don’t care who we are. Here, they care. There are a lot of us, but they know all of us, really. They know us, they know who we are (supervisor).

It may so happen that the cleaners’ personal circumstances lead them to adopt unexpected behaviors that can leave the company in difficulty. For example, a manager who has been with the company for 15 years admits that she was unreliable at the start of her career:

I was a person with many problems. When I had problems, I didn’t come, and they would ask me why, with patience. Then I finally told them ... you know ... violence ... violence against women ... They sent specialized people to help me and thanks to them I got out of it (supervisor).

The patience and personal support of managers in dealing with employees facing health problems or violence is, in the leader’s opinion, the best way to prevent withdrawal or absence:

If we realize that a person wants to work, is interested in work, knows how to work, and has a problem for some reason ... we try to find a way to help them so they can solve their problems and continue to work (operations manager).

It happens sometimes that managers take sanctions, but in this case the sanctions are used as a last resort, and most often for educational purposes: *“when you make a mistake, superiors will never yell at you; instead, they will talk to you in private, explain the consequences and listen to what you have to say”* (cleaner).

Even though the organization may have to dismiss a few employees, this ability to be attentive to employees’ vulnerability and to welcome unexpected behaviors fosters employees’ expression of trust in their managers and clients.

The shortcomings of the dominant free-riding approaches and the merits of the approach based on the common good perspective are outlined in Table 1.

4.1. Theoretical Implications

Our approach contributes to the free-riding literature by proposing a benevolent vision of seemingly uncooperative behaviors. Leaders concerned with the common

Table 1: The Merits of the Common Good Perspective on Free Riding

	The dominant approaches: a focus on free riding	The common good approach: a focus on trust	Implications for business practice
System implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application of coercion measures to all members of the organization Development of control procedures Development of sanction rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust as an unconditional gift System based on the hope that the other members of a community will be trustworthy Trust in generalized reciprocity System based on the acceptance of a partial decoupling of contributions and benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting a culture of trust Expressing trust in each member of the organization, and in the self-benefits of the logic of trust Using sanctions at a last resort (individualized, predictable, and discreet sanctions) Recognizing employees' reliability and expressing gratitude
Interpretation of unexpected behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misinterpretation of certain acts Misinterpretation of withdrawal acts Misinterpretation of deviance acts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust as a response to vulnerability Trust in those who may find it difficult to be trustworthy Apparent free riders as potential vulnerable persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking a different look at unexpected behavior Avoiding hostile attribution bias Considering the causes of unexpected behavior Supporting workers who are less present or effective because of the difficulties they encounter Welcoming unexpected acts oriented toward the common good

good may recognize the limits of a coercive system focused on free riding (Carney & Getz, 2009; Ghoshal, 2005), which would be a sign that an organization was prioritizing the regulation of external goods. Conversely, by establishing trust as an unconditional gift to others and a response to vulnerability, leaders can reduce the risk of overestimating the free-rider tendency. They can discover that certain acts of withdrawal or deviance may be transitory, even profitable, and recognize the reliability of their employees by adopting a supportive initial response to unexpected behavior.

Our approach also enriches the common good literature (Arjoon et al., 2018; Frémeaux, 2020; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012) by considering unconditional trust as a virtue. From the common good perspective, trust as a virtue results neither from a contract nor from the acceptance of voluntary asymmetry (Brien, 1998; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; McLeod, 2020); it is based on the observation that an unconditional and uncalculated gift in response to vulnerability can result in

generalized reciprocity and increased cooperation. We emphasize the originality of this approach to trust in comparison with the view defended by new institutionalists. While Ostrom puts forward “trust that” x will do y as opposed to “trust in” someone (Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom & Ahn, 2008), and defends an instrumental view in which trust is dependent on assessing the likelihood of actions performed by others, we highlight the possibility of unconditional trust.

This does not mean that trusting actors fall into gullibility or blindness (Banerjee, Bowie, & Pavone, 2006); the trustors scrutinize, analyze, and evaluate their own and others’ behaviors throughout the history of their relationships. This observation operates “like a heuristic—a predilection to assume the best when interpreting another’s motives and actions” (Uzzi, 1997: 43). Practical wisdom—discernment—and benevolence replace rational calculation and tight monitoring to interpret the situation and the other’s behavior. This interpretation then helps in deciding what should be done and, more particularly, what support to provide.

Our approach to the common good does not exclude coercion, but it allows us to consider sanctions differently. The first sanction for a misbehavior is internal to the actors, who miss the contribution to community and development of internal goods. They can also feel guilt or shame. External sanctions can be meaningful as an educative, or healing, tool: “Punishment is a sort of medicine” (Aristotle, 2002: 1104b). It may help to restore trustful relationships or appropriate and internalize certain ethical orientations. Sanctions can also happen against behaviors corrosive to trust to protect the community. Exclusion may happen, as a mere statement that free riders themselves can make, if they refuse—at their free choice—to enter into trustful relations and to be part of the “common” (O’Brien, 2009). Therefore, unlike external sanctions aimed at retaliation (Axelrod, 1984) and offering an extrinsic motivation not to free ride, the other types of sanctions would be relevant, provided they are used as a last resort in an individualized, predictable, and discreet manner.

Our common good perspective on free riding is congruent with “new commons” research (Euler, 2018; Fournier, 2013; Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020; Meyer & Hudon, 2017, 2019), which also denounces the pessimistic approach to human nature by highlighting the value of “commoning”—the collective practices of producing, organizing, and using in common—and its creative potential to foster community development, new relationships, and production. Fournier (2013) proposed an original approach by rejecting the focus on resource allocation (organizing *in* common) to suggest other pillars of commoning, such as organizing *for* the common and organizing *of* the common. Those researchers refer explicitly to the common good approach when searching for an ethical foundation (Coriat, 2021; Meyer & Hudon, 2017, 2019; Peredo et al., 2020). Our study is in line with this literature, but it adds that the common good perspective plays a particular role distinct from and complementary to the theory of the commons in the fight against suspicion. Unlike the ethics of the commons, the common good approach also reveals what we wish to seek and decide together, that is, the common project for which we cooperate. Thus, based on the search for the common good, we can identify together the desirable, and

find the strength to seek it together, in common (Dardot and Laval, 2015). The common good perspective gives deeper meaning to institution building (Hess & Ostrom 2007; Ostrom 1990) and cooperation: it serves as a transcendent principle and goal that helps to build a culture of trust as the best lever for moral maturity and commitment among the various members of organizations (Brien, 1998; McLeod, 2020; Solomon & Flores, 2003).

4.2. Practical Implications

The common good perspective enables those with authority to achieve a double awareness: 1) the contribution to community is the only way to satisfy a personal good, 2) the pursuit of external goods can be a means to satisfying internal goods. That awareness would allow them to observe that free riding is the result of a double illusion; free riders believe that they can satisfy their individual good by instrumentalizing the community and renouncing internal goods. The common good perspective on free riding makes it possible to bypass the shortcomings of classical economic and managerial approaches, which tend to deny our need to participate in a community and to develop internal goods. Such awareness can be facilitated by the experience of trust that protects us from exaggerating the prevalence of the free-riding risk. Our two vignettes illustrate the empirical possibility that the adoption and internalization of the common good approach shapes members' beliefs and behaviors in a way that is radically different from the dominant economic and managerial approaches. Our proposal is congruent with numerous psychological and sociological studies supporting the claim that adopting a positive view of human nature and approaching others in a trustful and benevolent manner may end up with personally and collectively beneficial outcomes (Bregman, 2020).

Certainly, the common good may not be pursued by all, and the culture of trust is inconceivable in an environment excessively marked by competition and individualism. Thus, a culture of trust can only be established in "virtuous corporations" (Moore, 2005b) pursuing a common project oriented toward the common good, fostering community development and the pursuit of internal goods. Such organizations are loosely regulated, based on clear, stable, and predictable operating principles, with a primacy of human relationships over formal systems. These corporations provide an appropriate context in which leaders can be in a position to give their trust, thus inviting the other members of the organization to do the same. This culture of trust can develop more easily in relatively small-scale organizations, such as those described in the two vignettes, in which the trust that leaders give to each member of the organization is known by all.

In other organizations, it is likely that the two theories-in-use that we confront in this study come into conflict (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1996), thus preventing individuals from actively participating in generalized trust. How can the members of an organization shift to a culture of trust that does not exclude a certain degree of control and sanction but encourages the expression of gratitude and a positive view of unexpected behavior?

Managers have a responsibility to instill such a culture of trust: to avoid the nocebo effect, whereby we act badly because we believe that human nature is evil

(Bregman, 2020), they can opt for a positive view of human behavior which encourages the members of an organization to express their trust, suspend disbelief (Möllering, 2006), and give others the benefit of the doubt. They can also ensure that the people they recruit adhere to this hopeful vision of humanity by showing themselves capable of receiving and giving without calculation and by expressing their vulnerability without fear of judgment. Gradually, these newly recruited people will be able to experience trust and then become aware of their organization's rules and ethical assumptions.

We also argue that the dialogue is central to this process of avoiding hostile attribution bias and trusting fellow members of organizations (Frémeaux & Vöglin, 2022; Solomon & Flores, 2003; Zózimo, Pina e Cunha, & Rego, 2023). To be fruitful, such a dialogue should welcome dissent as an opportunity, including the views of those who somehow do not participate for the common good or even engage in free riding: "What will be important ... will be to ask what can be learned from such dissenters" (MacIntyre, 1998: 251). Concretely, organizational deliberation mechanisms can take the form of meetings dedicated to workplace practices, to the different ways of reaching the higher ethical objectives, to everyone's contribution to the common projects, and to the changes that need to be made. It may thus be part of a leader's role to listen to the reasons for any behavior that deviates from the expected norms and to interpret the intertwined motives for such behavior wisely. This implies that leaders, far from evaluating mere roles, should consider the whole life and whole self of their team members. The need for effective dialogue also requires that they organize a space where all workers can participate in the dynamic definition of standards of excellence, that is, what might normally be expected or welcomed of each member of the community, and the common goals for the collective benefit.

Trust can be damaged, of course. In the common good perspective, members of organizations, and particularly managers, should not answer betrayal with immediate retaliation (Axelrod, 1984), that is, the end of trust. The proper response would be to restore trust, and even to renew it. This seems possible if they have enough goodwill to continue the dialogue with the supposed free rider instead of immediately choosing sanction and exclusion. It involves recognizing that the trustee may sometimes have good reasons to act in unexpected ways or that the trustor's expectation may have been exaggerated. It also involves offering the trustee the possibility to explain the situation and to enter into a dialogue:

Once the conflict is aired ... the dynamic changes. It becomes mutual, a problem to be solved, in place of two independent behavior patterns that have resulted in unintended conflict. A conversation leads to a concrete program, a new resolve ... The resulting collaboration converts the former source of distrust into a strong source of trust ... What is important is that the problem is mutually recognized and "worked through," by way of a series of understandings and renewed commitments (Flores & Solomon, 1998: 223).

Members of organizations struggling with trust are also dependent on and influenced by the broader trust climate. For instance, "high trust" societies offer a framework more favorable for the development of trust at any level than "low

trust” ones (Fukuyama, 1996). In economies and markets, the switch from classical approaches based on control and coercion to a more relational approach to trust would require some sort of change of paradigm. Business schools can participate in this switch of paradigm in the business realm (Akrivou & Bradbury-Huang, 2015) if they abandon their—performative—gloomy vision of humanness (Ghoshal, 2005), give more salience to community development and the pursuit of internal goods, and search for inculcating and eliciting virtues, such as trust and practical wisdom, among students (Sison & Redín, 2023).

4.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study shows that the common good perspective provides resources to avoid the latent obsession with free-riding risk. Indeed, it offers a transcendental view whereby the attention to community development and to internal goods that is made possible within certain organizations and conducive to the development of trust can help human beings to cooperate and flourish.

Such community-based cooperation may seem illusory and difficult to implement for several reasons. First, community development is itself dependent on the genuine willingness of its members to participate in the common good and to trust the other members of the community. Secondly, some communities can be toxic despite the well-intentioned pursuit of the common good (Dobson, 2017). For example, action programs aimed at helping the most vulnerable employees in so-called inclusive communities may have the effect of excluding all those for whom the programs are not intended (Frémeaux, 2020). Even spontaneous, unorganized communities that are undoubtedly practicing particularly active cooperation can be formed or maintained by focusing on sacrificial victims banished from the community despite participating in the development of the common project (Girard, 1986).

This study does not neglect that difficulty; on the contrary, it aims to overcome or alleviate it by suggesting that acts of withdrawal and deviance that may be favorable to the common good be reconsidered. It advocates the introduction of a flexible, general, and clear preventive orientation, which does not exclude a complex system of sanctions to be used only as a last resort.

Our reflection, which focuses on organizations, can also be mobilized at a broader level—that of society. The behaviors that agents adopt in their professional lives are linked to their education and the more general practice of virtues, so they cannot be thought of outside the framework of society and the different communities to which they belong. Therefore, we invite researchers to examine free-riding suspicion by considering both the economic model applicable to organizations and the one that governs state policy. Indeed, at the societal level, the fear of free-riding behavior in the form of excessive reliance on state financial aid becomes amplified and may incite more citizens and politicians to focus on the development of control and sanction systems. However, as Spinoza notes, society does not become virtuous through control and punishment; on the contrary, such measures invite the risk of weakening the social body and hindering the development of virtues:

Of a commonwealth, whose subjects are but hindered by terror from taking arms, it should rather be said, that it is free from war than that it has peace. For peace is not mere absence of war, but is a virtue that springs from force of character: for obedience is the constant will to execute what, by the general decree of the commonwealth, ought to be done. Besides that commonwealth, whose peace depends on the sluggishness of its subjects, that are led about like sheep, to learn but slavery may more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth (Spinoza, 2013: V § 4).

The philosopher argues that governments concerned with the development of virtues must be established by “a free multitude” participating in dialogue and deliberation, not “a conquered multitude” acting out of fear of sanctions. Drawing on that inspiration and our study, further research could examine the interconnections between the state regulation of free riding and that implemented by corporate governance to explore how the common good perspective can create unity and harmony in preventing free riding.

Our study could also be usefully complemented by other empirical investigations examining the conditions for and the process of emergence of a culture of unconditional trust as a response to vulnerability and as a bulwark against the suspicion of free riding. An insistence on empirical case development is also a lesson that ethicists can draw from Elinor Ostrom’s very grounded work.

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