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Elements in Corporate Governance

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THE EVOLUTION OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

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The Evolution of Corporate Governance

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Abstract: In this Element the origins of corporate governance are reviewed, recognising that corporate entities have always been governed, that important developments took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the huge significance of the invention of the joint-stock limited liability company. The development of corporate governance in the twentieth century around the world is explored, with complex groups, private companies and top management dominating shareholder power appearing in the inter-war years. Some unresolved issues in both principle and practice are identified. Various theories of corporate governance are described and contrasted. The subject is seen to be in search of its paradigm and a systems theoretical relationship between the theories is suggested. The need to rethink the concept of the limited liability company is argued, and a call is made for the development of a philosophy of corporate governance.

Keywords: corporate governance, evolution, institutions, limited liability company, management

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