

CONTROL SYSTEMS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH MONASTERIES

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ABSTRACT

Modern control theory deals with control systems in complex organizations by referring to the underlying reasons for, and the form and the timing of, control activities. Medieval English monasteries may have been initiated as simple organizations, but in many cases quickly became very complex because of the acquisition of remote real estate and the establishment of remote priories. In this paper we examine the control processes used by English monasteries in the high middle ages.

Keywords: Control Systems, Medieval English Monasteries, High Middle Ages

INTRODUCTION

Monasteries in England in the middle ages represent some interesting problems of management and control. One of the most important issues was that of geographical dispersion which underwent significant change during this period.

This paper is organized in the following sections: the theories of strategy and control; a description of the medieval English monastery system; the changes effected by the Norman conquest in 1066; charters and cartularies as monastic records; the Rule of St Benedict; personal control in the monastery; action control in the monastery; results control in the monastery; clan control in the monastery; summary.

STRATEGY AND CONTROL

Organizations are purposive: they exist to pursue objectives. In order to do so they develop strategies: ways in which the resources of the organization will be generated and deployed in pursuit of the objectives. Strategies themselves are complex, and there are several theories about what strategies are, how they come about and how they are enacted.

The military model of command and control assumes that power is located at the top of the organization and that orders from above will be carried out, or, if not carried out, the non-conforming behavior will suffer serious sanctions. This model is pervasive in simplistic models of organizational behavior, such as Taylor's scientific management (Taylor, 1911). It is widely recognized that this model fails to capture the complexities of the real-life situation in modern commercial organizations: even in military settings it is unlikely to be a complete description of the reality.

Many models of strategy formulation start with the hierarchical or military model in the sense that strategy is said to be developed at the top of the organization and then it is communicated to and implemented by, lower levels. At management levels just below top management we see management actions that are very clearly aligned with strategies (in a commercial situation, for example: developing new products and new markets), gradually

becoming less strategically focused, until, at the lowest levels, employees are engaged in performing tasks that are difficult to relate to strategies (such as manufacturing products or delivering goods to retail stores), even though they are essential to the successful pursuit of those strategies. Using such a model we get ideas such as the two basic organizational strategies (differentiation or cost leadership) that Porter (1980) suggests. This is intended strategy.

“There are several implicit assumptions in a hierarchical view of the strategy process: strategies are deliberate and intentional; strategies are articulated in advance of implementation; formulation is separate from implementation; strategy making is reserved for top management; and strategy equals a plan.” (Simon, 1995).

Mintzberg (1978) proposed a richer model of strategy that includes not only intended strategy, but also emergent strategy. Emergent strategy could be inferred from patterns of action, competitive position or an overall perspective as well as plan that are the summary of intended strategy.

“In this emergent, or incremental, view, strategy can emerge from all levels of the organization as individuals search for and create opportunities...Several assumptions underlie the emergent view of the strategy process: strategies are incremental and emerge over time; intended strategies are often superseded; formulation and implementation are often intertwined; strategic decisions occur throughout the organization; and strategy equals a process.” (Simon, 1995).

Management control is the

“Process by which managers influence other members of the organization to implement the organization’s strategy” (Anthony, 1988).

Given that there is a range of views about how strategy happens, it should be no surprise that there are different views about what form of control is appropriate to achieving strategy. Morgan (1986) writes that organizations may be perceived as machines, organisms and other types of system. Clearly the control system must be a good fit with the organizational variables: an organization that is seen as a machine can be effectively run by a top-down mechanistic control system, while more complex and subtle forms of organization need to be controlled through more complex and subtle control systems.

One of the earliest writers to discuss control as a variable that is distinct from variables such as structure and technology was Ouchi (1979). Ouchi proposed that the normatively correct control system would be a function of the underlying social requirements and informational requirements: where there was only a “norm of reciprocity”, market control (through the price mechanism) would be appropriate. Where there was also the existence of “legitimate authority”, then bureaucratic control (through explicit rules) would be appropriate; where there were also shared values and beliefs then clan control (through traditions and professionalism) would be the appropriate control strategy.

Simon (1995) would use a diagnostic control system to control a simple mechanistic organization but use an interactive control system to control a more complex one as well as using belief systems and boundary systems. Anthony & Govindarajan (2007) take a hierarchical view of control systems: strategic control being exercised at the top of the organization, task control being exercised and the lowest levels and management control being exercised in between the other two. Merchant & Van der Stede (2012) typifies control systems as being: action control, personnel & cultural control or results control.

Action control relies on detailed instructions and measurement of workers' actions. In order for it to be effective it is necessary that the controller understand the tasks involved (so that correct instructions can be issued) and that the actions are observable (so that it can be seen that the instructions were obeyed). Action controls are of limited usefulness where the tasks involved are only capable of being evaluated by the specialists who carry them out (such as would be the case in a research laboratory). They are also of limited usefulness where the tasks are carried out at remote geographical locations.

Personnel & cultural control relies on employing workers with appropriate skills and abilities and immersing them in a culture where performing tasks that prosecute the organization's strategy is routine. Deficiencies in skills and abilities can be rectified through training, through inculcation in a strong culture and/or through motivational processes.

Results control relies on being able to measure outputs (i.e. results) and compare them to the desired results. Organizations frequently fall back on results controls where action control and personal control are not possible.

Merchant & Van der Stede also view any control system as being applied tightly or loosely. In a tight control system the expectations are clear and unambiguous and rewards follow from achieving control norms while punishments follow from not doing so. A budget is an example of a control norm. In a tight control system failing to meet the budget results in serious sanctions. In a loose control system achieving the budget is hoped for, but failing to do so has more informational value than punitive value. Actors are expected to be doing as well as could be done, given the contingency of the circumstances.

MEDIEVAL ENGLISH MONASTERIES

A monastery is a group of monks living together with a religious purpose, the greater glory of God, pursued through an explicit strategy such as a life of contemplation. Christian monasteries have existed since early times.

"Egypt and Syria were the cradles of Christian monasticism. Monasteries emerged there in the third and fourth centuries..." (Olson, 2013).

"Within Roman Catholicism, a monk is a member of a religious order who lives a communal life in a monastery, abbey, or priory under a monastic rule of life (such as the Rule of St. Benedict). (Wikipedia: accessed October 2017).

A monk is not an ordained cleric (as would be a priest) but is a layperson who, after serving a novice, has taken certain vows and has been accepted into a monastery. For the purpose of this paper we will not distinguish between monasteries (for men) and nunneries (for women), as most of the remarks apply equally to both groups.

The earliest monasteries were established by a monk, or a group of monks, setting up their place of worship in a remote location: in the near east, this was often a desert. By the middle ages the established pattern in England was that monasteries were established by a donation from a wealthy patron and were geographically located in and around large towns and cities as well as in remoter locations. The first monastery in England was established in Canterbury in 597 A.D. (Burton, 1994). By 1,000 A.D there were about 40 monasteries in England. Prior to 1066 there were about 60 religious houses (48 monasteries of men and 12 nunneries of women) in England (Dickinson, 1961). In this paper we will look at financial and other control systems in English monasteries in the high middle ages: A.D. 1000 to 1300.

THE NORMAN INVASION

In 1066 William of Normandy successfully invaded England. The English thegns were dispossessed of their land and other holdings. William then distributed much of the land to the Norman-French lords who had fought alongside him in 1066 and who subsequently suppressed the English population.

This was done partly in reward for their past support and partly in expectation of future support. The gift of land was freely given, but it required the recipient to provide “knight service” when required. There was no standing army at that time, but in periods of war the tenant lords were expected to send specified numbers of soldiers (mounted knights, foot soldiers, arms etc.) to support the king and the kingdom. The more valuable the land holding, the greater the expectation of numbers of soldiery.

The king and his retinue could also make a “progression” through the kingdom staying at the castles of his lords at their expense. As this could be for a fairly long visit and would involve a huge retinue with high entertainment expectations, it could be a heavy burden for the lords to bear.

As a result of this redistribution of land there developed a pattern of ownership that often entailed hereditary property in France as well as newly acquired property in England and a class of lords who enjoyed considerably more wealth than had previously been the case. While they could enjoy a higher lifestyle they also had the resources to invest in more spiritual pursuits. Both kings and lords engaged in the establishment of monasteries on an unprecedented scale.

“After the Norman Conquest of 1066 not only did the scale and style of monastic building improve enormously, but the number of English monasteries...increased fantastically.” (Dickinson, 1961).

By 1300 monasteries had burgeoned to far larger numbers:

“A traveler in 1300 would have been hard put to it to find a place in (England, France, Germany and Italy) more than twenty miles from the nearest religious house: and in the richest areas...more than fifteen...” (Brooke, 2003).

While some monasteries were the recipients of relatively modest donations and could therefore support only a small number of monks, others were very richly endowed and could support over a hundred monks, as well as lay persons who were servants and tradesmen working in support of the monks.

And by the time of the dissolution of the monasteries (the late 1530s) by Henry VIII there were over a thousand monasteries in England (Dickinson, 1961).

At the height of their numbers, immediately prior to the Black Death plague in the 14th century, there would have been about 14,000 monks in England.

We can take as an example, Henry I, who wanted to set up a monastery at Reading in southern England. A priory was established in 1121 and the first abbot was appointed in 1123. The charters in the Reading monastery cartulary show the following as part of the initial endowment (the original charters are in Latin and quite long: these are summary translations):

1. Notification by King Henry I of his foundation of Reading Abbey and gift of Reading, Chelsey & Leominster with their churches and with a mint and moneyer at Reading, Thatcham and the church at Wargrave; and a grant of specified liberties and immunities. (March 1125).
2. Notification by King Henry I of his foundation of Reading Abbey and grant of all immunity, power, quittance and liberty that the royal power can confer on an abbey, with specified privileges (1127).

3. Notification by King Henry I, addressed generally for England that he had acquired from the abbot and monks of Mont St Michel the churches of Wargrave & Chosley in Berkshire in exchange for £12 worth of land which he has given them in the manor of Budleigh in Devon; and that he has given the churches in free alms to Reading Abbey. (1123).
4. Precept by King Henry I to all who have lands in the hundreds of Leominster to come to the hundreds-courts at the summons of the abbot of Reading and his ministers as fully as they used to come when the hundred was in the king's demesne. If not the abbot may distain them by judgment of the hundred-court. (1123).
5. Gift by King Henry I to Reading Abbey of the Hand of St James at the request of his daughter, the empress Matilda, who gave it to him on her return from Germany and mandate to received and treat it with all due reverence. (1127).
6. Notification by King Henry I, addressed generally for England, that he has granted Reading Abbey a fair at Reading on the feast of St Lawrence and three days following. No one shall disturb those attending it on pain of a forfeiture of £10. (1129)
7. Precept by King Henry I to the justices, sheriffs and ministers of England that the men of Reading Abbey shall be quit of shires, hundreds, tolls, passage-money and all customs and of gelds, aids, pleas and plaints. (1129).

As can be seen from the above, Reading Abbey was extremely well endowed with land, churches, rights and also the “Hand of Saint James”, an important religious artifact.

“Land was by far the most important economic resource enjoyed by the religious orders” (Burton, 1994).

When the monastery had been given a gift of land they could either work it themselves (known as a grange) or they could rent it to an outside party. If they worked the land themselves they could do so to provide their own necessities or they could do so to sell the harvest. Frequently they did some of both, using what they needed and selling the surplus. If they were farming the land themselves, then it was quite usual for the management of the activity to be put in the hands of a steward or bailiff and for the actual work to be carried out as part of tenancy obligations and/or by workers hired for the purpose.

Not only was land valuable in itself, but if it had been transferred to the monastery as a manor, it would also include manorial rights: these would include labor from tenants, profits from fairs, tolls and similar taxes.

In addition to land received by way of gift monasteries would on occasion clear and develop waste land to put it into cultivation: A process known as “assart” and one that could only be done where the monastery had license to assart it.

“In 1143 the monks (of Peterborough Abbey) received confirmation of all their assarts so far created: and twenty years later they were fined for assarting without license in four places. (Burton, 1994).

Revenue and resources also came to religious houses by other gifts, such as those of mills, fisheries, salt, pannage (pasture for pigs), timber, mining and turbarry (the right to extract turf).

The totality of rents and other revenues described above are called “temporalia” and are distinguished from “spiritualia” that were derived from control of ecclesiastical sources such as a church.

When the monastery had been given a gift of a church it could enjoy the associated revenues such as tithes from properties in that parish or patronage from the church.

In summary, the medieval monastery was likely to hold a complex portfolio of assets that would provide goods for the conventual consumption and money revenues and physical goods. It would also involve the monastery in supervision of a range of associated outgoings, such as the fees of stewards and the wages of employees. Particularly in respect of larger monasteries, where

multiple donations had taken place, these land assets could be spread throughout England and often in other countries, particularly France. As yet a further complication, dating from pre-conquest times, some French monasteries held land in England which assets may have been augmented by further donations after the conquest.

MONASTICAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Within the monastery, the monks' behavior would be governed by one of the "rules", such as the Rule of Saint Benedict. Saint Benedict of Nursia wrote his book of precepts for monks living communally under the rule of an abbot in about 529 A.D. Not only does it deal with how monks will pray and serve God, but it also details how monks will live and work together, in obedience to their superiors (such as the Dean or the Abbot) and working at manual labor. Provision is made for sleeping, eating and clothing requirements. (Wikipedia, accessed October 2017).

Other rules (such as those of Saints Augustine, Basil, Albert and Columbanus) also existed, but the differences were relatively minor and those other rules had fewer adherents in England. Celtic monasticism was quite powerful in England in pre-medieval times, centred on Lindisfarne in Northumberland (now part of England, but then an independent kingdom), but gave way to Italian monasticism (e.g. Benedictine rule) after the Synod of Whitby in 664 (Dickinson, 1961).

A monastery was a hierarchical group. The Abbot was in overall command and depending on the size and complexity of the monastery; he might have seconds-in-command, such as priors or deans.

"Abbots were simultaneously the heads of religious houses and powerful lords" (Berghofer, 2004).

Individual responsibility areas would have obedientaries specifically appointed from among the monks. These would include roles such as a claustral prior (discipline), cellarer (property, rents and revenues), sacrist (the church), precentor (liturgical books), succentor (the chant in church), novice master (novices), almoner (charity), kitchener (meals), infirmarian (the sick), chamberlain (clothing) and could there could be as many as 20 named obedientaries in a large monastery (Burton, 1994). The abbot himself could be a layperson, a monk, a priest or even a bishop.

While control within the monastery was a matter of conventual practices, a continual source of tension was where control of the abbacy lay: that is, who could appoint an abbot when a vacancy occurred. The bishop of the see in which the abbey was established in an obvious first choice, "One of the hottest issues by 1000 was episcopal control over monasteries" (Berkhofer, 2004) but several monasteries successfully claimed to have been established by higher authority and to be controlled by the pope directly.

The Order of St Benedict stated that, on a vacancy, the new abbot be elected from the monastic community, but Edward the Confessor modified that because these positions were so important: while the election still took place, appointment also required consent of the king. (Burton, 1994).

Although the Benedictine rule called for monks to observe personal poverty, the monastery itself could be collectively wealthy. In addition, there was usually a split between the assets ascribed to the monastery for the support of the monks and their associated obligations and the assets ascribed to the abbot. The abbot could be extremely wealthy. Many of the monasteries'

internal rules of operation are about whether a particular expense (for example feeding guests or the stabling of their horses) would be the responsibility of the abbot or of the monastery.

“Wenlock’s quarrel with Hadham brings out sharply the evil consequences which might flow from the division of monastic lands and revenues between the abbot and the convent, despite the great practical advantages of such a division” (Harvey, 1965).

Among the conventual assets it was commonplace for specific assets (for example a particular piece of land) to be identified as the source from which a particular obedientary (for the example the almoner) would get the resources out of which he would exercise his obligations (in the case of the almoner, giving alms and charity to the needy).

“Customarily in Benedictine houses, the officials or obedientaries controlled certain streams of income sufficient to enable them to perform their role” (Knowles, 1969).

“The subdivision of monastic revenues at Westminster may go back to the earliest days of the Confessor’s foundation. An extent written in the twelfth century shows that assignments were already made for food, alms and pittances, fires, clothes and stipends and the Maundy” (Harvey, 1965).

This was seen as possible by the recognition of the value of land in terms of its rental potential. For example Reading Charter 3 above refers to “£12 worth of land”: that is land that could be rented for £12 per year. This system works well in a stable economy, but less well in one experiencing any change in the purchasing power of money.

“The way in which English landowners sought to exploit the income-producing potential of their land varied between the broad alternatives of farming the properties or renting them out. Up to the 13th century “the bulk of [estate] income was received in the form of fixed rents” [Oldroyd & Dobie, 2009]: then for about 100 years...landowners reclaimed “the demesne and [undertook] its direct management”. The position again reversed itself during the late middle ages (the 14th and 15th centuries) as “many estates”, both lay and ecclesiastical, abandoned the direct farming of their own lands, leasing farms or even whole manors to tenants and commuting labor services for payments in money or kind (Betley, 1993)”. (Edwards, 2011).

Obviously if circumstances were to change the situation would become unmanageable. Either the office would have insufficient revenue to carry out its obligations, or it would build up unnecessary surpluses. While rents may have been at times somewhat static, other income classes, such as tithes, being a tenth part of a parish’s production, were variable, depending on how good the harvest was (Dobie, 2008) and many of the monasteries owned those tithes.

CHARTERS

Most of the records that survive that inform us about the medieval monastery are loosely referred to as charters. A charter is a written account of some event (for example a donation). They were used to authenticate a situation such as ownership of land.

Galbraith (1934) makes a strong distinction between two forms of charter:

1. A letter: which was written at the exact time of the event (such as a donation of land); a letter would be authenticated by the seal of the donor and it would form part of the “livery of seizin” that transferred ownership of the land in question; or,
2. A diploma authenticated by the sign of the cross made by the hands of the witnesses.

Berkhofer (2004) also notes the distinction between:

1. A survey: which was a summary list of land owned by a monastery,
2. A charter: which was written after an event (such as a donation of land) by a monastery to record the event having occurred,
3. A confirmation: which would be a written acknowledgement of a situation (such as ownership of land): bishops or the Pope were typical writers of confirmations.

Prior to 1000 A.D written records were less common. The monastery would have a collective memory, through its member monks and the culture was largely oral. After the Norman Conquest written records became much more frequent.

“By the twelfth century, writing and rule had become closely linked-scribal culture and accountability became mutually supporting” (Berkhofer, 2004).

As monks, wrote charters after the events to which they related and as there was no external oversight of their contents, the opportunity arose for forgery. It is widely accepted that monks made alterations to the known history of events when writing charters so that they would represent their interests more strongly.

“The vexed question of forgery can hardly be avoided in any collection of charters dating back to the first half of the twelfth century” (Hockey, 1975).

“The monks of Saint-Denis did more than simply take their old confirmation to the pope: they manufactured new ones to serve their purposes” (Berkhofer, 2014).

THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT

Saint Benedict of Nursia wrote the Rule of Saint benedict sometime between 529 A.D., when he founded the monastery of Monte Cassino and the end of his life in 547 A.D. Much of the Rule describes the form of worship, disciplinary punishments and work expectations, but for the purpose of this paper, the important chapters are as follows:

1. Qualifications of monks and abbots (Chs. 1, 2, 58, 59).
2. Internal structure of the monastery (Chs. 3, 4, 5, 21, 22, 31, 32, 63, 64, 65, 66).
3. Individual poverty and rights to food and clothing (33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 55).
4. Common responsibilities (such as hospitality to guests) (53, 56).

CONTROL SYSTEMS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH MONASTERIES

Boundary and Belief Systems

The common purpose of monks in a monastery is a good example of a belief system (Simon, 1995). Because they were all committed Christians and had pledged obedience to the abbot they were (or at least should have been) able to act with a common purpose.

The monastery walls were a physical example of a boundary system (Simon, 1995): to the extent that monks had to deal with the outside world and to the extent that they might have owned remote land assets, that boundary system was weakened. Other boundary systems would be behavioral, rather than physical: a mendicant or evangelical order, (the Black Friars, for example), would be held together and distinguished from other monks by a common vow of poverty and reliance on begging for their daily necessities. The split of monastically assets between those of the abbot and those for support of conventual activities is another example of a boundary system.

Bureaucracy/Action Controls

Bureaucratic rules (Ouchi, 1979) and other action controls (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2012) can be used effectively where the principal is both aware of the parameters of the task and can monitor the agent's actions. The Rule of Saint Bernard gives some clear evidence of action controls exercised on the monks:

1. That they observe personal poverty (but that the abbot is to supply all necessities);
2. That they are allowed individual beds;
3. That they sleep in their habits so as to be ready to rise (and pray) without delay;
4. That they are allowed two meals a day including two cooked dishes, a pound of bread and a Hemina (about half a pint) of wine, but none of the flesh of four footed animals (except for the sick or weak);
5. That they engage in daily manual labor;
6. That they are allowed adequate plain and cheap clothing for the weather and a change of clothing to allow for laundry (and better clothing while travelling).

All of the above could be monitored and enforced either directly by the abbot, or by one of his obedientaries (who were in charge of specific areas) or a dean (who would be in charge of each group of ten monks).

Punishments were laid down for both minor infractions (such as coming late to prayer) and for major infractions such as contumacy, disobedience and pride. Major infractions could be punished by progressive punishments depending on their severity and frequency and could include: a private admonition; public reproof; separation from the other brothers; and ultimately excommunication or corporal punishment.

It is clear from some of the records of "visitations" that action control was not always one hundred percent effective. Visitations occurred when a complaint was lodged and an authority figure (such as the abbot of a senior house or a bishop) travelled to the monastery and quizzed the monks about their adherence to the Rule.

For example, when Eudes Rigaud, archbishop of Rouen, made a visitation to Sacey (a dependent priory of the abbey of Marmoutier) in 1250 A.D. the monks were discovered to be sleeping on feather beds and eating meat, both of which were forbidden them (Olson, 2013).

Clan Controls/Personnel & Cultural Controls

Because the main strategic purpose of a monastery was promotion of the greater glory of God through a common process, such as a life of contemplation and because the monastery would only admit those postulants who seemed to have common purpose with the rest of the monks, there is a clear case of clan control being an appropriate control mechanism in respect of the main objective. Direct observation of the piety of novices would militate against an inappropriate person being admitted; direct observation of monks going about their ritual religious observances would monitor ongoing piety. Monks who failed to attend the regular daily services, or who might fall asleep during them. Would have sanctions applied. The most severe sanctions were physical punishment or even expulsion from the monastery.

Personnel and cultural controls (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2012) are centered on selecting suitable persons to fulfill roles within the organization. If the people are well chosen, then they will pursue the objectives of the organization's aim contemporaneously with their own.

Chapter 2 of the Rule of Saint Bernard describes the necessary qualifications for an abbot.

Chapter 58 includes a clear statement of the process of becoming a monk. First, the applicant must be an adult, as children were not to be admitted. The postulant spends a short time as a guest; then he is admitted as a novitiate; if after twelve months' probation he perseveres, then he may make his monastic vows and thereby bind himself to the monastery.

We must presume that much of the above would include testing the piety of the applicant. It is also reasonable to assume that honesty and character would be assessed at the same time and unsuitable applicants discouraged. It is not known whether or not the aptitude of monks for filling the secular duties (such as beer making, coking, marshalcy etc.) were taken into consideration when assessing the suitability of a postulant to become a monk. It is, however, reasonable to assume that on-the-job training would be available to remedy any deficiency of knowledge or skill and that once established as a monk he would be put into some role for which his talents suited him.

Results Controls

Results control (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2012) consists of comparing actual outcomes with those that were hoped for or expected. Clearly results control happens at so late a stage in the process that it cannot directly influence the activities: all it can do is report that a control has failed and suggests that corrective action be initiated to prevent its recurrence.

Visitations (referred to above) are an example of results control, initiated by someone complaining of irregular behavior. In many cases visitations would focus on the moral and spiritual activities of monks and abbots. In other cases the visitation would focus on financial issues.

"In 1280 and 1281, over a period of just a few months, Archbishop Wickwane of York (1279-85) visited twenty-three religious houses in his large diocese, and appointed delegates to investigate three others on his behalf" (Burton, 1994).

Monasteries were expected to "cut their coat according to their cloth": that is, if they were poorly endowed, they were expected to enroll a small number of monks so as not to overburden their treasuries. There were priories with as few as five monks. For many, the number of the apostles (twelve) was considered the minimum number of monks in a single house. Certainly, the fewer the number, the more the individuals would have to take on multiple duties as obedientaries, which would offend against the management principle of the separation of duties and weaken the control system. For example if a single individual were to be responsible for both collecting the rents from tenant farmers and also paying out alms and charity, there would be opportunities for cross contamination and misfeasance.

Larger monasteries would have around 70 monks and the very largest up to 150. With such numbers every activity could be separated from every other activity, increasing the level of control that became possible.

Results control practiced in modern times is largely based on accounting reports either financial statements (prepared for external users) or management accounts (prepared for use by managers within the organization). In the modern organization both types of report would be supported by the double entry bookkeeping system. While there is evidence of the double entry system being used in thirteenth century Italy (Lee, 1973), there is no record of its use in England until the 16th century (Edwards, 2011). The precursor to double entry bookkeeping was charge and discharge accounting (CDA).

“In ancient times...and much later, systems of accounting did not engage with the written word. A “visual and oral system” of exchequer accounting...originated in 12th century England...wherein the sheriff accounted for collection of the king’s revenues based on procedures that became known as CDA. It was originally made operational through the use of tallies, the checkerboard, counters, and the spoken word, arrangements which had particular attraction in a less literate society...A written system of CDA was also used for exchequer accounting purposes in the 12th century and was widely adopted by the priories and monasteries of England from the 13th century onwards (Noke, 1981; Edwards, 2011).

Edwards (2011) comments that CDA is still in use in some legal situations in both Scotland and the U.S.A.

In charge and discharge accounting (CDA) the steward is recognized as being in control of specific assets, with known values (for example, land worth £12, as mentioned earlier in the context of Reading Abbey). He would then be expected to produce the £12 at the end of the year or demonstrate good reasons why he could not. The reasons could be the failure of the tenant to pay the rent or his payment of legitimate expenses out of the rent received. The agent is charged with an expectation and discharges it by either a money payment or by evidence of incurring legitimate outgoings.

The CDA would be exercised annually in the normal course of events, but also whenever there was a change in the responsibility, such as the appointment of a new obedientary or the death of a steward.

On occasion the CDA would reveal a deficit. Minor deficits were forgiven as “condonaciones” as at Beaulieu Abbey in the late 13th century (Hockey, 1975). Sometimes even very large deficits were forgiven in this way.

The CDA account could also fail to balance because of intertemporal adjustments resulting in amounts owing being carried from one accounting period to another. Surviving CDA reports are sometimes difficult to reconcile because of these amounts owing and their cumulative effect over a number of years.

Not only was results control exercised in respect of monetary items, but physical items could also be controlled through the same process: for example at Beaulieu Abbey:

“The bakery account...is perhaps the most complicated of the whole series, since the quantities of the four grades of bread—conventual, guest house, ‘clermatin’ and family bread—in quality and quantity consumed by each individual, in grange or workshop, was accounted for in annual consumption down to half a loaf. The Christmas season provided an allowance of higher grade bread all round. As we have seen, this intricate account yields information well beyond the liveries of bread. The bran and sweepings were sent to the pigs and also to a horse kept at the smithy for working some kind of horse-mill.” (Hockey, 1975).

And these physical records were further augmented by translation into money equivalents using standard rates: an ox was valued at 13 shillings and a piglet at four pence, for example (op. cit. p.41).

CDA was further complicated during this period because of the effects of war. England and France were at war, then at peace, then at war again throughout the middle ages. English kings at various times forbade English monasteries remitting money or goods to their French mother houses and we can only expect that French kings did likewise. This would result in the buildup of unremitted resources on both sides of the channel and a failure to balance the CDA without recourse to recognizing these assets and liabilities. Monasteries that came under the direct control of a French mother-house were called alien priories.

“It was the financial tie that involved the alien priories in a whole sea of troubles with the English Government starting in the late years of the thirteenth century. This was because, from this time onwards, the English and French were long at loggerheads, a rivalry which soon flared up into the Hundred Years War. War is expensive and, at an early stage, vigorous protests were made against the existence of alien priories which were liable to send money to France, the land of the enemy. Though the total amount must have been small, it was understandable that government action should be taken to prevent its transfer. On several occasions in the very late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the English crown took control of these alien priories” (Dickinson, 1961).

English kings also, at various times, recognized the problem of English monasteries which had French mother houses being populated with French monks and even having French nationals as abbots. To prevent spying and aiding the enemies of the state French monks were not allowed to live within twenty miles of the sea.

War was also waged between England and Wales: In 1212 King John ordered the destruction of Strata Florida, a Welsh monastery, as a punishment for its harboring England’s enemies. (Burton, 1994).

Results control is another way of expressing Ouchi’s “market control” through price mechanisms (Ouchi, 1979).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Control systems in the medieval English monastery in the period 1000 to 1300 represent turning points on a number of fronts, including the following:

1. The massive change in land-holdings and lordship obligations after the Norman conquest;
2. The substantial increase in the number of monks and monasteries;
3. The increase in remote land holdings;
4. The shift from an oral culture to a written one;
5. A greater appetite for results control and accountability generally.

It is disappointing that so many of the records of this period have failed to survive (witness the use of medieval tallies are firewood in the recent past), but the records that have survived paint a vivid picture of how the business of the monasteries was carried out.

The control systems that we see in place in Medieval English Monasteries have clear parallels with the control systems that modern authors write about in respect of contemporary organizations, both in the business world and in the not-for-profit sector. It is perhaps remarkable the Rule of St Benedict so clearly enunciated control principles that applied then as now, 600 years later.

The control systems described in this paper represent a “moment in time”. Prior to the Norman invasion, monasteries were few and many were too poor to do anything but engage in basic survival. During the high Middle Ages monasteries burgeoned and they became a major economic and religious force. For example, the main export commodity of England was, at that time, wool. It has been estimated that land owned by monasteries produced as much as half the wool produced in England.

Between 1536 and 1541 Henry VIII dissolved the 900 or so monasteries and other religious houses of England, which, at the time, housed as many as 2% of the English population (Bernard, 2011). The monastic assets were then redistributed to his courtiers and to pay for foreign wars. Thus their control systems were no longer of any relevance.

Further study of this interesting topic could include in-depth analysis of specific monasteries records, to see how the general principles described in this paper were enacted in individual situations.

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