

CSR, Sustainability, Ethics & Governance

Series Editors: Samuel O. Idowu · René Schmidpeter

Günter Müller-Stewens
Notker Wolf *Editors*

Leadership in the Context of Religious Institutions

The Case of Benedictine Monasteries

 Springer

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Series Editors

Samuel O. Idowu, London Metropolitan University, London, United Kingdom

René Schmidpeter, Cologne Business School, Cologne, Germany

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Editors

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Editors

Günter Müller-Stewens
IFB Institute of Management
University of St. Gallen
St. Gallen, Switzerland

Notker Wolf
Archabbey of Sankt Ottilien
St. Ottilien, Germany

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Foreword

Dear friends,

It is both amazing and wonderful that the *Rule of St. Benedict* has enabled men and women to navigate a monastic life through the centuries. While it is about 1500 years old, it gives a rule of life that is still applicable today. St. Benedict showed himself to be a master for understanding the blessings and the pitfalls of life in common. He recognized both the strengths and the weaknesses of the members of his community, and his *Rule* takes them into account. His wisdom can be expressed in two words: moderation and balance. While he uses the Gospel and the Scriptures as his guide, he also has a wonderful sense of the needs and aspirations of the human person.

For those who live under the *Rule of St. Benedict*, they are subject to the changes of cultures and historical developments. Changes always carry with them new challenges to balance transition with fidelity.

To assist our brothers and sisters who carry responsibilities in their communities to cope with these challenges, Sant'Anselmo—in cooperation with the School of Business and Management at the University of St. Gallen—provides a two-week seminar which is held in Rome at Sant'Anselmo. While the participants know the mission, tradition, and goals of their monastic communities, they also see how to use tools and frameworks from other organizations outside the monastic world which are fruitful, life-giving rules of leadership and education.

About 150 monks, nuns, and sisters who live under the *Rule of St. Benedict* have participated in this program, and the responses to what they have learnt have borne much fruit in their communities and an overwhelming expression of gratitude for having participated in the program. They learn that they are not alone in their challenges, and other participants share in the same issues and problems. This program provides an opportunity to exchange and to seek the best possible practices for their own communities. This booklet summarizes a bit of the lessons learnt from these courses of the *Leadership and the Rule of St. Benedict* program over the past

5 years. This program has given men and women in the monastic world the chance to learn and to adapt their tradition and spirit in new and vibrant ways. I am happy to share this information with you.

Abbot Primate of the Benedictine
Confederation
Sant'Anselmo, Rome, Italy

Abbot Gregory J. Polan, O.S.B.

Preface

There are many books in the market where Benedictine monks or nuns advise managers from the secular world how they can take advantage of the *Rule of St. Benedict* to improve their own leadership. But this book is the other way around. Here we talk about possibilities and limitations in transferring knowledge and tools from the corporate world to manage a monastery or another type of religious institution.

The book is the outcome of a small symposium held at the Archabbey of St. Ottilien in Germany on March 18–20, 2018. The topic of the symposium was leadership development in the context of religious institutions.

In Part I of this book, we reflect on leadership in a more generic way. What are the specificities for managing and being a leader in religious institutions? What are the requirements, possibilities, and limitations? And can the governance of abbeys be improved by using tools and frameworks from the corporate world? And vice versa: can experiences gained in the governance of such long-standing institutions like Benedictine abbeys be transferred to the secular world?

In Part II, we summarize and reflect our experiences of running the course “Leadership and the Rule of St. Benedict (LRB)” for 5 years (2013–2017) at the Benedictine University of Sant’Anselmo in Rome, which was conducted in cooperation with the University of St. Gallen. About 150 abbesses and abbots, priors and prioresses, cellarers, and other Benedictine nuns and monks from all continents gathered to grapple with questions about the management of monasteries. Very specific here is that all course modules were taught in a unique co-teaching approach: an expert from the secular world and an experienced leader from the monastic world combined their knowledge and presented it together to the participants.

In Part III, we look to the future: what will be expected from leaders in the future? Very experienced leaders from the Benedictine world give us their views on future challenges leaders are faced with and the capabilities needed to cope with these challenges. The fourth part is a summary of the final discussion and conclusions we reached at the symposium.

Of course, the observations and conclusions are the result of the interpretations of insiders and outsiders of the monastic world, and the recommendations we make are formulated with the utmost regard and respect to the organization, and they are not made from the perspective of being the “wise guys.” By publishing this report we wish to share our learning and insights taken from the Benedictine community, because we think they can be helpful for other clerical institutions as input to their own discussions on leadership.

In over 5 years working together on the LRB course, the people involved held lengthy and very engaged discussions on the subject. We all learned a lot about and from “the other side” (monastery versus university), and—last but not least, we had a lot of fun working together and made friends. Therefore, we are very grateful for the time spent together. The “outsiders” always felt the spirit of Benedictine hospitality. The LRB years were important years in our life, which nobody wants to miss.

Our sincere thanks for making this book possible go first to all the participants of our LRB courses. Their open-mindedness helped us a lot to gain a better understanding of their needs. And we will never forget the warmhearted atmosphere in the classroom—in spite of the hard work. Secondly, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to the organizations and people who supported the courses with their personal backing and with financial resources. These are internal supporters like AIM or some congregations, or external benefactors, particularly the Foundation Benedict, the Alois und Jeanne Jurt Stiftung foundation, and the international philanthropic organization Porticus. Our sincere thanks also go to Pater Markus Muff who supported the project from the beginning and managed the donor relations with great professionalism and empathy.

St. Gallen, Switzerland
St. Ottilien, Germany
November 2018

Prof. em. Dr. Günter Müller-Stewens
Abbot Primate em. Notker Wolf OSB

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List of Contributors

Fr. John Braganza OSB Abbot, Westminster Abbey in Mission, Mission, BC, Canada

Prof. em. Dr. Thomas S. Eberle Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. Birgit Feldbauer-Durstmüller Chair of Controlling and Consulting at the Johannes Kepler University of Linz, Linz, Austria

Fr. Luigi Gioia OSB Research Associate of the Von Hügel Institute, St. Edmund's College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Dr. Erwin Hettich Manager Venturing and Ecosystems at Helvetia AG, Basel, Switzerland

Sr. Franziska Lukas OSB St. Scholastica Abbey, Dinklage, Germany

Fr. Markus Muff OSB Director of Development for Europe, Sant'Anselmo, Rome, Italy

Prof. em. Dr. Günter Müller-Stewens Professor Emeritus of Strategic Management at the University of St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland

Fr. Maximilian Neulinger OSB Abbot, Benedictine Abbey of Lambach, Lambach, Austria

Fr. Gregory J. Polan OSB Abbot Primate, Sant'Anselmo, Rome, Italy

Simon Sandberger Assistant at the Chair of Controlling and Consulting at the Johannes Kepler University of Linz, Linz, Austria

Jeremias Schröder OSB Benedictine Congregation of Sankt Ottilien, St. Ottilien, Germany

Sr. Ulrike Soegtrop OSB St. Scholastica Abbey, Dinklage, Germany

Sr. Ruth Mary Starman OSB She is assistant Prioress General Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, OH, USA

Fr. Ansgar Stüfe OSB Chairman of the auditing council, Muensterschwarzach Abbey, Schwarzach am Main, Germany

Prof. Dr. Jean-Paul Thommen Professor of Management and Organization, University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

Fr. Dr. Mauritius Wilde OSB Prior, Sant'Anselmo, Rome, Italy

Fr. Notker Wolf OSB Abbot Primate Emeritus, Archabbey of St. Ottilien, St. Ottilien, Germany

Part I

Managing in a Monastic Context

Each kind of organization has to be managed. The way it can be done depends on the tasks an organization has to fulfil. On the one hand the leaders in an organization have options in the decisions they make; on the other hand these options are partly limited and predetermined by the context the organization is embedded in.

Of course, the context of institutions of the church is very specific, and even more specific is the monastic context. However, monasteries also have to be managed and organized. Their leaders have to differentiate into various responsibilities and integrate these. This means that the quality of leadership matters regarding the sustainability of a monastery.

This book is based on experiences in the monastic context of the Benedictine Confederation. The history of the Benedictines starts with Benedict of Nursia (480-547 AD). With the Rule of St. Benedict (RB), Benedict created a basis for the community that is still alive today. Currently, about 7500 Benedictine monks and 16,500 Benedictines nuns live in about 800 independent communities on all continents; in addition there are smaller, dependent houses and communities. In recent years, the Benedictine membership in some parts of the world, like Europe, has declined significantly; but in other parts of the world, its communities have grown.

Many monastic institutions have existed for many centuries. They have had to manage many ups and downs in history. Some monasteries had to close their doors, new ones were founded. And there are amazing places, like St. Maurice in Switzerland, which has operated for more than 1500 years without interruption! The monks live there under the Rule of St. Augustine. After all, monastic institutions have left us a very rich cultural heritage.

Markus Muff describes in the first chapter how specific the monastic context is. Work plays an important role in such a community: Work is participating in God's creation. Work is serving the needy and is a remedy for indolence. Benedictine monasteries are obligated to be largely economically self-sufficient. A monastic community's economic activities should provide for its maintenance. In addition, the proceeds of this work should also care for the needy and the poor. The Benedictines are therefore not only active in spiritual and pastoral fields, but also in cultural,

charitable, and economic areas. Nevertheless, monasteries were not established as industrial enterprises. Benedictines should not favour anything above divine worship, not even work. The search for God goes on during prayer and work, and reading of Scripture nourishes this search (“ora et labora et lege”). They don’t need to aspire to the greatest possible efficiency and effectiveness. If they earn something that is fine and the available skills should also be put to good use. But the aim is not to accumulate wealth or acquire property, but profound growth, in the love of each other and of God.

Like any other organization, orders also have to adjust their way of managing to cope with the changing environment. Although they live behind the walls of the monastery, these walls are becoming more and more permeable (e.g. the impact of the internet). Some are doing this by looking for ways to transfer management knowledge and tools from the corporate world. But such “managerialism” has clear limits. If they are not perceived and respected it puts the monastic community in danger. In the second chapter, *Günter Müller-Stewens and Luigi Gioia* reflect, based on the experiences of the LRB course, on the possibilities and limitations of using knowledge of management science in the context of the church. They see a clear danger for doing too much of this managerialism; to find the right measure it takes a lot of sensibility towards the specific context. More specifically, in the third chapter *Günter Müller-Stewens, Markus Muff and Thomas S. Eberle* share in a field report their observations about the managerial challenges Benedictine monasteries are faced with. They come to the conclusion that leaders should put more trust in the use of management systems to make their own operations more efficient and effective, and to get more time for contemplation.

In the fourth chapter *Birgit Feldbauer-Durstmüller, Simon Sandberger und Maximilian Neulinger* take a historical view on the development of the Benedictine Confederation. They use data about the lifespan of Benedictine abbeys and reflect on the reasons why they are such long-lasting and stable institutions, compared for example with the average lifespan of corporations. They ask if there are any unique governance mechanisms that can explain this longevity which might be useful in the secular world. However, they are sceptical regarding the possibilities for direct best practice transfers. In spite of this, they recommend studying the Benedictines leadership principles to encourage new thinking about corporate leadership.

In the last chapter of this Part I, *Notker Wolf*, the Abbot Primate Emeritus of the Benedictines, issues a strong plea regarding the need for continuing education in leadership. But he also identifies major challenges in convincing the leaders in doing and implementing it. There is still the widespread assumption that we do not need it, or we can do it by ourselves. He also refers to the huge variety of the Benedictine communities: Some places are flourishing astonishingly, others are in decline. It means there is hope—even in tough times.

A Monastery Is More than a Business: Spiritual Foundations of the Rule of St. Benedict for the ‘Oikonomia’ of a Monastery



Markus Muff

Abstract This chapter describes how specific the monastic context is. Work plays an important role in such a community: Work is participating in God’s creation. Work is serving the needy and is a remedy for indolence. Benedictine monasteries are obligated to be largely economically self-sufficient. A monastic community’s economic activities should provide for its maintenance. In addition, the proceeds of this work should also care for the needy and the poor. The Benedictines as such are not only active in spiritual and pastoral fields, but also in cultural, charitable, and economic areas. Nevertheless, monasteries were not established as industrial enterprises. Benedictines should not favour anything above divine worship, not even work. The search for God transpires during prayer and work, and the reading of Scripture nourishes this search (“ora et labora et lege”). Monks do not need to aspire to the greatest possible efficiency and effectiveness. Earning something is fine, and the available skills also should be put to good use. However, the aim is not to accumulate wealth or acquire property, but profound growth, in the love of each other and of God.

1 Initiators and 10 Years of Work

Memories are always one of those things. Well at least my personal memories tend to become tinged, and this probably intensifies gradually over the years. So my memories of the first discussions about the leadership course are shaped by frequent and long conversations with Georg Holzherr, longstanding abbot of the large Einsiedeln Abbey. But Alois Jurt from Monaco was also very interested early on and later supported the courses financially as well.

The fundamental question was how Benedictine monks and nuns can be motivated in management responsibility to undertake continuing education in business administration matters. For us, it appeared as though there are methods and techniques in business administration that could simplify or at least improve the structure

M. Muff (✉)

Director of Development for Europe, Sant’Anselmo, Rome, Italy

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