

Size isn't everything



In 1667 the Treaty of Breda brought an end to the second war between England and the Netherlands. One of the provisions formally recognised what had, by then, become evident, that the occupation by the English of Dutch colonies in North America and by the Dutch of an English island in the Far-East, was liable to be permanent. The background behind this exchange of claims is explained in Giles Milton's book "Nathaniel's Nutmeg"¹ so I guess is fairly well known.

If you'd discussed this swap with those involved I'm sure they would all agree that the Dutch got the better end of the deal. At the time everyone knew that colonies in North America were expensive, hard to maintain and generally a drain on a country's hard pushed finances. Sugar and spices were the financial powerhouses of 17th century economies, that was where

fortunes were being made. As a result the Dutch were focused on keeping their sugar factories in Surinam and maintaining their monopoly in nutmeg. Investment in the scrubby farmland and trading posts of North America was obviously never going to compete with that. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that allowing the English to keep New Amsterdam (soon to be renamed as New York) had a much greater influence in the course of history. In the 17th century it was clear that Manhattan was an expensive liability, the nutmegs of Run were "obviously" much more valuable. In the 21st century we would assess the relative merits slightly differently and Manhattan would "obviously" be the more attractive of the two to control.

It is an interesting coincidence that the island of Manhattan is about the same physical size as the island of Pulau Run (which it was, sort of, exchanged for). Of course, we all know history is about details, the story of Manhattan cannot be explained by focusing solely on a single measurement, such as its area. In the same way, of course, the data handling in an oil company cannot be completely expressed by any single metric. If forced to pick just one number then my first choice would be the data management maturity. However, in the same way that the area of Manhattan only gives some hints about living there, the overall maturity measure of an oil company's processes just provides vague clues to the key issues that they face. Extending the maturity metric, for example, to independently assess each of the DAMA functions helps provide more perspective, a richer picture comes closer to the truth.

¹ This interesting book tracks the career of one Nathaniel Courthope in the Banda Islands, the exchange of Run for Manhattan is really a footnote that occurs well after the rest of the tale. I would recommend it.