

## Gods Of Management

Charles Handy, in "Gods of Management", attempts to classify four distinct management cultures that exist within all organizations. He uses the ancient Greek gods to symbolize these management cultures or philosophies. There are four types of management cultures or philosophies present within all organizations. The four cultures are the club (Zeus), role (Apollo), task (Athena), and existential (Dionysus) cultures.

The first culture Handy discusses is the club or **Zeus** culture. He uses a spider web to represent the club culture. "[T]he lines radiating out from the centre" represent "divisions of work based on functions or products" (Handy p14). The most important lines however "are the encircling [lines], the ones that surround the spider in the middle, for these are the lines of power and influence, losing importance as they go farther from the centre. The relationship with the spider matters more in this culture than does any formal title or position description" (Handy p14). Handy also maintains that this type of culture is excellent for "speed of decisions" (Handy p15). However, because of its speed, quality is dependent upon Zeus and his inner circle. This results in an emphasis being placed upon the selection and succession of Zeus. The club culture achieves its speed through empathy. This in turn leads to very little documentation within the organization and face-to-face meetings between Zeus and his subordinates or contacts. Furthermore, this culture is dependent upon networks of "friendships, old boys, and comrades" (Handy p16). Because of the high level of trust, this type of organization is cheap to operate. The only costs incurred in this type of organization are those of phone and travel expenses. In essence, these types of organizations value the individual, give him or her free rein, and reward their efforts.

The second type of culture that Handy discusses is the role or **Apollo** culture. This type of culture bases its approach on the definition of the role or the job to be done. The symbol used to represent this type of culture is a Greek temple. The pillars of the temple represent the functions and divisions in an organization. "The pillars are joined managerially only at the top, the pediment, where the heads of the functions and divisions join together to form the board, management committee, or president's office" (Handy p44). Besides being joined at the pediment, the pillars are also connected through rules and procedures. This type of organization looks to the past in order to predict the future, based on the assumption that tomorrow will be like yesterday. This then allows the organization to examine and pull apart yesterday in order to formulate improved rules and procedures. "Stability and predictability are assumed and encouraged" (Handy p45). The role or set of duties is fixed in the Apollo culture. Furthermore, in this type of organization, efficiency is determined upon meeting deadlines and standard objectives. Exceeding the objectives or beating the deadlines does not lead to reward but rather a re-evaluation the institutions goals and objectives. This in turn results in very little initiative among the employees. According to Handy, some typical examples of the role or Apollo culture are "life insurance companies, civil service, state industries, and local government" (Handy p47). Furthermore, apollonian cultures abhor change. Generally an apollonian response to a change in the environment would be to first ignore it and then usually do more of what they were already doing. "Role cultures respond to drastic changes in the environment (changing consumer preferences, new technologies, new funding sources) by setting up a lot of cross-functional liaison groups to hold the structure together. If these measures don't work, the management will fall, or the whole temple will collapse in merger, bankruptcy, or a consultants' reorganization" (Handy p48).

The next type of organization is the task or **Athena** culture. This type of organization basically views management "as being basically concerned with the continuous and successful solution of problems" (Handy p70). The management accomplishes this by first locating or finding the problem. After locating the problem, appropriate resources are given to solve the problem and waits for the results. In this type of organization, performance is judged by the results or problems solved. The symbol used for the task culture is a net. According to Handy, these types of organizations draw resources from various parts of the organization in order to solve a problem. In this type of culture, "power lies at the interstices of the net" and is a "network of loosely linked commando units, each unit being largely self-contained but having a specific responsibility within an overall strategy" (Handy p72). In the Athena culture, expertise in a specific field is the source for one's power or influence. For example he states that "[t]o

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contribute to your group, you need talent, creativity, a fresh approach, and new intuitions. It is a culture where youth flourishes and creativity is at a premium" (Handy p72). However, Handy asserts that task cultures are expensive organizations to run and supports his assertion by noting that these types of organizations are staffed by experts who demand their market worth. Furthermore, he maintains that these experts discuss in excess the problems an organization faces, which results in costing the organization a large quantity of money. Also he states that some problems are not solved the first time around, so there is a need to experiment which results in some errors and those errors also cost the organization money. This leads Handy to conclude that these types of organizations "tend to flourish in times of expansion, when the products, technologies, or services are new or when there is some sort of cartel arrangement that provides a price floor" (Handy p74). However, he also contends that a task culture comes into difficult times when the organization needs to make the solutions permanent or routine, and that the cost of maintaining the culture seems excessively expensive. Furthermore, Handy asserts that the lives of task cultures are short. To support his assertion, he states that "if [organizations] are successful, they will grow big, and to pay their way will take on a lot of routine or maintenance work, which requires Apollonian structures" (Handy p74). In essence, this leads to the transformation of a task culture into that of a role culture.

The last type of culture or philosophy that Handy discusses is the existential or **Dionysus** culture. In an existential culture, the organization exists to help the individual achieve his purpose. This is in contrast to the other three types of cultures where the individual is there to help the organization achieve its purpose. The symbol Handy uses for this type of culture is a cluster of individual stars loosely gathered in a circle. The members of this type of organization are not interdependent and thus do not cause an organizational change if one or more members leave the organization. In this type of organization, management is considered a chore. Furthermore, a manager is considered the lowest status in such organizations. Furthermore, in a Dionysus culture, the manager can only manage by consent, and every individual has the right of veto, so that any coordinated effort becomes a matter of endless negotiation. An example Handy gives of a Dionysus culture is a university. A university is an existential culture in that "there are no sanctions that can be used against [the] [professors], [and] [d]ismissal, money perks, or punishment are all outside the jurisdiction of the leader" (Handy p97). Furthermore he states that these decisions are made by a "group of equals" and not by an individual. In essence, Handy asserts that the Dionysus culture is becoming more prevalent in society. He states that "[t]here is a growing band of "new professionals", individuals who define themselves according to their trade, not just doctors and lawyers, but now also the "systems analyst," "research scientist," "public relations adviser," and "consultant"" (Handy p100). Furthermore, Handy asserts that these types of people view themselves as independent professionals who have temporarily lent their services or skills to an organization. Most people who belong to this culture are "young and usually talented and can command an open market salary and reputation" (Handy p102).

In essence, Handy argues that in order for a manager to be successful, the manager must first be aware of the different organizational cultures that exist within his or her organization. Once a manager is aware of the different cultures present in an organization, the manager may be effective as a liaison between the different cultures, thereby eliminating slack or inefficiency.

### **Bibliography**

Charles Handy, *Gods of Management: The changing work of organizations*, Oxford University Press, 1995