Charles Handy's Gods of Management

Charles Handy's[1] model of culture is based on the way in which organisations are structured. It is important to remember that a single organisation may have more than one of these cultures because parts of the organisation may be structured differently and because of different occupational/professional cultures. Handy uses the Greek gods as metaphors for his cultural types because each god represented a particular trait or set of values.

- Zeus is the god representing the *power* or *club* culture. Zeus is a dynamic entrepreneur who rules with snap decisions. This culture is based on personalities with power and influence coming from a central source, usually the founder or leader. Organisations with this culture are usually small and informal and are capable of adapting quickly to changing circumstances. However the success of the organisation depends on the luck or judgement of key individuals. These organisations are really clubs of like-minded people where personal contact is more important than formal liaison. An ACL provider, led by a dominant Head of Service who has recruited individuals on the same wavelength to key positions, may have elements of this culture.

- Apollo represents the *role* or *bureaucracy* culture. The underlying presumption is logic and rationality. Apollo organisations have formal structures and well defined rules and procedures. The structure defines the authority and responsibility of individual managers. Fulfilling the requirements of a job description is important, but individuals must remain within the boundaries of their authority. The Apollo approach works well for large organisations, with predictable work in a stable environment. You would expect the payroll section in a large organisation to work this way. The task, time frame and rules and procedures are clear and the result is that people are paid on time. The downside of Apollo organisations is that they can be inflexible and are generally slow to adapt to change. Some local authority providers feel that they are part of a large bureaucracy with a strong focus on rules, procedures and standardisation.

- Athena is the goddess of the *task* culture. Management is seen as completing a series of projects or solving problems. Task cultures usually have matrix structures or are organised as project teams. The principal concern is to get the job done and performance is judged by results. The ability to accomplish a particular task is more important than formal status. Task cultures depend on variety and creativity which requires a tolerance of

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[1] Handy, C (1995), *Gods of Management, the Changing Work of Organisations,* Oxford, Oxford University Press

mistakes. These organisations are flexible and constantly changing with project teams being disbanded and new ones formed. This culture is suitable for organisations (or parts of them) which are concerned with problem solving and short one-off exercises. There is a conflict between the desire to see results in meeting targets (task culture) and the way accountability is being enforced through procedures, returns etc. (bureaucracy). The leader's role is to strike an appropriate balance between these competing demands.

- Dionysus is the god of *existential* culture. In the three other cultures, the individual is subordinate to the organisation or the task. An existential culture is found in an organisation whose purpose is to serve the interests of the individuals within it. True existential cultures are rare although many professional practices come very close. These organisations are characterised by management having lower status than professional work. Management can only happen with the consent of the managed and the organisation's success depends on the talent of the individuals. Occupational/professional culture is dominant here and in the past many education professionals, among others, found it difficult to accept the need for any form of management.

Handy advocates a 'best fit' approach to organisational culture. The most effective organisations have an appropriate fit between the individuals, the type of work, the environment and the culture. This implies that changes in the work or the environment may lead to a requirement for culture change as well.