

# gods of management



characteristics	
author:	Handy, Charles B.
country:	United Kingdom
period:	1978
type:	model
role:	consultant, change agent, coach and manager
activity:	analyse and reflect
topic:	leadership & management and culture & internationalisation
abstr. level:	organisation
perspective:	living
status:	final
module:	classics I
comments:	2

## description:

The British management writer, Charles Handy, classified organisational culture by the power of individuals' roles and functions within an organisation. He identified four archetypes:

### 1. ZEUS

or Club Culture. Power is concentrated in the hands of one individual, the top boss. Control radiates from the centre's use of personal contacts over procedures. The most powerful person dominates the decision making process. Proximity to the boss is vitally important as he frequently uses his network of friendships and old boys. Decisions are made quickly, but their quality depends almost entirely on Zeus and his inner circle. The Club culture's administration is small as are its costs. Investment banks and brokerage firms reflect organisations with a dominant club culture.

### 2. APOLLO

or Role Culture. A strong role culture places a premium on order and efficiency. Power is hierarchical and clearly defined in the company's job descriptions. Decision making occurs at the top of the bureaucracy. An apollonian response to a change in the environment generally starts by ignoring changes in circumstances, and by relying on the existing set of routines. Life insurance companies reflect an Apollonian organisation.

### 3. ATHENS

or Task Culture. Power is derived from the expertise required to complete a task or project. The work, itself, is the leading principle of coordination. Decision making occurs through meritocracies. Employees move frequently from one project or group to another. Task culture fosters a high level of adaptation and innovation by emphasising talent, youth and team problem-solving, although excessive individual independence can lead to irresponsibility. Task cultures are expensive organisations that require highly paid experts driven to analyse organisational problems in depth. High cost drives organisations to construct routines and adopt a greater Apollonian work mode. Task cultures are often short lived. Ad agencies and consultancies reflect a dominant Athenian culture.


### 4. DIONYSIUS

or Existential Culture. Organisations exist for individuals to achieve their goals. Employees see themselves as independent professionals who have temporarily lent their services or skills to the organisation. Management is considered an unnecessary counterweight and given the lowest status. Decision making occurs by consent of the professionals. The Dionysius culture can lead to poisonous, ideological wars among its professionals. Universities and professional service firms reflect the dominant Dionysian culture.

Handy had no preference for any of the four archetypes since they co-exist in most organisations. To reflect his point of view, he named the four cultures after ancient Greek gods who were worshipped simultaneously.

The Handy model helps consultants and managers become aware of the different cultures within the client organisation. Effective interventions must aim at striking a balance between the four cultures while remaining faithful to an organisation's dominant culture.

## assets:

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## pros:

- All the archetypes are equal in value. Organisations are not homogeneous consisting of multiple and competing forces. Organisations tend to subdivide into groups, each of which subdivides into the four archetypes as do the individuals who compose them. An effective organisation learns to build bridges between different forces. Handy's model can be used on an organisational, group and individual level.
- It provides a framework to help decide the scope and composition of an effective set of interventions. A dominant culture is based on the organisation's size, rate of change, production mode and type of people -- the larger the organisation, the greater the need for Apollonian measures; the higher the rate of change, the more Athenian measures are required; when a singular, unique product (such as a satellite) is built, people focused interventions are preferred over system oriented interventions. The staff's composition and habits are critical to the successful implementation of changes.

## cons:

- The model provides insight, but is not prescriptive.
- The quality of assessment is based on the observer's maturity, skill and experience.

## references:

• Organizations

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/013016559X?ie=UTF8&tag=provenmodels-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=013016559X>  
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• Understanding Organizations

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Charles B. Handy • 1976 • Penguin • United Kingdom • ISBN 0140156038