

## Gods of Management by Charles Handy

Every large organization is made up of a number of cultures. In a hospital there will be a number of distinct cultures. This makes management very difficult and requires managers to be able to adapt and apply different solutions to similar problems with different groups within the organization.

For example a process for cleaning a hallway is easy to define, easy to implement and compliance by a unionized or non unionized staff only requires attention to detail.

The process of administering pills to patients can be regimented and implemented by a trained nurse and so much as the nurse has the observational skills, experience and care of her profession can be depended upon to diligently follow the process.

The same is true of technologists, nurse practitioners and other technical staff in the hospital. The greatest management challenge comes from doctors who see themselves as consenting to be managed, and sees management as having a lower status and than themselves. They tend to see the organization as serving them and resist the infringement of process controls, measurement or supervision of any kind.

The consent of the managed is always required, and a culture should be based not on the requirements of the managed but on the requirements of the customer / market / and in this case patients. The solving of the problem of disease, and the success rate of that activity should mandate the way the organization is structured.

As the organization defines the cultures based on job functions and political considerations and develops processes and metrics it becomes more capable. While every specialist sees their role as unique and full of tricks of the trade, this is exactly where errors happen. Handy uses the Greek gods as metaphors for his cultural types because each god represented a particular trait or set of values.

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The metaphorical gods are identified as Zeus, Apollo, Athena and Dionysus. The challenge for hospital administrators would be balancing Apollo cultures of technicians and nurses with the Athena culture of specialists and surgeons with the Dionysian culture of a doctor who should be in a private practice.

- **Zeus** is the god of the club culture., the 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. Small and informal they adapt quickly to change. **Success depends on the luck and judgment of individuals.**

- **Apollo** is the bureaucracy culture. Logic, rationality, well defined rules and procedures. The structure defines the authority and responsibility of managers. The Apollo approach works well for large organizations, with predictable work in a stable environment. **You would expect payroll to work this way, inflexible and slow to change.**

- **Athena**; the goddess of the task culture. Management is seen as solving problems usually in project teams. Performance is judged by results more than status. Task cultures depend on creativity and are more flexible. This culture is suitable for parts of organizations which are concerned with problem solving and short one-off exercises. Conflict will develop between meeting targets (task culture) and accountability and procedures. (bureaucracy). **The leader's must strike a balance between competing demands.**

- **Dionysus** is the god of existential culture whose purpose is to serve those within it. A small professional practice would come very close. Management has a lower status and can only happen with the consent of the managed. Many in this culture find it **difficult to accept the need for any form of management.**