HANDY'S FOUR TYPES OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Management Models

>> INTRODUCTION

In *Understanding Organisations*, Charles Handy identified four basic "cultures" that organisations typically embrace. These are associated with ancient Gods as a means of enhancing comprehension by personifying organisational characteristics:

>> HOW CAN THIS HELP ME?

Think about which model best describes your organisation. Perhaps you can see elements of more than one culture? What about your competitor or partner organisations? Understanding the prevailing culture in your own and other organisations can be of particular use when considering issues around decision making and change management.

>> ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Understanding organisations, Charles Handy.
Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993

Charles Handy: understanding the changing organisation (CMI management thinker 010)

>> THE MODEL

Role Culture: This is personified as Apollo, the God of Order and Rules, represented by a Greek temple. Such organisations are based on the assumptions that people are rational; and that roles can be defined and discharged with clearly defined procedures.

They display stability, certainty and have great strength in situations marked by continuity; they often display weakness in adapting to, or generating, change.

Power Culture: This is represented (metaphorically) by Zeus, the strong leader who has, likes and uses power, and graphically by a spider's web.

All lines of communication lead, formally or informally, to the leader. Such organisations display strength in speed of decision making, their potential weakness lying in the calibre of the "one man bands" running them.

Task Culture: This is likened to Athena, the Goddess of Knowledge and is found in organisations where management is concerned with solving a series of problems.
The structure is represented by a net, resources being drawn from all parts of the organisation to meet the needs of current problems. Working parties, sub-committees, task forces and study groups are formed on an ad-hoc basis to deal with problems. This type of culture is seen to advantage when flexibility is required.

Person Culture: This is represented by Dionysus, the God of Wine and Song. Organisations characterised by these cultures are those where the organisation exists to serve the individual and where individuals are not servants of the organisation. They consist of groups of professionals, for example doctors or lawyers, with no "boss". Co-ordination may be provided by a committee of peers. Such structures are becoming more common as more conventional organisations increasingly contract out work to professionals and specialists whose services are used only as and when required.

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