Charles Handy 1

# Organizing the Culture

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*The culture of an organization — the way it works and what
I people believe about it — has a major effect on performance
and overall results. Identify the dominant culture of your
organization, using the Handy-based questionnaires set out
in this masterclass. Then seek to balance the cultural mix to
obtain maximum effectiveness from everyone.*

**UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURES**

Handy identified four cultural patterns, each characterized by a different Greek god.
Most organizations are dominated by one of the three cultural patterns below. The fourth
culture, ruled by Dionysus, is that of the individual, and its followers are not interested
in organization or in organized cultures.

> **THE THREE TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**
>
> 1   Power - ruled by Zeus
>
> 2   Role - ruled by Apollo
>
> 3   Task - ruled by Athena

Each Handy culture has its particular strengths. The personal power of Zeus-dominance can
work wonderfully well even in large companies — given the right father figure. But larger
companies also require the order and control that Apollo's role culture embodies, with
its emphasis on systems, routines, and predictability. In today's fast-moving environment
both Zeus and Apollo find the Athenian task-orientated approach increasingly essential.

**FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE**

Achieving the right balance between Handy's gods involves countering the excesses that all
three cultures can easily develop — respectively, autocracy, bureaucracy,
and disintegration. A successful mix will also embrace individualistic Dionysus.

The combination of all four gods satisfies Handy's definition of good management. For this
you must use Zeus to provide purpose and direction, Apollo to look after the steady-state
needs, Athena to keep the organization moving forward, and Dionysus to supply the vital
spark of creativity.

# 1. Identifying power

*Handy compares the Zeus culture to a spider's web. All authority radiates outwards from the centre, and the closer managers are to that centre, the more important they are.*

**FOLLOWING ZEUS**

To discover if your organization is ruled by Zeus, answer Yes or No to the following propositions. Do they describe the organization's typical values, beliefs, and forms of behaviour?

- A good boss is strong, decisive, firm but fair.

- A good subordinate is hard-working, loyal, resourceful, and trustworthy.

- A good member gives first priority to the personal demands of the boss.

- People who do well here are politically aware risk-takers.

- The organization treats individuals as people at the disposal of the bosses.

- People are controlled and influenced by rewards, punishments, or charisma.

- It is legitimate to control others if you have more power-.

- Tasks are assigned here on the personal say-so of the bosses.

- Competition is for personal power and advantage.

**ANALYSIS**

- Nine "Yes" answers: a pure power culture, dominated by a Zeus figure or figures.

- Nine "Nos": the culture is remarkably free of bossism.

- Three or fewer "Yes" answers: the culture is not generally autocratic.

- Three or fewer "Nos": the culture is generally autocratic.

**COUNTERING AUTOCRACY**

If your organization is dominated by the power culture it will need to resist autocracy. To do this, increase the number of Athena-like autonomous task forces. Task forces are mini-Zeus cultures, with a boss, a web, and a mission. Autocrats can understand their value and the way they work, and can therefore accept them in the organization. Such groups do not threaten the autocrat's power, but they do make it less easy for him to exert centralized control.

# 2. Defining the Roles

*Handy represents the highly organized, systematic Apollonian role culture as a Greek temple with each pillar representing a function or division, and control resting with the senior executives at the top. Is this your organizational picture?*

Organization man

To discover if your organization is ruled by Apollo, answer Yes or No to the following set of propositions. Are they or are they not the organization's typical values, beliefs, and forms of behaviour?

– A good boss is impersonal and correct.

– A good subordinate is responsible and reliable.

– A good member gives first priority to duties, responsibilities, and customary standards.

– People who do well here are conscientious, responsible, and loyal.

– The organization treats individuals as if they are under contract.

– People are controlled and influenced impersonally by enforcing procedures and standards.

– It is legitimate to control others if you have formal responsibility.

– Tasks are assigned here on functions and responsibility.

– Competition is for high formal status.

**ANALYSIS**

– Nine "Yes" answers: a classic "organization man" culture, dominated by Apollo and the Apollonians.

– Nine "Nos": the culture is remarkably free from systems and controls.

– Three or fewer "Yes" answers: the culture is not generally bureaucratic.

– Three or fewer "Nos": a definite inclination towards bureaucracy.

## COUNTERING THE EXCESSES

The potential excesses of an Apollonian role culture are dehumanized behaviours and the creation of a power lid bureaucracy. Countering these excesses requires finding ways of injecting individualism into what is essentially a collective culture.

One way of forcing a general cultural change is to alter the reward system. Apollonians love rigid pay-scales tied to rigid hierarchies, under peculiar rules, such as "nobody can be promoted more than two grades at a time" or "lower grades cannot be placed over higher grades". Do not reward people simply for coming to work. Give exceptional rewards for exceptional performance, and make the rewards psychic (celebrations, congratulations, etc.) as well as real (money and promotion).

## CHANGING SPECIFIC BEHAVIOURS

You can change the culture of an organization only by changing the behaviour of individual members. There are eight specific Apollonian behaviours that together lead to a dehumanized and bureaucratic organization. Each one has an antidote, which, if routinely employed, will decrease these unhelpful tendencies.

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**WAYS TO CHANGE APOLLONIAN BEHAVIOURS**

1　Refusing to entertain contradictory/unorthodox views.
　　Empower official Cassandras to oppose the consensus.

2　Ignoring evidence that argues against chosen policies.
　　Require proposers to provide a full list of pros and cons.

3　Taking decisions that are unethical or inhumane.
　　Publish a code of ethics and appoint an ombudsman.

4　Seeing opponents and colleagues as stereotypes rather than individuals.
　　Arrange face-to-face meetings supervised by an impartial facilitator.

5　Pressurizing people to conform to group opinions.
　　Reward individual initiatives and demand new ideas.

6　Forming cliques that keep themselves to themselves.
　　Send outsiders into groups as co-opted members.

7　Leaving people in groups no option but unanimity.
　　Solicit everybody's opinion in rotation.

8 Continuing with policies that have been proved false.

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# 3. Tackling the tasks

*More and more managers are working in temporary groups that cut across departmental boundaries, mingle disciplines, and exist to complete a common task. The Athenian task-force mode is changing most Apollonian cultures. How far has it affected your culture?*

**THE TASK-FORCE MODE**

To discover how much influence Athena exerts in your organization, answer Yes or No to the following propositions. Are they or are they not the organization's typical values, beliefs, and forms of behaviour?

– A good boss is egalitarian and can be influenced.

– A good subordinate is self-motivated and open to ideas.

– A good member gives first priority to the requirements of the task.

– People who do well here are technically competent, effective, and committed.

– The organization treats individuals as committed co-workers.

– People are controlled and influenced by personal commitment to achieving goals.

– It is legitimate to control others if you know more about the task.

– Tasks are assigned here on ability to execute.

– Competition is for excellence of contribution.

**ANALYSIS**

– Nine "Yes" answers: an organization that puts performance ahead of personalities and gives people many opportunities to succeed.

– Nine "Nos": the culture is either authoritarian or bureaucratic, or both.

– Three or fewer "Yes" answers', the culture is not an open one.

– Three or fewer Nos: the culture is open -most of the time.

**IMPROVING THE NETWORK**

The task-oriented culture is essentially a network. It may well extend outside the borders of the company to suppliers and customers. To optimize the effectiveness of this kind of culture and to ensure its continued dominance in your organization, use the latest information technology to connect yourself to the network, and think of yourself as an essential node.

# 4. Injecting Creativity

*Any culture, however many its defects, can succeed with just one great idea, so powerful that it transcends those defects. Creative self-oriented Dionysian individuals can provide such ideas. Does your organization contain enough of these people?*

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**CREATIVE DIONYSUS**

Dionysus has nothing to do with organization, but he has a lot to do with culture. God of the non-organization, his disciples are primarily individual and creative thinkers, who find it very difficult to work in large, highly structured, Apollo-ruled organizations.

No organization can do without this type, however, if it is to deal successfully with the exceptional situations where the normal responses have failed to provide a result. In these circumstances only the quick, individualistic thinking of Dionysian types is likely to provide a solution. Are you such a Dionysian individual? Do you:

– Give your subordinates stimulating work?

– Respect the needs and values of others?

– Give priority to individuals and their needs?

– Excel in personal relationships?

– Treat colleagues as interesting and valuable people?

– Get deeply interested in and excited by your work?

– Manage with the full consent of others?

– Make all appointments strictly on merit?

– Compete primarily to heal your own best standards?

**WORKING WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION**

The attributes and behaviours of a Dionysian individual would be applauded by all of Dandy's three organizational cultures: the autocrat, the bureaucrat, and the task-master would all say that they want managers to fit this excellent pattern.

But saying and doing are not the same thing. In organizations of every culture, you will find lip-service to the Dionysian ideal, coupled with actions, procedures, and interactions that make Dionysian behaviour difficult in practice. Do not despair. Bear in mind that, while cultures are collective, the collective is made up of individuals. Live up to your best Dionysian ideals at all times.