

Getting Our Administrative Bearings:
a discussion paper prepared for the BC Educational Leadership Council
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The purpose of this brief paper is to provide a semantic scaffold for collective consideration of the meaning and the means of educational leadership at a symposium organized by the BC Educational Leadership Council. This symposium is a foundational step in the development of programs and services that will sustain and enhance leadership in the public school system in British Columbia so that student experience and achievement will be optimal, which is the first and final purpose of educational leadership at all levels.

There is no shortage of talk about “leadership” but the term remains enigmatic, variously defined and frequently confused with related terms and processes. Consequently, opportunities for individuals to learn by reflecting on their experience and to share that learning with others are frequently confounded by the imprecise, and thus confusing, use of terms like “management,” “leadership,” “administration” and “governance.” This paper concentrates on an explication of those terms.

Particularly unfortunate is the profligate use of the term leadership to describe any admirable or successful act in a relationship, group, family or organization. Recently, a bit more discipline seems to be emerging in the use of the term leadership to describe acts of personal influence that invite and nurture common commitment, as compared to management, which describes acts of positional authority that ensure compliance with roles and responsibilities. Both leadership and management are vitally important and both require intelligence, skill and tact in order to be done well, neither more than the other. Both also require foresight, which should not be mistaken for leadership although that is unfortunately common—even more so when foresight is embellished as vision.

Leadership and management are the yin and yang of administration, which is the collective term I will use to describe the role of a person in a position of authority within a school, district or Ministry. Thus, I will not use the common term “manager” because this would suggest someone who manages, and may therefore imply that s/he does not lead, and I will not use the term “leader” because it might suggest someone who eschews management. This may result in some awkwardness but also, I hope, more clarity and perhaps, through the struggle to use these terms carefully, more insight.

As we distinguish leadership from management, we must also recognize that leadership is not something that is done exclusively by leaders, or at least not by formally designated leaders. It is an act defined by the nature and quality of relationship between people that transcends specific roles and permeates the school system and its community. Everyone can, and should, lead—trustees, support staff, superintendents, teachers, parents, school administrators, students and provincial officials—by acting in ways that strengthen relationships and encourage commitment to the common cause of public education.

It is important at the outset to also distinguish administration from governance. The popular Carver Model¹ of governance begins with the assumption that a school board has total authority and total responsibility until it chooses to give some of it away, and that in doing so a board is well advised to retain for itself a focus on the purposes of the school district while assigning operational (i.e., administrative) authority to a Superintendent who acts as the Chief Executive/Educational Officer (CEO) for the school district. The remaining responsibilities of the board are then enacted through policy statements that focus on ends and leave the definition of means to the CEO to the maximum extent possible. These governance responsibilities of the Board may be seen largely in terms of defining the purposes and values for the organization and the internal and external relationships through which they will be achieved, but avoiding intrusion into the operational domain (aka not “micromanaging” or “playing with the trains”).

Of course, a school board does not have total control over the purposes of a school district, which are defined by provincial legislation, but that legislation necessarily leaves much room for interpretation and variable application in the diverse contexts of the province. In a similar manner, a school administrator has an obligation, and abundant opportunity, to interpret and shape district policy within a particular school or in application to a particular situation. So too is a classroom teacher given considerable permission (aka professional autonomy) to adapt provincial legislation and local policy in order to ensure that s/he provides the best possible learning environment for all students. Thus, from top to bottom the various actors in the school system are engaged in acts of interpretation, application and delegation that involves both compliance and creativity as high level “ends” become progressively focussed and defined into specific “means.” They do so both through a linear chain of command (aka hierarchy or bureaucracy) and non-linear relationship networks (aka culture or community).

Because the school system is simultaneously both a bureaucracy and a community, the semantic scaffold that was proposed in order to enhance the clarity and insight of leadership discourse is complicated by overlap and ambiguity that defies tidy classification. Conceptual models, particularly as they strive for consistency and clarity, are invariably an artificial imposition on experience, which is inherently messy. Our analysis and our definitions should not deny that fact. They must come with the caveat that all classifications are artificial constructs requiring interpretation in context and that the reductionism of classification must be balanced by an appreciation of the gestalt of practice and the interdependence of functions. It is useful to parse our experience and define our terms, but we should not then imprison our thinking by reifying the distinctions we have created.

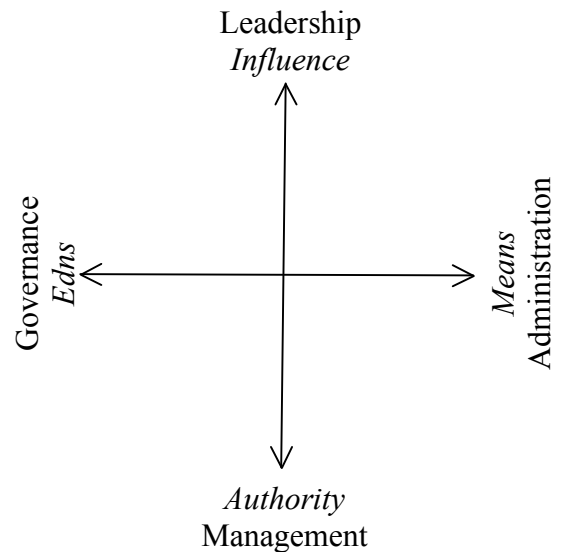
Nonetheless, a short recap may be useful.

- Governance: Definition of values and purposes
- Administration: Development and implementation of roles to achieve the purposes
- Management: Rational authority that ensures compliance with roles to achieve purposes
- Leadership: Relational influence that models values and invites commitment to purposes

¹ See <http://www.carvergovernance.com/pg-np.htm> for a description of the Carver model and <http://www.iog.ca/page.asp?pageID=24&htmlarea=aboutUs> for a critique of the model

The relationship between these four terms defines the following field of action.

The Board of School Trustees is often assigned to the lower left corner of this diagram and discouraged from excursion into the other three quadrants. That is probably a good starting point but it cannot be a rigid rule. There will always be situations in which the board rightly wishes to define operational details—for example, appeal procedures or codes of conduct—although this should be the exception that proves the rule that a board most appropriately focuses on definition of ends and delegates the development of means. (The development of means is located on the right hand side as ‘executive’ or ‘administrative’ action.) Similarly, effective boards show leadership by behaving in such a way as to win the hearts and minds of the community and thus exert an influence that builds confidence and deepens commitment to district goals. Individual trustees should never intrude into the administrative domain but will frequently venture into the top half of the diagram by exerting earned influence in both ends- and means-focused ways as engaged participants in and inspirational examples to the school community.

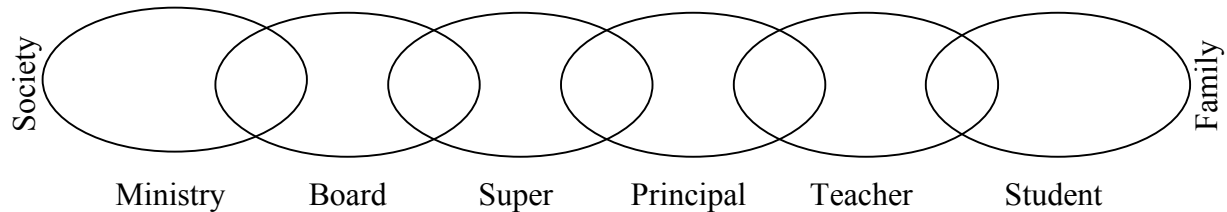


The Superintendent, as CEO, primarily occupies the right-hand side of the diagram, hopefully with a healthy balance of management and leadership, but once again this is not an inviolate rule. The board may assign some governance authority to the superintendent—for example, within aspects of the curriculum—albeit again as the exception that proves the rule. (This should always be an intentional strategic decision rather than an act of omission.)

School administrators also act primarily on the right-hand side, probably exclusively so in relation to the board, but certainly not in relation to the superintendent, who is liable to define operational goals that leave specific interpretation and development of means to the school level. This might include learning objectives the board has assigned to the superintendent—for example, social responsibility—or the more specific determination of means to achieve a goal that looks like a cleanly defined mandate to the board but opens up into a more complex mixture of means and ends with room for variation at the school level when viewed from the perspective of the superintendent—for example, accurate accounting for funds.

Similarly, the relationship between a principal and a teacher, or between a teacher and a student, requires attention to both ends and means through the exercise of both authority and influence. This chain of duties and responsibilities may be thought of in simple graphical terms as follows. (The aphorism that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link would not be inappropriate when describing the link between Ministry intentions—that is, Prescribed Learning Outcomes—and student outcomes, but it is also true that a capable and committed

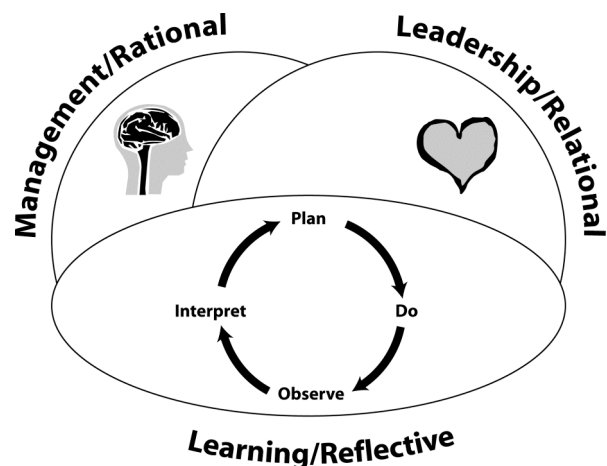
classroom teacher can be extremely successful even when the other links in this chain are weak and that without a healthy working relationship between the classroom teacher and the students very little can be accomplished. Thus, the metaphor of a causal chain can also be misleading if it masks the power and central importance of the individual professional.)



At each point of intersection there are actions that involve defining ends (i.e., governance) and developing means (i.e., administration), both of which may be enacted through a combination of authority (i.e., management) and influence (i.e., leadership). These terms describe the interdependent relationship between the actors. (One might connect the two ends of this chain, thus forming a loop, in order to better illustrate the fact that schools are both created by and responsible to the commons, which is the ultimate source of authority.)

The blending of managerial authority and leaderly influence is a complex process that frequently involves dilemmas in which two valued ends conflict or cannot be simultaneously satisfied.² Sometimes this is a matter of insufficient resources—for example, budgeting and timetabling—and sometimes it is more fundamental—for example, fulfilling a rational policy-based interest in justice and a relationship-based sense of compassion when dealing with a staff or student situation. Again, this tension is experienced at all levels in the system, from the board room to the classroom.

For the purposes of this discussion, however, we will focus specifically on the role of a school principal to develop a model for thinking about leadership as an aspect of administration. The three parts of this model are management (the rational aspects of the role), leadership (the relational aspects of the role), and learning (the reflective aspects of the role).



The *management* aspects of school administration are the technical and legal duties related to the hierarchical structure of the district and the authority that is vested in the principal. In large measure, these tasks focus on compliance with legal mandates, local policies, or the rationally defined duties of

² See <https://public.sd38.bc.ca/~bbeairsto/Documents/BureaucracyAndCommunity.pdf> and <https://public.sd38.bc.ca/~bbeairsto/Documents/MultidimensionalAdmin.pdf>

the role. They involve the stewardship of resources and the provision of processes and structures that are necessary, although not sufficient, to enabling the school to achieve its goals. When assessing the principal's management, the underlying worldview is rational (aka bureaucratic, technical or mechanistic), the focus is on competence, and the operative question is, *Does s/he tend to the infrastructure of the school and the internal and external processes required to sustain it in an efficient, effective and timely manner?*

The **leadership** aspect of a principal's role is more artistic than technical. It relates to the community served by the infrastructure and is effected through influence rather than authority. Leadership fosters not merely compliance but meaningful commitment to the organization and its purpose. It relates to the human relational aspects of the role and the deeper meanings and purposes of the school, as distinct from the more utilitarian duties and tasks that sustain the bureaucratic mechanisms that support those purposes. When assessing the principal's leadership, the underlying worldview is organic, the focus is on character, and the operative question is, *Does s/he articulate the school's purpose and values effectively and treat other people in an ethical manner that is consistent with those values, build commitment to that purpose and foster individual initiative in support of it?*

Leadership behaviour defined in this way should not be limited to the principal, or to others with formally designated authority. It is an opportunity open to all and a responsibility of every employee, albeit in different ways, because all roles in the district are interdependent with others. Leadership is a way of being that strengthens community and it should be widely distributed—in fact, it is always widely distributed whether we wish it or not, so the only real question is how we will work with that inescapable fact. Thus, while the principal has a special responsibility for demonstrating his/her own leadership and for nurturing it in others, s/he is not alone in this regard.

In the diagram, management and leadership are distinguished, but it should be noted that the school district is simultaneously both a bureaucracy and a community. Thus, every action has both rational and relational elements. Both management and leadership are inherent to every action. Management is not in any way inferior to leadership because it provides an essential foundation of order and efficiency without which nothing else can work. However, there is a sense in which leadership should occupy the foreground of our intention and management should occupy the background. When planning our holidays, the destination takes precedence over the vehicle even though the vehicle is essential. This is the reason that the leadership circle is seen to lie on top of the management circle in the diagram.

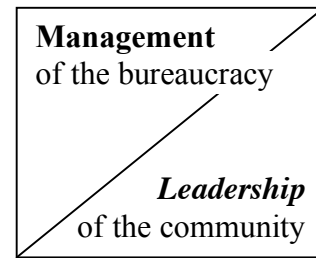
Frequently, there is a tension between these two essential dimensions of the principal's role—between the rational and the relational aspects of the work, between bureaucracy and community, between authority and influence, and between ensuring compliance and inviting commitment. Some of the most subtle, but important, learning that is required in order to be effective in the role is the ability to deal simultaneously with these often contradictory aspects of experience. It is not sufficient that there be a situational balance of management and leadership—a little management today and a little leadership tomorrow, or leadership when one can find some time after the management duties are done. There must be a fusion of these two elements in all actions, a healthy combination of direction, discussion and

dialogue in each conversation. Thus, management and leadership are not intended to be opposites that define a polarity, but rather the yin and the yang of an indivisible whole. Often leadership is shown by the way one goes about management tasks, or simply the way one interacts with others. Coming to understand the challenge of infusing management with leadership, to give words to the feelings and dilemmas that it creates, and to deal with it in an increasingly metacognitive fashion is what leads to wisdom and enables us to share our experience with others and learn from theirs.

Direction

Discussion

Dialogue



The **learning** component of the model acknowledges the intention that a school should be a learning community that is actively and constantly engaged in intentional gathering and purposeful use of feedback that leads to continuous improvement. This requires that each and every individual within the organization conduct him/herself in a thoughtful manner and develop the discipline of reflection *on* action and reflection *in* action so that he/she enhances his/her personal understandings and skills, and is able to adapt to the dynamic circumstances of the school and its community. In some ways this learning is a matter of 'growth'—that is, the deepening of understandings and expansion of skills within a familiar mental set—and in some ways it is a matter of 'development'—that is, reframing mental models in a way that allows one to better express those deepened understandings and expanded skills, and to move beyond them into new realms of understanding and skill. Sometimes this learning makes it possible to solve problems and eliminate obstacles, but other times it simply allows us to better appreciate irresolvable dilemmas and to live with them with increasing wisdom and grace. When assessing the principal's learning, the focus is on curiosity and the operative question is, *Does s/he behave in a thoughtful manner, treating each experience as an opportunity to learn, and demonstrating the willingness and ability to seek and use feedback to continuously improve management and leadership understandings and skills?*

Conclusion

The preceding discussion is admittedly interpretive and neither seeks nor lays claim to objective truth or prescriptive power. It is simply intended to suggest a semantic scaffold that will assist educators in talking to each other about their aspirations and experiences so as to improve governance and administration in the service of student achievement. Management and leadership pervade all aspects of the school system and are inherent to all roles within it. Understanding of these complementary behaviours not only improves governance and administration but also contributes to a thoughtful culture of learning about these functions throughout the system, and thus helps to ensure a continuous supply of individuals ready and able to provide the leadership that will sustain the system through ongoing generational change.

Appendix: Organizational Behaviour

Any conception of leadership is inescapably rooted in an organizational theory, albeit perhaps subconsciously. In the interests of a tight focus on leadership, consideration of organizational theory was omitted from the preceding, but some aspects that are fundamental to the current context will be briefly discussed in this appendix.

There have always been organizations to build, to fight and to worship, but it was the industrial revolution that brought large scale organizations to commerce and at the beginning of the twentieth century the foundations of classical organizational theory were provided by people such as Henri Fayol, Frederick Taylor and Max Weber.

Fayol, a French engineer, made the first comprehensive attempt to analyze the managerial role, describing it in terms of centralized planning, organization, command, coordination and control. Taylor, an American engineer, developed the principles of “scientific organization of labour,” perhaps the most enduring legacy of which is the widely used method of breaking complicated tasks down into isolated subtasks that can be performed by semi-skilled individuals, which led to the assembly line. Weber, a German sociologist, provided the theoretical case for the rational bureaucratic model that Taylor and Fayol described in practical terms. His theoretical analysis of society identified three distinct types of domination—traditional, legal and charismatic—of which he identified ‘pure legal domination’ based on the rule of law and rationally established procedures as the ideal.

It was on this philosophical foundation that the principles and practices of what Henry Mintzberg termed “Mechanical Bureaucracy” were built.³ Mechanical Bureaucracy, which was the dominant organizational form in the first half of the twentieth century, featured a rationally defined set of independent roles connected in a hierarchical pyramid of authority and governed by strict rules of conduct intended to ensure consistent behaviour and outcomes.

The rational foundations of Mechanical Bureaucracy were given a fairly significant shake in the 1930s by the ‘discovery’ of the human factor in organizations through the work of Elton Mayo and the subsequent researchers who established the new field of industrial social psychology. It was Mayo who identified the famous “Hawthorne Effect,” which showed that individuals can be influenced to be much more productive through the simple act of paying positive attention to them and conveying a sense of their importance. This represented a significant departure from the rational, behaviorist assumptions of the day, which reduced employee behaviour to calculated self-interest.

In the 1950s Douglas McGregor took this idea further with his development of Theory X and Theory Y. Theory X, which he described as “the assumption of the mediocrity of the masses,” holds that individuals are inherently passive and lazy, thus needing to be motivated through external rewards and controls. They resist change and actually prefer to be led than

³ Mintzberg, H. (1979). *The structuring of organizations*. Prentice-Hall.

to be autonomous. Theory Y, which represented McGregor's personal view, assumed that people were inherently industrious and imaginative, requiring only the liberating conditions of an enabling and inviting environment to unleash their constructive energies. Of course, stifling organizational control could make them passive and indifferent so McGregor saw the essential task of administration as enabling employees by providing structures and processes that would support rather than control them.

In the 1970s Karl Weick suggested that organizations might be more adaptive and more able to survive increasingly rapid change if they took advantage of their human capital by being somewhat more "loosely coupled;" that is, if the rigid rules and roles of Mechanical Bureaucracy gave way to increased permission for individual initiative. Such freedom, however, required a tighter coupling in other ways. First, employees had to understand the overall organizational goal and be committed to it so that the adaptations they made in their individual practices would be consistent with that larger goal. Second, their practices had to be standardized through increased levels of training on a broader range of skills than they required if only expected to repeat a simple task.

This led to the development of what Mintzberg termed the Professional Bureaucracy, an organization that was flattened by eliminating much of the middle management and giving increased autonomy to more highly trained front line workers. School systems, health systems, law offices and engineering firms are examples of Professional Bureaucracies.

Administration of a Professional Bureaucracy is a much different matter than administration of a Mechanical Bureaucracy. Perhaps it was an attempt to understand this change that led James McGregor Burns to first make the distinction between transactional and transformational administration.⁴ Burns defined the transactional style as a simple exchange of work for pay and loyalty for security, and contrasted that with a transformational style that induced workers "to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of *both leaders and followers*." [Italics in the original] Thus, Burns felt that administrators must motivate staff by appealing to shared values and by helping them to fulfill their higher order aspirations and needs. He saw this style as inherently moral "in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both."

Burns' distinction has persisted, and has been frequently restated in different terms, ever since. In this discussion, the transactional aspects of administration have been termed management. They are based on, and appropriate to, Mechanical Bureaucracy, in which the administrative task is to ensure compliance with carefully designed roles and detailed rules. The transformational aspects of administration have been termed leadership. They are based on, and appropriate to, Professional Bureaucracy, in which the administrative task is to promote organizational goals and inculcate organizational values so that staff are motivated not only to perform their work faithfully but to do so with commitment and creativity.

⁴ Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. Harper and Row

School systems being both Mechanical Bureaucracies in some ways and Professional Bureaucracies in others involve both transactional and transformational relationships between administrators and staff. This gives rise to two challenges: learning how to behave in transformational ways, and successfully integrating this behaviour with the transactional aspects of administration, which are also required.

The transformational approach to administration is very challenging to put into practice because it requires not only new conceptual understandings and procedural skills, but also different assumptions. The rational mechanistic assumptions about the world that are the foundation for Mechanical Bureaucracy are also the assumptions that underlie classical scientific methods. They are deeply embedded in our society—to the extent that they seem like irrefutable common sense—and even though modern science has moved on to different assumptions that are less reductionist and deterministic, classical scientific assumptions persist in the popular imagination. We are, however, slowly coming to understand the flaws and limitations of this worldview as a result of the serious problems that have arisen in ecology, economics and other aspects of social life from its application. It's not that mechanism is wrong, but it is insufficient and needs to be combined with a more organic worldview in order to adequately describe reality and foster healthy human organizations.

The application of rational analytic assumptions to human behaviour led to the Skinnerian view that every response could be understood, and modified, by attending to the stimulus that caused it. Alfie Kohn⁵ points out that our everyday practices continue to be based on “pop behaviourism”—which he defines as “Do this and you'll get that”—arising from Skinner's work with rats, despite the fact that, “the behaviorist's conception of humans as passive beings, whose behavior must be elicited by external motivation in the form of incentives is, by any measure, outdated.” We now understand that humans respond not to events themselves but to the meaning they make of those events and that meaning is personally constructed in complex ways. Nonetheless, most people continue to act in a way that suggests subconscious acceptance of a concept of human motivation with the same discredited behaviourist roots, and much that has been written about leadership involves the use of incentives and rewards in a way that betrays the same erroneous assumptions.

Although many commentators would have us believe that the “modern” mindset, which underlies the classical view of organizations, is now discredited and invalid, having been replaced by a more evolved “postmodern” mindset, it is neither necessary nor constructive to entirely reject either rational analysis or mechanistic thinking. In the ongoing refinement of human understanding there are times to refute and times to reframe, and times simply to broaden our view. Some of our old understandings are, indeed, disproved but this is not a reason to throw the baby out with the bath water. It would be so much simpler if we could adopt one perspective and simply abandon the other, but we cannot.

The world of the school is both mechanistic and organic, requires the administrator to use both analysis and synthesis, presents problems that are soluble and dilemmas that are not,

⁵ Kohn, A. (1993). *Punished by rewards*. Houghton Mifflin.

sometimes requires us to focus on particular events and sometimes can only be appreciated with a systems view. An educational administrator must be able to shift from a *dichotomous* understanding of these two worldviews to a *dialectical* understanding in order to fully appreciate, and be effective within, the complex arena of school life.

Developing a well-balanced dialectical worldview is enormously challenging for two primary reasons. First, the lingering effect of the classical science creates a pervasive bias in society, and consequently in all of our previous experience, in favour of an administrative style that is rooted in the rational mechanistic worldview. Second, the restructuring of our worldview to accommodate a more balanced approach to educational administration involves not only the development of new understandings and habits of mind, but also the suppression of old ones in order to allow the new ones to emerge. This ‘unlearning’ is often the hardest part.

One of the important new practices that emerged in the last part of the twentieth century was decentralized decision-making, which led to the concept of distributed leadership. In schools this began by giving more independence to the school principal and then evolved into the understanding that every teacher, and ultimately every staff member, had both the possibility and the responsibility for creative response and should not simply be expected to follow the curriculum or the policy book—Weick’s proposal fully expressed. Thus leadership was divorced from its exclusive association with leaders and became a matter of distributed organizational capacity.

If everyone in the school system was to be empowered to take initiative and to make adaptations in order to “enable all learners” then it followed that everyone would also have to continuously expand his or her understanding and improve his or her skills. No longer could innovation be left to specialists or to researchers. The school had to become a community of learners, and if everyone on the staff became a learner then the organization itself had to become a learning community in which the emergent abilities of individuals resulted in ongoing structural and procedural change to accommodate the new understandings and skills.

Just as mechanistic thinking and behaviourist assumptions have not yet entirely relinquished their grip on the administrative imagination, the concept of a learning community must be said to be still under development. The implications for administrators who hope to work in this changing environment are enormous. The principal who provides direction through rational analysis and a focus on the big picture must now also inspire through passionate engagement in the operational details. The boss must also be a colleague.

Organizationally, the well-oiled machine becomes a “complex adaptive system” as decision-making is decentralized and individual staff forego clearly defined roles and procedures for more flexible working patterns and change from merely obedient doers to thoughtful and creative doers. The organization then strives to find a balance between structure and chaos, in which the minimal set of requirements and restrictions are employed to provide sufficient order and coherence without imposing unnecessary limitations.

David Perkins⁶ suggests that “the intelligent behaviour of a collective resides in no one thing, because too much is going on, but rather in the emergent consequence of the many knowledge transactions that make up the minutes, hours and days of group life.” Thus, it is the quality of the thought and interaction between individual staff members that determines the intelligence and effectiveness of an organization as much as, or more than, the vision and capability of its administration. Ensuring that small scale patterns of behaviour are coherent and constructive so that intelligent organizational behaviour emerges is as important as, or more important than, implementing a strategic plan that imposes purposeful activity. From this organizational perspective administrators must become coaches and culture creators as well as planners and architects.

In fact, some theorists have gone so far as to suggest self-organizing systems that do not require any imposed structure at all, and postulated that well chosen minimal specifications may empower groups of people better than traditional organizational approaches. Dee Hock, the founder of VISA, for example, has proposed “chaordic organizations,” which he defines as “any self-organizing, adaptive, nonlinear complex system, whether physical, biological, or social, the behavior of which exhibits characteristics of both order and chaos or loosely translated to business terminology, cooperation and competition.”⁷

School systems have incorporated some elements of these organizational trends, but for the most part they have shown an amazing inertia, changing much less than many private enterprises. Since the mid 1980s, many governments (starting with the Thatcher government in the UK) have attempted to force schools to become more goal oriented, data driven and responsive to community needs by imposing requirements for public participation and public accountability. These changes are largely a response to the globalization of economic forces, which has resulted in increased competitiveness and a growing dependence on market approaches to reduce the cost of government services and increase economic productivity.

In an analysis of this trend in Europe, Mulford⁸ cites Dempster as characterizing “New Public Management (NPM)” as follows.

- decentralization through school self-management;
- the injection of competition between schools;
- greater demands for financial accountability;
- an increase in consumer control through school governing councils;
- recentralization of curriculum and assessment control;
- expanding the powers of school principals;
- increasing pressure for outcomes-based assessment;
- the exposure of school performance to public scrutiny;
- the assessment of teachers against employer defined competencies; and,
- tighter regulation of the teaching profession.

⁶ Perkins, D. (2003). *King Arthur's round table: How collaborative conversations create smart organizations*. John Wiley and Sons.

⁷ See <http://www.newhorizons.org/future/hock.htm>

⁸ See <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/61/2635399.pdf>

The World Bank describes NPM as “a management culture that emphasizes the centrality of the citizen or customer, as well as accountability for results. It also suggests structural or organizational choices that promote decentralized control through a wide variety of alternative service delivery mechanisms, including quasi-markets with public and private service providers competing for resources from policymakers and donors.”⁹

This wide-spread movement has found partial expression in British Columbia through a series of legislated innovations that have included District Accountability Contracts and School Planning Councils, and the same underlying philosophy is reflected in the “School Report Card” produced annually by the Fraser Institute. The assumption that market forces are required to stimulate change and will result in school improvement are, of course, contested and Henry Mintzberg has dismissed NPM as “old corporate values” that should not be applied to the public sector,¹⁰ but that issue will not be explored here.

The important point for school and district administrators is that their role is significantly affected by the organizational structures within which they work, and the assumptions and goals upon which those structures are based. The pervasive effect of rational analytic thinking over the past several centuries and the widespread adoption of Mechanical Bureaucratic approaches to organization create a strong hidden bias for this approach and thus a tendency toward a command and control style of administration. This is countered by more recent developments that urge organizations to be more loosely coupled and to empower staff through the creation of a professional learning community. Overlaid on this long term trend is the more recent influence of New Public Management (whose effects have been felt in BC but not nearly to the extent of many other countries).

The combined effect of these conceptual currents and societal trends is to create a turbulent environment of conflicting assumptions and approaches that have a dramatic impact on school administrators. Being aware of them is the first step towards being able to respond in ways that are innovative while remaining faithful to the goals of public education and the administrator’s own beliefs.

End

⁹ See <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/debate1.htm>

¹⁰ Mintzberg, H. (2004). *Managers, not MBAs: A hard look at the soft practice of managing and management development*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.